Endemic Pains and Pandemic Traumas:

The Narrative Construction of Public Memory in Iran, Palestine, and the United States

by

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Thesis Abstract:

Once limited to clinical psychology, trauma, broadly defined as a disruptive pain, an extraordinary malaise that may leave an indelible mark on one's memory, has been extended in the past decades to describe abruptly horrific experiences on the communal level. Wars, revolutions, genocides, or large scale calamities of any kind that sweep the social sphere without giving it a chance to adapt or resist, are considered traumas. Since the rise of academic studies of the Holocaust, the prevalence of trauma studies has continuously grown.

A line of inquiry, however, that is not yet fully investigated in trauma studies is the issue of narrativization. The essential question of this project is how emplotment—i.e., arranging experiences into a coherent plot—renders horrific memories comprehensible. In other words, the question is how narration engenders trauma out of mnemonic fragments. To this end, the project offers an original tripartite paradigm of trauma emplotment. The three stages of this paradigm, each defined as a dialectical opposition of two narrative trajectories, are named comic-tragic, inclusive-exclusive, and universal-unique. Collectively, they illustrate the process through which convoluted, and sometimes incongruous, memories of extraordinary hardship and horror are aligned into an understandable whole. Using this composite framework, I examine three distinct, but interrelated, national cases of traumatic histories in Iran, Palestine, and the United States.

In the chapter dedicated to the Iranian pro-government literature of the 1980-88 war against Iraq, the hegemonic discourse of war, known as the Sacred Defense (*defa-e moghaddas*), is studied. Four representative literary works are analyzed to unearth the narrative that supports an apologetic account of war, appropriating the raw material of

traumatic memories to consolidate an Islamic revolutionary nationalism, particularly one that is bolstered through a historical antagonism against the American foreign policy.

The next chapter, examining Palestinian literature after the Oslo Accords (1993-95), grapples with a problem from a different direction: in the absence of any national sovereignty, it asks how memories of dispossession and displacement are organized, to what collective identity they contribute, and how several generations of traumatic memories are prioritized to construct a narrative whole. This chapter analyzes the fragmented experiences of a nation under constant threat of extinction, whose commemoration of historic traumas is both thwarted and intensified by the ceaseless unfolding of new traumatic experiences.

Studying the American literature of the two post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq complements, and complicates, the topics covered in the two previous chapters. In the case of literary works by American veterans, mostly personal war experiences thinly shrouded in fiction, the issues of nationalism and public memories of war are explored by turning the tables, as it were, to examine the trauma of the traumatizers. This chapter focuses on the reveries of empathy with one's purported national enemy and the moral dilemmas, which exacerbate the traumatic experience.

With all their different political trajectories, the representative texts in these three national cases use common narrative strategies to construct unified stories, resolving innate problems of memorialization in order to present indelible pains. Each of these literary constellations applies the same narrative paradigms of trauma emplotment, but generates entirely different artefacts. My project articulates, in sum, how narrative processes move from painful experiences to political statements.

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Introduction

What is trauma? The term that once simply meant wound became, by the late nineteenth century, a new keyword in the rising profession of psychology, denoting any kind of latent reaction to a deeply unpleasant or shocking experience. In the past several decades, trauma has been transformed into a catchall for anything from daily experiences as a refugee of war to witnessing an unlikely defeat in a referendum—news headlines containing phrases like "Brexit trauma" and "Syrian children's struggle with trauma" seem to belong to two entirely different discourses, if not two different worlds (McGeever and Subhedar; Ghoneim). Yet, with all the differences in using the term outside the contours of professional medicine or psychology, the prevalence of this term in the common parlance suggests that it does fill a certain gap in signification. It would not be hyperbole to suggest that our age is marked by the ubiquity of trauma; the concept is borrowed to explain everything from the concentration camp survivor tales to large-scale narrations of postcolonial histories. The fact that the former case only considers trauma to be a tangible experience of mental and physical pain has not deterred scholars from also using trauma in the latter case, which underlines not a single, locatable traumatic event, but a silent and slow process of reckoning one's collective loss, redeeming one's communal identity, and facing any kind of social malaise that was left latent under the reign of colonialism.

Stef Craps, whose *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (2013) is among the recent scholarly works to expand the domain of trauma studies, begins his analysis by noting that trauma should be regarded as more than what the practitioners of psychology—

or cultural theorists who rely exclusively on psychoanalysis—tend to believe. Noting that foundational texts of modern trauma studies, including works by Cathy Caruth—who will be discussed in my first chapter—have mostly fell short of their claimed "cross-cultural ethical engagement," Craps argues,

> They fail on at least four counts: they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas.
> (2)

The rest of his book builds up on all of these four objections against a parochial understanding of trauma, and places trauma within a global framework. What is quite interesting for my project is not the efforts of Craps and others to work against a Western-oriented approach, but the fact that such ameliorative steps in adapting the concept of trauma to non-Western socio-political conditions effectively work against any definitive understanding of the concept. Current trends in the scholarship of trauma, coming from various disciplines, from political science to area studies, and from literary theory to the history of science, are mostly preoccupied with expanding the common understanding of trauma in order to make it more applicable to contemporary situations all around the world. The more scholars like Craps push for a comprehensive understanding of trauma, which resists fitting into a privileged Western model, the less unified and coherent will remain the

concept of trauma. The idea of underscoring a theory's political shortcomings and taking steps to amend it is admirable, but it appears that most contemporary attempts at rectifying certain aspects of trauma do not result in a refined definition of the concept, but become testaments to its versatility when applied to events and histories that seem utterly incomparable.

The first chapter of my study probes this specific aspect of trauma: the problem of definition. What I explain, against an interdisciplinary background, is that almost every attempt in the recent history of trauma studies tends to either downplay or fully ignore a certain aspect of the phenomenon in order to offer a totalizing formulation. My goal in this chapter is not to entirely undermine current theorizations of trauma, but to question whether an attempt at redefining the concept would really take us any further. While I do share the concerns of Craps and others, who believe many trends in trauma studies are too much engrossed with Western examples, I find the solution not in reformulating the concept, but rather in approaching it from an entirely different perspective. The question of trauma, in both the psychological sense and the collectively historical one, could be studied for its narrativization. Most of the examples in my project are chosen from non-Western histories, but in studying them, I am not trying to shape an entirely new model for trauma. Instead, I examine the process of emplotment of trauma—i.e., selecting, ordering, and prioritizing traumatic events and experiences into a unified plot—as a vantage point to understand the political directions that narration of painful memories can take.

Surveying formative studies on trauma, including works by Cathy Caruth, Ruth Leys, Allan Young, and Judith Herman, and examining more recent works by Didier Fassin, Richard Rechtman, Wulf Kansteiner, Jeffrey Alexander, and Ron Eyerman, the first chapter

gives an account of how various understandings of trauma have evolved, and highlights the merits and limits of different approaches to studying this phenomenon, on both personal and communal levels. It concludes by noting that an analysis of trauma narration is not adequately studied in any of the outlined scholarly trends. The second chapter, "The Three Patterns of Trauma Emplotment," addresses this shortcoming in detail and offers a tripartite model for analysis of traumatic narration. This composite framework is neither a totalizing structure, in the spirit of structuralist narratology, nor is it a formalistic categorization of atomized blocks of narration. The offered model of emplotment underlines the narrative vectors and trajectories that are continuously present in the process of transforming horrific mnemonic fragments into unified memories of pain and loss. Each of the three dialectical patterns comprises two antithetical forces, which coexist within the process of narration: "tragedy-comedy," "exclusion-inclusion," and "universality-uniqueness." The three pairs of opposing elements constitute the driving force behind any narration of trauma, yet they are not defined in such a way as to preclude a detailed and historically focused analysis of any specific trauma narrative. In other words, this theoretical framework does not create a narrative formula for trauma, but only a general outline of the narrative tendencies and frames of reference in the process of solidifying painful memories into coherent stories.

The next three chapters use the above model of emplotment to analyze three distinct historical conditions of trauma. In particular, I outline the most fundamental of the narrative patterns, and the one effectively engendering the other two, which is that of tragedy and comedy. In the chapter, "Trauma and Propaganda: The Antinomies of Iranian Sacred Defense," I examine a state-sponsored Iranian domestic literary movement that responds to the memories of the war against Iraq. The movement, officially knowns as "Literature and

Art of Sacred Defense," extensively appropriates painful incidents, including civilian casualties and deployment of child soldiers, for the purpose of a selective remembrance of the war. While this movement is not the only contemporary literary reaction to the horrors of the war, it is by far the most dominant, due to its enormous governmental resources. My goal in studying examples of this literature is to analyze one of several directions that memorialization of traumatic experiences can take, namely, propaganda. Examining three memoirs, including the best-selling *Da* (Seyedeh Zahra Hoseyni, 2008), which has been so far the most financially successful book in the movement, and one of the very few written by a woman, this chapter investigates how the narration of war becomes both dreadful and magnificent. The literature of Sacred Defense, I argue, not only tends to glamorize the war, but also propagates a militaristic discourse in the country that is always in the service of the dominant hegemony, particularly whenever social unrest has to be quelled. Employing the tripartite model of emplotment in examining these narratives, I demonstrate how unpleasant memories of violence are transmuted into powerful exhortation for the Islamic Republic's dominant ideology, particularly in its consolidation of a mytho-historical account of righteousness by establishing a link to the life of the Muslim Prophet and his ancestry. In outlining the politics of Iranian trauma narration, I will also point out the history of American intervention in the country, most importantly the 1953 coup that overthrew the government of Mohammad Mossadeq. The chapter concludes with a study of one novel in the genre of Sacred Defense, *Chess with the Doomsday Machine* (Habib Ahmadzadeh, 2008), which both expands the range of references and complicates the politics of propaganda. The novel exhibits many staple features of the movement, like the patronizing

depiction of child soldiers, but its allusion to other histories of modern violence, including the Armenian genocide of 1915, makes for a contrarian interpretation of the trauma.

The next chapter, "A Nation Defined by Trauma: Palestine after the Oslo Accords," analyzes a national traumatic condition that showcases a radically distinct political direction compared to the Iranian war trauma. In the case of contemporary Palestinian literature, there is no singular traumatic event that would shape the entire narration; neither is there any powerful state to sponsor or otherwise give direction to memorialization of historical trauma. After an overview of Palestinian literature since the formation of State of Israel in 1948, this chapter engages in close readings of four representative examples of the Palestinian narratives of trauma. The memoir *Palestinian Walks* (Raja Shehadeh, 2008), written originally in English and for an international audience, gives a critical account of the civil life in the West Bank, where the State of Israel continuously invades the Palestinians' lands and annexes them for settlement construction projects. The book is examined not only for its particular dynamics of trauma emplotment, but also for the way the analysis of its narration sheds light on the multilayered traumatic experiences in the daily lives of local Palestinians. The next book, *I Saw Ramallah* (Mourid Barghouti, 1997), offers a different account of Palestine, from the viewpoint of an exiled poet, who found a rare chance of visiting his hometown after three decades. While the first book opens a window into lives under occupation, the second memoir complements it by narrating life in isolation from one's land and family. The next book analyzed in the chapter is the novel *The Image, The Icon, and the Covenant* (2002), by Sahar Khalifeh, the most renowned female writer of her country. It accentuates the domestic life in Palestine under occupation, focusing not only on the female experience in a long traumatic history, but also on the infirmities of the local

culture in acknowledging their own limitations when it comes to any act of commemoration of the past. My analysis of the novel through the prism of trauma emplotment explains how the unresolved memories of earlier oppressions have negatively affected the current reactions to ongoing traumas. The fourth work takes us to a doubly marginalized part of the Palestinian collective identity, in the lives of ethnically Palestinian citizens of Israel, who claim Christian or Muslim heritage, and are almost entirely sequestered from the rest of Palestine. The novel *Let It Be Morning* (Sayed Kashua, 2004) narrates a day in the life of an Arab-Israeli family in a predominantly Muslim town, where people can read Hebrew but speak their own dialect of Arabic. The story's unique confrontation with the hybrid identity of the Palestinians in Israel adds another layer to the complicated body of Palestinian trauma literature. Through the examination of four recent narrative works, this chapter underscores how the poetics of trauma emplotment functions within a polyphonic space of scattered, and sometimes discrepant, memories, and how such memories cohere within narratives that are not, contrary to the Iranian case, contributing to a unified nationalistic rhetoric, but remain dispersed.

The final chapter of this study looks into a more recent case of traumatic history on a national scale. The American military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have produced a burgeoning body of literary responses, some of which by veterans of the two wars. The chapter, "When Trauma Comes Home to Roost: The United States at War after 9/11," examines three representative cases of this new literary movement, which I call, "Post-9/11 Veteran Literature." While the chapter on Iran demonstrates the political trajectory of domestic propaganda in narration of trauma, and the Palestinian literature presents a case of thematically close but politically diverse project of narrative memorialization of a traumatic

past, mostly because of the absence of any hegemonic sovereignty, in the case of contemporary United States the literary reactions to the wars are neither subservient to a chauvinistic pro-war rhetoric nor openly apologetic in their revisions of the war. Instead, focusing on the role of the American soldier as an agent of hostile intervention, these narratives tend to re-imagine the experiences of the foreign locals from their own self-confessedly limited perspective. An analysis of two novels and one collection of short stories, all written by veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, unearths the process of narrativization of the soldier's experience. The two common thematic features of all these narratives, as my close reading of them reveals, are the crises of masculinity—which becomes particularly important when we note that all these writers are men—and the universalization of the war's experience by comparing it with either other American wars, most significantly Vietnam, or other recent violent episodes in the Middle East, such as the Arab Spring and its offshoots. These narratives showcase a desire by the American authors, who see themselves as traumatizers, to simultaneously give an account of the trauma they endured and the one they engendered. The novel *Green on Blue* (Elliot Ackerman, 2015) narrates the life of an Afghan boy in a war-torn rural area of his country, which has been mired in an endless war. The novelist reduces the role of Americans in the story to only a single marginal figure, and gives the spotlight entirely to the local warriors. Likewise, more than one-third of the novel *Fives and Twenty-fives* (Michael Pitre, 2014) is narrated by a young Iraqi, who joined the American forces as an interpreter, and who thereafter must live a surreptitious life, preoccupied with questions of identity and morality.

Together, these three chapters cover a wide range of political directions in narration of trauma. Notwithstanding all their different political trajectories, the three national cases in

the study employ common narrative strategies to construct unified stories, which resolve innate problems of memorialization in order to present indelible pains. Each of these literary constellations applies the same narrative paradigms of trauma emplotment, but generates entirely different artefacts. This study examines how the narrative processes utilize painful experiences to shape political statements, using the cases of Iran, Palestine, and the United States as representative examples.

These three cases of collective trauma are chosen not only because they demonstrate three visibly different political directions that the politics of traumatic narration can take, but also because of the outlook of belonging and alienation that each one offers. Stories of these traumatic experiences share comparable concerns regarding owning one's voice and representing one's adversary, but the way each one approaches these concerns is vastly different from the rest. In the case of Iranian literature, the appropriation of a traumatic history for the sake of consolidating an apologetic memory of the war could be viewed as the attempts of a newly established state to maintain its popular appeal and reinforce its claim on the nation's self-image. The history of Palestine showcases the absence of such state apparatus; instead, my analysis details how claims for one's land, ethnicity, and identity are formed in the vacuum of political sovereignty. The American narratives of the two wars after 9/11 provide an interesting contrast with the other two chapters', because the United States' aggressive policies in these wars can be traced back to its previous hawkish policies in, among other places, Iran and Palestine. The stories by American war veterans turn the tables, so to speak, to reveal the fragile position of the traumatizers in addressing their own trauma.

During a confrontation between the representatives of an indigenous community and the governmental officials in British Columbia, writes J. Edward Chamberlin, when the two sides' negotiation about ownership of a piece of land escalated, one of the First Nations' elders bluntly asked his Caucasian counterparts, "If this is your land . . . where are your stories?" (1). Fascinated by the deep truth that was eloquently, and yet simply, conveyed in the question, Chamberlin notes that stories, much more than dogmatic belief systems, are responsible for maintaining a sense of collective belonging. Such stories need not be mythological creation tales or moral fables, but in whatever form, "they are all ceremonies of belief as much as they are chronicles of events, even the stories that claim to be absolutely true" (2). Stories of nation-wide trauma, which my project analyzes, are crucial to creating and propagating this sense of belonging. In the case of American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, when the matter of collective trauma becomes excessively complicated, as the disillusioned veteran sees himself to be the agent of a vain, brutal policy of aggression, the issue of belonging, and by extension, that of out-of-placeness are vital. In studying the three national cases of collective trauma, I address the question of one's ownership over one's memory, and the ways in which narrativization of trauma both contributes to, and complicates, the public memory of a nation. In sum, this project offers a poetics of trauma narration, and uses it to evaluate trauma's politics of memorialization.

1. Trauma Theory and the Problem of Narration

Theorizing trauma is not totally unlike fighting an invisible hydra; not only does cutting off a head trigger the growth of several new heads, but also finding each of the heads is itself a herculean task. It is ubiquitous and yet latent, a concept fragile in theory and vehemently painful in reality. The problems in investigating trauma are partly due to the fact that, whatever its definition, it can be seen as both a perilous condition and a basic survival skill, laden with both negative and positive normative contents, something to overcome but also to relish. It is exceptionally difficult to approach it as a subject of study because of the inharmonious entangling of various disciplines focused on it, not all of which recognize the legitimacy of one another. In practice, trauma is challenging to address because in our time and age it has become an umbrella term, covering a range of phenomena from surviving domestic abuse to simply being the citizen of a country in a time of turmoil, from torture and incarceration to being bullied in cyberspace, from captivity in the hands of terrorists to living under constant surveillance in an otherwise peaceful society. Any negative event described in superlatives seems open to the rhetoric of trauma. The topic of trauma has been fraught with so many irreconcilable difficulties that any theoretical perspective offered for explanation has to achieve a relative comprehensibility through a systematic omission of some of its aspects.

This project does not try to establish its own theory of trauma, nor does it intend to offer a sweeping critique of current theories to clear the way for a more robust theory in the

future. Indeed, my work is fueled by the innate impossibility of a comprehensive trauma

theory, an aporia that is itself highly valuable and should be appreciated for its resistance to

any simplification. Studying trauma is a pressing matter not only due to its pragmatic value,

but also because of its unique capacity to highlight some of the most fundamental questions

in the general area of humanities. Instead of discovering a safe path through the minefield of

trauma theory, I focus on one of the omnipresent issues in considering it from a literary

standpoint: narration. Trauma, being first and foremost a question of memory, is always

involved with the problem of recounting. From *fin de siècle* psychologists' early

advancements with their "talking cure" to the most modern therapeutic techniques, retelling

the harmful experience is considered the key to recovery; in the larger scale of cultural

patterns and social reactions resulting from an exceptionally dreadful experience, the

narration of what is perceived as the traumatic event is always a demanding issue, as well.

In the latter case, narrating the experience has the potential of redrawing a historical sketch

of the society's current condition, or even more radically, revising the established history

and the heretofore dominant culture. Narration of trauma, moreover, is never only the

recounting of the event alone, because every harmful incident, whether in the scale of a

domestic abuse or that of a genocide, has its own bundle of germane tales and experiences

that will be eventually conjured up on the narrative stage; a narration involves not only a

chronological ordering of experiences immediately resulting in pain, but also a prioritization

of events in terms of their relevance and correspondence. The poetics of narration, in other

words, is not at all far from its politics. When it comes to the details of any case study of

trauma, the question of epistemology—i.e., "How do we recognize the origin of trauma?"

and "How do we grasp the order and magnitude of trauma?"—plus the problem of ethics are

added to the already populated stage of narration. What does a study like this, hence, try to achieve in such a dense area of inquiry? The one unequivocal result that can already be forcefully articulated is that there is no unequivocal result to look for. The multiplicity and pervasiveness of trauma make it hard for any scholar to come up with an all-inclusive theory, or at least to offer a type of taxonomy in the service of understanding its nuances. Such a theory would, in one way or another, reduce the common understanding of trauma by labeling it as legitimate and illegitimate—if rape qualifies, for instance, as a *real* trauma, then a national crisis of economic austerity is either a *fake* trauma or a category mistake, and has to adopt a different terminology.

To understand the subtleties of trauma narration while maintaining our grip on the epistemological subtleties, one has to approach the question of trauma narration dialectically. This, as the next chapter will examine, is the core of my project. To analyze trauma narration dialectically means that, instead of denouncing or selectively approaching the long list of binary oppositions in studying trauma (public/private, remembering/forgetting, ethics/politics, repression/enunciation, etc.), the oppositions should be valued for their dialectical energy, which not only drives the discourse of trauma forward, but is the reason behind the apparent impossibility of any definitive mapping. The dynamic nature of trauma makes it as hard to locate as it is to ignore. Observed through a dialectical lens, trauma is the product of chain reactions between contradictory forces, and simultaneously an active agent in regeneration of new series of contradictions. So the taxonomy that will be offered in chapter two is not a categorization of types of narrative per se, but an effort in breaking down the dialectical elements at work in generating narratives.

Of all the binary oppositions mentioned, the one that seems most productive and pragmatically important is between the private and the public—or in slightly different contexts, notable as monadic/political, personal/social, and individual/collective. In reviewing the scholarly literature on trauma studies, we can note three major patterns through which the realm of personal experience is linked and concurrently distinguished from that of the social. The first one focuses on the disciplinary history of trauma studies. Works in this vein show how the political and cultural atmosphere in any given historical episode has a direct correlation to both the scholarly discourse on trauma and the popular perceptions of it, as for instance, the aftermath of the Vietnam War contributed to the official recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the feminist movements since the 1970s effectively shaped the dialogue on trauma of sexual abuse. The second trend of scholarship directs attention to crises of representation in the cultural apprehension of trauma, adopting a particularly poststructuralist reading of psychoanalysis. Studies of this kind usually discuss trauma in the context of the personal and social concomitantly, arguing that at the core of trauma lies a fundamental problem of linguistic signification. The third, and most recent, of the scholarly trends is the product of a mainly American school of sociology that believes trauma at the cultural level has to be distinguished from personal psychic trauma and redefined from square one. It highlights a constructivist approach to trauma as a cultural condition that has to be detached from any essentialist view. Before parsing each of these three general trends, it is worth noting that a large number of studies on trauma do not fit neatly within any of them, as they usually incorporate elements of one with another. Of the three patterns, only the last two stand in sharp antagonism to each

other, and even then, certain scholars such as Ron Eyerman have tried to bridge the gaps between them.[1]

1.1. Genealogies of Trauma

Among the genealogical analyses of the disciplinary status of trauma studies, works by Ruth Leys, Ian Hacking, and Allan Young are mentioned the most frequently. Young's influential study on the history of PTSD, *The Harmony of Illusions* (1997), traces the articulation and gradual acceptance of the idea of traumatic memory in the Western medical community, and by extension, popular opinion, starting from the earliest documented cases of railway accidents in Britain to the rise of the trauma culture in the late twentieth century. Hacking's several works follow a similar historical path in configuring the foundational assumptions underlying what is now almost undisputedly known as traumatic memory.[2] Borrowing Michel Foucault's famous approach to the intertwined relations of power and knowledge, Hacking offers his argument that "the sciences of memory have not been with us always," but were invented in the nineteenth century, and with them appeared a specific understanding of the newly recognized problem of trauma neurosis ("Memory" 79). The entrance of the very term "trauma," originally denoting a wound or lesion, into the diction of psychology was itself, as Young and Hacking explain in detail, the product of a concrete

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[1] Arguably, we can discern a fourth scholarly path, as well, although much less trodden than the other three: the cultural pathological study of the dominance of trauma in popular media. Anne Rothe's *Popular Trauma Culture* (2011), which examines the recent market boom in "misery memoirs," among other things, is a representative example.

[2] While rarely mentioning trauma as an independent subject, Hacking's *Mad Travelers: Reflections on Transient Mental Illnesses* (1998) brilliantly overviews the gradual shifts in professional perceptions over traumatic ailments.

social condition. The earliest examples of trauma were of workers who could not totally recover from accidents, most frequently in the railway industry, and had to fight for compensation from their employers, who looked to medical professionals to offer an expert opinion in the court of law. The injured person seemed to be physically recovered, but various signs of mental perturbation were still present, and sometimes increased, to the physicians' perplexity and the lawyers' distrust. A similar situation, but on a much larger scale, happened during the First World War, with soldiers suffering from a brand new condition that at the time was dubbed "shell shock".[3] Physiologically healthy soldiers were completely unable to continue their normal lives, let alone fight, and were frequently targeted by their superiors and other officials as malingerers with little sense of patriotism to defend their homeland. The psychologists at the time, sincerely disagreeing with each other on the nature of the ailment, all gradually came to accept the pathological condition as a real psychic disease, yet their scientific notions about the problem were deeply imbedded in their own professional state.

This type of Foucauldian approach to the history of clinical trauma is most clearly resonated in Ruth Leys' *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), in which she uncovers a series of recurrent enigmas in the history of trauma analysis by tracing the particular problem of assimilating the clinical evidence within a sweeping theory. From a standpoint similar to Young and Hacking, Leys introduces the irresolvable binarism between two general outlooks toward trauma: The mimetic and the anti-mimetic. The former views trauma as a problem of "dissociation," where the victim is in a state of absence "from the self in which [she] unconsciously imitate[s], or identifie[s] with, the aggressor or traumatic scene in a

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[3] For a detailed history of shell shock and its significance for the discourses of trauma and memory, see Fussell (1975), Stone (1985), and Fendtner (1993).

condition that was likened to a state of heightened suggestibility or hypnotic trance" (8). Diametrically opposed to this is the anti-mimetic view that tends to "regard trauma as if it were a purely external event coming to a sovereign if passive victim," which was adopted more by a positivist trend of medical scholarship (10). Subtleties of this particular dichotomy stand outside of my focus, but what is important to note in this regard is that Leys outlines this polar tendency in the history of psychological trauma as a means to observe the specifics of professional history and concrete social conditions that surround the disciplinary progress. She opens her book by tracing this problem in Freud, and moves on to his contemporaries like Pierre Janet, and the next generations of psychiatrists, such as W. H. R. Rivers, Abram Kardiner, and Sándor Ferenczi. The significance of Leys' work is not in charting the history of the field—many before her had done that—but in showing that with their fundamental disagreements in understanding the basic core of trauma, Janet's disputes with Freud being the most characteristic example, all of these theories had to lavishly borrow from their antagonistic view while pointing out the other one's shortcomings, and were highly restricted by the socio-economic conditions of their time.

Not all the studies, however, offer a skeptical view of the field's progress. Judith Herman's classic *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), which has played a substantial role in establishing the popular acceptance of trauma, particularly in cases of domestic abuse, reviews the history of the field in a slightly more optimistic hue. The first chapter of her book recounts a historical narrative similar to those of the aforementioned scholars, but with a tone that connotes a faith in the teleological progress of medicalizing trauma. "Three times over the past century," she writes, "psychological trauma has surfaced into public consciousness. Each time, the investigation of that trauma has flourished in affiliation with a

political movement" (9). The first case was the hysteria that preoccupied the Continental European psychologists of late nineteenth century, commonly perceived as a women's disorder. The second was shell shock in the First World War, which continued to be an issue for medical officers on both sides of the Atlantic, and reached its climax after the Vietnam War. The third case was the more recent issue of domestic and sexual abuse that was directly linked with the feminist movements, particularly in North America—and one of whose leading figures was Herman herself. She goes into historical detail for each case to exhibit how they are situated in a bigger social framework. In the first case, for instance, Freud's famous *Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) shaped the first sketches of a theory about childhood sexual experiences with disturbing effects that only surface much later in life. "Hysteria was so common among women," Herman comments, that if Freud's hypothesis were indeed true, "he would be forced to conclude that what he called 'perverted acts against children' were endemic, not only among the proletariat of Paris . . . but also among the respectable bourgeois families" (14). So the social pressure against this view marked the end of Freud's probing this subject, until two decades later, when he became briefly interested in it again in the First World War's aftermath.

Herman continues the historical investigation up to her own time to conclude that only after 1980, when PTSD was officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association, it became clear "that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war" (32). The lesson she offers is to note that, "[w]ithout the context of a political movement, it has never been possible to advance the study of psychological trauma" (32). But now, years after that remark, when trauma is not only legitimized, but has turned into

one of the most ubiquitous signs of our time, one could ask where its study has brought us. This is a question that Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman address in *The Empire of Trauma* (2007, trans. 2009). The two French anthropologists begin their inquiry with a curious observation. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when about seven hundred psychiatrists offered free psychological support for survivors, witnesses, and even local residents, surveys revealed that the majority of the people who sought help and were diagnosed with traumatic disorder were college-educated and white (Fassin and Rechtman 1; Boscarino et al. 278-79). Not only is it noticeable that the scope of trauma is broadened to include the residents of a city where the attack occurred—who may not have been survivors or eyewitnesses—but the self-identification as traumatized is far from a universal condition, and dependent on class and race, among other factors.

In their investigation, Fassin and Rechtman follow a relatively similar perspective to the Foucauldian authors before them, but they do add to the historical findings of their predecessors by both incorporating more recent events and following a few parallel genealogical traces that were so far ignored. One of the most interesting issues they bring to light is the historical shift in the middle of the twentieth century in understanding the victims of trauma as survivors, not sufferers. The latter concept perceives victims with a generally aporetic, if not completely repugnant, view, mostly because they were exposing a challenge to authorities in terms of compensation for their injuries, or sometimes even more basic rights such as medical leave from military service. The climax of these negative views, as Fassin and Rechtman observe, happened during the First World War, when several medical procedures were invented to cure the mentally injured soldiers based on the idea of their psychic inferiority, as if they were too low in their mental rank to appreciate the

value of patriotism and had to learn a lasting lesson on that. One of the most radical of these procedures, called "torpille," was simply an electrocution device, a torture machine that was supposed to cure the victim's illness, or more realistically, convince him out of it (45). In many cases, even after the war, the victims were seen as profiteering schemers; when their symptoms were diagnosed as authentic, they were suspected of being subconsciously motivated by profit. By the time of the Second World War, the medical society was more or less in concurrence about the reality of traumatic neurosis, yet it was not accepted as a reason for desertion or compensation, and so the sufferers were still under a denigrating gaze. What changed this derogatory approach was the discovery of the concentration camps.

The Holocaust, at the time not yet named as such, was too perplexing for containment in the extant theories and procedures. The victims were civilians, to begin with. "None of the etiological factors hitherto adopted to explain the development of traumatic neurosis as a chronic condition," Fassin and Rechtman note, "bore any relation to the experience of the survivors. The notions of malingering, cowardice, selfishness, overdeveloped narcissism, secondary gains, class interest—all stigmas attached to traumatic neurosis, could not be applied to these people in striped pyjamas who were emerging directly from hell" (71). The image of the survivor had a distinct positive quality in contrast to the sufferers. If the latter were belittled for an infirmity they exhibited, the former had the potential to be revered. Two new complex situations immediately appeared, which later contributed to a fundamental shift in perceiving trauma victims. The first was "the way the traumatic experience was repositioned to become a testament to the unspeakable. Whereas previously trauma related to an individual and subjective experience, the concept was now enlarged to represent universal human experience" (72). This universalization owes itself to

the fact that victims of camps were ordinary people, while the shell shocked soldiers were deemed inferior.

The second situation can be summarized by the key term "survivor guilt," appearing initially in the works of the Austrian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim.[4] The survivor's self-blame, derived from an ungrounded guilt "remains present, obsessive, destructive, and reveals an insistent unease about the reasons for his survival" (74). In contrast to the traumatized soldiers, here it is "not the therapist who suspects the survivor of bearing any responsibility," but the victim "who suspects that she owes her survival to something shameful or even underhanded, since so many others in identical circumstances died" (75). Guilt, whether unfounded or not, brings up a subject of morality heretofore absent: the moral obligation of testimony. The idea of survivor guilt presents a practical confirmation to view victims as not only witnesses to what happened, but the only remnant of those who did not make it out of the camps. "Through their guilt they inscribed within their suffering the memory of those who could no longer bear witness," add Fassin and Rechtman, so the testimony to trauma "was gradually recognized as offering ultimate truth about the human condition," as it was the only way to see what happens at the farthest limits of humanity (75, 76).

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[4] In one of his most celebrated essays, titled "Survival," Bettelheim writes: "One cannot survive the concentration camp without feeling guilty that one was so incredibly lucky when millions perished, many of them in front of one's eyes . . . feeling—against one's better judgment—that one should have intervened, feeling guilty for not having done so, and most of all feeling guilty for having often felt glad that it was not oneself who perished" (297-98).

1.2. Poststructuralist Trauma Studies

The universalization of trauma is the main focus of attention in the second trend of

scholarship regarding the culture of trauma, the postmodernist psychoanalytical approach,

ostentatiously present in, but not exclusive to, works of literary analysis. The most

frequently cited figure is Cathy Caruth, whose works in the 1990s dominated the scholarly

dialogue on trauma in literary and cultural studies.[5] The general argument of this scholarly

trend, borrowed from Paul de Man's poststructuralist view of language, is based on a

particular interpretation of Freud's work on trauma. His claim that trauma neurosis is not

directly the result of a vehement horrific event, but of the psyche's incapability to

peacefully process it, is presented by Caruth as such: "[T]rauma is not locatable in the

simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very

unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to

haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed* 4). In the next step, trauma becomes a social issue,

highlighting a general problem of human culture: the problem of representation. As Caruth

elaborates, it is "in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma . . . that

we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly

referential," and so the main objective behind analyzing trauma is a "rethinking of

reference" in human history (11). In this sense, trauma brings about a valuable opportunity

to discuss the more general topics of communication, memory, and representation in the

modern human culture. The reliance on poststructuralist readings of two key texts by Freud,

Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), has been a

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5- While considered a pioneering figure in this scholarly path, Caruth, as she acknowledges in the beginning of
Unclaimed Experience, does owe a significant portion of her theory to, most notably, Shoshanna Felman and
Geoffrey Hartman. See Felman (1991, with Dori Laub) and Hartman (1994, 1996).

subject of many critical responses, which focus mostly on the self-celebratory attitude in using horrible human disasters as opportunities for abstract theoretical adventures, or the overextension of a problematic trope, whereby the loosely defined history (or culture) of trauma is based on a metaphor for individual psychic trauma. Caruth does not shun broad remarks, such as, "[H]istory, like trauma, is never simply one's own," because of "the way we are implicated in each other's trauma" (*Unclaimed* 24).

The first critical objection to that approach targets its tendency to appropriate trauma as "a basic ontological condition," instead of a concrete horrific experience (Kansteiner 204). When, for instance, Caruth notes that "physicians and psychiatrists have begun to reshape their thinking about physical and mental experiences," and finds this an appropriate call to a similar move for "resituating [history] in our understanding," she directly links the indelible effect of psychological trauma on an individual and the general issue of representation at the cultural level (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 11). As Wulf Kansteiner puts it, rather than "improving our understanding of the experiences and treatments of trauma victims or revising the theoretical foundations of such treatments," Caruth studies the question of trauma "because the phenomenon appears to her as a perfect, particularly vivid illustration of her understanding of the workings of language" (203). This critique is both against the philosophical premises of this approach and its moral responsibility regarding trauma. The model loses its force if one disagrees with the poststructuralist claims about language, but even if those premises are accepted, the conflation of serious harmful events and general failures of representation and language does not meet the required level of commitment toward the victims of trauma.

Fassin and Rechtman, likewise, believe that "the universalization of trauma," however inadvertently, by this pattern of critical analysis, "results in its trivialization" (19). Looking at Caruth's humanist approach, and also Slavoj Žižeck's Lacanian viewpoint on trauma,[6] they assert that in "these models, every society and every individual suffers the traumatic experience of their past. Not only do scales of violence disappear, but their history is erased" (19). Placing Caruth's argument against the larger background of scholarship in the Humanities, Harald Weilnböck and Kansteiner criticize its integrity as such:

> Caruth emphasizes that the failure of the trauma victim to come to terms with the origins and symptoms of his/her mental illness represents a rare and valuable moment of authenticity because human beings only get a chance to perceive reality directly whenever our cultural systems of signification temporarily disintegrate under their own weight. In this way, trauma is conceived as a revelation that teaches us about the limits and possibilities of human culture. ("Against" 230)[7]

What makes this approach even more questionable is the way it assumes trauma spreads its effects in a society. Partly because this mode of thinking invests considerably in the issue of language, it takes for granted that the linguistic representation of trauma is itself a vehicle

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[6] For the details of Žižeck's views on trauma theory, see his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), and for his specific application of it to the case of 9/11, see *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002).

[7] For an example of Weilnböck's and Kansteiner's own preferred approach to trauma studies, see their essay, "Provincializing Trauma?" (2012). Also, for a recent attempt at responding to Kansteiner's criticism, see Eagleston (2014).

There is another line of criticism against Caruth, which is similar to Kansteiner's, but questions not just Caruth but also the modern clinical psychology that some of her arguments rely upon. Joshua Pederson, citing the psychologist Richard McNally's *Remembering Trauma* (2003), argues that literary criticism on trauma should highlight "the accessibility of traumatic memory and the possibility that victims may construct reliable narrative accounts of it," instead of focusing on narrative lacunae (338). McNally's own arguments, for instance, that no serious clinical evidence for "traumatic amnesia" exists, are in tandem with the above works by Young and Hacking.

for trauma. This leads to the second line of criticism against this method: the overextension of metaphoric language.

The psychoanalytical model of cultural trauma neglects the fragility of the metaphor that constitutes its foundation, and tends to treat it as literal. This problem seems to be equally the result of the Freudian aspect of the model as well as its reliance on poststructuralism. Caruth, for example, extensively uses Freud's most speculative book *Moses and Monotheism* for her analysis of trauma, whereby his conjectures about the possible roots of the Jewish history are discussed and elaborated into a large-scale model for trauma in general. Regardless of the criticisms of *Moses and Monotheism* in particular, and psychoanalysis in general, one can find a significant problem in Freud's text, which is directly echoed in Caruth's. "The psychoanalyses of individuals have taught us that their earliest impressions, received at a time they were hardly able to talk, manifest themselves lately in an obsessive fashion," Freud writes. "We feel that the same must hold good for the earliest experiences of mankind" (167). When the analysis assumes that society at large can be studied like an individual human being, there is no need to explain the mechanisms of social life, nor does it seem important that different bodily aspects of humans may have no parallel in the social sphere.

1.3. Social Constructivist Theory of Trauma

At variance with the poststructuralist-psychoanalytic view stands the third scholarly approach to trauma studies, pioneered by a group of sociologists who offer a social framework to observe large-scale horrific events and their effects on the cultural sphere.

Jeffrey Alexander's study on the history of the Holocaust and its gradual social impacts in North America, and Ron Eyerman's work on the wide-scale trauma of slavery that shaped the African-American cultural identity (Alexander, *Remembering*; Eyerman, *Slavery*) were early steps in redefining trauma as a cultural phenomenon, something not quite reproducible in the psychological sphere but not completely irrelevant to it, either. At the core of their attempts, which later flourished in several edited volumes and culminated in Alexander's *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012), was the need to redress the permeation of the psychological concept of trauma into the social and cultural vocabulary, not quite dissimilar to the earlier flow of the term from the realm of physiology to psychology more than a century ago. Whether one approves of it or not, the terminology of trauma is now appropriated for not only rape and war experiences, but social events that leave a fundamental lesion in the collective body of a nation, an ethnicity, or any other imaginable community. One can trace this disciplinary shift historically, as to an extent Fassin and Rechtman do, or one can claim its current treatment a category mistake, as Kansteiner does, but it is undeniable that the pervasiveness of its usage serves a purpose: the culture of our time is constantly shaped and reshaped by alertness to constructed threats, such as terrorism, or intimidations of forgetting a dark past, as in postcolonial societies, or the invented obligations to rewrite the past, like what happens after most revolutions. The senses of menace, angst, injury, and panic that drive most of the cultural energy in this day and age can be best expressed through the critical vocabulary of trauma. True, this understanding of trauma has to differ from the psychological one, or else it will fall prey to the same objections that poststructuralist theories face, and this is what Alexander and his colleagues undertake.

In the way of offering a general contour of "cultural trauma," Alexander states that it "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (*Trauma* 6). He draws a bold distinction between his theory and the poststructuralist-psychoanalytic conjectures on the cultures of trauma by labeling the latter a "lay trauma theory" for its incapacity—or indisposition—to address the role of social institutions and hegemonic cultural narratives in construction of trauma (*Trauma* 7). Condemning the essentialist ideas, according to which the transformation of a horrific experience into an indispensable element of collective identity occurs without the mediation of any social agents, he elaborates, "that first and foremost . . . events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (*Trauma* 13). Alexander extends this ascription to even nonexistent events that are only imagined through a dominant social narrative; "such imagined events . . . can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred" (*Trauma* 13). His definition explicitly claims that cultural trauma is not identical with the horrible event itself, but should be perceived as a social process generated out of a society's response to such an event. [8]

Alexander's theory puts forth an outline of claim-making processes that construct cultural trauma. "It is a claim to some fundamental injury," he writes, "an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and

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[8] One of Alexander's fellow sociologists, Neil Smelser, defines cultural trauma slightly differently: "A cultural trauma refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole" (38). Smelser does, of course, clarify that "cultural traumas are for the most part historically made, not born" (37).

reconstitution" (*Trauma* 16). He categorizes four different types of question that an effective trauma narrative has to provide acceptable answers for: What is the nature of the pain? Who are the direct victims? What is the relation between the victims and the wider audience? And who should be held responsible for the pain? (*Trauma* 17-19). Contrasting this with the famous title of Caruth's book, *Unclaimed Experience*, one notices that social theory recognizes trauma as the result of asserting certain experiences, not the complexity of leaving them unspoken. This theory does not aspire to provide means for moral assessment of the social claims' authenticity, but aims to deliver a medium to study "how and under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results" (*Trauma* 14). By honing in on the concrete and local dynamics of a collectivity, it seeks to know the process through which "[c]ollective actors 'decide' to represent social pains as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they want to go," without pursuing any direct moral judgment about such decisions, or exposing them to any question about the general condition of human beings (*Trauma* 15).

Evidently, neither the claim-making questions nor their possible responses materialize in short periods, nor does the relative success of a trauma narrative become visible in a brief time frame. What the psychoanalytical cultural approach calls "latent period" is considered from the sociological perspective as a period of solidification for the hegemonic narratives to fully emerge. "Social narratives are not composed by some hidden hand of history," Alexander states. "The trauma-drama emerged in bits and pieces," as he explains for the specific case of the Holocaust. "It was a matter of this story and that, this scene and that scene from this movie and that book, this television episode, and that theatre performance, this photographic capturing of a moment of torture and suffering" (*Trauma*

65). An approach to trauma, in this sense, has to take into account the possibility that in some cases a collective suffering may not at all lead to trauma. In sharp contrast with the general psychological assumption about trauma, the social constructivist theory considers the communal reaction to a pain to be open to a variety of different alternatives, not all of which qualify as traumatic.

By the same token, not every case of apparent trauma at the cultural level is necessarily traceable back to a horrendous originary event. Here is a patent difference between trauma as a systemic cultural occurrence and clinical psychic trauma. In the latter, the traumatic symptoms, objectively observable and universally present in all the victims, is not only a testament to the medical pathology, but also an irrefutable sign of the causal event. Something *must have happened* to the person who shows all the symptoms of PTSD, and unearthing that happening from inside the repressed memories of the victim is an elemental part of understanding—and treating—trauma. Yet with cultural trauma redefined from a completely different standpoint, the question of what *actually* happened is much less important than asking what is perceived to have happened, or what the dominant narratives of trauma espouse. To extend this contradistinction, one can note that cultural trauma is not necessarily a plight itself, or an illness that needs to be cured. It is a social experience in which an interaction at the cultural level plays itself out to assign meaning to a horrific occurrence and to inject this newly formed meaning into the collective identity of the group. In this sense, cultural trauma is a communal practice of historical hermeneutics, an attempt by a society's various institutions to interpret a calamitous event, redraw the history of the event through that interpretation, and consolidate its newly shaped identity via social practices that uphold certain values in the light of that horrible memory.

To complicate the matter further, let us note the stress on extraordinariness of the traumatic event in both cases of individual and cultural trauma. All the various approaches that I have summarized share a similar emphasis on the aberrance of the traumatic genesis from what can be perceived as normal. The whole point in the medicalization of psychic normalcy is to chart the symptoms of disorders, which has to be done if a disorder is to be recognized. But normalcy in various contexts can mean different things. If the criteria for trauma are the extraordinariness of the event and the response to it, then does a statistical measure sustain, or inversely, refute the putative benchmark for something to be called extraordinary? Say, if knowing that statistically cases of rape are very prevalent at a given time in a given society, then does that disqualify rape victims from claiming the trauma due to the fact that their ordeals do not exceed the average (or normal) experience? Does the chronic predominance of PTSD in combat soldiers invalidate it as a disorder because it has turned into the normal order of a soldier's life experience? The answer to questions like these is a forthright no. In the case of individual afflictions, the proof of trauma is in trauma itself. We can maintain the right to question the social norms that propagate a victim image, or the links of power-knowledge that weld professional medicine with the politics of recognizing trauma, as some of the aforementioned writers have done, but all that withstanding, the practical measure of what counts as an extraordinary state is always answered by the mental status of the victim.

However, in the case of cultural trauma, the assuredness of clinical observation does not have any equivalent in the social realm; there is no evaluative procedure as to what indeed is extraordinary. Wars, acts of terrorism, mass migrations, economic austerities, revolutions, and many other disruptive events may be unique from the perspective of those

directly involved, but are not, on a grand historical scale, extraordinary. Something of such a magnitude happens in a corner of the world every month, if not every week, as a quick look at any televised evening news program confirms. Even atrocious crimes against humanity and genocides are not that rare if considered on a global scale. Here, we do not have the promise of clinical evidence to work as its own proof. Thus, if the question of epistemology in individual trauma is only marginally interesting for scholars—and rarely important for practicing psychiatrists—it is of prime significance in the social cases.

The query is not so much as "what causes trauma?" as "how do we know if this is trauma?" bearing in mind that it is not the ontology that is questioned, i.e., if there *is* a cultural trauma to speak of, nor the morality, i.e., if the claim for trauma is veridical. At stake is the prevalence of a discourse, marked by the frequency of narratives produced in the cultural realm: from op-ed columns in newspapers to television series, from best-selling memoirs to museum pieces, from college course syllabi to stand-up comedy shows. This concludes that, as Neil Smelser writes in a volume co-edited with Eyerman, Alexander, and others, "once a historical memory is established as a national trauma for which the society has to be held in some way responsible, its status as trauma has to be continuously and actively sustained and reproduced in order to continue in that status" (38). Not only are we dealing with a socially constructed trauma, but also with one whose extraordinariness is part and parcel of its *modus operandi* as a continuously predominant narrative; its unusualness has to be perpetuated in a usual way or else it will disappear. This means that trauma as a cultural phenomenon shares nothing but name with the psychic trauma as a medical ailment. In the same way that the Greek origin of the word, meaning wound, is only figuratively

relevant to its current psychological usage, so is its employment in the context of collectivities in relation to psychology.

Yet the more one probes the condition of cultural trauma, the less its distinction from that of personal experiences holds fast. A good vantage point to see the intricate links between the two concepts is the idea of collectivity itself. Alexander and his colleagues make abundant references to concepts like collective identity and collective memory, taking them as key terms in elucidating the social theory of trauma. But examining what the scholarly tradition of sociology has thus far argued over memory, for instance, shows how closely intertwined is the personal realm with the public. The term "collective memory" was coined by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his landmark study *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (*Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925), where he attempts to define memory's social structure against the more dominant theories of memory (including Freud's), in which the prominence was given to the individual. Since then, a wide gamut of theories of social memory has been proposed and examined, to the extent that the very idea of memory in a social sphere has become one of the broadest and most challenging interdisciplinary topics in today's human and social sciences.[9] One of the recurring problems in this area is in confusing two different, but related, concepts: the memory of individuals in a social sphere, and the memory of a society itself. One is still an individual memory, only perceived against, and accumulated in, a social framework, and the other considers the memory of a collectivity distinct from the cumulative of its individuals' memories. Jeffrey Olick proposes a new terminology to clarify the case. He gives the name "collected memory" to "the aggregated individual memories of members of a group," and

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[9] For a concise overview of Halbwachs' theory, see Marcel and Mucchielli (2010). Also, for detailed discussions of various theories of social memory, see Erll (2011) and Misztal (2003).

uses "collective memory" only to focus on the institutional practices of creating and maintaining an image of a shared past (338).

Olick's distinction is particularly useful when one intends to analyze the rise and fall of certain memory paradigms on a social scale; how various generations revisit a part of their history, or how an official representation of a historical condition is challenged when the socio-economic power of the state deteriorates. If one studies sudden ruptures of memory, in works as varied as memoirs and photo collections, however, one notices that the reference point in reconsidering memory is always personal recollections. A memoir, or more significantly, a literary work of fiction, is conditioned by cultural and institutional factors, but still written by a singular person ruminating on a series of individual memories. The collective memory shapes the grounds against which the work is written, and to notice its presence, such a work has to be treated not as a singular testimony of individual responses—because it would then be part of a "collected memory"—but as an element in a systemic construction of memory claims. This approach serves social or political scholarship very well, but only at the expense of diminishing the literariness by placing literature alongside other institutional products. Thinking of collective memory as something innately different from individual memories recounted against a communal backdrop is useful, but also very restricting when it comes to studying literature.

Alexander is quite accurate when claiming that trauma emerges in bits and pieces from all different types of cultural products. However, a challenge to his argument would be that what is inscribed in any single one of these works is not itself merely a piece in the puzzle of collective memory, but an autonomous attestation to a personal memory, which of course is embedded in social conditions. A narrative of, say, the Spanish Civil War may

only follow a handful of characters, their backgrounds, and their painful experiences—think of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. Such works focus on the traumatic lives of a few, while painting a picture of a whole country in affliction. Perceiving works like these as trauma literature means focusing on those few characters within the milieu of the war. But looking at it *à la* Alexander and colleagues, the works serve merely as singular pieces in the large mechanism of a social narrative. The collective memory is not present in one work alone; it is only visible when the work is placed alongside many other productions of similar order. Needless to say, by then, the scholarship may reduce a literary narrative into a document, strip it of its unique literary qualities. The text as a text has a scholarly value for the recognizable contribution it makes to the social discourse of collective memory. There is an inevitable reductionism in treating those little bits and pieces that augment a social narrative of trauma when the singular aesthetic and narrative features of the works are not factored in. Thus, *If This Is a Man* (1947), the magnificent Holocaust memoir by Primo Levi, for example, stands side by side with mountains of popular memoirs, television series, and movies with very little artistic distinction, as they all fortify the inclusive discourse of the Holocaust trauma. This by no means vitiates the veracity of the social approach, but highlights how close the socio-cultural reading of trauma is interwoven within personal experiences, specifically when we consider it from the standpoint of literary scholarship.

As observed thus far, theories of trauma tend to sacrifice one aspect of the problem for the sake of accentuating the rest of it. If the psychoanalytic trend in collective trauma takes serious methodological missteps, or the sociological attention is focused on the social role of cultural artefacts in generating and maintaining discourses more than closely reading

those works for their particular nuances, it is all because trauma, as both a social and psychic condition, stands well above the level of any attempt at comprehensively theorizing it. Moreover, the concept of trauma is so fluidly protean that its applicability is now virtually unlimited, and by the same token, an all-inclusive definition of it is almost impossible. That impossibility, however, should not deter us, and in fact, as I intend to show, should be savored as the main focus of the study. Trauma is a counterpoint of many valuable paradoxes, and it is the constant friction of these contrarian qualities that energizes the emplotment of trauma.

Any attempt at offering a poetics of trauma narration, or as I call it from here onward, "trauma emplotment," must be able to systematize the various ways that horrific experiences turn into cogent memories. The question, as explained above, is neither the authenticity of any traumatic memory, nor the matter of cure, reclamation, or normalization. If the general understanding of trauma has already surpassed the level of psychic disorders, and includes large-scale public memories, the project of mapping its emplotment has to examine, simply put, how pain is transformed into a story. The pains of losing one's ancestral land, living under colonial oppression, going to war, returning from war, witnessing a terrorist attack, or living in exile, are each palpably different in substance from the rest and cannot be assumed to have a shared essence. Nonetheless, what unifies all of these painful experiences, and many more, is that they all go through relatively similar processes of narrativization.

When it comes to the issue of traumatic narration, this study does not completely rely on any single theoretical foundation for trauma, because, as already detailed, none of them fully encompasses the scope of the traumatic experience; however, I will not entirely

do away with these theories, either. All the objections to Caruth and her psychoanalytical approach to trauma considered, I will still indirectly use some aspects of her work in my own venture to define the patterns of trauma emplotment. Particularly, one of the major objections to Caruth, her commingling of the literal with the figurative, which harms the ethical aspect of her approach, will be extensively invoked in the next chapter. I will argue that indeed such verbal border-crossings are elemental to any understanding of trauma narration. Reading a narrated trauma requires an engagement with the survivor figure, who, as I will elaborate, is the quintessence of the integration between the literal language and the figurative. Likewise, the sociological theory of trauma falls short of offering a totalizing definition of its object of analysis, but I will borrow from its contribution to clarify the process through which the collective scope of trauma is constantly redefined. Alexander's theory does not allow much of a space to contemplate the dynamics of narration, but it does articulate the need to understand the memorialization of trauma as a process that continuously refreshes itself. In the next chapter, I will use his definition of trauma's universalization to elaborate a dialectical pattern of emplotment.

2. The Three Patterns of Trauma Emplotment

Coined by the historian Hayden White in his germinal book, *Metahistory* (1973), the term

"emplotment" originally meant the process of formulating events and experiences into a

unified story. White uses the term to explain how Western schools of historiography are

born out of the tradition of chronicles. The latter is only preoccupied with recording a set of

major events in any given year for any particular court—deaths, births, and marriages of

nobles, wars and treaties, etc.—which on their own could not establish a comprehensible

narrative. White argues that the "arrangement of selected events of the chronicle into a story

raises the kinds of questions the historian must anticipate and answer in the course of

constructing his narrative," including questions of choosing or highlighting certain events at

the expense of others, and so emplotment becomes the collective name for a historian's

policies and preferences to offer a "*followable* story" from scattered records (7).

I am borrowing this term from White to use it in a slightly different context. Instead

of focusing on the underlying dynamics of historiography, this study is looking into

construction of narratives from mnemonic fragments, particularly those pertaining to

traumatic memories. In this chapter I offer an outline of the patterns that narrativization of

traumatic experiences tend to follow. The underlying assumption is that it is possible to

detect sets of similar configurations in the process of selecting, ordering, and prioritizing

horrific and violent experiences, on both individual and collective level, while maintaining

enough flexibility in the offered outline to avoid the implication that all trauma narratives

are similar, regardless of their local politics. Indeed, the main difference between my

resorting to the concept of emplotment and White's original usage of the term is that I do not adhere to any grand plan for an all-inclusive structuralist map of narration. As the next three chapters will detail, the strength of my theory of trauma emplotment is in its adaptability to dissimilar political and historical contexts. Not only will it not overlook local differences in traumatic narratives for the sake of one grand scheme, but the offered theoretical framework will highlight critical peculiarities in each of the three historical case studies, which would not be entirely visible otherwise.

The three patterns discernible in the narration of trauma, tragedy-comedy, inclusion-exclusion, and universality-uniqueness, detail the insurmountable difficulties of the traumatic condition, and explain the mechanism through which the perplexities of trauma become relatable. These patterns are not paradigmatic elements of a generic plotline or atomized blocks of a syntactic structure. What studying each of these dialectical categories achieves is not a breakdown of a narratological skeleton, but an overall grasp of the process through which the irresolvable complications of trauma find their comprehensible narrative order, i.e., their emplotment. As argued thus far, the contending theories of trauma may not have succeeded in fully mapping the phenomenon; their relative failure, however, is itself a testimony to the protean nature of trauma itself. The historical problem of definition, initiated in physiology, then moving to psychology, and later the social sciences, showcases the value of approaching the study of trauma from an interdisciplinary point of view, and indeed the latter's critical indispensability. Even if, following Young, Hacking, McNally, and others, we argue that trauma as a mental condition is entirely invented by the modern medicine, it still has to be addressed within the framework of narration. An invented category is a category nonetheless, and the fact that every record of trauma is always a

narration means that the best approach to understand trauma could be a study of how it is chronicled. Here I will argue that the emplotment is what renders the antinomies of trauma not just meaningful, but forcefully persuasive.

Each of these three patterns highlights a level of rhetorical engagement between the urge to record the disturbing memory and the necessity of distancing from it to gain a meaningful perspective. The pattern of tragedy-comedy exhibits the most fundamental level of such an engagement: the narrator of trauma builds an anticipation for redemption (or reclamation) within a trajectory of demise and decline. As I will explain below, stories of trauma are neither entirely tragic nor fully comic, yet they offer an intersection of the downward and upward vectors of these two basic plot patterns. The dialectical interaction of tragic and comic plot modes leads to a theoretical appraisal of the axis of trauma narrative: the survivor. Examining the situation of the survivor figure in trauma emplotment, in turn, opens the path for elaborating the problem of exclusion in traumatic experience that begets, quite paradoxically, its own inclusiveness. While the survivors may not fully express their indomitable inner pain that can remain latent for a long time, they do find channels of empathy through larger group identities, be it gendered, racial, ethnic, national, or religious. This is typified in the sense of belonging and participation found in responses to trauma narratives that claim, for instance, that all African-Americans experience the same social discrimination, all Jews bear the wounds of the Holocaust, and all women share the dark memories of sexual harassment. Even if claims of this nature are factually incorrect, or at least exaggerated—e.g., Jews of non-European descent were not exterminated by Nazis, or statistically speaking, many women may never directly experience sexual assault—the widespread existence of such discourses shows the integral narrative pattern of exclusion

and inclusion, especially if we note that the claim of broadening traumatic identity to a group works both to embrace a collective empathy and to draw a border around it. So, one may allege that, while not all Jews can be claimed to partake in the memory of the Holocaust, *only* Jews are able to fully grasp it. Obviously, the historical veracity of statements like this is open to doubt; however, my focus is on the narrative process that creates the sense of belonging and marks the binarism of self and other.

This dialectical mechanism also embraces a third pattern of trauma narrative, which I call universality-uniqueness. The problem of defining trauma as an extraordinary phenomenon, briefly mentioned in the first chapter, presents itself as a fundamental enigma in narration. In a nutshell, the problem is that if trauma, on both clinical and socio-cultural scales, is marked as a state of crisis, a condition that surpasses whatever is taken for normalcy, then how and why does its singularity give way to universalization? If, to pick up another Holocaust reference, what happened in the concentration camps can be suggested as an evil beyond any equivalent in history, it is definitely worth noting how the very word "holocaust" gradually came to be used as a generic reference for many other calamitous events. It is, as I will argue, not at all a feature limited to the Holocaust: the critical conditions of Palestinians are frequently referred to as apartheid, a term originally coined, and until recently solely used, for the case of South Africa. Even in legal terminology, one can notice phrases such as "crimes against humanity," initially used in condemnation of the Ottoman Genocide of Armenians in 1915, and largely popularized after the Nuremberg trials, gradually entered the public lingo in reference to a wide variety of horrendous acts (Luban 86). Reflecting on the problem of universality of the traumatic condition that is

engendered out of its own singularity, this chapter concludes by sketching an overall theory of trauma emplotment.

2.1. Tragedy-Comedy

The pattern of trauma emplotment that I call tragedy-comedy needs a short explanation in terms of its labeling, especially because it is easy to be confused with the recognized dramatic genre known as tragicomedy. At first glance, it seems both morally and structurally inappropriate to refer to trauma narratives as "comedy," for the obvious reason that there is rarely any laughter in such stories, but also because comedy presupposes a sense of derision, a downward look that often implies the assumed position of the audience to be higher than that of the story's characters. In comedy, we as the readers can afford to laugh at the characters' pains and worries, which does not correspond with the experience of trauma narration. However, what I envision as the *comic pattern* in traumatic experience, which I borrow from Northrop Frye's definition of the plot type in his classic *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), does not appertain to either the humorous quality of the genre or its expectations of a certain social status of the characters. In fact, trauma narrative never fully becomes a comedy, but neither does it turn into tragedy. The most elemental dynamic force behind trauma emplotment is in the opposition of the tragic condition, the story of downfall and demise, and the comic condition, the tale of transformation and cohesion.

What in dramatic literature is known as tragicomedy, exemplified in works like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Chekhov's *The Seagull*, should be distinguished from my current subject of analysis. The genre of tragicomedy is generally known to comprise either works of stern attitude that adhere to the classic requirements of tragedy but spare their characters a fully dark and dismal ending, or the opposite: a narrative with a disastrous

ending but bereft of any high rhetoric or decorum. In contradistinction to that, the tragedy-comedy dialectical pattern highlights not a genre division but a locus of narrative engendering that combines two contrary directions without fully assimilating one within the other. Trauma narration does not constitute a genre per se, but rather an underlying logic of communication that can crystalize in a wide variety of pre-existing literary genres.

In his pursuit of a totalizing theory of literature, Frye asks, "are there narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary literary genres?" In response, he famously divides narrative literature into four different "pregeneric elements," which he calls "*mythoi* or generic plots," each one corresponding to one of the four seasons (162). Within this framework, generally titled "Theory of Myths," Frye fleshes out the details of each *mythos* according to its overall pattern of narrative progress and the type of emotional and intellectual response they invoke. The mythos of spring is comedy, summer is romance, autumn is tragedy, and irony/satire is the dedicated mythos of winter. To clarify his usage of this terminology, Frye explicates that terms like tragedy and comedy "may have been originally names for two species of drama, but we also employ [them] to describe general characteristics of literary fiction, without regard to genre" (162). In his detailed explanation of each narrative mode, Frye notes that there is a relative overlapping between the ones that emblematically represent successive seasons. In the same way that spring only gradually turns into summer, the mythoi of romance and comedy, or satire and tragedy, do contain to a certain extent some shared patterns and similar stock characters. This means that the whole process of narration, even if it does not fit into any single genre, is mappable within the seasonal system of mythoi. Frye's theory is, by and large, driven by a formalist attitude that tries to encompass as wide an area of inquiry as possible within a neatly

categorized series of elements. While not quite a structuralist—mostly because in contrast to his contemporary European theorists, he rarely shows interest in Saussurian linguistics—Frye offers, in his own words, "a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principle, and techniques of literary criticism," with a mindset not less ambitiously structuralist than any other theorist of his age (3).

Similar to my reference to Hayden White, the recourse to Frye is not an attempt to emulate his comprehensive reformulation of literary genres in general. In this study, references to Frye are not to reinvigorate the "synoptic" approach that is now, quite rightfully, out of fashion. This resort to a few terms from Frye's rich but outdated vocabulary is better justified if seen from a merely economic point of view: Instead of inventing new jargon, why not refurbish the already familiar ones, particularly those that are remarkably well-expressed? There is little value in expanding all the concepts that Frye outlines in his theory, since many of them are not homologous with trauma narration. The mythoi of romance and satire, in particular, are defined by Frye in such a way that their essential characteristics are not relevant to the current subject of study. [10] Comedy and tragedy, on the other hand, are intrinsic to the emplotment of trauma. What follows, thus, is less a climbing up on Frye's theoretical ladder than simply a borrowing and distilling of a few of his pertinent terms.

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[10] The mythos of romance is, simply put, the projection of the ideals of "the ruling social or intellectual class," whereby "the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threat to their ascendancy" (Frye 186). Romance, as envisioned by Frye, is a "perennially child-like" mythos, due to its constant nostalgia for a world order that was never disrupted and will never change (186). The mythos of satire/irony is basically "a parody of romance," in which the focus is on "ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence" (223). As I explain above, the narration of trauma depends on a constant move from an unbearable world to a desirable one, and vice versa. The mythoi of romance and satire are essentially bereft of such shifts in their narrative trajectories, as they either exist entirely in an idealized social order, or never move away from an intolerable one.

The generic plot type of comedy is, in its most basic form, "a movement from one kind of society to another" (163). If at the beginning, the obstructing characters, whose role is to impede the hero's desire—to marry his beloved, for instance—are in charge of the story's society, at the end of the narrative "the device that brings the hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognitio*" (163). This overarching description of comedy grasps the progression in plotlines of many actual comic works, from Shakespeare to Chaplin, Aristophanes to Shaw, and Chaucer to Jane Austen. "The tendency of comedy," Frye continues, "is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the block characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated" (165). The blissful ending of a comedy is not simply happy in the sense of a victorious life bestowed upon the triumphant protagonist, but an overall optimism deriving from a shift from one social norm to another. Comedy depends upon a major reversal on a scale larger than any single character. Quite different from the mere wish-fulfillment that typifies romance, comedy includes a social transformation from an unacceptable status quo to a utopian alternative. The normal response of the reader to a happy ending, Fry maintains, "is 'this should be,' which sounds like a moral judgment. So it is, except that it is not moral in the restricted sense, but social. Its opposite is not the villainous but the absurd" (167). It is a crucial aspect of the comedy mythos that the transformation at the social level, desired and expected by the audience, does not occur because it contains a retribution to the malefactor in the story, but because it demolishes an unsustainable order. The sweetness of a comic dénouement is not the taste of vengeance or punishment, but of harmony.

The society that emerges at the end of comedy represents "a kind of moral norm, or pragmatically free society," writes Frye. "Its ideals are seldom defined or formulated . . . . We are simply given to understand that the newly-wed couple will live happily ever after . . . . That is one reason why the character of the successful hero is so often left undeveloped: his real life begins at the end of the play, and we have to believe him to be a potentially more interesting character than he appears to be" (169). The transformation in comedy does not hinge on a gradual growth or a development in the circumstances, but on a sudden turnover, one that does not "impress us as true, but as desirable," in the sense that it may not register as an inevitable turn of events, but responds to a longing that is shared by the characters and the audience for tranquility (170). Comedy ignites a desire for change, proposes the possibility of that change, and invites the reader to join in imagining the real world that a comic change may produce. There is optimism involved, of course, but there is a good deal more than sheer optimism that drives comedy forward. A sense of utopianism is the kernel of comedy, a solicitation for imagining alternative possibilities. The inclusiveness of comedy, the implication of life "happily-ever-after" that encompasses all parties present, calls for an active participation beyond the boundaries of the text: the reader is asked to share the utopia that comes to realization. "The watcher of death and tragedy has nothing to do but sit and wait for the inevitable end," Frye writes, "but something gets born at the end of comedy, and the watcher of birth is a member of a busy society" (170). So, it is a transition from a society dominated by aridity to the one marked by birth, and if not exactly a literal birth, at least a promise for a delightful beginning. In this sense, the entirety of a comedy plot is a prelude, whereby the actual life of the characters may start only at the end.

With tragedy, Frye argues, we have a "disinterested quality in literary experience." Compared to tragedy, all the other mythoi "might be plausibly explained as expressions of emotional attachment" (206). In the same way that comedy is not merely tantamount to a happy ending, tragedy is much more than simple demise and death. If the vector of comedy points in the direction of a transformation from a disturbing reality to an imaginable alternative, the course of tragic action moves from a simplistic vision to a matured but distressful reality. Approaching tragedy from a more or less Aristotelian perspective, Frye believes that the tragic hero is usually a character higher in status than the assumed audience, yet as much as that may be the case, there is "something on the side of him opposite to the audience, compared to which he is small. This something else may be called God, gods, fate, accident, fortune, necessity, circumstance, or any combination of these, but whatever it is the tragic hero is our mediator with it" (207). A defining component of the tragic mythos is the process of social isolation the hero undergoes. The unique position of tragic characters pushes the plots toward their seclusion, both in the sense that it is only the tragic hero who has to face the fateful destruction and everyone else would vicariously experience it, and also in the sense of a general movement from a simplistically open society to an aggregate of sundered individuals, from an irenic harmony to total atomization.

Tragic heroes, Frye argues, "are wrapped in the mystery of their communion with that something beyond which we can see only through them, and which is the source of their strength and their fate alike . . . and the center of tragedy is in the hero's isolation, not in a villain's betrayal, even when the villain is, as he often is, a part of the hero himself" (208). It is crucial to note that in both comedy and tragedy the plot is not driven primarily

by an established antagonism between the heroes and their adversaries, but by a social force

that in the comedy thrusts the narrative from the distressful to the desirable, and in tragedy

from the desirable to the inevitable. That social force is a utopianism in the case of comedy,

and for tragedy, "an epiphany of law, of that which is and must be" (208). This law, asserted

as natural and objective, be it the force of gods or the hands of fate, materializes in the

conclusion of a tragedy as an avenging agent, exerting its power over the tragic hero, who is

perceived as

> disturbing a balance in nature . . . a balance that sooner or later *must* right
>
> itself. The righting of the balance is what the Greeks called *nemesis* . . .
>
> [whose agent] may be human vengeance, ghostly vengeance, divine
>
> vengeance, divine justice, accident, fate or the logic of events, but the
>
> essential thing is that *nemesis* happens, and happens impersonally,
>
> unaffected, as *Oedipus Tyrannus* illustrates, by the moral quality of human
>
> motivation involved." (209)

But if the force of vengeance does not show any appeal to human sentiments, why is the

hero avenged at all? Does not vengeance, in whatever form, express a moral intention or a

sentimental value? To address this problem and explain his idea of tragic *nemesis*, Frye

discusses, and repudiates, two "reductive formulas" of tragedy: one is to claim "that all

tragedy exhibits the omnipotence of an external fate," which is a view that reduces the tragic

process to one of its byproducts, i.e., the hero's demise (209). The other reductionism is

"that the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of *moral* law,

whether human or divine" (210). The problem with the latter idea is that it cannot address

the question of the innocent sufferer in tragic plots—*King Lear*'s Cordelia, for instance, is hardly a violator of any moral norm.

The reduction of tragic plot to a matter of fate or flaw, Frye believes, misses the real point of tragedy. The suffering of the tragic character may or may not have an impartial moral reason, but what makes it tragedy is the paradoxical situation in which the hero's fall is accepted as unpreventable. The reason that *nemesis* acts like an impersonal vengeance—which seems like a contradiction in terms—lies in the irreconcilable condition the tragic hero is placed in. On the one hand, his downfall is necessary for the reader to observe the imposing natural order or impersonal law that ultimately governs the story; on the other hand, the downfall is not always acceptable as a form of proportionate punishment for a wrong deed. If the force behind comedy works to enlarge the imaginative horizon of its audience, to invite them to the possibility of a shared utopia, tragedy restricts that imagination by dictating all the limits that utopianism tends to discard. The comic ending leaves the reader blissful, because it offers a boundless harmony that hardly excludes anyone, whereas the tragic ending disinterestedly draws the borders between the individuals and their surroundings, and marks the boundaries between the human will and the extra-human order. The tragic heroes are, in a sense, sacrificed so that the reader gains an awareness of what is impossible.

At the outset, trauma narrative cannot be either tragedy or comedy, because unlike that of the tragic hero, the traumatized character's fate is not the work of an impersonal *nemesis*, and unlike the comic hero, the trauma survivor cannot offer a utopian bliss. The best way to examine the dialectic of tragedy-comedy in trauma narrative is to look at the constant struggle between asking readers to widen their imaginative capacity and urging

them to notice how limited their imagination ultimately is. The combination of a tragic downward spiral and a comic upward momentum certainly goes deeper than simply having a sad story with a happy ending. It constitutes the fundamental dialectics of trauma emplotment that not only shapes the story's framework, but generates the reader's response and affects the politics of traumatic identity. Compared to what Frye outlines as the essential aspect of tragedy, we notice that the traumatic *anagnorisis* differs from the tragic one: if what counts as inevitable in tragedy is the protagonist's downfall that illustrates the unquestionable dominance of an impersonal order, in trauma narrative the inevitable outcome is always a *partial survival*. It is survival because the narrated trauma logically needs a survivor to recollect the events, and it is partial because the protagonist's life from then on bears deep scars that comprise the trauma. Likewise, comparing the trauma plot to comedy suggests that, while the comic recognition consists of a totalizing change from one social norm to another, the trauma plot connotes the impossibility of a sweeping transformation; even if everything goes well in the end, residues of the unforgettable pain cast a dark spell on whatever the future holds.

The *anagnorisis* of trauma plot does, however, share an elemental feature with comedy. In the same way that a happily-ever-after ending in comedy suggests the beginning of an open narrative not yet told, the culmination of trauma narrative features the birth of another story, that of the present. In fact, it is only after the emplotment of trauma reaches its dénouement that trauma itself begins—if we take trauma as a reference to the aftereffects of the horrific events. From a different angle, the tragic ending with its epiphany of a domineering power over characters is similar to the trauma plot in the sense that they both highlight the presence of the pain's source, apart from the character's fate or flaw. To

understand what happens to Oedipus, Lear, or Hamlet, the reader inquires not just into the agent of suffering or the immediate causal logic of it, but the overall rationale behind it, the ever-present force that was bigger than the hero's power. Far from simply combining happy and sad moments, this pattern is the basic narrative outlet for an antithetical situation of the traumatized characters. They are trapped in an omnipresent problem of representation; whether to ask for empathy, even if the tragic plot mode does not allow a wholehearted participation, or to seek a disinterested readerly response. After all, if comedy's predilection is toward passionate involvement, tragedy is the arena of cold judgments.

The dialectics of tragedy-comedy is born out of the contrary position of envisioning an original story of suffering while trying to assure the reader's imaginative engagement with it. Ideally speaking, it is an impossible situation. In practice, however, the opposing forces of comic inclusiveness and tragic disinterestedness do not make the story impossible to tell, but internalize the binarism and turn it into the main thrust of the emplotment. Through the mode of tragedy, we see the sheer powerlessness of the protagonist in front of the forces that dictate his fate, but trauma narrative aspires to go higher than depicting the dominance of the trauma's agent. It also directs the reader in imagining alternative outcomes, which may not actualize, but nonetheless have to be imagined so the reader *can notice the trauma*.

Looking back at this study's first chapter, we remember that one fundamental factor in definition of trauma—both personal and social—is its extraordinariness. The psychic trauma that afflicts an individual's unconscious manifests itself by distorting the normal functions of the human psyche, and the social trauma, while an ontologically different concept, also presents itself as a condition surpassing normalcy. Tragedy, as defined by

Frye, is always a forceful assertion of the norm. The basic law, the natural order, or whatever else one may call it, dominates the end of a tragedy that always starts by a deviation from it. The "epiphany of that which is and must be," to use Frye's own terms, is part and parcel of the tragic mode. The distinction between tragedy and trauma, in this respect, is that in the latter the narration climaxes in abdication of the normal, not restoration of it. In terms of trauma emplotment, this only happens because the mode of comedy is involved alongside, and contrary to, tragedy. The utopianism of comedy is an open invitation to redefine the norm. Trauma narrative invokes a set of imposing forces that cannot register as the one and only possible norm as long as the readers are invited to imagine the comic upheaval of values and standards. Such an upheaval does not necessarily occur—which itself is the point of distinction between trauma and comedy—but it has to be imagined so the condition of trauma as the exact opposite of normal can be seen. The reason we do not tend to think about, say, Oedipus and a Holocaust survivor in the same way is that for one of them the painful condition is perceived as an inescapable outcome of his actions, while for the other it was a dark historical contingency. Whether or not we see him as culpable, Oedipus is punished so the divine order returns to Thebes, but a Holocaust survivor is not going through a rectification of normalcy in her audiences' eyes.

There is a possible objection that has to be addressed here. One could argue against my contention that stories of sexual assault, imprisonment, torture, dispossession, or war crimes are still conceivable without the particular features that I highlighted, in which case the pattern of tragedy-comedy is nothing but an occasionally observable emplotment pattern in some, but not all, stories of trauma. I have not produced any large-scale survey of existing trauma narratives, in the spirit of formalism or structuralism, to outline their shared

elements; thus, my general assertion that stories of trauma incorporate this particular narrative pattern is susceptible to be only the result of a selective study. The response to this objection is that although specific representations of tragic and comic entanglement differ from story to story, and have to be pursued in each case according to their own minute stylistic modes and contextual circumstances, the fundamental narrative dialectic is central to all trauma stories because of one constant figure in all of them: the survivor. As long as a narrative of pain and suffering does not only produce victims but also survivors, and as long as the tale of trauma—fictional or real, personal or social—is told as a way of expressing the life *after* suffering, the pattern of tragedy-comedy is crucial. In all the three national cases of contemporary Iran, Palestine, and the United States, each showcasing a completely different political condition of collective trauma compared to the others, the narration of horrific memories always requires a person to look back at those painful experiences, and that person's role is the crystallization of the tragic-comic dialectics. Moreover, the survivor figure has a unique place in chronicling pain not only due to its distinctive combination of downfall and ascendance, but also because it propels the next level of dialectical structure, which pertains to the question of communication and belonging. If the narrative of trauma is directly involved with the question of expressing a painful memory, it must as well address the issue of the survivor's identity against a large social backdrop: Who is able to understand the pain of the survivor? People of the same gender, the same nationality, the same race, or the same religion? Or is the matter of identity politics even relevant to communication in the survivor's account? Is it possible that, regardless of any group identity, a reader—or a character within the narrative—vicariously shares the terrible experience of the survivor? If the answer is yes, then we have to argue how the narrative

allows such links between victimization and witnessing, and if it is no, then we should ask what enforces limits of this kind in the narrative.

2.2. Exclusion-Inclusion

In an essay about racism and inequality in contemporary United States, Walter Benn Michaels raises a point about American memorialization of the Holocaust and whether an active participation in revering a history that happened elsewhere and victimized people of other nations can dilute the commemoration of similar events in the American history. Referring to a protest by a group of African-Americans in front of the Washington Holocaust Museum, he asks, "Why should what the Germans did to the Jews be treated as a crucial event in American history, especially when, given the absence of any commemoration of American racism on the [Washington] Mall, what Americans did to Black people is not?" ("Plots against America" 290).[11] He takes this point further by arguing that American identity politics has come to replace the problem of class struggle, to which Michael Rothberg in his essay, "Against Zero-Sum Logic," responds, "Although I agree with Michaels that the presence of a national museum dedicated to the Holocaust on the Mall in Washington makes for an odd and somewhat troubling version of American history, I argue that memory and representation don't actually obey the same logic of scarcity as real estate development" (304). The conversation between Michaels and Rothberg moves on from the American response to the Holocaust to discussions of the larger question of criticism in the time of multiculturalism, the problem of discordance

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[11] This was, of course, written before the African-American Museum in Mall opened in 2016.

between class and race, and the issue of memory politics; yet, the provocative question stays unsettled: Is a social attempt to memorialize, and sympathize with, another society's painful history a commendable act on its own? Does it effectively work against the traumatic memories of one's own collectivity, or as Rothberg believes, is it a fallacy to think of memory and empathy through the logic of scarcity? [12]

Taking either side is quite difficult, not just because they both seem to follow morally admirable arguments, but also because in terms of approaching other groups' calamities, there seem to be two contrary attitudes coexisting with—and as I will argue, complementary to—one another. There is an attitude of inclusivity that maximally asks for empathy, and there is the call for exclusiveness of histories and experiences. The former can justify its moral ground by arguing that observance of a history of injustice not only does not obscure comparable conditions, but indeed highlights them and brings them to fore. The latter's moral defense is to ask for a proper response to a concrete experience, especially if the aftereffects of that experience are still visibly painful. The inclusivist would argue that the American commemoration of the Holocaust does not work as a façade for obliteration of similar memories at home, and may inversely sharpen our senses toward such analogous domestic issues. The opposite side can reply that, if particular horrific experiences are the results of actions toward a group—Jews were treated as such *because* they were Jewish, and blacks *because* they were black—then infinitely expanding the confines of empathy and commemoration does nothing but reduce the level of committed response.

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[12] Both of these scholars base their later books on this initial discussion. Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) uses the case of American Holocaust commemoration to discuss the issue of Holocaust memory in general, delving into works by a wide variety of public intellectuals, including Hannah Arendt, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Aimé Césaire. Michaels's *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006) takes up the initial question from a different angle, inquiring how the American public came to redefine social justice from a matter of class to that of race.

Instead of trying to settle the debate on either moral or logical grounds, I argue that what Rothberg and Michaels point out is indeed a realization of the second pattern of trauma emplotment. The invitation to witnessing and empathizing is an extension of the comic thread, counterposed by the tragic outlook of isolation and withdrawal. A comic hero asks everyone within the storyworld to join the final celebration that marks the dawn of a new order, while a tragic hero is left in total desolation with no one else to share the burden of his pain. The survivor figure, who is an amalgamation of the two contrasting hero figures, shows on the one hand a predisposition for confining the trauma to only those directly exposed to it. On the other hand, the trauma narrative is incomplete without an attempt at breaking this exclusive barrier.

Trauma narrative's inclusivity ushers in a reading that ultimately relieves the readers of an interpretive anxiety, that is, whether they really can understand the magnitude and subtleties of the narrated trauma. Nonetheless, what comes as the counterforce to this openness is the constant emphasis in trauma narratives that there would be very little left to understand if the national, ethnic, gender, or racial context is ignored. The invitation for a shared imagination, which is the extrapolation of the comic trend, is necessary for the audience's basic engagement with any traumatic recollection, but at the same time, the assumed prerequisites for this engagement often boils down to a commonality in identity markers. It is, furthermore, not just the readers' engagement at stake, but the cogency of the survivor's account in general, because a trauma that is too easily understandable loses the necessary extraordinariness that defines it, and one that is too impenetrable goes against the very intention of narration.

The matter of identity and trauma becomes more complicated if we note the exclusionary attitude is problematized by the fact that victimization is often directly related to the survivor's group identity. Trauma's narration represents an identity struggle between the victims and the perpetrators, as rape is an assault on the victim's gender and sexuality, and historical cases like apartheid are about nothing if not race. The exclusion of others in the narrative of one's trauma, especially if those others share the identity marks of the offenders, can enjoy an estimable moral justification, but it does carry the potential of turning trauma into a treasure that has to be protected, instead of an ailment that must be healed: The survivor's pain becomes a proud laurel of endurance and fortitude. The irony is that the same identity trait that led to the horrific experience of trauma can now be lionized *because* of the trauma. A man who lived through the horrors of concentration camps could have been an Everyman before the experience, but is not less than an emblem of ethnic pride after he becomes a survivor. The problem here is not moral—there is nothing wrong with eulogizing survival. It is a narrative problem, in particular that of narrative identity. If belonging to a specific group identity is seen as the instigator of traumatic experience, does that inversely equate the survivor's identity with that definite collective indicator? In other words, does trauma narrative essentialize the victim's identity because recognition of trauma requires it? If so, it would be possible to argue that every trauma narrative establishes an allegory, because the character's individuality dwindles compared to the collectivity it represents, and so a woman's rape memoir offers an allegorical testament of womanhood, and war refugee stories can be read as narratives of nations' fates.

In contrast to the allegorical inclination in emplotment stands the rather literal approach that concretizes trauma's memory as a unique set of events. The underlying tragic

force of the trauma narrative makes it possible to read the survival story of, say, a war refugee as not the inclusive account of an entire nation, but the endurance and pain of that single individual. The inclusive-exclusive dialectics deals with the matter of appropriation, of raising the narrative of trauma from the stage of concomitant comic and tragic plot modes to the level of defining the 'who': Who the perpetrators, the witnesses, the sympathizers, and the survivors are. In the case of the survivors' identity, the narrative's tendency to allegorize trauma and yet to resist a fully allegorical reading for the benefit of a literal understanding of the pain reaches an interesting apex. The very word "survivor" is the locus of a dialectical opposition between literal and allegorical meanings. A survivor, from a basic verbatim point of view, is one who outlives a (nearly) fatal experience. The etymology of the word—from Latin, *supervivere*, "to live after"—clearly denotes the term's direct reference to evasion of death. In several cases of trauma, particularly early twentieth-century ones, the term survivor was used only as a literal description of the trauma victim. However, in the current lingo of trauma, survival is easily applied in reference to many non-fatal cases, be it sexual abuse, childhood maltreatment, or even witnessing other people's pain. One could argue that in these cases, survival may not mean outliving, but instead highlights one's psychological wholeness threatened after a devastating experience, as if the mind is glassware and trauma is a hammer's blow. This, of course, makes only for a figurative survival. Again, the problem is not particularly of a moral dimension. It is not a question of which condition qualifies for a *true* survival; it asks, nonetheless, how at the core of trauma emplotment there is a character whose essential identity is open to both literal and non-literal (or allegorical) interpretation. How is it, I inquire, that we tend to describe a person going through the injuries of a terrorist attack and another one, for

instance, sexually abused by a co-worker both as survivors, while only one of them did escape the certainty of death? I do not believe that it is a matter of a category mistake. It is one, and perhaps the most fascinating, example of materialization of the inclusivity-exclusivity dialectical pattern in trauma narration. The literal tendency to recognize and represent trauma as the product of a confrontation with death is countered by the allegorical tendency to take wholeness, sanity, or tranquility as the object of trauma's assault, and not just life in the strict sense. In the same manner that the survivor figure is the synthesis of the comic and tragic dialectics, it also harbors, and integrates, on the next level of the dialectical opposition, the trajectories of inclusion and exclusion.

The issue of whether trauma emplotment seals the path of empathy against the readers outside a certain collective identity, or inversely invites them in sharing the story's call for engagement, is never fully settled; ergo, it constitutes a *dialectical* opposition between the two forces of inclusion and exclusion, and not a simple logical contrariety. In the larger context of communal trauma, phrasing historical episodes such as "Europe's survival after the Second World War," or "the survival of American auto-industry after the Great Recession," may appear as rhetorical extensions of the term that do not register the same value as those of individual survivor experiences. But, looking through the prism of inclusion-exclusion pattern, such verbal extensions still make sense, albeit only figuratively. In fact, one possible reason that trauma has become such a ubiquitous notion, as observed in the first chapter, is the synthesis of exclusion and inclusion at its core. The exceptional flexibility of this concept that makes possible a combination of allegorical and literal readings allows a further extension of the same dialectics. This means that if, from a merely narrative standpoint, survival after (non-life threatening) sexual abuse is figurative, so is a

nation's survival after a war; if the former is readily understandable, there should be no problem understanding the latter, either. If the narration of trauma synthesizes the two tendencies to, one, define the pain's memory as linked directly to a collective identity, and two, invite those outside that collectivity to receive the narration and take part in it, what consecutively follows is the issue of the memorialized pain's status within a larger history: whether a traumatic memory is to be narrated in its singularity or via its possible links to other traumas. The third pattern of trauma emplotment is where the traumatic incident is accentuated in its uniqueness, which is itself demonstrated by having it linked to other unique memories, in a dialectical process that projects uniqueness within generality and vice versa.

2.3. Universality-Uniqueness

Elaborating his sociological theory of cultural trauma through the prime example of the Holocaust, Jeffrey Alexander notes that, because of its extreme cruelty and its unprecedented scale, the Nazi extermination of European Jews "became enmeshed in what might be called the dilemma of uniqueness" (*Trauma* 85). The historical aftershock in the West gradually turned the Holocaust into not a mere example, but the very paradigm of evil, which was then perceived as a cautionary measure for analyzing, and reacting to, other catastrophic horrors. The "dilemma," as Alexander calls it, arose from the fact that the Holocaust could not function as "an archetypal tragedy unless it were regarded as radically different from any other evil act in modern times. Yet it was this very status—as a unique event—that eventually compelled it to become generalized and departicularized" (85). The process through which, Alexander argues, a traumatic history such as the Holocaust is placed against this impasse of uniqueness and generality is a combination of two modes of

expansion, namely metonymic and metaphoric associations. Borrowing from the jargon of literary theory, Alexander illustrates how the Holocaust, initially seen as just a war crime, was enlarged into the supreme act of horror against humankind, a standard by which other collective traumas could be weighed.

The metonymic amplification of the Holocaust was a derivative of early legal attempts to define the guilt and responsibility of whoever directly or indirectly could be associated with the death camps. The Nuremberg trials only focused on the officials who were palpably related to the extermination of innocent civilians, but long after the trials were over, the general consensus of guilt by indirect association was loudly present. The enlargement of trauma is visible in the returns and re-judgments for "every individual or collective entity who was, or might have been, even remotely involved," Alexander writes. "Many individual reputations became sullied in this way. The list of once admired figures who were 'outed' as apologists for, or participants in, the anti-Jewish mass murders stretched from such philosophers as Martin Heidegger to such literary figures as Paul de Man and such political leaders as Kurt Waldheim" (*Trauma* 78). The associations to trauma made in these examples are all through an expansion of the accepted definitions of guilt and responsibility, so the mere propinquity to the source of pain is enough to include one in the body of perpetrators. In none of the defenses by those metonymically implicated or their supporters, Alexander notes, the claim was ever made that "Holocaust does not incarnate evil," but instead that "the accused had, in fact, never been associated with trauma in any way" (78). This points out that when the metonymic link in trauma is made, questioning the underlying assumption that legitimizes such linkage in general is not possible; the only defense is to deny the association, not the possibility of mounting it in the first place. Being

called a Nazi-sympathizer, all one can do is to try denying the alleged connection. Disputing the connotation that such an accusation may have—e.g., by claiming one could be a Nazi-sympathizer while not guilty of concentration camps—is not an option. The logic of metonymy works exclusively through connotations; as long as one is shown to have a personal association to the history of Nazism in Europe, one's name is tarnished by the memory of the horrors, for which one may not have been directly responsible. The metaphoric link, however, follows a slightly different logic and a more far-ranging scope of application.

With a specific focus on American politics, Alexander, referring to cases similar to the one Michaels and Rothberg discuss, delineates the emendations in domestic histories of injustice through analogies with Holocaust. The ubiquity of the Holocaust as a metaphor served radical revisions in "moral understandings of the historical treatment of minorities inside the United States" (79). Looking back, for instance, at the detention of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, the parallels "between this action and Nazi prejudice and exclusion became widespread, and the internment camps became reconfigured as concentration camps" (79). The similarity may not, if inspected disinterestedly, hold fast: the American officials never attempted to eradicate their ethnic Japanese population, there was no American version of "Final Solution," nor was any record of using Japanese free labour to feed an American war machine; but that does not matter. In contrast to the metonymic connections, the analogy between one event and another would stand powerful regardless of any evidence to challenge the claim for association. All that is needed to put forth the claim to reassess the history of Japanese mistreatment through a comparison with Nazi genocide is that victims in both cases were

minorities against an alienated white majority, and they were both treated without dignity, or even simply that both cases exhibited systemic, collective evil. The differences between the two historical conditions would not pose any serious problem in the way of establishing the metaphor.

Metaphoric association, by looking for similarity instead of proximity, comparison instead of connotation, makes the bridge between different historical occurrences, their agents, and their victims on a much larger scale than metonymy could. When the analogy is suggested, it becomes increasingly hard to see which specific element was established as the base of similarity, and which ones were subsequently extended out of that. When, to use an example on the global stage, the massacre of Chinese civilians in Nanjing by Japanese soldiers during the Second World War is referred to as the "Chinese Holocaust" or "Asian Holocaust," it might be futile to trace the metaphor to see if it stems from similarities between the victims (both civilians), the offenders (Nazis and Japanese were both harboring age-old historical racism against their victims), or the scale and quality of horror (Nanjing casualties is estimated up to three hundred thousand and Holocaust around six million).[13] The metaphoric association, like a summoned demon, starts its own life after it is whispered into existence. By simply bringing out the possibility of an analogy, one is effectively constructing that analogy, which would then become very difficult to ignore or deny, notwithstanding whether the source of comparability stands a test of verification. It is not, therefore, too hard to see why the peerless incarnation of evil, with all its superlatives, transforms into a universal signifier for many other events, which are themselves, each in its

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[13] For detailed historical analyses of the Nanjing Massacre and its metaphoric link to the Holocaust, see Katsuichi (1999), Li, Sabella, and Liu (2002), and especially Chang (1997), whose book's title, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, clearly shows the universalizing association.

own way, presented as exceptional. Quoting Peter Novick's influential study on the afterlife

of the Second World War in American life, Alexander notes that the Holocaust "is invoked

as reference point in discussions of everything from AIDS to abortion" (Novick 159;

Alexander, *Trauma* 85-86).

The web of metonymic and metaphoric expansion is, in Alexander's view, the

reason that we perceive the Holocaust as "unique and not unique at the same time." The

Holocaust's living history is marked by this "insoluble dilemma," he believes, "once it had

become a tragic archetype and a central component of moral judgment in our time" (86). I

agree with Alexander's overall argument, with two exceptions, or rather two adjustments: I

suggest what the condition of metaphoric and metonymic linkage actualizes should be

called a dialectic opposition, instead of "an insoluble dilemma." Dilemma implies choice,

but a dialectic relation sees the coexistence of opposing conditions and seeks to locate their

synthesis. I would also like to point out that such a dialectical pattern is not at all limited to

the Holocaust, but is an inherent aspect in narration of any trauma, personal or social. If

seen via the two other steps of trauma emplotment, the simultaneous generality and

singularity of trauma is simply the next level of the complexities that tragedy and comedy

highlighted, which are then formulated within the exclusive and inclusive tendencies of

survivor identification.

In further elaboration of this last dialectical pattern in trauma narrative, we can note

a historical example whereby both metonymic and metaphoric modes of association are

locatable in creating the bridge between Holocaust and another traumatic history. With the

rise of ethnic clashes in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the American-European

military interventions against the Serbian assaults on other ethnic groups were propelled by

constant references to the memories of the Nazis. "The part played by symbolic analogy," Alexander writes, "was demonstrated during the early US Senate debate in 1992. Citing 'atrocities' attributed to Serbian forces, Senator Joseph Lieberman told reporters that 'we hear echoes of conflicts in Europe little more than fifty years ago'" (80). By the time the Serbian forces threatened to enter Kosovo, the Holocaust references escalated to a level that justified aerial bombing and other military interventions by NATO. President Clinton, in a public speech, took the analogical link to its boldest. Explaining the Balkan conflict as "the inevitable result . . . of centuries-old animosities," he insisted, nonetheless, that such a "systematic slaughter" is directly made through the ruthless order of the Yugoslavian President, Slobodan Milosevic. Consummating the analogy, he said, "You think the Germans would have perpetrated the Holocaust on their own without Hitler?" (qtd. in Alexander 81). But the metonymic association between Balkan and Holocaust was not made until, per Clinton's personal request, the renowned writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel visited the Kosovar Albanian refugee camp. After his three-day visit, *The New York Times* quoted him saying, "I've learned something from my experiences as a contemporary of so many events. . . . When evil shows its face, you don't wait, you don't let it gain strength. You must intervene" (Rohde; Alexander, *Trauma* 82). The Balkan crisis, then, does not only bear resemblance to Nazi crimes, but is linked through the personage of a survivor of the latter, who claims to have also been through the experience of the former, although only metonymically. Wiesel's statement bears a much heavier emotional weight than any advanced by a U.S. Senator or President, because it combines the two modalities of expansion. It is not just the resemblance of the two events underscored, but he who claims such a resemblance is a living relic of one trauma visiting the current site of the other.

With regard to the narrativist perspective of my study, this example spells out a significant point: While the metaphoric relation between two or more traumatic conditions is not exclusively traceable in any specific character, location, or time, the metonymic link has to have a distinct narrative carrier, which is often either the perpetrator or the victim, or both. The analogical connection, once made, permeates through every aspect of the trauma narrative, but the metonymy is always restricted to the persona that makes the connection possible. A survivor of one trauma may be depicted as resembling the survivors of many other historically and geographically unrelated traumas, but if the link is to be made via proximity, not resemblance, the narrative must make the effort to connect those histories and geographies. This dichotomy between the metaphoric and metonymic generalizations of a traumatic narrative also resonates with the binarism noted above in the cases of literal and figurative interpretation of survival. A literal viewpoint, which is tantamount to a rather exclusivist understanding of a traumatic narrative, forces the interpretation of trauma toward a direct association with other traumatic events, and not a comparative analogy. The metaphoric link, on the other hand, opens the interpretive space for any kind of connection through resemblance, which makes possible an allegorical reading of a trauma story. For example, as we will see in the case of Iranian war narratives, the memories of a geographically, and historically, bound war are linked to the universal narratives of redemption and resistance from early Shiite Muslim history. These links are made both through metaphoric associations, which allegorize the war against a neighbouring country into a global campaign for reclamation of "true Islam," and also through metonymic links between a sacred figure of early Islamic history and the contemporary leader of the Islamic Republic, as the latter is claimed to be literally the heir of the former. In the case of

Palestine after the Oslo Accords, we will note the same mechanisms of association used to create a link between their condition of segregation and dispossession with similar histories, such as South African apartheid. As for the American stories of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, a series of links is made to the history of prior American global military activities, including the Vietnam War.

The theory of trauma emplotment sketched here is based on the observation that trauma, extremely mercurial when inspected analytically, is nonetheless readily understandable through narration. The sheer number of war memoirs, refugee stories, and all other types of survivor tales makes it clear how readers of all levels of sophistication can relate to the stories of human pain and misery. The primary questions I have addressed are, how can such a capricious notion become so vividly intelligible; how can a story so deeply ingrained in local politics and history convey the experience of pain and horror to readers who have little access to its temporal and local origins, without reducing itself to mere pathos; how can the character of survivor, unique in the narrative role it plays, be constructed, and how can its role be essential to the mechanics of the narrative. The dialectics of trauma narration that in its most fundamental level is manifested in the interplay between tragedy and comedy, carries the coexisting antinomic forces into the problem of identity (of victims and victimizers), and after symphonizing the inclusivism and exclusivism of identifications, flourishes in the act of representing the trauma itself. On the most general level of emplotment, the trauma is memorialized as an experience whose singularity is only understandable within its generalization.

In the next three chapters, this theoretical outline, which is the blueprint of a trauma poetics, will be taken up to study the politics of narration. In the case of post-revolutionary

Iranian narratives, with a specific focus on memories of the long war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), the interactions between national commemorations of the war, the hegemonic discourse of "Sacred Defense," and its attempt at universalization of its own trauma, will be studied. The next chapter examines the contemporary literature of Palestine, focusing on the representational politics of displacement and loss to domestic and international readership, and the agonizing problem of defining national identity in the absence of political sovereignty. The final chapter of this study looks into a recent movement in American literature I call the "Post-9/11 Veteran Fiction," written mostly about the firsthand experiences of the two recent American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I will analyze a series of novels and short stories by writers who transform their own memories of military service into narratives that bear significant differences from the popular bombastic accounts of war. In all three of these chapters, my textual analyses focus more on illustrating the first of the three patterns of emplotment, because the dialectics of tragedy and comedy emerges at the most foundational level of the narrative process, and is decidedly more abstract than the other two. This means that a more explicit articulation of this pattern in the narration of trauma is needed, compared to the patterns of exclusion-inclusion and universality-uniqueness, which are observable through the presence of collective identity markers and historical comparisons with other traumatic memories. Also, because each of these three patterns is intelligibly linked to the other two—i.e., the trajectory of comedy is toward inclusivity, which then heralds a universalizing outlook, and likewise for tragedy's tendency toward exclusion and uniqueness—the more clearly I ground my arguments for the coexistence of tragic and comic vectors in each of the narrative examples, the more noticeable will become the other two patterns of emplotment.

3. Trauma and Propaganda: The Antinomies of Iranian "Sacred Defense"

In the decisive year of 2015, the result of one of the most intense international negotiations in Iranian history was about to decide the fate of the country's nuclear facilities, and along with it, usher a long-awaited change in crippling economic sanctions, political isolation, and decades of adversarial history. The Supreme Leader's difficult decision to comply with the demands of the American and European officials during those negotiations was repeatedly referred to as "taking a cup of poison" (Lucas; Charbonneau and Hafezi). Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who finally acceded to the general framework of the nuclear agreement in April of that year, never openly used the poison-cup metaphor, but a great many of the political observers on both sides of the border did. The reference was to his predecessor's famous speech, more than two decades earlier, after accepting the UN Resolution 598, which called for an immediate cease-fire between Iran and Iraq that effectively ended the bloodiest war in the nation's modern history. In his public speech on 28 July, 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini made it clear how saddened he was for accepting to end the war. "O Lord," he invoked in his usual histrionic style, "keep this book of martyrdom open for all the earnest ones, and do not deprive us of its attainment. O God, our country and our people are still at the beginning of the battle's path and in need of the martyrdom's lighting torch, may You guard this luminous torch from smothering," and then proceeds to announce that after "drinking the poisonous cup of accepting the Resolution," he is "embarrassed in front of this great nation's magnificence and endurance" (Khomeini 21: 93, my translation).

In his speech, Khomeini berates Israel, US, USSR, the European countries, the infidels—*moshrekin*—who sympathize with the West, and the Iranian liberals, leftists, and secular nationalists. He particularly goes on a long tirade against the Saudi Arabian ruling dynasty, whom he accuses of betraying their sacred role as "Guardians of Ka'ba" (21: 81); that nowhere in the speech he explicitly mentions Saddam Hussein or the Baathist Party of Iraq, the direct enemies in the long war, may come as a surprise, given the fact that at least part of the speech was an attempt to clarify the goals and conditions of the peace resolution. The neighbouring country's name is brought up on a few occasions, and even there, it is directly linked to the Western superpowers: "Didn't the brave nation of Iran resist the repeated bloodsheds of Americans in the Persian Gulf, including military and intelligence backing of Iraq and attacks against oil rigs and ships and boats and striking the commercial airliner?"(21: 86).[14] By the war's end, the nascent Islamic Republic state had managed to transform a local military conflict between two old neighbours into a universal crusade against all that stands in the way of its revolutionary ideals. For the Supreme Leader and his followers, the contention had long ceased to be about border disputes; it was a matter of paradigms, of religious and nationalist values, and of the tenets of Islamic resistance. It was, therefore, not at all strange for Khomeini's domestic audience to conceive of the peace as poison. Twenty-seven years later, the decision of Khomeini's successor to strike a deal with the West on nuclear capabilities—which, following a similar revolutionary logic, was understood as a quarrel on matters well beyond atomic technology—evidently had a reverberation of drinking from the old cup.

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[14] On 3 July 1988, an Iranian commercial airliner was shot down by a US Navy guided missile in the Persian Gulf, killing all of its passengers. The U.S. officials reported the incident as a human error, but the Iranians considered it an intentional attack that amounts to international crime. For more, see Wilson (1988).

The rise of popular militaristic rhetoric after a revolution is not unique to Iran. Almost all modern revolutions give birth to passionate discourses that beseech systematic violence in the name of national or creedal defense. What makes the Iranian Islamic revolution's rhetoric of "Sacred Defense" (*Defa-e Moghaddas*), as the war was officially dubbed, quite noteworthy is how the internal paradoxes of the war's religious aspects were to be resolved—e.g., how a war against another Muslim nation can be considered "sacred." Even more significant is the way the entirety of the war was promoted as an act of defense. The Iranian officials continuously make the claim, backed by historical evidence, that Saddam Hussein was the conflict's instigator; however, for the majority of the war's eight years, the Iranians were actively attacking their enemy in its own land, even after retaking the originally invaded territories—there were a total of six large-scale operations, for instance, to seize the Iraqi city of Basra, none successful.[15] "The Islamic Republic's definition of the Iran-Iraq War as a war between Right/Islam and Wrong/Evil eventually led to the emergence of the war as a religion in itself," writes Mehdi Khorrami, "which naturally had its own sacred and profane components." Within this discourse, "any mention of peace would be and was considered a blasphemy, treason" (167). Furthermore, the militaristic grandiloquence did not stop after the peace breakout, but gradually crept into the post-war civil life, to be conjured time and again in moments of political turmoil. The poison-cup reference during nuclear negotiations is far from a single resurrection of wartime diction, but rather a commemorative response to what is perceived as a continuation of foreign aggression, against which the same sacred defense is importuned.

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[15] Those operations were: Ramadan (July-August, 1982), Khaibar (February-March, 1984), Badr (March, 1985), Fajr 8 (February, 1986, Iran captures the Faw Peninsula near Basra), Karbala 4 (December, 1986), and Karbala 8 (April, 1987). For details of these operations, see Murray and Woods (2014), and Johnson, R. (2011).

The history of the Iran-Iraq War is, as military historians often remark, a cautionary tale of how not to fight a war. The two opposing sides engaged in a long military campaign in which they "failed the basic tests of strategic competence," as both countries' leaders entered the conflict "apparently believing that emotion, simplistic rhetoric, and a motivated population would deliver victory," and when the stalemate proved them wrong, "their response was to shovel more men and more resources into the struggle, while issuing ever more fanatical and ferocious pronouncements" (Murray and Woods 1). Desperation and disillusionment led the Iraqi side to the most abhorrent practice of widespread chemical warfare, and similar conditions allowed the Iranian leaders to dispatch human waves of unprepared infantry units into the battlefield, many of whom were below the age of conscription, and in some cases without even the most basic military equipment like rifles (Hiro 103-110; Murray and Woods 78-84; Ward 248-66). The telltale cannon fodder operations not practiced since the First World War and the poor quality of military equipment on both sides that only exacerbated the human casualties have been detailed by many historians (Johnson R. 71-79; Murray and Woods 143-152, 261-275; Ward 261-279). In the following pages, I examine the narratives of the war from the Iranian side not to probe into the military history of the conflict, but to uncover one of several political directions that trauma emplotment can take: propaganda.

The poetics of trauma emplotment, discussed in the previous chapter, offers a vantage point from which to view how the narration of horrific experiences resolves their inherent cacophonies to produce a readily understandable whole. The question at this point is how the engine of trauma narration can work in various ideological directions. As elaborated thus far, narration of trauma is never politically inert, nor is it always, by default,

an act of resistance against a hegemonic discourse. The dialectical dynamics of emplotment can be employed, due to its considerable malleability, for the service of the dominant ideology, as well as against it. In the case of the mixed genre called "Art and Literature of Sacred Defense" (*Honar va Adabiyyat-e Defa-e Moghaddas*), which includes a wide range of works in literature and plastic arts, backed financially and culturally by the Iranian state, wartime memories become the primary raw material for promotion of the official ideology for a public audience. This chapter looks into a handful of representative works on the Iranian Sacred Defense to observe the process through which trauma is not just appropriated by the political hegemony, but is essentially defined and narrativized to internalize the political perspective it is supposed to reflect.

The works selected for this case study are chosen from those published more than a decade after the war's end to get a better sense of literary attempts to revitalize a declining public memory. All of these works are written with the assumption that memories of the war are fading, and so are in dire need of revisiting. In the years after the war, the country's political sphere underwent a series of changes, apparent in all the successive parliamentary and presidential elections, each staging a struggle for power between the voices that call for galvanizing the memories of war and those that intend to sideline militarism. One side continuously uses the commemoration of war history to erect a treasured legacy to which the whole nation must be grateful, and the other side, commiserating about the losses and cautiously commending the sacrifices, focuses its address on the betterment of material lives for ordinary citizens.

As time goes by, the war's legacies become more complicated, as do its literary reveries. Seyedeh Zahra Hoseyni, the author of *Da,* one of the memoirs to be analyzed in

this chapter, explicates her decision to narrate her memories of war after two decades of silence as part of an effort "to defend the Holy Defense itself," which pertains to the domestic political forces that in her opinion were trying to ignore the ideals for which the war was fought (Hoseyni 1). With every turn in the national *realpolitik*, the claims that the wartime spirit is wrongfully forgotten come to the fore in justification of reactionary decisions by the militarized establishment. The cries about viciousness of The Enemy—so unspecified and protean that it covers everything from Saddam's Baathist regime to the moderate politicians who strive for less contentious policies—abound in the Sacred Defense literature. To consider a recent example of the rhetorical battle on the memories of war, a quick look at President Hassan Rouhani's public speech on the Sacred Defense Week, 22 September 2014, is elucidating. The very fact that every September, Iranian officials celebrate the anniversary of the war's beginning—and not its end—with public military parades and special television programs is itself a sign of the antinomy at the heart of the war discourse: a celebration of victimization. Yet Rouhani, belonging to the relatively moderate political spectrum, offers in his speech a consolation of the war's losses along with an accolade of peace. He begins with a salutation to "all the martyrs . . . whose pure blood's perfume, after thirty-four years [since the war's beginning], has filled with joy and pride the hearts of our nation, all the Muslims, and all the dispossessed in the world." But he makes sure his message is not lost in the bombastic references to the dead and the bereaved: "We have no fear from the enemy's pressures. But of course we are the nation of peace and never had, nor will have, any intention to impose war on another country" (Rouhani, my translation). He ends the speech by making a series of financial-aid promises to the low-class families of martyrs and veterans. What Rouhani offers is simultaneously a patriotic

retrospection and a pragmatic approach to a future free from such costly wars, a position not always welcomed by the hardline patrons of Sacred Defense.

I begin my analysis with an examination of two recent wartime memoirs, Hassan Rahimpour's *Life Was Good* (2009), which recounts the author's voluntary service in a martial infirmary in the early years of the war, and Ahmad Yusefzadeh's *Those Twenty-Three* (2013), which narrates the author's own experience as a prisoner of war when he was only sixteen years old. Both of these memoirs clearly follow the dominant discourse of Sacred Defense, whereby the voluntary service of militiamen, known as *Basiji*, mostly young and from less privileged backgrounds, is romanticized. Next, I will study in detail one of the most sensational books of the Sacred Defense genre, *Da* (2008, translated as *One Woman's War*, 2014), the memoir of Seyedeh Zahra Hoseyni, which not only offers a feminine perspective on the war's experience, but does so with surgical precision. Hoseyni's book, whose sale figures have dwarfed those of all the other books of its genre, contains detailed accounts of the war's first weeks, during which she witnesses the deaths of her father and elder brother, among many other horrific moments. The book will be analyzed not only for its ideological position, which, like the other two books', concurs with the dominant Sacred Defense discourse, but also for the scenes it draws on a large narrative canvas, large enough to see the intricacies of trauma emplotment at work. The chapter will conclude with examining a novel, Habib Ahmadzadeh's *Chess with the Doomsday Machine* (2008). Being a work of fiction, the book freely draws upon the author's personal wartime experiences, while allowing for the subdued, but invaluable, contrarian voices against the discourse of Sacred Defense to assert themselves. The novel is particularly interesting in its

references to civilian life during the war, and its playful narrative strategies, predominantly

regarding the conflations of religious and national identities.

Before moving on with my analysis of the mentioned works, I must clarify that the

literature of the Iran-Iraq War is not limited to the apologetic narratives of Sacred Defense.

There are works of Iranian literature that, while pertaining to the subject of the war, do not

follow the dominant pro-war trajectory. Novels like Ahmad Mahmoud's *Scorched Earth*

[Zamin-e sukhteh] (1981), Esmail Fasih's *The Winter of 83* [Zemestan-e Shast-o-do]

(1991), and Shahriar Mandanipour's *The Courage of Love* [Del-e deldadegi] (1998)

approach the war's memory without attempting to proselytize for "the religion of war," to

use Khorrami's phrase. It is worth noting that non-governmental—or anti-governmental—

war literature in contemporary Iran never achieved the status of a literary movement, and

exists only in the margins of the domestic literary sphere, due to the power of state-owned

publishing houses that monopolized the domestic market, and of course the state censorship.

The reason I do not extend my focus on these works is that the primary goal of this chapter

is to underline the dynamics of propaganda in the emplotment of trauma.

There is also the Iraqi literature of the war, which this chapter will not delve into, but

is worth a mention. The post-war political condition of Iraq was quite different from that of

Iran, in the sense that the former hardly experienced a period of relative peace in which it

could safely look back at a historical episode of violence. Less than two years after the

cease-fire of 1988, Iraq initiated an invasion into Kuwait, which led to the retaliatory U.S.

intervention, commonly known as the Gulf War (1990-91). That war was followed by a

series of debilitating international sanctions against Saddam Hussein's government,

crippling its economy and practically creating a persistent state of emergency for the

country, which lasted until the full-fledged American invasion of 2003. Compared to Iran

and its post-war period, in which the literature of Sacred Defense could flourish, the Iraqi

society tumbled from one war to another, not being able to afford its own "post-war" era.

This does not mean no war-related literature was produced in Iraq; works like Mahmoud

Saeed's *A Portal in Space* (2012, trans. 2015) and *Saddam City* (1981, trans. 2005) offer a

glimpse into the Iraqi side of the war against Iran. However, considering the succession of

different wars in Iraq, it is difficult to categorize its contemporary literature into periods,

each corresponding to one of the wars. Distinguishing Saeed's novels, for example, from the

rest of Iraqi literature that covers other wars, like Hassan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition*

(2014), which focuses on the aftermath of the second American invasion and the chronic

sectarian violence that followed, is both difficult and counterproductive. The contemporary

trauma literature of Iraq, in other words, requires its own separate study to cover the chain

of calamities that befell the country for more than three decades.

3.1. *Life Was Good* and *Those Twenty-Three*: The Evil Benevolence of the War

The most visible hurdle in narrating the Iranian side of the war as an imposed aggression by

foreign forces is to assimilate nationalism with religious identity, a particularly difficult task

in post-revolutionary times. The Iranian state's agenda before the revolution was so full of

nationalist agitprop, mostly at the expense of religious sentiments, that standing against the

patriotic rhetoric of the Shah and his followers became a primary feature of revolutionary

policies. The Pahlavi era was marked by a type of nationalist sensationalism not unlike the

Italian Fascist revivalism of Roman history, or for that matter, the German Nazis'

invocation of Aryan roots. It was an acclamation of an underappreciated nation with a proud

history, projected against the contemporary setting of deprivation and humiliation. In his early years on the throne, Reza Shah, who had adopted the last name "Pahlavi"—which denotes the ancient Middle Persian language spoken in the era of Pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty, who ruled the last Persian Empire—officially renamed the country as "Imperial State of Iran."[16] In one of his early speeches he directly invokes the mythologized figures of Pre-Islamic Emperors. "Our dear homeland stands in urgent need of its brave sons," he says. "Be alert and diligent: the dust of Ardashir [The Sasanian Emperor] is watching over you" (qtd. in Ansari 39). His son, Mohammadreza, took the task of affiliating modern Iran with the pre-Islamic culture even further by, *inter alia*, changing the official calendar from the old Islamic—beginning with the Prophet's hegira on 622 CE—to the newly designed Imperial one, with a reference dated back to the coronation of Cyrus the Great on 559 BCE (Abrahamian, *History of Modern Iran* 152). To the religious movement that gradually controlled the voice of the revolution, this chauvinism denuded of Islamic elements was an abomination; it had to be quelled by all means. What made a widespread reorientation of the national culture quite difficult was that in almost two years after the revolution's official victory, the country was under military attack, which in less chaotic conditions could have resulted in a surge of patriotism among the public.

The solution, as it appeared, was commingling an inclusivism on national matters and a bold exclusionary attitude on religious issues: A nation whose pride is not in the revival of a distant culture before the Arab invasion, but in cherishing its realization of the truest version of Islam, one so precious that it needs fervent protection against other

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[16] Affiliation with Nazism in Reza Shah's nationalism is more than a coincidence. In his official renaming of the country, the assumed etymological reference to Aryans was intended. "A government circular," writes the historian Ervand Abrahamian, "explained that whereas 'Persia' was associated with Fars and Qajar decadence, 'Iran' invoked the glories and birthplace of the ancient Aryans" (*History of Modern Iran* 86).

Muslims, as well as the West. This imagined nation is not bound by its geographic

territories; it yearns to "export the revolution," as Khomeini himself was fond of saying

(Khomeini 11: 266, 20: 118). The narratives of Sacred Defense are filled with passionate

expositions on the need to protect not just the homeland, but the dear *Islamic nation*. The

two words, "Islamic" and "nation," are tightly intertwined in these texts. The war was not to

be seen as a clash of two nations, but a conflict between a state glorified by an ideal

harmony of its rulers' ideology with its public's valor, and a despotic one, whose army does

not have broad national support. If Saddam Hussein is seen as a usurper without any public

support, then a war against *him* is not a clash between two Muslim nations, but the virtuous

efforts of one—Iran—to liberate the other—Iraq. In his study on the post-revolutionary

Iranian nationalist rhetoric, the historian Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh states that the cultural

motif of "fighting a mighty power as an underdog, which has a long precedence in Shi'i

history," becomes the ideological adhesive that binds together, as it were, a nationalism

rooted in a mythologized history and a religious sensationalism that authorizes massive

violence in the name of public resistance (87). "The modern Iranian flag in one hand and

Quran in the other," the young fighters were stringent in their belief that defending their

national autonomy and waging a crusade in the name of their religion are the same thing

(100).[17] The nature of the enemy, who can be at once a brother in faith and an oppressor,

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[17] In his study on the Iranian school textbooks, before and after the revolution, Haggay Ram explains how the Islamic Republic "clung to the European/Pahlavi master narrative of Iranian history, its very basic 'story line'," while it made an "apparent shift from 'Iran Time' to 'Islam Time'" (68). The complicated formula of a national ancestry that maintains a religious framework, which essentially reaches far beyond any national sovereign borders, is the ultimate goal of post-revolutionary Iranian nationalism. Selectively borrowing the elements of national history from the Pahlavi era, the Islamic Republic reconstructs a history in which "the Iranian nation, as it emerges in the textbooks, remains a distinct community of people whose destiny is at once inexorably linked to Islamic history and at the same time predates it, and even persists in separation from it" (78).

backed by the Western world powers, is perennially problematic in the narratives of Sacred Defense.

The prevalence of religious nationalism, invoked against the aggression of an imperialistic force, also has roots in another decisive chapter in modern Iranian history. The 1953 coup d'état against the popular government of Mohammad Mossadeq, orchestrated by the CIA, left a lasting effect in the public memory of the country. For the United States, which had only recently ascended to the position of global domination, the coup came as a promising success in hawkish foreign aggression, which led it "to conclude that troublesome governments elsewhere could easily be overthrown" (Abrahamian, *Coup* 205). The long list of American "regime change" campaigns in Latin America, Africa, South East Asia, and the Middle East, is the outcome of the fateful coup. Such policies, as we will see in the fifth chapter, culminated in the two military invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which not only aggravated the already volatile political climate of the region, but also came to haunt the American public, as well.

For Iran, the coup had a much more sinister long-term effect. Apart from the halt to the nationalization of the oil industry—which was the coup's main goal—Abrahamian lists three decisive legacies in the domestic politics of Iran: "the destruction of secular opposition," "the fatal delegitimization of the monarchy," and most importantly, "the further intensification of the already intense paranoid style prevalent throughout Iranian politics" (*Coup* 207). It is quite difficult, and fruitless for my line of inquiry, to argue whether Khomeinism was the direct consequence of the coup or an opportunistic force, riding with the high tide of anti-Americanism in the absence of any powerful secular nationalist groups. It is, however, clear that the "paranoid style," as Abrahamian calls it, in Iranian religious

nationalism owes much of its triumph to the humiliation wrought by the coup. "During the Islamic Revolution," writes Abrahamian elsewhere, "Khomeini found 'plots,' here, there, and everywhere. 'The world,' he proclaimed, 'is against us.' [He believed that] 'Satanic plots' lurked behind liberal Muslims favoring a lay, rather than a clerical, constitution" (*Khomeinism* 122). The literary works in this chapter do not make any clear reference to the historical memory of the 1953 coup, but they do not need to do so. The deep animosity against the United States, and by extension the entire Western world, had permeated in the fabric of the Islamic revolutionary worldview. The problematic coupling of nationalism and religiosity in the Sacred Defense literature should be viewed against the backdrop of the coup's dark legacy.

In his first days near the battlefield, Rahimpour, the author of *Life was Good*, who has just joined the crew of an infirmary as a hematologist, and is already traumatized by witnessing a young soldier's dying on a stretcher, is pensively walking amid the ruins of a border town, listening to a friend talking "of the history of the town and its people, the coming of Iraqis, their carnage and raze, of the town's liberation and of discovering a mass grave full of raped girls" (64).[18] Yet in the next page, still stupefied in the war zone, he sees a flock of sparrows and thinks,

> Maybe one of the sparrows that slept above us in its nest last night is now on the other side, flying over the invaders, scared of the sound of their artillery. Its chirping could be heard by an Iraqi soldier, who hates the war, and who, listening to the bird, wishes the war was over, so he could get back to his

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[18] All quotes from the books *Life was Good* (*Zendegi khub bud*) and *Those Twenty-Three* (*Aan bist-o se nafar*) are my translation. The originals are in Persian.

child's sweet smile, his wife's charming look, his city, his job, and all his

life's usual problems. (65)

These thoughts would not have seemed out of place, had they been written by a proud

pacifist. But, knowing the memoir's nostalgic attitude toward the war, and the fact that the

author happily volunteered to serve, one may find these lines antithetical to the spirit of the

book. After his stay in the infirmary is over, on his way back home, Rahimpour sees a street

vendor selling war memorabilia, including photographs. Hustling his way into the dense

crowd of buyers and onlookers, he notes that the most popular commodities are "pictures of

the shredded bodies of Iraqis, wretchedly lying on the ground," and finds himself thinking

that it could be the best souvenir of the war (207). The most surprising thing in this short

book is how the author does not find his own comments oxymoronic at all. The dialectics of

inclusion and exclusion of collective identities resolves the discord between the

Rahimpour's passionate anti-war sentiments with his patriotic beliefs: if what makes my

enemy is not his national otherness, but his religion (or lack thereof), and if it is my national

duty to offer the same liberation that our religious revolution has brought us, then it would

make sense to both hate and love the armed conflict.

Life Was Good has a relatively thin plot. The author's memories of his three-week

tenure are recounted chronologically, with little focus on any single event. Rahimpour

moves from one scene to another in the infirmary, watching the medical personnel's nearly

impossible task of saving the soldiers' lives. From time to time, he comments on the overall

status of the war, admires the brave spirit of his coworkers, and delves into anecdotes of the

battlefield told by injured soldiers. The book is bereft of any extensive historical claims, and

offers a firsthand account of the war in an unsophisticated language. In the preface, the

author introduces himself as a simple "nobody," whose memoir is a humble attempt to record the "details of all that bravery" of his comrades (7-8). Published by Sureh-ye Mehr, an imprint of The Organization for Islamic Promotion—*Sazman-e Tablighat-e Eslami*—one of the most resourceful state-owned cultural institutions in the country, *Life Was Good* is a miniature canvas of trauma emplotment. The exclusive-inclusive pattern is particularly evident in his constant praise and denunciation of the war as a religious campaign and a national duty.

The Islamic references in the book are mostly Shiite, but the narrator never describes the war as sectarian. On the broader historical level, there are two reasons for that: Iraq itself has a considerable Shiite population, so promoting the war as a battle between Shia and Sunni would not quite match the demographic reality. More importantly, Saddam Hussein, who had a Sunni background, grabbed power as a Pan-Arab nationalist, paying little attention to religion as a strategic factor. His famous comparison of the war against modern Iran with the historic battle of Al-Qadasiya (636 CE), in which Arabs defeated the last army of the Persian Empire, is markedly an attempt to promote his campaign in terms of Arab nationalism, rather than a sectarian strife (Hiro 44, 53). Rahimpour's account, following the discourse of Sacred Defense, highlights Saddam's insensitivity to Islamic creeds by repeatedly referring to the Iraqi leader as "Saddam the Heathen"—*Saddam-e Kaafar*. In a vignette by a comrade, the author is told that when the Iranian forces captured the trenches of the enemy, they found them "full of foreign magazines with dirty photos and lots of alcoholic drinks," which makes it clear that "no trace of faith was there" (110-111). The juxtaposition of patriotic markers (invasion of the land, ravishing the local population, destruction of the cities) and religious values becomes a recurring motif in his narration.

The inclusivism of a nation bigger than itself, for which one's life has to be put on the line, meets the exclusivist religiosity that permits shedding the blood of other Muslims, who, as the narration suggests, are only Muslim in name. Yet this dialectical engagement is itself an indication of a more basic—in terms of the narrative schematics—pattern of contrarian elements. The tragedy, the cold mythos of isolation and *nemesis*, to use Northrop Frye's terminology, pushes the emplotment of this trauma toward extolling the higher goals for which one is permitted to die. Comedy comes, on the other hand, to justify the act of killing as a means to achieve an ideal order, to give a dulcet purpose for becoming the agent of the other side's nemesis, which draws the blood circle full. Listening to a group of soldiers talking about their latest mission, Rahimpour is happily surprised to know how the enemy "fires artillery shells for half a day, to make sure no living creature is left in the area," only to face "our boys appearing in front of them, shouting 'Allah-o Akbar,' and make them all run away" (209). Jingoism of this kind, flavoured with faith, is counterposed by his melancholic thoughts, when deaths of his compatriots surround him. "The screams of hundreds of injured men will resonate in my ears for the rest of my life," he remarks after seeing another soldier shrieking on his bed while the doctors are trying to save his battered leg (147). The narration reaches its most emotionally effective points in sections that Rahimpour reconstructs his nightmarish dreams during and after his time in the infirmary. Unshackled by the dutiful seriousness of a veteran, he lets the surreal moments of his dreams flow onto the pages, exposing his pains, traumas, and all the crude horrors that escape the tight chambers of patriotism:

A group of people were standing in line, which was as long as eternity.

I looked closer; most of them were missing a limb or an organ. One was

missing an arm, another a leg, an eye, a jaw . . . and I was looking for something or someone. I saw Mahmoud, and beside him, Hamid [two friends who died in mortar attacks]. Hamid asked, "Why don't you join the line?" I said, "I'm coming."

The wind was blowing from an unknown direction, ruffling Mahmoud's hair. The ground beneath our feet was full of blood. Bottles of antigen were packed in a corner. The wind was making ripples in the blood and we were stepping in it. "What is it that you're missing?" Hamid asked.

I tried to find out, but I wasn't missing anything. Mahmoud started laughing in derision. I tried to touch my head, it wasn't there! Tried to touch my legs, not there! My stomach wasn't there [. . .] I was astounded. "You don't even exist!" Hamid said.

Everybody was pointing their fingers at me, laughing out loud. Filled with fear, I tried to touch my body with my hand, but it only waved in the empty air. No, I didn't exist. (112)

Like all survivors in trauma literature, Rahimpour is encumbered by many unprocessed memories, and presents himself as both the tragic ventriloquist for the enormous, silent horror that can only be manifested through him, and the comic vehicle for a utopianism that has to cross a sea of absurdities.

The survivor's crucial role in the narration of trauma is, in the case of the Sacred Defense literature, muffled. If narration of the war's horrors is to be given a positive twist, to shape them as propaganda instead of allowing them to evoke an anti-war sensibility, the comic-tragic role of the survivors, their simultaneous invitation for empathy and judgment,

must be either restrained or diverted. Rahimpour's memoir only divulges the magnitude of

survival in the short intermittent episodes of nightmares, as the projection of pride and valor

only allows a miniscule window for the silent terror to assert itself. The narrative of Sacred

Defense shifts the centrality of war memory from the survivor to the martyr. It is the figure

of the deceased that in this literary sphere is given the most stress. Martyrs are not only

those who willfully sacrificed their lives for the cause, but in the larger ideological frame of

the war, anyone killed on *our side* is a martyr, even if the death was accidental. Martyrdom

virtually replaces the word "casualty," transforming a neutral statistic concept into an active

beacon of the religio-nationalist creed. After knowing a friend of the author had just died,

one of his coworkers in the infirmary comes to "congratulate him," instead of consoling him

(111). Becoming a martyr, in both Christian and Islamic theology, is a high accolade of

purity and salvation, but in the case of this particular war, where martyrdom is not limited to

the combat zone, the focal role of a martyr is to carry the most significant anomaly of

Sacred Defense discourse: the celebration of victimhood. "Martyrdom is one of the key

icons of Iranian identity," writes Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, referring to both the Shiite history

of victimization by the Sunni majority since early Islam, and the allegorical references to

martyrdom as a mystic concept of purity (248). It is "central in Islamic mysticism and in

Persian mystic love poetry," but the Islamic Republic "used the cult of martyrdom as an

asymmetric weapon, by encouraging young Iranian boys . . . to offer their lives" in the war

(249). Analyzing cases of Iranian Sacred Defense poetry, Seyed-Gohrab notes how the

tropes of martyrdom in the abstract sense of mystic purity are extended into the literal sense

of dying. "Metaphors of killing and being killed," in the Persian literary tradition, "express

the utter annihilation of the lover's ego, necessary for union with the beloved," yet the

implementation of this theme in Sacred Defense literature "was not about a symbolic martyrdom or an ascetic way of life, but about a real fight against the power of Saddam Hussein" (253).

The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion of identities, which functions through a distortion of the boundary between the literal and the allegorical, is present in the treatment of martyrdom as the focal element in the Iranian trauma narrative of the war. The Persian (and Arabic) word for martyr—*shaheed*—means "witness," which parallels the Christian etymology of the word "martyr," going back the Greek *martur*, also "witness." In the Sacred Defense rhetoric, the exaltation of the martyr, as the one who witnesses the divine grandeur, steals the limelight from the survivor, whose role is to witness the trauma. Seyed-Gohrab notes this shift from the mode of allegory to that of literality in the poetry of Sacred Defense:

> The political poems of the Iran-Iraq war follow medieval love poetry in form, imagery and contents, and classical poetry itself was used during the war. It is striking that classical Persian mystic love poetry is marked by eroticism, a nonviolent and loving nature expressed in peerless metaphors, but when this classical literary heritage was used during the war to mobilize people to offer their lives, these metaphors of love were transferred into reality. (254)

The narratives of the war, and not just lyric poetry, demonstrably exploit the traditional imagery of martyr. Confronted with an enemy soldier in his first days as a prisoner of war, Ahmad Yusefzadeh, the author and protagonist of *Those Twenty-Three*, tries to elaborate his view on the values of martyrdom. The Iraqi soldier "was trying to prove to me that

becoming a prisoner is much better than being killed," he writes. "I was not in the mood to explain that what he called being killed, and was so much wary of, for himself and for me, is called 'martyrdom' on the other side of the trenches; no one is afraid of it, and we even pray to reach it" (120). Apart from the usual dichotomy of faithless enemy versus faithful self, what is striking in the narrator's bold claim is the peculiarity of a discourse that eulogizes the war not as an opportunity for achieving strategic aims but as a chance to get killed.

Published by the same institution that printed Rahimpour's book, *Those Twenty-Three*, the author's account of his first eight months as a P.O.W., seeks to refresh the memories of the war for the younger generation. To see the book's success in the advocacy of Sacred Defense, one can simply note the back-cover blurb, written by none other than Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme Leader, who praises it for being "eloquent, beautiful, and artistic." Yusefzadeh, who was only sixteen years old when he volunteered to serve in the paramilitary group, Basij, starts his account from the days before the operation that left him and a group of his comrades, all teenagers, surrounded by the enemy. The book mostly focuses on his days in several prisoner camps, and his acquaintance with a variety of other captured people, military and civilian. The narrative reaches its climax in the middle of the book, when a group of teenaged prisoners are handpicked to visit Saddam Hussein's palace as part of an Iraqi publicity tactic to expose the Iranians for vast recruitment of under-age soldiers. A photograph of this group of young boys, a total of twenty-three, standing beside Saddam in his palace was printed in Iraqi magazines, with the headline, "All Children of the World Are My Children," presumably spoken by the Iraqi leader (216).

The ironic position of the narrative, propagating a pro-war rhetoric by denouncing

the propaganda of the Baathist regime, trying to unmask the dirty tactics of the enemy,

while unwittingly approving the basic message of their magazine article—that there were

many under-trained child soldiers fighting for the Islamic Republic—is quite remarkable.

Like Rahimpour, the author seems impervious to the paradoxical position in which he is

placing himself. The first chapters of the book give the reader a good sense of the childish

innocence of the young voluntary soldiers, who are soon to be killed or captured in a

massive operation that—although the book does not explicitly mention—ends in defeat. He

remembers the times he and his young comrades would "waste Kalashnikov bullets to shoot

sparrows" out of boredom (19). One member of their group once caught a mouse, "tied its

neck with a thread to the ammunition box . . . and to entertain his comrades, started to talk

to the poor mouse." The soldier pretends the rodent is a captured enemy soldier, and keeps

asking him "about his home and family, the weather in Baghdad, and the reason he came to

the war. Then he himself would answer on behalf of the mouse, the Iraqi prisoner, in a high-

pitched voice" (20). That the members of the same happy crowd of zestful teenagers playing

a mock interview with a mouse will eventually have to sit for a similar interview, to be

observed like the tethered animal by the enemy officials, does not give Yusefzadeh any

pause to consider the larger framework of his experience. The playful episodes behind the

battlefield are not evoked later, yet they do render possible the comparison that he avoids to

make.

During his first days as a soldier, the author receives a handwritten letter from his

elder brother, who has already joined the paramilitary organization, The Islamic

Revolution's Guardian Forces—*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami*—praising him for

his valor and responsibility. "We are proud of you," it reads. "You have proven whenever God's true religion is in danger, you will pick up rifles instead of pens and go to the battlefield instead of school, to defend our Islamic nation" (22). The letter's patriotic rhetoric is, from the perspective of trauma narration, a powerful testimony to the mentality of Sacred Defense; it calls for a public resistance against the forces that, without any specific justification, are coming to destroy the Faith's glory. The same resolved dichotomy, seen in Rahimpour's book, between secular nationalism and religious identity is encapsulated in evangelizing the "Islamic nation," which sounds like a particular type of nation, as if nationalism on its own is too ineffable to call for a popular defense. The letter, moreover, offers a moment of tragic-comic dichotomy. The systemic beseeching of teenager soldiers, full of zeal and free from any caution, is justified, or even glorified, by inverting the old trope of "pen versus sword." The comic trajectory of disturbing the status quo for the sake of a desirable order, the leap for the comic *anagnorisis*, to which everyone is invited, even those who are yet too young to fight, is countered by the stark reality that invitation of these boys to the war entails deserting schools and dismissing what schools stand for. To build a future purged of the enemies of State and Faith—as they are assumed to be one—the lives of those who are expected to enjoy the fruits of such a future has to be sacrificed. In other words, a tragic *nemesis* is deemed necessary for the comic *anagnorisis*.

Martyrdom ascends to the apogee of the trauma of Sacred Defense because it is the synthesis of this dialectical opposition between the inclusive comedy and the exclusive tragedy. A martyr is a scapegoat for the internal contrivances of the pro-conflict narration. A war hero, in this convoluted armed conflict, is not the one who achieves the highest number of confirmed kills, but the one who is the most eager to offer his own blood for the cause. It

is not just about showing mercy and decency to the enemy; it is a matter of asserting the inclusion of histories within—and despite—the exclusion of identities. To kill the enemy is not, in this war, as sacred as to die by the enemy's hands: no matter how many times it is repeated that Iraqi forces are excluded from the circle of religious identification, it always comes to fore that killing them is fratricide. "I looked at that frightened group right beside the slope of their trench," writes the author of *Those Twenty-three*, of the moment his platoon seizes an Iraqi foxhole with a group of terrified soldiers surrendering themselves. "Then I went down and said to one of them, who was crying, two words in Arabic: '*La Takhaf*' [Don't panic]," a phrase he had learned in the training camp during a crash course in Arabic. "For him [the Iraqi soldier], these two words perhaps had many meanings . . . As if he had heard other hopeful and life-giving sentences behind my telling him not to panic, like 'You are safe,' 'We won't kill you,' and 'We're all Muslims'" (95-96).

A constant motif in Yusefzadeh's account is the class divide in the Iranian side of the war, evident in the author's sketches of his own background. The son of a poor family in a rural area in the province of Kerman, the author uses intermittent sections of his memoir to proclaim his roots in the local, unprivileged, working class, which sees itself as the true inheritor of the revolution. While at the outset, the discourse of the Islamic Revolution may seem not quite interested in class warfare as the drive for its popular success, a close inspection reveals that it appropriated the common leftist rhetoric, internalized it, and repackaged it within the message of Islamic resistance. Khomeini, whose political writings until early 1970s did not have any implication of class analysis, adopted this rhetoric in the few years leading to the revolution's victory. As the historian Ervand Abrahamian notes:

> Khomeini depicted society as sharply divided into two warring classes
> (*tabaqat*): the *mostazafin* (oppressed) against the *mostakberin* (oppressors);
> the *foqara* (poor) against the *servatmandan* (rich); the *mellat-e mostazaf*
> (oppressed nation) against the *hokumat-e shaytan* (Satan's government); the
> *zagheh-neshinha* (slum dwellers) against the *kakh-neshinha* (palace dwellers)
> . . . . In the past, such imagery would have been used by secular leftists rather
> than by clerical leaders. The fact that Khomeini—the country's most
> successful politician—came to power by openly exploiting class antagonisms
> should undermine the notion favored by many Western social scientists that
> class analysis is not applicable to Iran. (*Khomeinism* 26-27)

In the narration of war trauma, the trajectory of this class divide, sometimes relegated to the divide between the metropolitan and the rural, the latter being more courageous, more authentic, and more wholesome, plays an important role in laying out the ideological framework of Sacred Defense. The first half of Yusefzadeh's book is full of short vignettes of his childhood as an orphan brought up by his mother, in a village far from any large city. This identity marker is highlighted later in the Iraqi prison, when he is selected in the group of twenty-three young boys, all of whom, like the protagonist, are children of the lower class and mostly from villages or small towns. The proclaimed bravery of these boys, which makes the ethical backbone of the narrative, stands on the premise of a continued class struggle.

The episode of meeting Saddam Hussein in his palace includes a detailed interview between the Iraqi leader and the young boys. Saddam looks at the boys one after another, and asks them about their place of origins and their parents' occupation. The first boy

replies that his father is "a labourer," the second one's father is "a miller," and the next ones

have "driver," "cattle herder," and holders of other low-status jobs as parents (205-208).

This sketch of the economic level of the young captured soldiers bleeds into the larger

narrative outlook, in which the true defenders of the revolution, now under attack by the

outside enemy, are the hitherto oppressed majority. Projecting the internal divide of the

revolution, the class conflict within the Iranian society, onto the war between Iran and its

foreign enemies is part and parcel of the Sacred Defense discourse. Rahimpour's memoir

also has elements of such domestic class distinctions. The author's friend, who is afraid of

the war zone, and tries, in vain, to find an excuse to be dispatched a few kilometers behind

the battlefront, is a native of Tehran. The author, who is also from Tehran, compares

himself and his well-wishing but cowardly friend to other groups coming from small towns

and villages, and openly envies their courage and purity (52).

On a larger stage, one can note the symbolic role of class distinctions even in the

official titles of the paramilitary groups that were established in the first year of the Islamic

Republic. The Iranian military faced a series of purges in its high ranks immediately after

the revolution, in the form of either revolutionary courts' executions or compulsory

retirements, which created a sizeable vacuum in the body of the country's armed forces.

That proved to be a risky decision by the leaders of the revolution: Iran was by then the

most technologically equipped and the best trained military force in the Middle East, due to

Shah's ecstatic affection for military showmanship (Abrahamian, *History of Modern Iran*

124-25). But stripped of its competent officers and unable to purchase spare parts for its

armored machinery, which were mostly American, the country after the revolution was

virtually defenseless against outside invasion (Murray and Woods 72-78). Khomeini's

solution for this predicament was to establish the nation's largest voluntary paramilitary organization; in his own words, "a country with twenty million youth must have an army of twenty million" (Khomeini 11: 121). The full name of this paramilitary organization, commonly known as Basij, is *Basij-e Mostaz'afin*, "The Mobilization of the Oppressed," which clearly bears the marks of the class struggle rhetoric that Khomeini popularized during the 1970s.

After the war, Basij became the main militia arm of the hardliner groups within the Iranian government, crucial in suppressing student movements, ethnic uprisings, and other forms of civil unrest, most famously the 2009 Green Movement, which started as an electoral campaign and turned into a series of street demonstrations in Tehran and other metropolitan areas. The literature of Sacred Defense is instrumental in fortifying the hegemony that vitalizes Basij, particularly through reinforcing the celebration of victimization. The extension of the idea of martyrdom into the post-war civil life, an inverted heroism that glorifies a cheapening of human life by clothing it in the mixture of religious dogma and nationalism, provides the thrust for any violence that can be justified as an act of defense. In his speech after the suppression of the Green Movement, Khamenei clarifies Basij's crucial role: "Basij watches over the general direction that our revolution and our nation takes to assure it doesn't deviate from its correct path. Wherever it sees a digression, Basij stands against it" (Khamenei, my translation).

3.2. *Da*: A Woman's War

Perhaps nowhere in the history of Sacred Defense Literature have the complications of political appropriation been more evident than in *Da*, the seven-hundred-page memoir of

Zahra Hoseyni, which has been reprinted more than a hundred times after its publication in 2008. Hoseyni's book is among the most intimately detailed narratives of the war, not only because the author was present in the border town of Khorramshahr—the first town invaded by the Iraqi forces—from the earliest days of the conflict, but also as a teen-age girl in the midst of a dreadful chaos that was yet to become a full-scale war, she observed, and later recalled the minutiae that most people would either not notice or simply forget. Hoseyni's memoir is particularly interesting as a unique work in the literature of Sacred Defense for its meticulous effort to connect the Iranian memories of war to the history of Shi'ism at large. It has been praised, furthermore, for its contribution to post-revolutionary Iranian women's literature, particularly from a pro-government standpoint. As one Iranian commentator notes, "during the extreme surge of feminist literature, *Da* singlehandedly takes the task of voicing the heretofore silent brave women of the wartime," whose weight can counter the un-Islamic, Western concepts of feminism that obviously agitate the ruling hegemony (Tavakoli, my translation). *Da* makes the case, the argument goes, for an indigenous praise of the role of women in the war that aligns perfectly well with the overall pro-war rhetoric of Sacred Defense.

Moreover, the book is celebrated because it contains an antithesis for one of the oft-repeated accusatory claims against the Islamic Republic, namely the systemic discrimination against ethnic minorities. Hoseyni and her whole family are half-Kurd and half-Arab, who used to live in Basra until the rise of Saddam and eviction of Iranian citizens from Iraq. Upon her arrival in Khorramshahr, the author, who was then only five years old, states that she had to learn Persian as her third language. "Having grown up in Basra," she writes, "we were all fluent in Arabic, but at home or with fellow Kurdish immigrants we

spoke Kurdish" (6). In her first days in Iran, in a family gathering with Iranian relatives, she notes that "we couldn't understand what they were saying. Persian seemed very strange to us" (21). Her rather cosmopolitan background, highlighted against her family's poor financial status, later becomes a significant motif, as the readers come to notice how she embodies the proclaimed nationalism of the post-revolutionary era. An account of the war that not only conforms to the hegemonic discourse, but is produced from a multicultural feminine perspective is so exceptionally fortunate for its state-sponsored publisher that it fashioned the largest book promotion campaign in the country's recent history. As the book's English translator explains, it became "a cultural phenomenon," read and praised by a wide range of cultural and political figures, many of whom belonging to the reformist political camp, which usually opposes the militarism favoured by the proponents of Sacred Defense literature (Sprachman xi-xiii).

A good portion of the book's popularity is, however, the product of nationwide promotional tactics. Many state organizations dedicated a budget to purchase copies of the book wholesale and distribute them as gifts in various occasions to their employees. In one case, a high-ranking official of the publisher's parent company recounts how he himself was gifted several copies of the book from the producer of a state-television news program, in lieu of the usual payment for appearing as a guest speaker in his show (Tavakoli). Another promotional strategy for the book was a public meeting with the Iranian Supreme Leader. "Tens of people were invited as 'contributors to the book *Da*'," writes Zoheir Tavakoli, a pro-government Iranian critic, adding in jest that a single book cannot have this many contributors, even if one includes copy-editors and proof-readers. Tavakoli's point is not that the book was simply a cheap propaganda work that received undeserved attention. On

the contrary, his essay argues that *Da* is such a genuinely powerful work that promotional schemes of this nature only damaged its rightful reputation and worked against a public appreciation of its value. In her thorough analysis of the book's promotion in the Iranian domestic market, Laetitia Nanquette points out that "the [Iranian] Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance buys books that it considers 'beneficial to society,' particularly to give to public libraries, cultural centers, schools and universities" (953). She recalls an encounter with a teacher, who had been given two copies of *Da* by his institution. Considering the massive public purchase of the book, Nanquette maintains, "It can reasonably be assumed that [*Da*] has not been as widely read as it has been bought" (953). In examining the book's narration of trauma, I focus particularly on why *Da*'s reception went beyond the usual public attention that pro-government literature receives. Even if one would argue that *Da* could not have been celebrated without the state's direct advocacy, it begs the question why this particular book, among so many other works of its genre, became the focus of an unprecedented publicity campaign.

The book's first three chapters give an account of Hoseyni's family before the war. We learn of her father's political activism that puts him and the whole family in series of troubles. The family's constant relocation and her father's problems securing a fixed job kept them in poverty. "Often he would go out in the morning to look for work," she remembers, "but would return with nothing to show for it. Because of his political activities, he couldn't be hired in government offices" (22). This is before the revolution, when her father had already accumulated enough reputation as a local activist that he "had no choice but to rent a handcart and become a porter in the market" (22). The family was in such serious financial problems that the author and her older brother, Ali, would also start

working part-time after school, peddling "corn on the cob roasted over fire" near the rural

road (35). The family's poverty is detailed in anecdotes about not having proper shoes to go

to school (37), skipping daily meals (36), and accepting charity from neighbours and distant

relatives (31).

These chapters depict the ideal social class that Islamic Revolution's rhetoric

claimed to emancipate: rural, dispossessed, and faithful. On the walls of their small

apartment, she recalls, "were the usual framed pictures of the great clergymen like

Ayatollah Borujerdi and Hakim, whom father held in the most amazing esteem. The holiest

objects in our home were: first, the Quran, and, second, those photographs on the wall,

which he taught us to respect" (33). Reminiscing about the years that led to the revolution,

she writes, "Ali was the first to get involved in the movement. . . . [He] would go out

distribute leaflets and audiotapes made by Imam Khomeini" (41). One specific memory

clarifies the author's own clear ideological outlook at the time of writing:

> One time Ali brought home a poster of Che Guevara, who symbolized the
>
> struggle against imperialism for some. When father saw the poster hanging
>
> on the wall, he got upset and took it down, stashing it in Ali's closet. Father
>
> was always very wise and careful about images; despite all the love he had
>
> for the Twelve Holy Imams [of the Shiite], he had no use for the pictures that
>
> were painted of them. He explained that a number of miscreant Jews had
>
> made these imaginary portraits to lead people astray from the true faith. (41)

Blatant anti-Semitism and clear Shia references aside, the text makes a strong distinction

between secular nationalist revolutionary practices, symbolized in figures like Che Guevara,

and the *true* revolution, which must be exclusively Islamic. Traces of the 1953 coup, which

Hoseyni does not directly allude to, are visible in this attitude toward the authenticity of revolutionary maxims. As noted before, not only did the coup plant the seeds of anti-Americanism in the Iranian public memory, but it also effectively crushed secular resistance movements, leaving the political field open for hardline religious groups to reap the crops of national uprising.

In the first week after the invasion, Zahra, now sixteen years old, volunteers to assist in the morgue and cemetery of the town, which desperately needed help with washing and burying the bodies of civilians. The book details, with microscopic attention, the hardship and unbelievable devastation of her experience in the cemetery. "The first thing that caught my eyes was the small cement pool in the middle of the room that was ringed with a narrow drainage channel filled with blood," she writes. "I immediately thought of the slaughterhouse that was near our home" (64). In her second day at work, she has her first serious traumatic experience: "Suddenly, among the bodies that they had sent in I noticed a familiar face. I was trembling. She was one of our former neighbors, and the bodies of her two children were beside her. I got chocked up and suddenly everything went dark" (71). It takes her only a few more hours to see another familiar corpse. "All of a sudden it was as if there was an electric shock running through me; I jumped back," she writes. It was the body of a pregnant woman, called Effat, who used to live "on the same block" as the author (71). Unable to work on her body, she steps back to let others wash her. "Her lips, once red and full, were now closed forever. I couldn't stand to watch them unbraid her long hair, and ran into the next room, crushed by the sight." Hoseyni walks out, only to see Effat's family coming to the cemetery to bury her. "It was astonishing," she recalls, "The mother was speaking in their dialect to Effat as though she were still alive. The poor thing had no tears

in her eyes, which surprised me until I saw that she wasn't herself. She would beat her head and chest so hard you'd think she wanted to do away with herself" (73-74). Due to Islamic laws, the body of a woman, dead or alive, should not be touched or seen by non-relative men. Scenes like these, which abound in Hoseyni's memoir, are rare, if not completely absent, in the overall body of Sacred Defense literature, because most of the writers, who are veterans of the war, are men and had simply no access to experiences of this kind. At least part of the book's unprecedented recognition is traceable in its fresh accounts of the war experience, which is both original in its access to the female side of the trauma experience, and meticulous in its treatment of the traumatic memory.[19]

The dread of some of the scenes she remembers of her time in the cemetery borders on unrealism. "There were certain things I just wouldn't touch," she explains. "The fetuses aborted by wave after wave of bombings, for example, had horrible expressions on their tiny faces that scared me out of my wits" (86). To explain her loss of appetite in the evenings after washing the dead, she recalls the image of "bodies not only crushed by the force of the explosions but also twisted and mangled, and the sight of the people with their eyes gouged out and their throats torn open would appear before my eyes" (102). An episode of dark humour ensues when she and the gravediggers hear the roar of enemy aircraft, and afraid of bombing, all take shelter in the recently dug graves:

> After things had quieted, another thought occurred to me: If I had been hit by
>
> one of the shells, the grave where I found cover would have been my resting

---

[19] Regarding the "feminine"—and not necessarily feminist—approach of the book toward the war, one can note the larger shift in contemporary Iranian literature, which in the past two decades has seen the rise of female writers. "The success of the publication of *Da* . . . reflects," Nanquette writes, "the feminization of Iranian literature through its writers. Indeed, from around the 1990s up to the present day, women have been the primary writers of Iranian fiction, while at the same time being conspicuously rare contributors of 'Sacred Defense' narratives" (949). The book, one could surmise, was erected by state-owned institutions as an antidote to the surge of independent, feminist literature.

place. I stayed in it for several minutes to see what it would be like, going over the steps in the burial process in my mind: putting the body on the proper side, face down, laying the gravestone by the head; then darkness and solitude. I was suddenly struck with horror as I reviewed my good and bad deeds and watched scenes of my life pass by. I prayed to God to take me from this world after all my sins had been forgiven . . . .

Zeynab's [Her co-worker] voice brought me back to life, "Why [*sic*] are you doing down there, girl?"

"I wanted to sample the taste of death," I said. "Shovel some dirt on me so I can see what it's like to be a corpse." (108)

As the war's horrors keep unfolding, the frequency of these bleak observations increases. A short account of a caretaker's death in a mortar attack escalates the combination of the horrific and the absurd. "In the seconds it took for me to dive to the ground," she writes, "a piece of shrapnel had decapitated him, but his headless body, mangled and bloody, continued its mad dash until it ran into a partially open double door and hit the ground." More amazed than petrified, she asks a friend nearby to help the caretaker. "'What do you mean, help him?' he asked. 'He has no head'" (355). In some cases, jokes are grotesquely incorporated in the otherwise desolate narration of the war to produce a staggering effect. Encouraging her younger sister, who has insisted to help them with washing the dead bodies and preparing them for burial, but is stunned by the calamity's magnitude, the author cheerfully says, "Leila, I'm not the one in a hurry. It's this martyr; he can't wait to get to heaven" (383).

The narrative of the war's early weeks is simultaneously vigorous and horrific, as Hoseyni patiently dedicates page after page of intricately recounted memories to draw a comprehensive picture of her hometown in shock and mayhem. Khorramshahr is eventually lost to the invading forces, and will not be liberated by the Iranians until two years later. By then Hoseyni and the remainder of her family are living in a refugee camp. The narrative, while deeply embedded in daily accounts of the activities in the cemetery, does not lose its focus on the ideological matter of exclusive religiosity within inclusive nationalism. Hoseyni occasionally reminds her readers of her own mixed ethnic background, implying a broad nationalism that invites marginalized Iranians of Kurd, Arab, and other ethnicities to participate in the newly minted post-revolutionary collective identity. Watching a woman mourn her dead in a corner of the cemetery, Hoseyni makes a note of her dress: "She was wearing a dark silk shirt with a floral print. On her head was a large silk cloth tied Arab style, but her forelocks protruded from her head cloth and lay on her shoulders the way Kurds wore them" (73). When the author walks closer to hear her mourning, she notes, "I heard her saying in Kurdish, 'O my darling, I am the living dead because of the infidel.' Then she cursed Saddam, hoping for the day when his heart like hers would be ablaze at the sight of a dead child" (73). The same dichotomy, noted above in *Those Twenty-Three* and *Life Was Good*, is present here, between the true Muslims, who are all enjoined in a reborn nation after the triumph of its Islamic Revolution, and their enemy, whose Muslimness is assumed to be questionable. The unlikely condition of an Islamic collective identity that surpasses ethnic multiculturalism and yet excludes, provisionally at least, Saddam and his army, is at the heart of *Da*'s trauma narration.

To maintain this political outlook, Hoseyni does partake in fabricating some historical events and exaggerating a few others. Like the authors of many works of autobiography, she tends to place herself in the limelight of the story and give a higher agency to herself in certain cases, which seem unlikely to have a sixteen-year old girl at their center. In one case, she recounts how she stormed to the meeting of President Abolhasan Banisadr, who was under pressure by the more conservative members of the government to act quickly against the invasion. "I pushed my way through the crowd," she writes, "and screamed, 'OPEN THE DOOR! Why are you hiding him in there?'" and answering a guard who pleads with her to step back and show respect for the President, she shouts, "Respect? What for? . . . He's a traitor" (258). With regards to at least a few of the memories that make historical claims about the logistics of the war, her narrative does not stand the test of historical verification. In the third week of the war, for instance, on her way to the cemetery, she hears some of her coworkers talk about a group of prisoners, captured by Iranian forces the day before. She remembers hearing that "all sorts of people were among the prisoners—English, German, and Iraqi." Curious to know how those European citizens were even near the Iran-Iraq border by then, she concludes, "I wasn't aware that the rest of the world was backing the Iraqis and supplying them," which is a claim repeated continuously by the Iranian officials during and after the war (424). While supporting Saddam by some Western countries via selling equipment and ammunition, and in a few cases, supplying logistical intelligence, is recorded in several histories of the war, there is no evidence that Iranians ever captured German or British citizens in the battlefield.

The two climactic events in the book are the deaths of the author's father and brother. Hoseyni's father dies in the first week of the war, after joining the local people's

resistance forces. The account of his death and the subsequent mourning, which take about sixty pages of the book, displays the third dialectical paradigm of trauma emplotment, namely, universality-uniqueness. Trauma, as detailed in the previous chapter, is usually projected as profoundly unique to its cultural and political context, resistant to any subordination; yet at the core of its singularity is the unyielding penchant for generalization. Traumatic memories are universalized in two ways: the associative links to other events, characters, political realms, or historical episodes make for the metonymic process of universalization, and the comparison to other events or locations constitutes the metaphoric process. In the case of Sacred Defense literature, the war's trauma is connected to the most traumatic mythic-cum-historic event in the public memory of Shiite Muslims, the Battle of Karbala (680 CE).

As most of the official histories of early Islam recount, Hoseyn (also commonly spelled Hussein, Huseyn, and Husayn), the grandson of the Prophet and the son of the third Caliph, Ali, refused to concede to the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid Ibn-Mu'awia, who ascended to his father's throne on the April of 680 CE. Traveling with his family and close friends from Medina to the city of Kufa in the east, Hoseyn was intercepted by an army of the Caliph in an arid place west of the river Euphrates called Karbala. When Hoseyn refused to capitulate to Yazid, thus undermining the legitimacy of his Caliphate, he was attacked and killed by the Caliph's army in a highly disproportionate battle that lasted only a few days. Almost all male members of Hoseyn's caravan were slaughtered, and the women and children were taken prisoner and sent back to the Caliph in Damascus (Aghaie 3-10; Farzaneh 98-99). The event, commemorated annually in mourning rituals by Shiite Muslims, is considered the most significant historic episode of martyrdom in Shia history.

The details of the battle and its aftermath were later aggrandized, mythologized, and gradually interwoven with other elements of Shia culture. The figure of Hoseyn, as the true inheritor of the Islamic Caliphate, whose unsuccessful claim was supported by both his lineage and his position as one of the twelve Holy Imams—an exclusively Shiite concept that assumed a seat of spiritual leadership parallel to the political leadership of the Caliph— became a manifestation of the celebrated victimhood. He is considered a grand martyr, whose prominence is not only due to his valor and uprightness, but also to his venerable fate, i.e., being martyred under the worst condition. The logic of such commemorative histories is slightly like that of the early Christian sainthood: the more unjust, cruel, and intolerable the condition of his martyrdom, the more reverent his spiritual status.

Alongside the narrative of Hoseyn's martyrdom is the story of the survivors, including his children, who, as the official Shiite histories go, were treated extremely badly during their time of captivity. The singular survivor figure standing out in the narratives of Karbala is Zeynab, the martyred hero's sister, who refused to stay silent about the injustice before, during, and after the battle. In the historical canon of Karbala, the significance of Zeynab's heroic role is only secondary to Hoseyn's: had it not been for her courageous speeches about her family's fate, the entirety of Karbala's narrative would have been lost for the posterity (Aghaie 6-10, 117-122). The history of Karbala, therefore, becomes the ecumenical trauma narrative in Shiite public memory, an eternal drama of undeterred moral righteousness to stand against, and expose, those who are only considered Muslim in name. It is not too difficult to see why and how the Iranian literature of Sacred Defense invokes the mythologized history of Karbala and its crowned martyr to justify its own political agenda. The Baathist enemy can be seen as the inauthentic Muslims, who pose a threat to

the real Muslims—pious, revolutionary, and economically downtrodden—and the war can

be repackaged as a modernized version of Karbala. The metaphoric link between the two is

hard to miss.[20]

On the day of her father's death, right before entering the cemetery, *Da*'s author is

told by a colleague not to go inside. "On the way," she recalls, "I had a strange feeling

which I couldn't shake. . . . My gut feeling was that something terrible had happened,

someone in the family had been killed and that I would soon have to face that horror" (170).

At this moment, she foreshadows her father's imminent death by invoking the universal

trauma of Karbala: "The slaughter at Karbala also appeared in my mind, and I felt I would

soon be witnessing the same dreadful thing" (170). The memories of her father and brother

rush into her mind. "Ali's advice echoed in my ears: Be like Zeynab," whom the narrator

explicitly claims to be her historical role model, as she admired "how Zeynab's heart was

etched with grief at the sight of the slaughter of her most cherished relatives; how she

endured all the torments of imprisonment, and, when she finally confronted her tormentors,

stood up and said defiantly, 'On the plains of Karbala, I saw nothing but beauty'" (171). A

few moments later, she finds herself calming her mother and her younger siblings, sitting in

a corner of the cemetery. "Although on the inside I was in a frenzy," she explains, "I said to

them, 'Don't cry; father's gone on the same path as Imam Hoseyn, toward God. You

remember the children of Imam Hoseyn. The enemy martyred their father and burned their

tents'" (173). Minutes later, when the wailings of the eponymous mother—"Da" means

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[20] The modern references to Karbala did not start with the Sacred Defense discourse. Even before the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the Muslim revolutionary forces adopted the mytho-history of Karbala as a powerful narrative of resistance, yet the Iran-Iraq war created a fertile ground for the universalization of Karbala into a ubiquitous reference for modern Iranian politics. For a detailed history of the Karbala narrative's revival in modern Iran, see Aghaie (2004).

"mom" in Kurdish—scares the children again, the author admonishes her for not controlling herself. In the heat of one of the most emotionally charged scenes of the book, the references to the Battle of Karbala as a metaphor for their own ongoing war are again invoked:

> She [mother] shouted at me in Kurdish, "Little tramp, you've got everybody looking at you. How would you know what I'm going through?"
>
> "What do you mean?" I shouted back in Kurdish. "I wouldn't know what you're going through? Was father dearer than Imam Hoseyn? Are we better than the blessed Zeynab?" Then I embraced her and reminded her of the miseries Zeynab had to endure. (174)

In the next sixty pages, the author explicitly mentions the images of Karbala more than a dozen times, comparing herself and her mother to Zeynab, her father to Hoseyn, and by the same token, the entirety of the war to Karbala.

Some of the references simply repeat the metaphor, while a few add to its complexity. Recounting the moment of her father's burial, she notes that in the chaotic atmosphere of the war, most of her relatives could not show up to attend to the bereaved family. "It was a strange sight taking him to the grave," she writes. "It made me think of the funeral of Hoseyn, the Prince of Martyrs. How his body just lay on the ground with no one to accompany him to the grave" (182-83). Moments later, when her father's body is to be interred in the grave, she talks to her wailing mother, "Remember the blessed Zeynab, how there was nobody to comfort her," and then, to assuage her, positively extends the comparison to include herself and her younger siblings. "Think of Imam Hoseyn's children; how they were slapped around. Everybody here has treated your children with kindness and

comforted them" (184). The pathos of the scene is suddenly magnified in the next few lines: "Then I repeated. 'Pass father down to me.' One of the body washers joined me in the grave. The other men stepped forward and lifted him. Mother shrieked. The children, terrified, clung to her for dear life and cried in a louder voice" (184). The comparison to Karbala is not limited to the author's own personal grief. After the burial, she remembers her last talk with her father, a few days before his martyrdom, in which he also applies the same Shiite references, but not to his own life. Admitting the war's scale of power is asymmetrical, her father opines, "[B]ut we have the Imam [Khomeini]. We have faith on our side. . . . History is about to repeat itself. The Prince of Martyrs [i.e., Hoseyn] also faced overwhelming forces" (188).

The universalizing association between the contemporary Iranian forces led by Khomeini and the small army of Hoseyn in 680 CE, which conversely highlights the former's uniqueness in modern history, is established not only by recurring metaphoric links, but also through a particular metonymic bond. In many Muslim societies, a Seyyed (also commonly spelled Syed, Seyed, Sayyid, and Sayed, meaning "mister" or "sir") is an honorific title used to denote the descendants of the Prophet through his two grandsons. This title, which has little value outside the religious realm, adds a certain prestige to its holder as he would be considered a literal bearer of early Islam's glory and purity. The notion has more popularity within Shiite societies than Sunnis, so much that the Shia clergy have long adopted a dress code for distinguishing between Seyyeds and others: A Shiite Seyyed cleric wears a black turban, while others have to wear white. The Iranian Supreme Leader happened to belong to the black-turban subgroup, which implies that in the association with the Battle of Karbala, Khomeini is not only similar to its hero, but is

considered his heir. As it is the case with trauma emplotment in general, the allegorical and the literal are mixed with one another. The author of *Da* leaves no room for speculation on this matter. Rummaging through her father's belonging after his death, she finds a few cassette tapes, including one that had recitations of "the passions of Imam Hoseyn," which triggers a memory in her mind: "I'll never forget it when he said, 'Khomeini is the heir of Imam Hoseyn. We're always saying we wish we could have been there to help the Imam in his hour of need. Now it's our turn to help Khomeini'" (213). Notice how the two references to "Imam"—a religious leader in general, and one of the twelve historical spiritual leaders of Shiite Islam—are integrated to imply that Khomeini's role as the nation's highest politician is a bona fide reincarnation of Hoseyn's role for his faithful followers.

The death of the author's brother, Ali, reiterates the same mixture of allegorical and literal references to Karbala, augmenting the narrative's emotional charge even more. Since Ali's departure to join the Revolutionary Guardian Forces a few days before the beginning of the war, she had not had a chance to see her brother. Her first time to see him after the war turns out to be her last time to ever see him: "I saw that they had brought in the next body. I ran to the stretcher and looked at the face. Stunned, I couldn't help blurting out, 'Oh, but this is Ali!'" (312). She decides to keep the news from her mother, who is already grieving her husband and cannot bear to hear of another death. After clandestinely burying her brother, she sits by the grave and lets the pain out. "God! Why did you leave me behind?" she shouts, "I called on you to give me patience and on the blessed Zeynab for strength, but now I can't take it anymore. How long are you going to test me with all these calamities?" (344). She does inform her uncle and grandfather of Ali's death, but asks them to keep it from her mother. The episode, around the end of the book, when the mother

finally finds out about her son's death, four months after he is buried, again relies on the

Karbala reference. By then, the town of Khorramshahr is entirely evacuated and she and her

family have moved to a refugee camp near Tehran. One morning, her grandfather wakes up

to sing the call for prayer, and after that, gives "a full-throated recitation of how the

Prophet's grandson Hoseyn was martyred." The author notes, "We didn't know how

grandfather was going to tell mother about Ali's death. Mother thought he was giving the

recital in honor of father's martyrdom," but gradually her grandfather digresses from the

passions of Hoseyn. "When he got to part [*sic*] describing the martyrdom of Ali Akbar,

Hoseyn's older son, he recited beautifully. . . . Mother realized what he meant and she

immediately broke into an anguished wail, bringing out all the neighbors from their tents"

(579-80).

It is essential to note that Karbala's narrative is itself the domain of tragedy-comedy

emplotment. The narrative of Hoseyn's heroic death, with all its dread and shock, is not

tantamount to the dominance of an inevitable order that was asserting its rightful position; it

is the exact opposite. His martyrdom is a manifestation of a utopianism, a comic struggle to

disrupt the unacceptable order and introduce the desirable ideal, which is thwarted by a

tragic death. The appropriation of an archetypal trauma like Karbala to narrate the modern

war adds to the latter's complications, because it is both the traumatic dialectics of its own

historical condition that has to be addressed, and also that of its apotheosis. The idealism

inherent in Shia culture fuels the sense of retribution against the inauthentic Muslims, who

are believed to be either the puppets of the Western imperialism or in alliance with it. All

three representative texts of Sacred Defense literature discussed so far show clear signs of

an assumed moral superiority that is complemented by referencing the mytho-historical Shia

narratives of early Islam. The significance of martyrdom that all but sidelines the role of survivors is the most obvious legacy of Karbala's traumatic memory for the Iranian pro-war literature.

There is little doubt that *Da*'s unprecedented popularity is partly due to promotional strategies by its state-sponsored publisher, but the book is, as my analysis has so far demonstrated, a meritorious achievement on its own. Its simultaneous focus on all aspects of the Sacred Defense literature—class struggle, national inclusivity confronted with religious exclusivism, universalization of trauma through projection of its uniqueness, and representation of the female side of the war in a way that conforms to the domestic ideology of the Islamic Republic—makes it stand above the rest of the works in its genre. While other Iranian memoirs of the war, as the two previous examples attest, are limited by their male point of view, *Da* is free to roam in places that they could not have penetrated. In its ideological perspective, *Da* is as faithful of an advocate of the Islamic Republic's hegemony as any other text in the genre, yet in the limited political sphere it enjoys as a work of propaganda literature, it is surprisingly powerful.

3.3. *Chess with the Doomsday Machine*: Fiction of Sacred Defense

A work of fiction, in contrast to a memoir, has a much wider space of articulation and symbolic playfulness. Unrestricted by any fidelity to actual events, the writer of a novel in the genre of Sacred Defense has the leeway to orchestrate the elements of his narrative the way he wishes, thus offering a text with a higher potential for delineating traumatic emplotment. To conclude this chapter, I examine the novel, *Chess with the Doomsday Machine*, by Habib Ahmadzadeh, a veteran of the war, who freely uses his own wartime

experience and those of his comrades in his work. In general, the literature of Sacred

Defense has produced fewer serious works of fiction than memoirs, which could be either

because writing memoirs requires less literary expertise—many of them are ghostwritten—

or because the novel as a genre allows a broader margin to be politically vague, and in some

cases, outright subversive, which could undermine its whole purpose as propaganda.[21]

Ahmadzadeh, who is one of the most decorated Iranian writers after the revolution,

published his prize-winning novel with the same state-owned company that produced the

three aforementioned memoirs, but as we will shortly see, he does not care much about

depicting the enemy as an incarnation of evil, or glorifying the role of volunteer

paramilitary Basijis. His novel includes religious references, but instead of limiting them to

Shiite history, Ahmadzadeh broadens his symbolic language to include elements of Judaism

and Christianity, as the three epigraphs for the novel, excerpts from the Book of Genesis,

the Gospel of Matthew, and the Quran, clearly indicate.

     The protagonist and narrator of the novel, an adolescent member of Basij, who

works as an artillery spotter in the besieged city of Abadan during the first years of the war,

is pertinacious, valiant, and yet helplessly naïve. The Iranian forces realize the Iraqis have

started to use a state-of-the-art radar system, known as The Cymbeline, which is capable of

tracing the enemy's artillery with maximum precision and transmit its coordination for

retaliatory shelling. The enemy's new radar, the titular Doomsday Machine, as the

protagonist comes to call it, has to be detected and destroyed, but the Iranians lack the

manpower or the resources to do so. The group of young and ingenious Basijis decide to

fool the radar, instead of destroying it, by creating distracting fusillades that would make

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[21] For a general overview of the fiction of Sacred Defense, including works written by the war's veterans, see
Ghanoonparvar (2016).

their enemy doubt the precision of their new radar, and forego its usage. This risky plan needs a deft artillery spotter, and the protagonist, whose name is never revealed, but his code-name, Musa—Arabicized variation of Moses—has an evident biblical allusion to guidance and deliverance, proudly volunteers for the mission. What complicates the matter for Musa is the presence of a few desperate civilians, who have not evacuated the city, and given the ongoing military siege, are stranded in desolate buildings. There is Geety, a former prostitute, who lives with her mentally challenged daughter in a notorious neighbourhood that is now all but deserted, and there is an old man, whom everyone calls The Engineer: a hermit, claiming to be a retired engineer with a lifetime of experience in the nearby oil refinery, now living with his cats and cactus flowers.

As the story unfolds, the protagonist comes to understand the personal history of these characters, and furthermore, has to spend a night with them and two priests of the Armenian Church, who had come to clear out a local church building but cannot leave the city due to the bombardment. This medley of unlikely characters has to stay under the same roof on the eve of the artillery operation. In the final chapters, Musa, who needs The Engineer's compliance but does not want to reveal any military secrets, finds himself trapped in a conversation with the old man riddled with biblical references. The Engineer, a nihilist character who seems at once senile and quick-witted, believes the war to be an entirely meaningless endeavour, and constantly claims that both sides are fighting for a God who has already betrayed humans by fooling them with the Edenic fruit and removing them from the biblical Garden. With blasphemous remarks that enrage the young devout soldier, he keeps inquiring about the Doomsday Machine and why the Iranian artillery men are trying to expose themselves to it in an operation that will likely end in their own death. In

the climactic final episodes of the story, Musa replies that his friends are trying to die so they can take revenge on God for evicting Adam and Eve from Heaven. This seemingly inane answer satisfies the old man. The novel ends with the accomplishment of their mission, with no martyrs.

With this short synopsis, we can already discern how far Ahmadzadeh's novel stands from the mainstream of Sacred Defense literature, and yet, it remains steadfastly close to its pro-war spirit. As Paul Sprachman, the novel's English translator, who has also translated *Da* and a few other works of this genre, observes, "*Chess with the Doomsday Machine* contains no tearful goodbyes or happy homecomings," and while a common trait in the pro-war literature is to delegitimize the enemy, here the Iraqis "are not readers of *Playboy*, nor are they drinkers of Johnny Walker" (xii). Indeed, the novel does not have a single Iraqi character and never makes any direct reference to the Iraqis' faith. Were it not for the Doomsday Machine itself, the novel would not have any mentioning of the enemy at all. The war is, however, present in every page of the book. It is visible through the desolation of a once lively city, the civilian casualties, the disruption of normal life, and the vigorous yet arrogant attitude of teenager soldiers, simultaneously smart and juvenile. Besides, the novel includes characters that are usually ignored or willfully erased in the Iranian memoirs of the war: some would not conform to the finessed rhetoric of the Sacred Defense, some would be irrelevant to its political trajectory, and some would be simply too vulgar for works that intended to praise martyrdom. Ahmadzadeh's maverick story, nonetheless, moves in a less ideologically methodical direction. Not only the old prostitute, for instance, is included, but her indecent language is, within the book's narrow lexical limits, described in detail. When the protagonist unknowingly calls her "Madam"—

Khanoom—a term of address that connotes her former profession, the woman bursts in anger and starts to verbally attack the young man, "Madam . . .that's your mother! Your aunt! Your mother's a cunt!" (54). This episode sets up a humorous encounter in the final chapters, when an old Armenian priest, completely unaware of the woman's history, also calls her Madam out of respect. "Watch your mouth! Your mother's the madam!" she says. "Madam, have I insulted you?" the priest asks in earnest, which only makes her angrier (184). The inclusion of the two priests in the story is itself quite remarkable; their presence allows the author to significantly broaden the range of his symbolic references.

In his first encounter with the two priests, the young protagonist, with little knowledge of Christianity, sees a statue of a woman and a young child in the church and assumes them to be Virgin Mary and Jesus. His friend points out, "The Holy Mother's been hit by shrapnel!" He looks up to see a piece of metal cutting into the statue's chest, and remarks, "It was a familiar scene. Yes, the very one. The statue was just like a canvas painting they put up at our local Hoseyniyeh during Moharram [for observing the mourning of Karbala]. The one showed Imam Hoseyn cradling that infant Ali Asghar [his son] in one hand and pointing at Yazid's army with the other" (20). Later in the story, he asks the priests about the statue, and finds out it does not represent Virgin Mary. He reads the number 1915 at its foot, and inquires about it. "This statue is a memorial found at every Armenian church," says the priest. "It commemorates the massacre of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks." The universalization of the war's trauma through the memory of Karbala is complemented and complicated by linking it to a modern genocide that neither shares the mark of nationality nor that of religion with the Sacred Defense of the Iranian forces. The novel suggests the similarity between the mythologized trauma of Karbala and the historical

memory of a twentieth-century mass extermination, but does so ironically, through the perspective of a young man, who had never seen a church in person before, and has no prior knowledge of the Armenian history or culture. His attempt to reinterpret what he assumes to be a figure of Mary through Shia Muslim references is significant despite his misrecognition, and the traumatic affinity that the reader is left with, between the ongoing war of two Muslim nations and the massacre of Armenians at the hands of a Muslim majority is as much illuminating as it is problematic.

Instead of universalizing the trauma of war through a direct connection with Karbala, Ahmadzadeh undermines, and simultaneously expands, the possibility of such a universalization. The war is not a genocide, but it is uneven and unfair; one side has a Doomsday Machine and the other has nothing but a group of hot-headed men, who eagerly put their own lives at risk to trick the apocalyptic device. The fact that by the end no one is martyred is an extension of the same problematic universalization. The downplaying of martyrdom in this story and a few other works of Sacred Defense fiction does not sit well with the pro-war proponents of Sacred Defense, mostly because the image of a martyr, as discussed above, is the culmination of the propaganda literature of war. The "religion of war," according to Khorrami, places martyrdom at its center, and Ahmadzadeh's narrative, which does explicitly iterate the exaltations of martyrdom but does not deliver a martyr in the end, problematizes the most significant element of Sacred Defense discourse.[22] On the one hand, the war is glorified and the triumph of the young, faithful patriots is eulogized,

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[22] Khorrami details the case of another veteran novelist, Ahmad Dehghan, whose novel was treated negatively by two pro-state Iranian critics in an interview with the writer. The reason was that in Dehghan's novel, like Ahmadzadeh's, the story does not culminate in martyrdom. One of the critics, referring to a new translation of the novel in English, "effectively criticizes the translator for having selected this book from among so many other 'good ones.'" Because "at the end of this book the protagonist is not 'martyred,'" Khorrami writes, the critics claimed that "it is therefore not a realistic book about the Iranian approach to the war, and thus is not worthy of translation" (170).

but on the other hand, within the ideological framework that valorizes victimization, as we noted in the three memoirs, a victory in which no one dies seems like an oxymoron.

The novel is definitely not preaching pacifism, but it does plant the seeds of its own antinomy by including voices of those who cannot, or do not want to, participate in the Islamic Republic's hegemony of a unified war narrative. For the priests, whose church is bombarded, and are trying to salvage, among other things, the commemorative statue of a previous calamity—the allegory of one trauma meets the literality of another through the shrapnel that hits the statue—the war is neither sacred, nor is it a defense. The Engineer hardly disagrees. Using Musa's binoculars, the old man busies himself looking at the oil refinery in the distance, now burning in the war's flames. "For at least forty years I worked on the same rig that is turning to slag before our eyes," he dejectedly remarks. "I don't know which stinking gismo you're searching for out there," he addresses Musa, "but after you . . . annihilate it, then what? . . . The world will go on exactly the same way until eternity. They'll supply the artillery and you'll destroy it" (73). In the overall course of events, Musa and his comrades emerge victoriously and the old retired engineer returns to his reclusive life in the decrepit building, but the echoes of his admonition haunt the novel's purported optimism.

If *Da* and the other memoirs temper tragic occurrences with the utopianism of comedy, *Chess with the Doomsday Machine* offers a combination of tragedy and comedy from the opposite direction. It reveals the gloom that belies the idealism of young warriors, who are too passionate for martyrdom to see the devastation of what they contribute to. The authors of the said memoirs seem oblivious to the irony of their own position, but Ahmadzadeh strives to exploit that irony. As a veteran of the war, he does not express

contrition in his writing, but is shrewd enough to note the traumatic condition is too hard to tame. The juxtaposition of two metaphors, a Moses figure, leading a group of displaced outcasts to safety, and a divine messenger—the spotter's job is to constantly report the enemy coordinates to his base—makes for a positive interpretation of the protagonist's role in the war with an evil adversary, but at the same time the story underlines his role in perpetuation of destruction. On the fateful night of the battle, Musa asks one of the priests to help him on the roof. "I *am* a priest," he objects. "How can you expect a priest to take a direct role in fighting?" (201). In his mind, the young protagonist debunks that objection by justifying his battle as a necessary task of defense, seasoning it in sentimentalism: "[R]ight now, under that very rain, several children are waiting for their mother to come home. . . . This morning their mother was just as alive as you and me. But, then, a shell identical to the one that hit your church . . . landed right next to the place where she sells greens. Know where she is now?" (201). As it is with all the works of Sacred Defense literature, such claims are always threatened to be undermined by inadvertent admission to fratricide, like the examples from *Those Twenty-Three* and *Life Was Good*, but the novel cracks the walls of its own principles by revealing the naïveté of his teenaged protagonist.

Their near-suicidal operation is carried out with the help of the local army forces. In his first encounter with the highest ranking army officer, Musa keeps addressing him as "lieutenant," only to have an army soldier tell him later, "His rank is major, at least several pay grades above a lieutenant" (124). The protagonist is embarrassed about not knowing the basics of military ranking, but even that humiliation does not stop him later in the story from addressing the major in the least formal language. The young boy evidently cares little about the war's discipline; he enjoys the adrenaline, the grandiosity of martyrdom, and the

glory of defending the faith and the nation. The protagonist's misidentification of the Armenian genocide memorial statue, his quasi-theological quarrel with The Engineer, and his bickering with the old prostitute, all contribute to the comic-tragic trajectory of the narration; a puerile, idealist penchant for a utopian world meets the dark reality of an unchanging circle of cruelty. In his dispute with the old hermit, Musa thinks he is fooling the man by extending, and inverting, his claims about God's nefarious plans for humankind, but in effect, the discussion lays out the limits of his own mind. The Engineer asks him why Adam and Eve were evicted, and elaborates, "It's obvious. He [God] was looking for a way of getting them out of the way, so it wouldn't bother His conscience. Then He could say: See! It was all their fault" (218). Musa decides to explain the covert operation to The Engineer in his own terms. Clarifying the possibility of his comrades' death in the artillery squad, he says, "On the surface the operation will look like a failure, but the real objective is in the other world" (219). After being martyred, according to him, the artillery boys will ascend to heaven, and on their way up, will blow up the Pearly Gates, thus destroying "the whole machinery of eternity" (221). This answer, ostensibly asinine, and only meant to satisfy The Engineer's curiosity, extends the allegoric references of the novel.

The historical awareness of the old man, who is presented as senile and demented, echoes the reference to the Armenian genocide, and structures the whole narrative around two poles: a passive and pessimist side, wary of violence and hostile to providential causes, and a utopian side, eager to fight, unrestrained by the burden of the past, and cavalier regarding their own place in history. Whatever the novelist's intentions, the novel does not leave its reader with a glorified image of heroism. The innate polyphony of the novel works against the elaborately structured message of Sacred Defense. The inclusive nationalism is

present, but it is now projected, via biblical references, as the war of humanity against cosmic forces. The same conflict is also presented, through the link with Armenian genocide, not as a war, but a colossal victimization. Martyrdom is, therefore, valorized only indirectly. The novel touches upon the main tenets of Sacred Defense, yet it cannot help but problematize them, even if it runs against the glorification that this genre is meant to propagate. Together with the three memoirs, the novel exhibits the wide range of narrative elements employed in the Iranian pro-war literature.

The literature of Sacred Defense is at the outset a body of propaganda writings, aimed at a domestic audience for the purpose of reinvigorating wartime memories and sustaining a hegemonic discourse that fuels militarism. Upon a closer look, however, we note that appropriating the trauma narrative of the war is not a simple affair; it employs all three dialectical paradigms of the emplotment of traumatic memories to digest, reorient, and formulize horrendous experiences into political evangelism. What makes an examination of this literary movement significant is that it provides a contemporary example of the manifold political directions trauma narration can take. While it is common to trace the elements of trauma narration in literature of resistance, works that in one way or another employ the memories of horrific experiences to critique the source of horror, it was my goal in this chapter to show that trauma narration can in some cases fortify the oppressive status quo. The discourse of Sacred Defense, which conspicuously represents the peace as poison and the war as panacea, exhibits all the elements necessary for transforming traumatic experiences into coherent stories.

4. A Nation Defined by Trauma: Palestine after the Oslo Accords

On a spring day in 1964, a young Arab poet, living as a second-class citizen in the State of Israel, walked into a theatre hall in Nazareth to read his short poem for a public audience. Decades later, the poet, now celebrated as the voice of Palestine, recalls the significance of that fateful recitation, which overnight catapulted him and his words, "*Sajjel, Ana 'Arabi*"— "Write down, I am an Arab"—onto the public consciousness of his fragmented, stateless nation. The audience, he remembers, were "electrified by a secret current that released the genie from the bottle" (Darwish, *Memory* 174). Never before had they heard a poem that so forcefully and eloquently describes their history of common pain and dispossession. Mahmoud Darwish's poem, "Identity Card," reads as an imaginary conversation between a Palestinian Arab, trapped within the borders of a new country that claimed his ancestral home and renamed its towns, valleys, and streets, and an Israeli official, who is collecting the Arab's civic information to issue him an identity card. The former does all the talking, but the dark and imposing presence of the latter creates the forceful confrontation that signifies the national conflict's asymmetry of power. The first two stanzas begin with the Arab's voice demanding that his ethnicity be recorded in the card, and end with the open question, "*Fahal Taghdab*?"—"Does this bother you?" (*Selected Poems* 24). As the most anthologized work of modern Palestinian literature, this poem offers a rhetorical formula that becomes a recurring pattern in the works of all the generations of Palestinian writers to date: the voice of the dispossessed, irate yet eloquent, passionate yet rational, is

counterpoised with the dominant silence of the occupiers.[23] The Israeli side, be it the soldiers, the settlers, or the civil officials, are already present in the lacunae of the work, so their voice does not need to be accentuated by the writer, to highlight that they have not only occupied a land, but also imposed themselves on the creative imagination of the original residents.

Darwish's poem owes its instantaneous success not only to an articulate defense of the poet's national identity, but to its masterful depiction of the contrast between the ephemerality of his condition and the permanence of its memory: The Palestinian asks, or indeed orders, to have his identity written down. What, he assumes, would anger his interlocutor is not that he is an Arab, but that his Arabness is going to be recorded by the same political apparatus that had wished it eradicated. These two elements, the countering of voice with silence and the fusion of temporariness and permanence, are, as this chapter argues, the common motifs in the trauma literature of Palestine. In contrast to the previous chapter, in which a powerful state absorbs and appropriates the horrific memories in recent history to reinforce its own national propaganda, the Palestinian literature grows within a vacuum of national sovereignty. This makes the entire process of formulating historical traumas quite difficult, because the element of unification, the collective identity marker of ethno-nationality, is only understandable as *ressentiment*: The nation identifies its members by their shared deprivation and hostility. This, as we shall see in detail, is barely enough to hold a fragmented nation together. The Palestinian experience, marked by exiles and wars, has been a living history of segregation and deprival, from the 1948 *Nakba*—

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[23] *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, for example, has this poem as the only representative of modern Palestinian literature. The poem's clear political outlook and its concise treatment of the occupation make it quite suitable to be listed, as it is in the anthology, alongside other works of modern postcolonial literature.

"catastrophe"—that initiated the first mass expulsion, to the 1967 War that shattered all hopes for a unified confrontation of the Arab world with Israel, and led to more expulsions, to the first Intifada (1987-93) that started as extemporaneous acts of civil resistance within the West Bank and Gaza and complicated the peace negotiations, leading to the Oslo Accords (1993-95), and to the Second Intifada (2000-2005) that emerged out of the complete failure of Oslo. The latest manifestations of the ongoing collective trauma are the visually disturbing "separation walls," erected around the Gaza Strip and within the West Bank, for the purpose of annexing the land and isolating Palestinian towns and villages. Currently, there are Arabs living in Israel, who do not see themselves represented properly by their state; there are residents of the West Bank, whose lives are under constant threat of imminent Israeli settlement projects; there are Gazans, who almost do not have any contact with the rest of the country; and there are Palestinians in exile, some of whom have no living memory of their land. All of these groups bear the same ethno-national identity, but their decades of living in separation and their lack of access to any political sovereignty have made it all but impossible to consolidate their traumatic memories.

The main question this chapter intends to highlight is how the emplotment of traumas that continuously exacerbate the well-being of a group of people, without allowing any period of relative tranquility for them to retrospectively examine their sufferings, is possible via the three dialectical paradigms of narration. In his novel about the Palestinian experience in exile, *Gate of the Sun*, Elias Khoury writes, "the only thing that can make one forget a massacre is an even bigger massacre, and we're a people whose fate is to be forgotten as a result of its accumulated calamities" (275). The problem of trauma's continuity in Palestine complicates narrativization. As noted in the first chapter, while

definitions of trauma may vary extensively, they all converge, in one way or another, on the point that trauma is the result of an acute pain that does not convalesce on its own and haunts one's memories for a long time. But in the case of the Palestinian collective pain, locating the trauma itself is quite difficult, because the pain was not temporary, but chronic and intergenerational. The agony of dispossession, displacement, and in many occasions, prison, torture, and death, is still ongoing. What we could call the aftermath, the period necessary for reflection, in which trauma materializes in one's memory, is remarkably absent in the Palestinian experience. Khoury's claim that only the beginning of a new chapter of horror puts an end to the previous one is not hyperbolic; it is an apt description of the conundrum of Palestinian trauma.

The cataclysmic historical episodes that shape the modern Palestinian problem created a series of disruptions, with no time to heal before the next catastrophe would fall upon them. The 1948 mass expulsion, which historians like Ilan Pappe consider an "ethnic cleansing" and Israel's official calendar celebrates as "The War of Independence," scattered the local population (*Ethnic Cleansing* 1-9). Many had to leave the country for Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Many were displaced internally to other areas of the land, particularly the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which were considered protectorates of Egypt and Jordan, respectively. Some, however, either managed to cling to their land or later succeeded in "illegally" returning—Mahmoud Darwish's family, for example, belong to this last group.[24] The earliest works of modern literature that deal with the problem of Palestinian national identity focus almost entirely on the exiled population. Ghassan Kanafani's classic novella

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[24] For detailed analyses of the segregation of the Arab population in Palestine after the formation of the State of Israel, see Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians* (2006) and Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba* (2012). For Darwish's autobiographical notes on his childhood and youth under Israeli occupation, see Darwish, *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* (2010).

Men in the Sun (1963), written and published in Beirut, is the most celebrated example of the literature of this period. Few works, like the cited poem by Darwish, were dedicated to the Palestinian lives within the borders of Israel, most of whom were living in poverty, under highly discriminatory laws. By June 1967, when the war against Israel, led by the charismatic Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, ended in a humiliating defeat, the Palestinian calamity extended to the hitherto untouched areas of Gaza and the West Bank, thus opening a new era of dispossession. The two areas, known since then as the Occupied Territories, faced gradual annexation of the land and strict military control of civil affairs. The literature produced after this point has a more inclusive attitude to the problem of national identity, mostly because of the disillusionment after the dream of a collective pan-Arab nationalism, spearheaded by Nasser, was effectively shattered.

The 1970s, hence, were marked by three significant novels with three entirely different approaches toward the issue of Palestinian collective identity. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud* (1978), written in Baghdad, where the author lived since 1948 until his death, is the story of the eponymous freedom fighter, whose life was complicated by idealism, loss, resistance, and exile. Emile Habiby, who lived in Haifa and Nazareth, and started a political career in the nascent State of Israel, culminating in his election to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), wrote the instant classic *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (1972); the novel satirically portrays the disastrous life of a Palestinian Arab, who tries in vain to commingle as a normal citizen in Israel. In the same decade, the Nablus-born Sahar Khalifeh published *Wild Thorns* (1976), which narrates the lives of lower-class Palestinians in the West Bank, whose main source of income is as cheap labour in Israel. These works, representing the experiences in three distinct geopolitical

realms—exile, inland, and the Occupied Territories—showcase the broad range of Palestinian trauma, and the inherent difficulty of viewing them all as various aspects of the same history.[25] The situation becomes even more complicated after the first Intifada, which started as grassroots movements in the Occupied Territories against the Israeli policies of discrimination, labour exploitation, internment, and land grabbing. The movement was particularly dissatisfied with the efforts of Palestinian resistance groups in exile, such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had thus far focused mainly on armed resistance, with disastrous effects in Jordan and Lebanon. Intifada—which means "shake-off"—was also a response to the Iron Fist policy of the Israeli state, aimed to crush any militant activities in the areas under its control (Tamari 127-34; Shlaim 466-75).

The Intifada of 1987 introduced a different era in the history of Palestinian nationalism in two ways. It did, finally, create a massive popular movement by local residents that was neither guided by any pan-Arabic idealism nor entirely controlled by an exiled leadership. It was the first time in Palestinian history after *Nakba* that a sense of national agency determined the direction of political events. The gradual change in the social strata in Gaza and the West Bank, including the rise of accessible domestic higher education and the growth of local community alliances produced a generation of Palestinians with higher cognizance of their conditions under occupation. In his comprehensive analysis of the Intifada, Joost Hiltermann concludes:

> The effects of Israeli actions were felt by Palestinians in their everyday lives, as the economic pinch hurt landowners, shopkeepers, wageworkers, high school and university graduates, and entrepreneurs across the board. In

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[25] For a detailed literary analyses of all three of these novels, see Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel* (2016).

addition, those who stood up to protest the unfolding occupation were

silenced by military authorities. In that kind of situation it is impossible not

to have a heightened awareness of one's own objective predicament. On the

level of consciousness, therefore, nationalism found a fertile breeding ground

in the population of the Occupied Territories. (208)

The second effect of the Intifada, however, was not as positive. Under pressure by the

international powers, and facing economic problems within the country—Israel's main

market for labour and commodity was linked to the West Bank and Gaza—the Israelis

negotiated a peace treaty with the Palestinian representatives, whose legitimacy were then

recognized for the first time. The infamous Oslo Accords that effectively ended the first

Intifada were initially acclaimed as historic victories, but later proved to be disastrous,

because they gave legal pretext for most *de facto* land annexations, and the vagueness of

their terms allowed Israel to still be in charge of the territories. Edward Said, who, like

many other Palestinian intellectuals of the time, was initially supportive of the "peace

process" but grew dismayed of its later direction, describes the result of Oslo as such:

"What Palestinians have gotten is a series of municipal responsibilities in *Bantustans*

controlled from the outside by Israel. What Israel has secured is official Palestinian consent

to Israeli occupation, which continues in a streamlined and more economical form than

before" (*End of Peace* 14, my italics). The post-Oslo Palestine, which is the historical

timeframe of this chapter, is more intellectually vigorous and yet more oppressed than ever

before. It is a Palestine that has found a louder, clearer, and more coherent collective voice,

but at the expense of unprecedented violence and loss.

The significance of the word "Bantustan" that Said uses to explain the post-Oslo condition should not go unnoticed. After the first Intifada, the terminology used to describe Palestinian history was expanded. Not only revisionist historians such as Ilan Pappe and Avi Shlaim broadened the study of early Israeli occupation by borrowing new technical terminology, like "ethnic cleansing," but also the very phenomenon of occupation in Gaza and the West Bank were redefined, using other modern events in world history. In re-narrating the historical accounts of *Nakba*, Pappe directly compares it to more recent incidents, like the ethnic conflicts in Kosovo at the end of the twentieth century (*Ethnic Cleansing* 2). The term "Bantustan" was coined, and hitherto exclusively used, to describe the designated areas for segregated black Africans in South Africa during apartheid. This expansion of the terminology, moving away from the simple dichotomy of occupier-occupied, and including contemporary parallel conditions to compare the Palestinian case with other national histories of oppression, is one of the by-products of the post-Oslo situation. The narrative dialectics of universality-uniqueness is hard to miss here. In the twenty-first century, Palestine is the national locus of struggle against settler-colonialism of the type that is almost extinct elsewhere in the world, and yet, Palestine is also grappling with common problems of postcolonial societies, from crises in national identity to the issues of religious stratification. As we shall see in the detailed reading of four literary works in this chapter, the uniqueness of the Palestinian experience, highlighted via its similarity to many other cases in the world, is at the core of the emplotment of its incessant trauma.

To see one example of the simultaneous presence of colonialism and post-colonialism in the formation of Palestinian national trauma, we can briefly review an

observation by Laleh Khalili, who worked closely with Palestinians in Lebanese refugee

camps and those in the West Bank. In her study of the commemoration of martyrdom in the

Palestinian public life, she notes that both in the West Bank cities under Israeli occupation

and in refugee camps, "images of young martyred men stare out of posters pasted on alley

walls alongside photographs and murals of Jerusalem. Interior walls of almost every house

carry the picture of a young martyr, a son or daughter, a husband, a brother or sister.

Schools, clinics, and even small shops are named after cities and villages left behind and

destroyed in 1948" (6). Such commemorative practices are done with no direct imperative

by the Palestinian Authority officials, and rest entirely on voluntary practices of daily

memorialization. In contrast to the Iranian case discussed in the previous chapter, in which

the figure of the martyr is carefully crafted out of the traumatic narration of the war, and is

meant to veil the deep incongruities of the war narration for the sake of an ideologically

coherent rhetoric, in the Palestinian case the image of martyrdom is not intentionally

propagated by a hegemonic power to reinforce its own discourse of resistance. As Khalili

finds out when she travels to Ramallah, the interim capital of the Palestinian Authority after

Oslo, the officials actually tried to discard such commemorative practices and replace them

with a more future-oriented positive rhetoric. In 2005, the president of Palestinian

Authority, Mahmoud Abbas ordered the walls of the city purged of any pictures of

celebrated martyrs. When she visits the city in the same year, Khalili observes:

> [A]fter having become habituated to the commemorative markers of the
>
> refugee camps, I found the absence of such posters in Ramallah city streets
>
> disorientating. The same was not true of any other city I visited. The walls of
>
> Abu Dis, Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, Birzeit, and East Jerusalem were all

covered with commemorative martyrs' posters and murals familiar to me

from the refugee camps in Lebanon. But in Ramallah, where the Fatah-led

PA [Palestinian Authority] demonstrated its stateliness to the world, such

posters were only to be found in less visible alleyways or forgotten corners

such as the dark depths of the bus station. In their place, large banners and

posters showed the somber faces of candidates for the local elections

scheduled to be held in late September 2005. (194)

The political leaders had apparently decided that in the same way that elections could pave

the way for a long-awaited sovereignty, a doctrinal distancing from a constant reaffirmation

of loss and a move toward the positive rhetoric of self-governance can organize the

scattered experience of Palestinian nationalism.

The irony, Khalili notes, is that such attempts to organize a new sense of national

unity and conformity are constantly crushed by the Israeli armed forces, who seem

determined to remind the Palestinian political power that they, the Israelis, are the ones in

charge. Despite "its pretension to state-ness and the concurrent visible elimination of

militancy in its discourse and practice," the Palestinian Authority is not "safe from the

Israeli state's violent attempts at silencing them, and its nascent institutions have been

subjected to wanton destruction by the Israeli military" (194). An example of such

destructions was in 2002, when the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) ransacked the offices of

Ministries of Culture and Education, several NGO offices, and university libraries, to

confiscate or destroy archiving equipment, filing cabinets, and whatever else used to record

any raw materials for documentation of contemporary Palestinian culture (Twiss 49-67;

Khalili 195). In some cases the damage inflicted upon buildings and equipment was

completely unnecessary, meant only for the humiliation of the Palestinian institutions: "They wrote insulting graffiti on all the walls, and defecated on floors, inside desk drawers, and on chairs." The message was clear. "The concrete brutality of the occupation," Khalili concludes, "showed that the triumphant Palestinian state at the core of nationalist commemoration was still a fragile thing, subject to the policies of Israel" (195). On the one hand, the feeble State of Palestine tends to discard the accumulated trauma of oppression and displacement by replacing it with what is only nominally similar to the political guise of a contemporary nation-state, and on the other hand, the very existence of this nominal state is unceasingly threatened by the same political force that has caused the initial trauma. Narration of Palestinian memory after the Oslo Accords is fraught with problems of national identity, not only because the governmental institutions that could buttress public memories and official trauma narratives are too weak to handle the enormity of such a task, but also because even when they tend to propagate a unified national discourse of trauma, they do so by erasing and rewriting the collective traces of traumatic memories. Add to this problem the fact that many Palestinians do not see themselves represented by the Palestinian Authority (e.g., those in exile and those assimilated in Israel), and we find ourselves in a chaotic arena of cacophonous narratives that is Palestinian trauma.

In one of the earliest attempts at voicing the Palestinians' grievances for the Western audience, Said writes in *The Question of Palestine* (1979) that, even before the disaster of the Six Day War and the direct American intervention in the never-ending "peace process," there had been a tacit "identification between Western liberal discourse and Zionism," whereby "the Arab had become a nonperson." In Zionism, Said underscores, "the liberal West saw the triumph of reason and idealism, and only that (because that is what liberalism

wishes principally to see)" (37-38). To illustrate his point, Said examines the cases of renowned American intellectuals visiting Israel after 1967, and writing their impressions for the Anglo-American readership after their return. His account of Saul Bellow's and Stephen Spender's visits is quite telling:

> Their liberal humanity, their concern for the "possible" violation of Israeli democracy by military occupation, was demonstrated by a talk with an expert who represented the Arab "reality" to them, alleviated their concern for humane values, and reassured them about Israeli democracy. In turn, this view of the Arab Palestinian inside the occupied territories came to stand for what the Arab Palestinian was, what he wanted, how he felt. It would be exactly like sending a white "black affairs" officer to tell a visiting Western intellectual what the South African black majority *really* was, really wanted, really felt. (40-41)

By now Said's main argument—that the Palestinians are fighting both for their lives and their voices—is beyond dispute, and indeed dated. What makes this passage still relevant is the reference to apartheid, which foreshadows his later comparison of post-Oslo territories and the Bantustans.

Reading Said's arguments about the question of Palestine after more than three decades, one cannot help but notice how the contours of the Palestinian trauma after Oslo are the same as they were before, and yet not quite the same. As my analysis of the Palestinian narratives will show, by the 1990s the concern of literary struggles was not whether the local Arabs can present themselves at all, but that their presentation is mired in internal conflicts, shattered hopes, and most importantly, the enormity of accumulated pain.

The Arab characters in this chapter's works are not "nonpersons." Their voices are loud and clear, and yet somehow their material condition has grown much worse since the time of *The Question of Palestine.*

The analysis of post-Oslo Palestinian literature in this chapter focuses on two memoirs and two novels. I begin by analyzing Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2008). Shehadeh, a London-educated lawyer based in Ramallah, narrates the memories of his homeland's natural landscape that was gradually annexed and turned into massive settlements by the Israelis. Offering a mixture of personal anecdotes, family history, and political commentary, Shehadeh sketches the growth of Palestinian problem from an initial expulsion into a mayhem of unceasing violence and destruction, which is ironically done under the pretense of construction and civilization. His narrative is significant for both the intimate first-hand account of life in the West Bank, and its ruminations on the possibility of imagining a coexistence of the two alienated nations in one land. Next, I examine *I Saw Ramallah* (1997, trans. 2000), the acclaimed memoir by the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti. As its title suggests, the book recounts Barghouti's temporary return to his hometown in the West Bank after three decades of exile. With its rich lyrical account of loss and pain, the memoir, praised by Edward Said as "one of the finest existential accounts of Palestinian displacement," is a testament to an experience complementary to Shehadeh's: the former narrates the pain of seeing the beloved land vanishing in front of his eyes, and the latter tells the agony of exile from the same land (Said, *Foreword* vii).

The next two works to be examined add to the multiplicity of this collective trauma. Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant* (2002, trans. 2008) narrates

the life of a Palestinian man whose youth was spent in the era before the War of 1967, and who is returning after the Oslo Accords to Jerusalem in search of an old forgotten love. The book's rich allegorical references to Christian and Islamic scriptures, and its intricate depiction of the occupation on a microcosmic level, create an astonishing picture of a collectivity in search of its own memories. Its open ending, which coincides with the first public revolts in Jerusalem that instigate the Second Intifada, contributes to the question of Palestine's future. The chapter concludes with an analysis of another novel, Sayed Kashua's *Let It Be Morning* (2004, trans. 2006). As an Israeli Arab, Kashua offers an invaluable account of living under discrimination as a second-class citizen. His novel, originally written in Hebrew, not Arabic, is the fictional account of a young journalist, who suddenly finds himself and his entire family caught up in the midst of a bizarre military operation. Extensively borrowing from his own experiences as a columnist for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Kashua complicates the narrative of Israel-Palestine conflict by shedding light on the lives of the ethnically Palestinian, non-Jewish citizens of Israel, whose painful experiences may not be as obvious as those living in Gaza and the West Bank, or for that matter, those in exile, but whose presence in the midst of the Israel-Palestine conflict cannot be ignored. Reading Kashua's fictional account of a collective trauma, one cannot help but notice how complicated the political conditions have become since the days of Darwish's proud proclamation that he is an Arab, and yet how close in essence the problems still are: the pains of blurry identities, fleeting memories, continuous dispossession, and lack of agency.

4.1. *Palestinian Walks*: The Land Is Gone

Walking vicariously on the hills of Palestine, or what is left of them after decades of Israeli

settlement constructions, the reader of Shehadeh faces a tragedy of isolation and loss, whose

effect is not limited to the lives of the land's old inhabitants, but also destroys the image of

Eretz Israel for the new societies formed there to celebrate their ancestral mytho-historical

heritage. The book consists of six chapters, each narrating one hike that Shehadeh took

within the West Bank's borders, the first in 1978 and the last in 2007. In each walk, the

reader is exposed to the scenic beauty of a land that, until a few decades ago would have

"seemed familiar to a contemporary of Christ," but is now changing, with Israeli towns and

neighbourhoods stretching on the top of many hills, effectively annexing areas that were

thus far untouched by humans (xi). The general policy of construction on these lands has

little to do with a natural demand for housing; it is a "civilian occupation," as two Israeli

architects, Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman, call it. "The mundane elements of planning and

architecture have been conscripted as tactical tools in Israel's strategy," they write, "which

has sought to further national and geopolitical objectives in the organization of space and

the redistribution of its population" (19). As it happens, usually when a settlement is built in

an annexed area, the call for its security against the impending threat of nearby Arab

villages makes the case for building walls and highways that would assure a safe passage to

and from the settlement, which damages the natural landscape even more.

Deeply perturbed that he may never see his beloved countryside again, Shehadeh has

spent decades as a lawyer defending his compatriots against land grabbing in Israeli courts.

In 1979 he co-founded Al-Haq, a human rights organization based in Ramallah, which has

represented hundreds of Palestinian cases ever since. By the first decade of the twenty-first

century, disenchanted by the policies of the Palestinian Authority officials, who were either too myopic or too disorganized, Shehadeh resorts to literature. In 2002, he publishes the highly acclaimed memoir of his childhood and coming-of-age, *Strangers in the House*. With his fluent English, Shehadeh directly addresses an international audience, leaping over the hurdle of translation. That book's success pushed him to write more for a general audience. *Palestinian Walks*, which won the 2008 George Orwell Prize for political writing, is his next literary adventure. While the former book mostly recounts stories of Shehadeh's father and grandfather, both practitioners of law, who were exiled from the city of Jaffa during the 1948 *Nakba*, the latter discusses the contemporary lives of Shehadeh, his wife, and his friends during the years of occupation, both before and after the Oslo Accords. "Ever since I learned of the plans to transform our hills," he writes in the introduction, "I have felt like one who is told that he has contracted a terminal disease. Now when I walk in the hills I cannot but be conscious that the time when I will be able to do so is running out" (xvi). *Palestinian Walks*, therefore, is an attempt to record permanently the temporariness of a lifestyle that would have been otherwise taken for granted. It is a literary testament to a landscape that has already almost disappeared. What connects Shehadeh's narration to the body of Palestinian literature, including the iconic poem by Darwish that opened this chapter, is his persistence to counter the ephemerality of his experience with the immutability of having it written down.

Shehadeh's narrative goes much further than a lawyer's attempt to record the illegality of the occupation and the futile but earnest legal resistance against it. He juxtaposes long descriptive passages of natural scenery with stark notes on the irreversible human actions on the land. Recounting a hike in 1979, he details his free roaming on a hill

near his hometown of Ramallah and describes the landscape in evocative tropes—"hills spread below me like a crumpled sheet of blue velvet with the hamlets huddled in its folds" (65)—but suddenly confronts the reader with a dark reality: "I was unaware that this would be the last time I would be able to stand here on an empty hill," because the Israelis seized it "and used it to build the settlement of Dolev" (66). The literary prowess of the book is evident in juxtapositions of this kind. Painting a beautiful picture of a lost land does more than just invoke the reader's sympathy; it calls for an alternative imagination, a narrative resistance against tragedy. If the fate of the Palestinian land is taken as purely tragic, it would be an affirmation of its inevitability, but Shehadeh does not yield to the grand narrative of unavoidable modernization of the land. If the fate of Palestinian hills is seen as just one example among many cases of urbanization and deforestation in the world, it would make for a universal tragic account of environmental loss, which would consequently denude the traumatic fate of Palestinians from its geographical particularity. His meticulous descriptions of a receding natural world are accompanied by narratives of his own friends' and family's personal memories, producing a deeply intimate account of a nation gradually being erased. His is not just a nostalgic narrative, but one that employs nostalgia as a means for resistance: As long as one can imagine the land as it was before its expropriation, one has not entirely surrendered to the tragic *nemesis* of destructive construction.

Shehadeh does not limit himself to personal accounts of life under occupation—although there is plenty of that to be found in *Palestinian Walks*—but expands his reflections on the country's history to contextualize it within the long tradition of colonialism. "Palestine has been one of the countries most visited by pilgrims and travellers over the ages," he notes. It "has been constantly re-invented, with devastating consequences

to its original inhabitants" (xii). He quotes travelogues by Western intellectuals, who watched the same scenery that he did, but offered bleak descriptions of it, which reveals more their own ideological and cultural perspectives than the actual landscape. He cites Mark Twain, who wrote, "Palestine is desolate and unlovely . . . Palestine is no more of this work-day world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition—it is a dream-land" (qtd. in Shehadeh xiii). In his first hike, Shehadeh reaches the remains of a *qasr*—literally, "palace"—a pre-modern lodging for travellers, and is filled with awe of its beauty. "What fortunate people must have lived in this veritable paradise," he wonders, and hastens to add that "how wide of the mark was Herman Melville, who described this area as barren when he visited it in the middle of the nineteenth century" (10). The colonial interest in Palestine was always abstract, treating religious mythology as history and discarding real history as irrelevant. It began well before the rise of Zionism and the establishment of the Israeli state.

Shehadeh traces this kind of vested interest back to the British plans for "investigating the Archeology, Geography, Geology, and Natural History of the Holy Land" (46). He quotes a parliamentary hearing in 1865 that overtly echoes the type of pseudo-scientific expeditions that Said documents in *Orientalism*. A part of it reads, "No country should be of so much interest to us as that in which the documents of our Faith were written. . . . Much would be gained by [. . .] bringing to light the remains of so many races and generations which must lie concealed under the accumulation of rubbish and ruins on which those villages stand" (qtd. in Shehadeh 46-47). The inhabitants of the land were either invisible or nothing but obstructions over the real treasures that must be unearthed. The unfolding trauma of the contemporary residents of the region is traceable to a historical exclusion; the project of settlement requires, as the old Zionist aphorism goes, "a land

without a people." The exclusion of Palestinians from their own habitat is, for Shehadeh, a pronounced aspect of the universality-within-uniqueness of his national trauma. The case of Palestine is very similar to that of many other colonial projects, yet the assemblage of all the above quotes suggests that by being the epitomized object of Western colonial desire, the Palestinian trauma is indeed unique.

Countering this settler-colonialist view, Shehadeh suggests that the current Israeli settlers, "the main villains of [his] stories, are a constant presence," but he intentionally portrays them as "simplified and lumped together, just as the nineteenth-century travellers generalized about the local 'Arabs' as they tried to obliterate from the land they wished to portray" (xix). The settlements are everywhere in his accounts, but the settlers are only explicitly mentioned when the book tends to make a point about their behaviour and attitude, except for the very last hike, in which, surprisingly, the author finds himself sharing with a young settler a beautiful grove that is still untouched by the Israeli's unstoppable constructions. They face one another, uncomfortably at first, as each assumes the other might want to kill him, but end up smoking a water-pipe together and engage in a rich dialogue about the history of their common land and its possible future. The settlers, the perennial outsiders, whose walls and highways practically keep them away from the reach of the indigenous residents, are initially presented as the quintessence of colonialist hostility, but Shehadeh gradually gives them enough room to allow his reader to see them as shared inheritors of the land's gloomy future. The trauma narrative, which heretofore had willfully excluded the traumatizers from its purview, now grants them a limited space in order to include them in a tragedy that is the fruit of their own aggression.

At the beginning of their conversation, Shehadeh asks the young settler, "Aren't you afraid of being here alone?" implying the assumed danger of Arab villagers who can roam outside the walls. "Afraid?" he replies. "Why should I be? I've done no evil to anyone." This intrigues Shehadeh: "Done no evil, I thought, after all the land he and his people have stolen, after destroying our life for so long," and asks, "Why then carry a gun?" (192-93). The young man answers that he is supposed to carry one, without offering any further explanation—the writer has already clarified that according to Israeli laws, the settlers have the right to shoot Palestinians in self-defence, and even to make arrests. Their discussion becomes simultaneously more relaxed and more passionate, after they both realize the other's fervent affection for the land's diminishing natural landscape. "Did you know that this land you're on," the young Israeli says, "has been declared a nature reserve? We're protecting this spot. . . . As a walker you should appreciate this." Indignant by the entitlement in the man's claim, Shehadeh snaps, "*You're* protecting *our* land? . . . Let me tell you how things looked when this was truly a nature park. Before you came and spoiled it all," and goes on with a description of the almost forgotten serene beauty of the area (195). The Israeli man responds, unaware of the irony in his claim,

> Nothing can remain untouched for hundreds of years. Progress is inevitable.
> You would have done the same as we are doing. Only you lacked the
> material and technical resources to connect these distant areas to power and
> service them with water and electricity. Look at the villagers here, your
> fellow Arabs. They still have to fetch their water from the spring. . . . You
> lack the know-how and the discipline. Leave planning and law enforcement
> to us. We have built many towns and cities out of wild empty areas. Tel Aviv

was built on sand dunes and look how vibrant it is today. The same will

happen here. (195-96)

Had it not included the name of Tel Aviv, the man's statement would have been practically

indistinguishable from the vociferous call for civilization by European colonialists of two

centuries ago.

The conversation between Shehadeh and an Israeli settler brings to mind a famous

poem by Mahmoud Darwish, which is also based on an actual dialogue between the poet

and an Israeli man. "A Soldier Dreaming of White Lilies," originally published in 1969, was

highly controversial among the Arab readership of the time, not the least because it gave

voice to a troubled Israeli soldier, who had come to confide his personal conflicts to his

young, Palestinian friend. The first section of it reads,

He told me he dreams

of a bird

of lemon blossoms

and doesn't ask why or wherefore

understanding only the things

he can smell

the things beneath his hands

understanding

as he told me

that home

is drinking his mother's coffee

and coming back safely at evening.

I asked him:

And the land?

He said:

I don't know it

and don't feel it as skin and heartbeat . . .

I asked him:

Do you love it?

He answered:

My love is a leisurely stroll

or a glass of wine or an affair.

—Would you die for it?

—Let me tell you what keeps me in this place:

the speeches stirred me up

they taught me to love the idea of love

but I didn't share the land's heart. (*Selected Poems* 56)

A poem about "an Israeli soldier capable of feeling remorse for his violence . . . of feeling guilty about taking part in a conquest of the land of others, was perceived by the Arab world as betrayal—surely such soldiers did not exist" (Sand 9). Shehadeh's conversation with the Israeli man does not directly follow the logic of Darwish's polemical poem, not just because the contemporary settler makes a clear attempt at linking himself to the land, in contrast to Darwish's contrite soldier, but also because in the latter's case, the soldier's conscientious objection to armed conflict is narrated against the fresh memory of the 1967 occupation of

the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The settler of Shehadeh's account is gleefully ignorant of the other side's history of pain and dispossession, or at least feigns ignorance.

These differences, nonetheless, highlight a significant similarity between Shehadeh and Darwish, or indeed a shared pattern in the Palestinian trauma literature. The Israelis, be they the soldiers or the settlers, cannot be ignored in addressing the agonies of the Palestinians. Their motives and ideologies are unabashedly colonialist, yet muting their presence in the Palestinian accounts, as a way to resist their encroachment into the Arab rhetorical self-portraits, runs the risk of underplaying the Palestinians' own trauma. This is an irreducible dilemma; on the one hand, as the case of Darwish's "Identity Card" shows, the Israeli's presence does not need any highlighting because he already stands in the dominant position, but on the other hand, as the second poem and the above episode in Shehadeh's narrative clarify, the tale of the Palestinian trauma will be incomplete if the objectionable position of the occupiers is not fully spelled out.

The fundamental counterpoint of tragedy and comedy in Shehadeh's narrative is visible in the way he argues against the young settler's logic. Contrary to the old Europeans, whose gaze at the oriental lands was marked by their avidity to cultivate the resources— natural and human—and broaden their industrial markets, the Israelis are not exclusively looking to exploit a land and its people; they are there to stay. While their argument echoes the nineteenth-century British one, they are not agents of expropriation for the benefit of a distant homeland. What they tend to occupy is itself their designated homeland. The writer takes this fact into consideration, when reflecting on the outcome of such unquenchable thirst for modernization of a pristine land. His fear is for both of the nations, which will eventually have to coexist in the limited piece of land. Thus, the inclusivist comic trajectory

of imagining a shared home, which is not yet on the horizon, is undercut by the tragic

realization that by the time such an ideal may be achieved, the shared land is ruined beyond

repair. Shehadeh is not only arguing against the injustice of exploitation; he elevates the

argument by envisioning a future irremediably disturbed by the paradox in the Israeli's call

for progress. "The way it's going we'll end up with a land that is criss-crossed with roads,"

he says. "I have a vision of all of us going around and around in circles. Whether we call it

Israel or Palestine, this land will become one big concrete maze" (200-201). All this

isolation and loss, the outcome of a decades-long land-grabbing, is not only pushing the

lives of many Palestinians to the brink of extinction, Shehadeh suggests, but will also come

to haunt the Israelis, who will end up inheriting an ultramodern dystopia, instead of their

promised biblical world. In other words, one's tragedy is comically expanded to include the

fate of one's adversary, too.

This conflicting condition, in which occupiers are inflicting damage on themselves

by their continuous oppression of the occupied, is extended throughout the book. To

highlight the religious intimation underneath the process of occupation, Shehadeh cites

Segal and Weizman, who consider the encroaching settlements the crystallization of a

"cruel paradox," in which "the very thing that renders the landscape 'Biblical' or 'pastoral' .

. . is produced by the Palestinians, whom the Jewish settlers came to replace. . . . The

Palestinians are there to produce the scenery and then disappear" (Segal and Weizman 92;

Shehadeh xv). The trauma of exclusion is rendered inclusive to the traumatizers themselves.

Under this light, the religious justifications for legitimizing cruelty come to appear as inane

and self-contradictory. The most pronounced example of this is in Shehadeh's account of

the current settlers in the Dead Sea region. He notes the signs erected by the "tourist

authorities in Israel" that inform the viewers of the renegade pious Jewish people of two

thousand years ago, who chose to distance themselves from impure communities in

Jerusalem, and lived in a self-imposed exile in this area. Then, he comments on the current

settlers in the same place, also quite strict in their religious practice, as they see themselves

reviving the reverence of the region's original inhabitants. Describing their attire and

behaviour, he states that one can "get a sense of how anachronistic they are, like a people

from another era," but unlike their mythical ancestors, "these present-day rebels live on

state subsidies. They are protected by the strongest army in the region and needn't work for

a living" (116).

The erection of barriers between the Israeli settlements and the remaining

Palestinian towns and villages, under the pretense of security, which forms isolated Arab

ghettos—or Bantustans, to follow the common universalized reference of apartheid—is

achieved through more than just walls. In one of his trips, the writer notes that "the beautiful

Dome of the Rock . . . was no longer visible" from a certain passage way near East

Jerusalem, because "it was concealed by new construction" (105). He argues this blocking

of the view was intentional, noting that "they had also constructed a wide highway along the

western periphery of Arab East Jerusalem." Highways, Shehadeh continues, "are more

effective geographic barriers than walls," because walls "can always be demolished. But

once built, roads become a cruel reality," whose utility makes them almost impossible to

remove (105). The symbolic irony is not easy to miss. A road, intended primarily for

connection, is used by the Israelis as a blockade. The highway, therefore, becomes a

metaphor for the paradoxical fate of Palestine. It connects the isolated settlements by further

disconnecting the indigenous residents, resonating the fragmentation of Palestinian

experiences of dispossession and suppression. A highway connotes speed, in contrast to the author's tranquil hikes; it is meant for massive transportation, which stands quite contrary to his lonely ramblings on the hills and valleys. Shehadeh's walks are to observe and appreciate the land, but highways are to appropriate the same land. Like a living wall, the highway segregates the land under the disguise of progress and urbanization. Those who reject it are easy to dismiss as primitives.

For that matter, many officials of the Palestinian Authority, based in Ramallah, embraced the idea of construction and gentrification. In an argument with a member of the PLO in the aftermath of Oslo, Shehadeh finds out how drastic the situation is. When he criticizes the Oslo Accords for giving a silent concession to the Israeli projects of settlement construction, his interlocutor, Selma Hasan, optimistically replies that they will counter the Israeli projects by starting their own modernization plans. "Why be so worried about the settlements?" she says. "We too will expand. Investments will pour in and we will create a new reality. You just wait" (113). A few years later, Shehadeh reports how things turned out for the worse. As his pro-Oslo compatriot predicted, "international funding poured in" to help the Palestinians in the West Bank adapt to their "new reality." The outcome was "the rising materialism of a new elite," he complains. "The spirit of voluntarism was in short supply. The ideals of liberation, both personal and political, seemed further off than ever" (160). The long process of land annexation in the name of progress, Shehadeh suggests, has been so pervasive that even many of the Palestinians on the land started to believe such destructions were essentially positive; that is how the colonial discourse of civilization versus primitivism percolates into the minds of the occupied and the occupier alike. What amplifies the tragedy of Shehadeh's narrative is, ironically, the comic utopianism of his

compatriots, who try in vain to herald a brave new world by emulating their own traumatizers.

Confronted with such a zealous penchant for the devastation of the land by both the Palestinians and the Israelis, the author, utterly hopeless, reminisces about his own father's depression after the calamitous defeat of the 1967 War, which turned the West Bank into an occupied territory. "He was so distressed by the thought of losing everything once again," he writes, "that he considered ending his life" (118). If it were not for Shehadeh's mother, his father would have killed himself; now the son struggles, after the disaster of Oslo, with the same tribulation. Wandering aimlessly in one of his hikes and grappling with the dark contingency of losing his land to the intrusion of bulldozers, he reaches a remote monastery. "The monks who have lived here over the centuries," he surmises, "have succeeded in secluding themselves from the successive waves of conquerors, some more brutal than others. . . . They managed their monastic life and kept their garden going" (152). With his reference to Voltaire's *Candide*, Shehadeh finds a possible solution to his personal predicament. Walking inside the monastery with the help of a monk, he reflects, "In this land of turbulence and wars there have always been oases of tranquility and peace where monks have been able to hide themselves away" (154). The contrast between the world inside the building with its Edenic timelessness, and the outside, where the landscape is being irreversibly transformed, echoes, but also complicates, the same paradox of ephemerality and permanence:

> The wilderness behind Jerusalem is now mainly settled and the monks live in
> an area that has been declared a nature reserve. The changing times offer
> them yet another challenge among the many tribulations they have had to

overcome during their long residence in this lonely valley. This time the

transformation is permanent. Whatever the resolution of this intractable

political conflict, this area will never return to being the wilderness it once

was. Isaiah would not want his life back. As to the resilient monks, I have no

doubt that they will survive as they have in the past. (155)

The defeated lawyer's recourse to narration of his agonising memories is his way of

emulating the monks' mode of life at the heart of a volatile world. If all that surrounds him

is changing without respite, it is his task, Shehadeh comes to believe, to tend his literary

garden that would effectively immortalize the effervescent memory of a geographic pain.

4.2. *I Saw Ramallah*: The Telephone Nation

For those Palestinians, who, unlike Shehadeh, were not able to keep living in their

homeland, the pain of exile, instead of the witnessing of demolitions and constructions, is

the dominant source of a historic trauma. They yearned to have seen, counterintuitively,

what was so painful for Shehadeh to observe. For them, the land's geography is less a

matter of constant strife over the encroachment of settlements; it is the jagged experience of

living in an imaginary nation, being forced into an inverted cosmopolitanism—that is, being

a permanent expatriate—which signifies the problem of geography. The multiplicity of

Palestinian traumatic experience is nowhere more visible than in the accounts of exile,

whereby the land in transformation is reduced to elusive memories. The poet Mourid

Barghouti describes the constant shadow of insecurity that engulfs the mind of every exiled

Palestinian in his acclaimed memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*. He was an undergraduate at the

American University of Cairo, when the 1967 War broke out, Israel defeated the coalition of Arab armies, and occupied the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai desert. In a few days, the young poet's fate was indefinitely changed. He couldn't return home, because the Israeli government had barred the access of all Palestinians abroad, and his family could not fly to Cairo to visit him, afraid that they would be unable to return; thus began the man's open-ended exile. He only managed to acquire a permit for a short-term visit thirty years later, thanks to the peace negotiations after the Intifada. By then, he was married and had a young son, had lived in several countries, and had lost his older brother, also in exile, whose corpse was not allowed a return to their hometown of Ramallah.

The imagery of death in his accounts of diaspora is both a response to literal demise and a figurative depiction of a permanent change. "Displacement is like death," he writes. "One thinks it happens only to other people. From that summer of '67 I became the displaced stranger whom I had always thought was someone else" (3). The fact that his memoir continuously rehashes the accounts of many real deaths, from members of his family to several Palestinian intellectuals like Ghassan Kanafani and Naji Al-Ali—both of whom assassinated by Israeli intelligence services—complicates the simile of death and displacement. The two phenomena are not alike only because they take one by surprise, but also because they are irreversible. Later in the same chapter, he adds another simile for displacement to intensify the enormity of the experience of Palestinian exile and the estrangement it induces: "I know that the stranger can never go back to what he was. It is over. A person gets 'displacement' as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either" (4). The medical comparison speaks to the immanence of the pain. It is less a matter of resolving and recovering than that of accepting and adapting. It does echo the language of Shehadeh

when he writes about feeling like a terminally ill person after realizing the plans for his beloved countryside. The common denominator in both cases is the sharp contrast offered between a temporariness of experience and the threat of a permanent deprivation. If Shehadeh's book is an attempt by, as it were, someone in a deathbed trying to record everything before he is gone, Barghouti's memoir of his short return reads like a posthumous recollection.

In his introduction to the English translation of the book, Edward Said mentions that, having himself made a similar return to Jerusalem after forty-five years, "I very well know the admixture of emotions—happiness, of course, regret, sorrow, surprise, anger, among others—that accompanies such a return" (viii). The narrative of the poet's return, who is only allowed to visit and not to stay, is a reflection on the commonness of the pain and its transformation into a routine. The conflict at the heart of every trauma narration, the unstoppable battle between the extraordinary and the mundane, is vividly present in Barghouti's account, perhaps most clearly in his intermittent references to the role of the telephone in his life. "The Palestinian has become a telephonic person [*insanan tilifunian*]," he writes, "living by the sound of voices carried to him across huge distances." He continues in an affectively lyrical style, "A ring for joy, a ring for sorrow, a ring for yearning. Quarrels, reproach, blame, and apology between Palestinians are introduced by the ringing of the phone. We have never loved a sound so much, and we have never been so terrified by one" (126-27). The telephone for Barghouti becomes the embodiment of the trauma narrative's dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, similar to what Shehadeh's reference to highways near Jerusalem underlines. A modern object, meant to facilitate connections, is inversely used to allegorize the irremediable pain of exile. A telephonic

person—which is a neologism in the original Arabic, too—is not one in love with a phone, but one integrated with it. The sense of utter isolation, which is the hallmark of the tragic pattern, is intensified by the medium of communication.

For Barghouti, a telephonic man is one whose sense of identity and belonging is directly reliant on what the ringing of a phone may deliver. He is alone in the midst of a connected network, he is included in the scattered society of expatriates and their relatives, who are all excluded from living in their shared land. Recalling another death in the family, he outlines the role of telephone in shaping his life:

> In this beautiful home, in this happy natural scene, as you look out every day at this green bursting with life, your telephone rings one night and a hesitating voice tells you that so-and-so died "half an hour ago." You discover that you cannot join in the funeral, accompany him to the grave, because you have no passport, or no visa, or no residence, or because you are forbidden from entry. At one-thirty in the morning [my brother's] voice came to me across the phone—my father had died. (134-35)

His pain is linked to that of those trapped in the land, like Shehadeh, through the tenuous connection of a phone call, yet the same link is what highlights the excruciating isolation. He grieves for the same thing as those inside the borders, but he also mourns for his own seclusion with every ringing of the phone.

The book's narrative begins with Barghouti's long wait on the Jordanian side of the bridge that leads to the West Bank. His story freely moves from the present time of traveling home to his old friends and relatives, and his inexhaustible reservoir of memories from the years of exile. The fluid transition between the past, sometimes nostalgic,

sometimes traumatic, and the present time, which calls for revision of the ideal image he created of his motherland, drives the narrative forward. At one point, looking from a car's window, he wonders, "Did I paint for strangers an ideal picture of Palestine because I had lost it?" and thinks that when his son, Tamim, who had never seen the land, manages to travel there, "he will think I have been describing another country" (28). Not having been to the land for three decades, Barghouti had never seen an Israeli settlement in person, and wonders about the lives of those Israelis living in them. There is no direct confrontation of the type that Shehadeh's book offered, but there are fragments of surmise and doubt about these hostile inhabitants of the land. "Who lives in this settlement?" he conjectures. "Do their kids play football behind those walls? Do their men and women make love behind those windows? Do they make love with guns strapped to their sides?" (29). Barghouti does not explicitly analyze the political gridlocks of the peace negotiations, or the legal nuances of the settlement plans. Being a poet, he lets his imagination wander in the mayhem of the occupied territories, and like an impressionist painter, allows personal affectation to imbue his accounts of the reality. Rather than dissecting the historical roots of their national failure or openly contemplating on the aspects of colonialism, most of his powerful passages are written in a suggestive style that focuses on seemingly mundane matters with a sharp eye for the insinuations to be drawn from them. For instance, reminiscing about his life in the heat of the Lebanese Civil War, which caused serious damage to the Palestinian refugee camps near Beirut, he states guilelessly, "Prolonged wars generate boredom," and so to find ways to entertain themselves, he and his friends come up with an interesting game: "One evening I had a competition with Rasmi Abu 'Ali to think of all folk synonyms in the different Palestinian dialects for the verb 'to slap' [*safa'a*]," and mentions that together they

found over twenty words in total (107). The implication of defeatism is left for the reader to pick up.

In another instance, while crossing the bridge between Jordan and the West Bank, Barghouti ponders how many different names the same bridge has had over the years. "Fayruz [a famous Lebanese singer] calls it the Bridge of Return [*jasr al-'owda*]," he writes. "The Jordanians call it the King Hussein Bridge. The Palestinian Authority calls it al-Karama Crossing." (*Karama* means 'dignity' or 'honor'.) He goes on, "The common people and the bus and taxi drivers call it the Allenby Bridge," which refers to the British General Edmund Allenby, who led the Battle of Palestine against the Ottomans in 1917, and is credited with conquering Jerusalem for the British Empire. "My mother," Barghouti continues, "and before her my grandmother and my father and my uncle's wife, Umm Talal, call it simply: the Bridge" (10). Like a deft painter, in offhand brush strokes of a few terse lines, Barghouti draws a picture of colonialism, oppression, and hope, without losing his ironic distance. The bridge becomes a historical palimpsest, a locus of lost and regained memories. Its place in the popular Arabic culture, its attachment to national glory, and its evocation of a continuous history of colonial presence, are all enumerated only to reach the anticlimax: for those whose lives are broken apart for not being able to cross this bridge, it does not have any name, and probably does not deserve one. Like the examples of the telephone and the highway, the bridge is less a facilitator of connection than a manifestation of displacement. It is interesting to note that the writer does not mention what name the Israeli officials give to this bridge—they also call it Allenby—perhaps because the bridge is used since the days of Oslo Accords for the exclusive purpose of the Palestinians, and in some cases, tourists, and is not used by Israeli citizens. The book does not mention, albeit it

does imply, that this particular bridge is part of the segregation plan between the Israeli settlers and the Palestinians of the West Bank. It brings to mind Said's referencing to the Israeli policies after Oslo as a form of apartheid.

This particular universalization of the Palestinian trauma is facilitated by a metonymic connection. The bridge's history becomes the link between the early twentieth century British imperialism, the modern acquiescence and inertia of other Arab states (including Jordan) toward the trauma of Palestine, and the ongoing apartheid of the West Bank residents. Barghouti is clear enough about this insinuation, through both what he says and what he leaves unsaid. Perhaps he intentionally prefers to stay within his role as a poet, and not assume that of a political commentator. Crossing the bridge, he takes a glance at the Israeli soldier standing guard, and points out why his narration as a poet may be what is exactly needed in this occasion. "His gun is my personal history," he opines. "It is the history of my estrangement. His gun took from us the land of the poem and left us with the poem of the land. In his hand he holds earth, and in our hands we hold a mirage" (13). In the original Arabic, the last two sentences rhyme—"*Fi qabdathu turab, fi qabdatuna sarab*"— which accentuates the theme of poetic power within the formal structure of a poetic line. It does, furthermore, make an interesting comparison with Darwish's "A Soldier Dreaming of White Lilies," whereby the Israeli soldier confesses his lack of any sense of belonging to the land. In the same poem, the confiding soldier, being asked about his love for the homeland, ironically replies, "I make love with [*sic*] a gun . . . and the echo of my love is the sound/ of festivals in ancient ruins" (*Selected Poems* 57). Barghouti's comment that the soldier's gun is all he has of personal history aligns well with the caustic remark in Darwish's poem.

Lyrical musings do not, of course, hinder the narrator's attempts at polemicizing the roles of himself and his fellow writers in Palestine. A question posed throughout the book is, what should a poet do in such times and such places, whereby the victories of the political resistance against the occupation have been only symbolic? Does his nation need a writer as a eulogist or as a provocateur? Should he be the recorder of a fleeting memory or the critic of the incessant memorialization that amounts to fetishization? Where does, he asks time and again, the idea of progress (economic, political, or cultural) fit into the works of a poet like himself? For Barghouti, poetry is a means to achieve a more tangible language for description of loss. Abstraction, for him, is the bane of poetry. Complaining that the "long occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine," he underscores:

> I only started to believe in myself as a poet when I discovered how faded all abstracts and absolutes were. When I discovered the accuracy of the concrete detail and the truthfulness of the five senses, and the great gift, in particular, of sight. When I discovered the justice and genius of the language of the camera, which presents its view in an amazing whisper, however noisy the view was in fact or in history. Then I made the effort necessary to get rid of the poem that was an easy accompaniment to the anthem, to get rid of the badness of beginnings. (62-63)

The ideal poetry of Palestine, thus, is the linguistic equivalent of a silent camera, and the opposite of an anthem. The problem, however, is that Barghouti only became cognizant of this matter when he lost his access to the land. He is aware of the trade-off: when the land is gone and its idea is all that is left, the poet's job becomes to concretize the loss. Echoes of

Darwish's prodigious "Identity Card" are audible in Barghouti's definition of Palestinian poetry. The task of memorialization includes, in both cases, the verbalization of the losers' side and acclamation of their collective identity. Extension of this view into the daily lives of Palestinians, who are to be the subject of such poetry, poses an interesting conflict for Barghouti. Does not a constant focus on the loss perpetrate a nostalgic clinging to the past, which may itself exacerbate the loss?

Walking in the alleys of his childhood village, the poet, now an old man, asserts that he does not want to see the place "as it was or [his] childhood in it as it was," because the passage of time can, and should, be reckoned with (69). The occupation of the land has frozen the process of development of these villages, and the Palestinians in the land have come to cherish their forced backwardness, Barghouti alleges, as a token of resistance. The neighbourhoods have remained in the same stage of civilization as they were when the poet was a child, and this, to him, is a tremendous tragedy. "I have always believed that it is in the interests of an occupation, any occupation," he argues, "that the homeland should be transformed in the memory of its people into a bouquet of 'symbols'. Merely symbols . . . The occupation forced us to remain with the old. That is its crime" (69). This argument appears to be quite the opposite of what Shehadeh maintained in his narrative of progress during the occupation. For Shehadeh the pervasiveness of the progress discourse was a clear sign of a mentality polluted with the ideals of the colonialist occupier, as if the occupied has decided to beat its adversary in their own game. To him this was the sign of a double defeat: to lose one's land and one's mind, too. How, then, can Barghouti's argument be justified, and more importantly, how does his claim play a role in the larger narrative of a national trauma? The answer may be in the condition of permanence within, and despite,

temporariness, which is a common theme in both Shehadeh's account and Barghouti's. The permanence of the damage to the land, the segregation, the exploitation of Palestinian labour, the failures of the peace process, and the pastoral nostalgia, are all seen as justifiably temporary. This paradoxical condition engenders many logical convolutions. It could be the case that those two views—Barghouti's and Shehadeh's—are not entirely opposite, but only seem at odds because of the convoluted context from which they arise. To examine this, we should note that for Barghouti this temporal problem has another aspect, too.

In a chapter titled "Living in Time," Barghouti discusses the problem of ephemerality and permanence, through an account of his life in hotels after his eviction from Egypt—as a result of the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's peace agreements with Israel in 1974. "Theoretically I should have hated hotel life since it emphasizes transience," he notes. But "I felt comfort in hotels. . . . Hotels absolve you from immortalizing the moment but at the same time provide a theater for short acts and surprises." A hotel, in short, "gives you something of the taste of temporary permanencies [*al-kholudat al-muwaqqata*]" (92). The Arabic term used here for "permanence," *kholud*, has a connotation of immortality—there are other words in Arabic that could mean permanence without having such a connotation, like *dawaam* or *istimraar*. So the permanence in question is not a simple elongation of time, but an existential condition of infinity within the human mental frame. The comic vector in trauma narrative points toward a utopian perpetuity, a vision of the happily-ever-after world in which the antagonisms are already resolved. This is countered with tragedy's focus on the juncture in which the balance of the storyworld is disrupted. In trauma emplotment, comedy's wishful thinking is counteracted with tragedy's fixation on the unstable moment of transience. Barghouti's "temporary permanency" is

quintessentially an account of trauma's comedy-tragedy dialectics in a nutshell; it is an immortality of a critical instability, an acute pain that is suspended against the passage of time. The trauma of Palestinians, particularly after Oslo's outcome, cannot be expressed more precisely than this phrase. The protraction of an initial loss does not allow a time for either healing or reflection. Shehadeh sees this problem when discussing the plans for the future of his country with the PLO official. He notices how, instead of addressing the more fundamental questions of occupation, the authorities of the newly formed Palestinian government decide to neither forgive nor forget their historical trauma, but to simply shrug it off and push for a seemingly progressive agenda. The blind progress that bothers Shehadeh is not the opposite of the backwardness that Barghouti warns against. They are in fact the same. The former laments his compatriots' confusion of resistance with callowness, and the latter blames this shortcoming on the Israelis' efforts to ossify the lives of those under occupation. In both cases, the temporal paradox of being eternally stuck in a tragic moment is the key factor.

Envisioning the everyday lives of Palestinians in Jerusalem, Barghouti observes yet another side of this ossification. "They [i.e., Israeli officials] limit the number of Palestinians in the city, the number of Palestinian houses, the windows, balconies, schools, and nurseries," he laments. "We cannot live there or leave there, we cannot get bored with Jerusalem and leave it for Nablus or Damascus or Baghdad or Cairo or America," because of the occupation law that stipulates only the Palestinians continuously residing on their lands can claim ownership of it. "We cannot grumble about it as people grumble about their tiresome capitals. Perhaps the worst thing about occupied cities is that their children cannot make fun of them. Who could make fun of Jerusalem," he asks sardonically (144). In other

words, nothing can be left prosaic and banal in the middle of a permanent battle over the right of living in one's own city. When the commonness of life under occupation is replaced with resistance, every element of the cityscape and every walk in any street becomes part of the continuous struggle over the land, which empties the citizens' lives of the basic ennui, the mundaneness that colours the experience of living in a metropolis. As awkwardly antithetical it may seem to yearn for grumbling, Barghouti's claim highlights that resistance against the occupation is no less imposing than the occupation itself. There is no opting out of it. Not being able to mock your own city, which again epitomizes the tragic-comic dialectics—one is eternally trapped in a critical seriousness, deferring the comic *anagnorisis* indefinitely—is the "worst thing," the poet believes, about the occupation. It is as if one's normal life is transformed into a continuous battle after one is diagnosed with a terminal disease, even if the person is not consciously battling against anything; one's daily habits are now fights for survival.

With a sharp eye for detecting ironies, Barghouti concludes his book by offering his personal take on the international reception of the peace process that culminated in the Oslo Accords. This provides a chance for him to metaphorically universalize the trauma of Palestine and place it in the global context of modern imperialism. In doing that, he is aware that peace *per se* is not the goal of resistance, but rather the ambition of the colonizer. The peace, he observes, has turned out to be not at all about rectifying a history of injustice. It is about whose narrative of history can be more persuasive, and who turns out to have the final say. "It is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistic trick," he writes, "start your story from 'Secondly'," and ignore the initial causes of the violent history (178). Barghouti

expands the horizon of his national trauma by listing the examples of victim-blaming in the modern history of colonialism:

> Start your story with "Secondly," and the arrows of the Red Indians are the original criminals and the guns of the white men are entirely the victim. It is enough to start with "Secondly," for the anger of the black man against the white to be barbarous. Start with "Secondly," and Gandhi becomes responsible for the tragedies of the British. You only need to start your story with "Secondly," and the burned Vietnamese will have wounded the humanity with napalm, and Victor Jara's songs will be the shameful thing and not Pinochet's bullets. . . . It is enough to start the story with "Secondly," for my grandmother, Umm 'Ata, to become the criminal and Ariel Sharon her victim. . . . Their generous guns in Deir Yassin forgive us the fact that they piled our bodies . . . their fighter jets forgive the graves of our martyrs in Beirut. Their soldiers forgive the tendency of our teenagers' bones to break. (178-79)

The envisioned Palestinian nation, Barghouti suggests, is metaphorically associated to the entire history of modern colonialism, which conversely transforms the trauma of Palestine into a singular condition without any counterpart. The duplicitously celebrated peace after Oslo is in fact nothing but renaming, and thus hiding, the trauma that has to be unveiled. Barghouti's account of his short return is not only, to borrow Said's words, "an existential account of Palestinian displacement," but a testament to the multiplicity of Palestinian trauma, which is far more wide-ranging than being driven out of the land. It is the narrative of a nation threatened by a terminal disease, permanently suspended between life and death,

which, at this point, finds no respite in thinking about the prospects of peace, because it has become clear that the talk of peace only aggravates the pain.

4.3. The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant: The Allegoric Intifada

The most radical literary voice of her generation, the leading feminist writer of her country, and perhaps the most acclaimed novelist living in Palestine today, Sahar Khalifeh has been at the center of Palestinian literature since the War of 1967. As Bashir Abu-Manneh writes in his study of her early career, no writer of her nation "has subjected Palestinian society to as radical a political and social critique as Khalifeh has done" since her first work, *We Are No Longer Your Slaves* (1974), which is considered "Palestine's first feminist novel" (116, 120). Her second novel, *Wild Thorns* (1978), which established her career as a fastidious realist, was among the first literary depictions of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories—as noted earlier, most works until then focused on either life in Israel or in exile. Placing Khalifeh's image of Palestine, depicted painstakingly during four decades, side-by-side with the accounts by Shehadeh and Barghouti, one would immediately notice how she focuses almost entirely on the cultural infirmities and substantial shortcomings of the Palestinian society, rather than zooming in on the complications of the occupation. The Israelis in most of her novels only appear in the peripheries, if at all. If both Shehadeh and Barghouti criticize the politics of Palestinian Authority during and after Intifada while mounting pervasive critiques of the Israeli politics of occupation, Khalifeh reprioritizes her critical judgment to address her compatriots first and foremost.

In an essay published in 2002, she recounts that after her disenchantment with a failing marriage in her twenties, and witnessing her own father leaving her mother for a

younger woman, Khalifeh, shattered and dismayed, was blown away by yet another momentous event. "Our defeat in 1967 was the third tragedy to take place during my marriage" she writes. "I discovered that our political defeat was a result of our cultural defeat. I could see very clearly that the debacle of 1967 was the fruit of a rotten tree that needed a cure—the internally defeated do not triumph." Apart from the fact that she puts a national disaster right beside the personal calamities, caused by the men in her life, the way she looks back at her country's history, as if it were not just a lamentable misfortune, but a moment of truth, a historical catharsis, is quite telling of the political viewpoint she offers in her novels. The men in her domestic circle let her down at the same time that the traditional social hierarchy is failing her nation. Khalifeh sees the inevitable defeat by Israel, and later the crushed hope of Oslo, as signs of a deep-seated problem that has to be called out. When pursuing an academic education in her thirties, she embarks upon a personal project: "After conducting in-depth interviews with more than 50 leading intellectuals, revolutionaries, and ideologues, I decided to conduct similar interviews with their wives [or] girlfriends." The result of this research hardens her belief that exploitation and subservience have festered the life of the silent half of the Palestinian society. These women "firmly believed that whatever a woman did or sacrificed, or how high she rose—politically, professionally, academically—she remained far inferior to man." Khalifeh's literary career, in a nutshell, is a battle against the internal suppression of an externally oppressed nation.

However, to read Khalifeh exclusively as a chronicler of Palestinian women's lives is to pigeonhole the vast range of her interests. While she does castigate the suppression of the female presence in Palestine, her narrative style, which Abu-Manneh calls "panoramic realism," tends to broaden its scope of attention to depict domestic life in the West Bank

under Israeli control. Her subject matter is almost always the commonness of life under

occupation, the condition of ordinariness under the most extraordinary pressures.

"Palestinian history, panoramically told, is a story of endless repression and ever renewing

resistance and struggle," Abu-Manneh writes. "Constricted by their occupiers and weakened

by their own society's conservatism," her protagonists "come to grapple with a historically

over-determined reality" (120). Strikingly, one of the first challenges that Khalifeh

encountered at the beginning of her career was that her writing, according to a publisher

who rejected the manuscript of *Wild Thorns*, was not feminine enough. "If I put my finger

over the name," she was told by the publisher, "nobody would know that this is a novel

written by a woman." Recalling that interaction, she justifies her position: "I wanted to be

successful in portraying the suffering of my people like a man, because women usually have

portrayed their own suffering as women, and I wanted to prove that as a woman, I can do

better than men" (qtd. in Saliba and Kattan 90). In a seemingly paradoxical way, she

epitomizes a feminist writer by the virtue of expanding her narrative outlook to include the

trauma of Palestine as it engrosses the public lives and the private affairs of the dispossessed

people, male and female alike. The novel I analyze here, *The Image, the Icon, and the*

Covenant, is one of the few works by Khalifeh narrated from the perspective of a male

protagonist, but it is perhaps the most historically panoramic of her novels, starting just

before the 1967 War, and ending in the September 2000, at the very beginning of the

Second Intifada, which was initiated in the historic area of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

In the days before the occupation of the West Bank, the protagonist and narrator, a

young man named Ibrahim, finds himself helplessly infatuated with a young Christian Arab

girl, Mariam. Against the admonitions of friends and acquaintances, the relationship

between the two climaxes in a secret coitus at a hotel in Jerusalem. The girl's brothers find out and, in an attempt to regain their family honor, chase Ibrahim. The protagonist's flight from them coincides with the beginning of the 1967 War, which in a way saves his life by creating a massive distraction. Decades later, the man, now an American citizen and a wealthy merchant, returns to Jerusalem to find his old beloved. The chain of events in the story leads him to find his son, the product of Ibrahim's one night with Mariam, who has grown to be an ascetic priest. In his search for Mariam, he also encounters a medley of locals, each having their own story to offer. Finally, he finds her, who has long ago joined a monastery in Nazareth and is now an old nun. The story ends with Ibrahim and a group of his new friends in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, when a barrage of bullets fly over their heads and chaos breaks out. Unable to persuade either Mariam or their son, Michael, to join him, Ibrahim laments the sudden loss of men and women who died in the assault at the mosque. Among the dead are a Russian Jew, who had also come to look for his old beloved, and a local Arab villager named Mahmoud, who used to beat his wife and whose corpse is now drenched in her tears. In his preface to the Arabic edition of the novel, the critic Faysal Darraj points out that the entirety of this work can be summarized in the dual presence of "woman-homeland," because "there is no way for liberating the homeland without having a liberated man unconditionally aware of the woman's existence," and thus, the main female character in her story is "an allegory for a homeland in a suspended struggle, whose internal limitations pose an obstacle for its liberation movement" (5, my translation). The novel is indeed not only an allegorical account of a nation in search of itself, but an ironic look at a history of hurt and malaise.

The novel is full of biblical and Qur'anic allegorical references, but such references are almost always either inverted or disrupted. Ibrahim's father is called Ismail, which is a reversal of the biblical/Qur'anic account, and instead of the story of the father binding and sacrificing the son (in the Qur'an, it is Ismail who is bound by his father, not Isaac), in Khalifeh's account, the protagonist's father, in his one-time presence in the novel, invites his melancholic son to join him in his flourishing construction business. The protagonist's beloved, Mariam, whose life of chastity and devotion likens her to the New Testament's Virgin Mary, only joins the monastery after having committed the sin of sex. The son of Mariam, who lives steadfastly among the downtrodden and the poor like a saint, rejects his father's plea to be an heir to his wealth, which brings to mind a Jesus-like character with an upturned fate, as if in this account of Christ's life, his salvation somehow lies in not uniting with his father. What all these inverted religious allegories do is to defamiliarize a known history of collective trauma. To show the depth and breadth of the painful history of Palestine, Khalifeh shakes off any semblance of recognition from her reader's mind. The events and the characters of her novel are universally identifiable, yet as soon as the reader manages to trace the link between them and the scriptural narratives, the story dissociates the metaphoric connection. Even the choice of places is noteworthy: the novel's events happen mostly in Jerusalem and its surrounding villages, plus one short trip to Nazareth; both are cities with obvious biblical and Qur'anic significance—in contrast to, say, Ramallah, which is a modern city. Her Jerusalem, however, is not a hallowed city, but a depressing locus of fading memories, emptied of its old denizens and filled with newcomers, the European Jewish immigrants, who find a way to legally annex the city block by block and house by house.

The first section of the novel, which is the account of Ibrahim and Mariam in their youth, shows many elements of comedy, particularly in the sense that Northrop Frye envisions the mythos: it is all about a young, innocent love, hampered by unwelcomed circumstances, like religious and tribal factors; for a while, the trajectory of the narrative seems to move toward a final victory of the inclusive, desirable new world, where all the old limits are overturned. The first fifty pages of the novel make almost no reference to the Israelis, mostly because before 1967 the West Bank was not yet occupied by Israel. The few times the name of Israel is brought up in the early chapters are sporadic and ephemeral, like when Ibrahim mentions a rumor about his maternal grandfather, that he used to "sell the land to the Israelis," which refers to the events before the rise of State of Israel in 1948, when the newly established Jewish National Fund was buying large pieces of land from Arab feudalist landowners (18). Some of the details of this section highlight the pastoral comic aura of the narrative: Mariam, for example, tends to, as a hobby, shepherd a goat in the outskirts of the city. Ibrahim tries to write poetry and novels, and presents himself less as a freedom fighter and more as a sentimentally naïve intellectual. This is highlighted a few times by briefly mentioning an older brother he used to have, called Waddah, who was martyred in an armed struggle against Israel. The story never explicitly discloses when or how this older brother died, and under what condition; all we are told is that Ibrahim is not a martyr figure.[26] His mother, he recalls, used to tell him as a child, "Be diligent and study, eat well, and you grow up to become a man like Waddah." "Here I was," he comments on that memory, "a grown man, I ate well and studied well, but I didn't become like Waddah" (87).

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[26] The novel does mention the name of Mandelbaum Gate in reference to Ibrahim's brother, which could possibly mean that he died in the armed clashes in Jerusalem in 1948 (79). Mandelbaum Gate is the name of the checkpoint between the Israeli side of Jerusalem and the Arab Palestinian side.

The young man who dreams of becoming a great writer is in love with an ingénue in a prelapsarian world; there is no cause to fight for and no injustice to upend. The first section of the novel is in fact so different in tone and hue from the rest of the book that the leap from the mode of comedy to that of tragedy is impossible to ignore.

The thematic link between the first section and the rest of the book is made by Ibrahim's search for Mariam, in which one particular word with several meanings resonates and becomes a rhetorical bridge between a deliriously nostalgic past and an ostentatiously dark present. The word *sura*, which can mean a photograph, a drawn picture, or a mental image, appears frequently in all of these meanings. Early in the novel, Ibrahim refers to Mariam's beauty as a scenery deserving to be photographed, and later, when he tries to find her, he repeatedly mentions that having a photograph of her could help him in his quest. After finding a stash of Mariam's old writings and documents, he rummages through her items, hoping to find any pictures, but ends up with scattered notes by her that were apparently written decades earlier. He tries to portray himself as he was seen in her eyes, and comes to the realization that most of what he knew about her—and metaphorically, about her nation—could be the product of his own subjective judgment:

> I was young and innocent and inexperienced. I too lived an imaginary life, in my artist dreams. What I knew about people was the product of my imagination. . . . I used to see them in what I liked or imagined. I always pictured them the way I wanted, but what about their reality, what was it? Even now, despite my sixty years and experience, do I really know what reality is? Does anyone know without interference? I interfered with her image, and Mariam was therefore an image and I a photographer. (163-64)

The English translation cannot quite transmit the linguistic playfulness of the original passage, in which *sura* is used to denote picture, photo, and image. This paragraph is a telling example of the larger allegorical aspect of Khalifeh's novel: the search for a past might result in the discovery that the Edenic image of a bygone era is more or less a fabrication of the protagonist's own mind, and has little relevance to the actual history of his nation. The simple-mindedness of the comic realm that was expanded in the first section of the story is now infused with a dose of tragic recognition. A realization of the cold truth that the angelic image of a beatific Palestine before 1967 had no relevance to the political reality of the time is a necessary step in recognition of the present time's traumatic condition.

Darraj's point that the images of home and of woman create a symmetry in the novel is quite evident in Ibrahim's attempts to find Mariam. Seeking traces of her, he runs into an old woman, Jamileh, who claims to have helped the young Mariam with her newborn son. There is a box full of documents belonging to Mariam, Jamileh tells Ibrahim, in her former house. The problem is that the house is already occupied by two young American Jews, who recently immigrated to Israel and managed to claim her old place. To salvage the box full of Mariam's belonging, the protagonist has to enter the house of the occupiers and escape before they arrive. "We designed a plan," says Ibrahim. "She would sit at the entrance of the house to watch the alley and keep her finger on the bell to warn me" (175). To search for his memories, or for that matter, the lost memories of his nation's past, the Palestinian man has no choice other than literally sneaking into his lost love's occupied home. The home is as much beyond access to him as the memory he seeks to regain. More tellingly, the novel never includes the two Israelis, who now own the place. Like Darwish's "Identity Card" and Barghouti's memoir, the story only shows the occupiers by depicting their omnipresent,

silent shadow. They are outside the frame, but they are neither eclipsed nor ignored by the author. Barely making it out of the house in time before the new proprietors returned, both Ibrahim and Jamileh are terrified of what could have happened to them, had they been caught. "We remained silent and still," he states, "as if we were spying on the inhabitants of the house, as if they were the owners of the house and we were the neighbors" (188). This scene and the final episode of the novel in the mosque are the only occasions in which the presence of the Israelis is explicitly mentioned. For the rest of the story, the occupiers remain unnamed and unaccounted for, but their menacing presence percolates through the entire narrative.

The novel's peculiar treatment of allegories extends to its historic markers. The ominous War of 1967 turns out to be Ibrahim's saviour, because the havoc it brought gave him a chance to hide from the revenge of his lover's brothers and eventually escape the country. The old, cosmopolitan man, who now returns to his hometown after more than three decades, owes his very life to the historical catastrophe that had plagued his nation ever since. How, we may ask, can this upside-down narrative of national memory make sense? The calamity of occupation is, on the one hand, quite literally the obstacle for the protagonist's quest for lost memories—in the form of the old house's usurpers—but on the other hand, it is the boon for the young Ibrahim's fate. The war, in a sense, rescued him not just from the avenging hands of Mariam's brothers, but from the traditional Arab society that would have impeded any attempts at intellectual maturation. "Had it not been for the war," he says, "I wouldn't be alive today, or I would be living in this cave, with the people of the cave," referring to a group of villagers living in a decrepit house (107). The young lover returns as a worldly, opulent man, thanks to the horrific episode in his nation's

modern history. To make sense of this, one needs to look no further than Khalifeh's autobiographical essay cited above. Equating the humiliation of the Six-Day War with her personal disillusionment about her domestic life, her mother's, and other Palestinian women's, Khalifeh claims the shock of war awakened her to discover the roots of their collective misery in every Palestinian household. If Barghouti only implies the inherent frailties of the Palestinian society in confrontation with oppression (through, for example, his short anecdote about the abundance of synonyms for "slap" in Palestinian dialects), Khalifeh makes her scathing critique of her nation's painful past as unequivocal as possible.

On the day the war broke out, Ibrahim remembers, "I saw young men in the alley standing in line, training to disassemble and clean their weapons. . . . I was watching them from the window, and felt embarrassed that while people were celebrating the liberation of Jerusalem, I was hiding from Mariam and her brothers" (88). There was a price that the young protagonist had to pay for his lucky but imposed distance from the surge of patriotism that was soon to be crushed. "We had become," he wistfully remembers, "a nation that had awakened and was taking control of future," and so Mariam's memories were reduced to "an insignificant story not worthy of being part of history." Looking back at all that naïve heroism, he concedes that "Mariam and her memory was lost; so was I, and so was Jerusalem" (89). Thus, his search for her in the present time is a quest not so much to restore history, but to redefine it; yet, it is quite difficult to see Ibrahim in an entirely positive light. He is far from being a hero who has come to save a nation from itself. To place Ibrahim's journey against the social context of modern Palestine, Khalifeh uses the minor subplot of Mahmoud and Sakineh, a rural couple, who are first introduced via a moment of crisis. A bus used for local commuting "was hanging on the cliff, held only by a

rock and the branches of an old oak tree," and in it was Sakineh's son, while she was "shouting like a crazy woman," asking for help (120). The young priest, Ibrahim's son, ventures to rescue her boy, but that night, after everyone has retreated to their houses, they find out Mahmoud has come back from work to beat his wife for not being responsible enough to tend to their child. Sitting in the village elder's house, Ibrahim and other men hear the shouts and shrieks from Mahmoud's house. "It is certainly Sakineh being beaten," one of them says frivolously, "I hope he doesn't divorce her." Others join in and joke about the matter. Ibrahim finds this entire dialogue intolerable and interrupts, "Sakineh is a victim and I am a witness; and so is Michael." To his dismay, however, Michael prefers not to intervene on this matter. Their host replies to Ibrahim, "Come and sit and don't worry. Sakineh is happy with her life. We don't know whether it is Sakineh's voice or that of another woman. That's how women are; they're always loud," and thus he ends the conversation (131).

The sudden epiphany for Ibrahim to find himself estranged among his fellow Palestinians, whom he patronizingly helps by establishing a charitable organization, is too much for him. The passivity of the group of men, which Ibrahim interprets as a sign for inertia against any internal change, is to him a threat as big as the loss of memory that is haunting himself. "How could we build a nation," he wonders. "I was very depressed by my own situation and that of the nation. The two conditions, the personal and the general were confused, and I was not able to tell which had priority" (132). Later in the evening, he has a short conversation with Michael. Castigating Michael for not defending Sakineh against her husband, or even against the slanders of other men, he hears back the reply, "What can we do?" He is unable to utter an answer: "I didn't say: religion, legality; I didn't say power and

law; I didn't say revolution and change, because we had tried them all and failed. Here we are, starting all over again, in the heart of the night and in the darkness" (133). This episode would remain relatively marginal, if the couple did not reappear in the final scene of the novel, the massacre at Al-Aqsa Mosque, whereby Mahmoud dies in the arms of his terrified wife.

Khalifeh's style of "panoramic realism," as Abu-Manneh calls it, is most visible in the final episode. She places the people's past beside the present and lets the reader reach a conclusion: the nation unprepared to critically observe its history and filled with its own unresolved incongruities, is pushed over the edge of militant struggle, which only aggravates its deep-seated problems. In the streets of Jerusalem, Sakineh wails and weeps, saying, "Hey Mahmoud, father of my children, how can you leave my like this? Get up man . . . stand up, son of a bitch. Do not make me a widow." The same village elder that had ended the discussion with Ibrahim some nights ago, berates her, "Shame on you woman, have faith in God. He is a martyr of Palestine, have faith in God." To him, she snaps, "For Palestine's sake? Would Palestine have pity on me? Who will feed me? Who will protect me and protect my honor?" (255-56). Perhaps nowhere in the literature of contemporary Palestine can we find a sharper opprobrium of the discourse of resistance and martyrdom than here, whereby an unlucky misogynist villager, a rural Everyman caught up in the wrong place at the wrong time, is elevated to the throne of martyrdom.

The question that Khalifeh poses but leaves unanswered is, what kind of resistance movement is it that not only does not address the domain of domestic life, but also conflates lethargy with heroism? And of course, the flip side of this question, aimed at the silently omnipresent occupiers, is, what kind of historical condition has barred the traumatic

memories of defeat and humiliation from manifesting themselves? The contorted problem of Palestinian national identity after the defeat of Oslo is that not only its previous painful memories were suppressed under the guise of an optimistic heroism, but that its defeats have somehow worked to diminish the possibility of introspection. How, Khalifeh's novel asks, can a nation in search of its own lost image, which cannot be reached in any way other than intrusion into the occupied realm, muster enough energy to redefine its own domestic structure? The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion of identities, which so far was only concerned with the question of ethno-nationality, in Khalifeh's novel produces an intricate web of overlapping collective belongings, because the issue of gender is now added to the list of identity markers. Mariam, the celestial image of a nostalgic, unreal Palestine is out of reach, her memories are usurped, and her legacy appears illusory. Complementary to her role is Sakineh's, the recently widowed villager, who, in her wailings over her husband's body alludes to Palestine not as a lost love, but as a failed protector. The two Palestines, the idolized image of a pastoral desire, and the failed model of a patriarchal order, are two sides of the same coin.

4.4. *Let It Be Morning*: Between the Occupier and the Occupied

If Shehadeh's account of land grabbing illuminates the problems of legality and the dismal future of coexistence, Barghouti's narrative outlines the difficulties of exile and the daily horrors of a disturbed life, and Khalifeh's novel portrays a nation facing its own shortcomings and its unresolved dark memories, there is still one aspect of the Palestinian historical trauma that none of the three touched upon: the ethnically Palestinian citizens of Israel, descendants of those who either managed to stay in the country after the mass

expulsion of 1948 or succeeded in returning shortly after the initial eviction. While the lives

of these communities of Arab Israelis are much less distressed than those living in the

Occupied Territories or the exiled ones, their overall condition, particularly after the first

Intifada, is far from peaceful and just. Apart from legal limits on the non-Jewish Arab

citizens of Israel, which technically turn them into second-class citizens, these communities

have been accused constantly of harbouring anti-nationalist sentiments and collaborating

with dissidents from across the border. As Ilan Pappe states in his comprehensive history of

the Palestinian citizens of Israel, they are continuously called a "demographic time bomb"

by the Israeli media, projecting the fear that the presence of such an impurity in the

otherwise perfect Jewish nation could sabotage the entire project of Zionist nation-building

(*Forgotten Palestinians* 3). Some of the laws passed against them in the recent history make

no attempt to even slightly hide the prejudice against these communities. A piece of

legislation passed in 2007, for example, restricted marriage rights between residents of the

Occupied Territories and Israeli Arabs. Similar laws include "banning of the

commemoration of the *Nakba*—the 1948 catastrophe—in public events or school curricula

and textbooks, the right of communities in Jewish suburbia not to accept Palestinians as

residents," and the state's right to withhold purchase of land by Arabs, "known as the 2007

Jewish National Fund Law" (4). Such legal measures are, of course, only a manifestation of,

and not the reason behind, a historical, systemic hatred against the indigenous denizens of

the land.

For a few decades after the establishment of the state of Israel, the indigenous

Palestinian population were subject to a cultural assimilation policy, whereby their Arabic

ethnicity and culture would be either neutralized or completely erased under the Israeli

educational system, including the monolingual Hebrew school curricula.[27] The eruption of

Intifada in the late 1980s shattered the image of a silent minority in the process of

acculturation. While the peace negotiations between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat were

acclaimed around the world as the positive sign of a new future, the ethnic fissures that were

buried under layers of political optimism started to widen and soon turned into tectonic

shifts in the policies of collective identity. The assassination of Rabin in 1995, which

practically ended the peace process of Oslo, was but one of many signs of this seismic clash

of identities. His assassin, a young ultra-right Jewish student, "said that one of the reasons

for his action was that Rabin was elected on the votes of 'Arabs'," by whom he does not

mean the Arabs of the Occupied Territories, who were represented by Arafat in the

negotiations, but the ones in Israel, the man's own compatriots (Pappe, *Forgotten* 171).

Remembering the mayhem of post-Oslo, Pappe recounts that "'*Eyn Aravim, Eyn Piguim*'

('No Arabs, No Terrorist Attacks') was a very popular sticker on cars in those days" (172).

The Intifada and its aftermath, moreover, gave an impetus to civil political movements by

the Arab communities in Israel. The disenfranchised ethnic groups, who had been almost

invisible in the political establishment of the country, mobilized themselves in the form of

new parties, including "Mada"—acronym in Hebrew for *Miflaga Demokratit Aravit*, "Arab

Democratic Party"—which was established in the heyday of Intifada in 1988, and managed

to win two seats of the Knesset in the 1992 election, and "Balad"—short for *Brit Le'umit*

Demokratit, "National Democratic Assembly"—established in 1995 by one of the most

iconoclastic Palestinian intellectuals in Israel, Azmi Bishara, who was then continuously

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[27] For detailed historical studies of the Arab citizens of Israel see Kretzmer (1990), Haklai (2011), and Pappe, *Forgotten Palestinians* (2011).

elected to the Knesset since the party's first election until his resignation in 2007 after

allegations of treason were mounted against him (Haklai 123-35; Pappe, *Forgotten* 204).

The social and cultural breaches between the Jewish and non-Jewish citizens of

Israel widened after the Second Intifada, in which the Arab Israelis actively participated

alongside the residents of Gaza and the West Bank. If there were any insinuation of ethnic

and religious solidarity between Arabs of Israel and those deemed its national enemies, by

the year 2000 such allegations surfaced as public denunciation of the Arab communities by

the media and the state officials. Their street protests were crushed in the same spirit, and by

the same methods, as any act of insurgency in the Occupied Territories were being treated,

ignoring the fact that the former protestors were officially citizens of Israel (Pappe,

Forgotten 230-36). For those Arab Israelis who were thus far trying to establish their place

within the civil sphere of their country, the years after Oslo were nothing short of the

eruption of a political volcano that was assumed dormant for a long time. One of these Arab

Israelis is Sayed Kashua, a journalist and novelist, born in the predominantly Arab city of

Tira and educated at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who writes a column for *Haaretz*,

Israel's most famous newspaper. Kashua's personal and professional life is the epitome of

what a progressive transition between Arabic ethno-nationalism to Israeli citizenry would

look like. Trained in the most revered institutions of the country, he has a creative writing

career spanning from television sitcoms to award-winning novels, and yet such a successful

transition from the margins of the Israeli society to its inner circles of political and cultural

life somehow could not ameliorate the deep problems with his segregationist nation. In

2014, in the midst of a critical turmoil that soon led to the military conflict between Hamas

in Gaza and the Israeli Defense Forces (known also as the 2014 Gaza War), Kashua left

Israel for good to immigrate with his family to the United States. In a note published in *Haaretz*, he explains his deep fear and disillusionment about the future of his country. He was confronted with the fact "[t]hat the lie I'd told my children about a future in which Arabs and Jews share the country equally was over. . . . That all those who told me that there is a difference between blood and blood, between one person and another person, were right" ("Leaving Jerusalem"). But even before leaving his country, he was grappling with the unending questions of collective identity and the future of coexistence in Israel.

Kashua has lived his professional life in the grey zone between the two identities he bears. When in 2007 he created a television show called *Avoda Aravait*, "Arab Labour," which tried to use the opportunity of prime-time television comedy to shed light on the problems of Arab communities in Israel, he was criticized harshly by his Arab compatriots, who claimed "it borders on insulting" (Kershner). The title itself is "Hebrew slang for second-rate work," and more than seventy percent of its dialogue is in Arabic, with Hebrew subtitles, a bold move given the fact that "Arabic-language programming on [Israeli] Channel 2 is usually confined to news and current affairs broadcasts at siesta time on Friday afternoons." Most of the show's funny moments are products of the culturally significant mishaps of the Arab characters in a predominantly Jewish environment, such as getting "invited to participate in a Seder" and feasting on traditional Jewish food that are completely unknown to them, like gefilte fish and unleavened bread (Kershner). Kashua does not shy away from the fact that his intended audience were indeed not his Arab compatriots, but the Israeli Jews. "Everything I did was thought-out, and in full awareness of prime time," he says in an interview. "I had to develop characters that the average Jewish viewers would see and love" (qtd. in Mendelson-Maoz and Steir-Livny 111). He took upon

himself to become the cultural envoy of a supressed minority to the uninvolving majority of Israelis, and yet, as his own immigration a few years later suggests, he was not quite successful in bridging the chasm between the two collective identities, or even in negotiating on behalf of one in front of the other. Kashua's literary career attracts a good deal of academic attention in Israel. For example, Batya Shimony studies his early works and his television show in the context of hybrid identity, borrowing from several theorists of postcolonialism, and concludes that Kashua's work "is generating a true revolution in Israeli literature," because it "reveals the dialectical existential levels of that third type of existence, one that is not at peace and which conducts no dialogue; it is simply stuck in a hopeless daily battle for survival" (166).

His first novel, *Dancing Arabs* (2002) is a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, whose protagonist is a young Arab boy from Tira, who receives a scholarship to attend an elite school in Jerusalem, and thus dives deep into another world within the segregated Israel, a world that his parents had no access to. The novel, which received international acclaim and was later adapted into a feature film of the same title, has an overall satiric tone in describing the double life of its protagonist. His next book dispenses with satire and approaches the question of ethnic segregation in a strikingly dark style: *Let It Be Morning* (2004), the book I analyze in the rest of this chapter, is also semi-autobiographical. It is the story of a young Arab Israeli journalist whose career goals fade away when his colleagues in an unnamed major newspaper start to treat him as a potential agent of domestic terrorism. He decides that living in an Israeli metropolis is not tenable anymore in the face of daily harassments, and takes his wife and young child back to his home village. The entirety of the narrative happens in the village, when without any prior warning the military block the

roads and put the village under siege. Water, electricity, and telephone lines are all cut, and the village descends into chaos. The residents, who cannot even guess what trouble they are in, scavenge the local stores' resources, turn against one another, betray the illegal Palestinian residents who work as cheap labourers amidst them, and in the end surrender to the shocking reality that concludes the novel: a secret negotiation to create two separate states of Israel and Palestine is successful, and their village, which was so far part of Israel, is now annexed to the newly formed independent country of Palestine. He hears on the television that Israeli Arabs "never felt part of the State of Israel. . . . They should be pleased that we are enabling them to reunite. They have always complained about being discriminated against and about their minority status, and we should be pleased that our democracy will finally have meaning" (269). This seemingly good news is, as the novel patiently outlines, the most devastating outcome for the protagonist and his family, and so the story as a whole becomes an experiment in delineating just how problematic the issue of belonging in contemporary Israel is.

The unnamed narrator explains how, after the incidents of the second Intifada in 2000, his hopes for advancement in a journalistic career started to diminish. "The privilege of criticizing government policy was an exclusively Jewish prerogative," he notes. "I was liable to be seen as a journalist calling for the annihilation of the Zionist state" (20). The narrative establishes a duality between the oppressor and the oppressed, the majority and the minority, but from the story's beginning, it hints that the homogeneity of his side, the victimized community of Arabs in Israel, is merely an illusion. The Arab community to which he returns is itself a highly, though unofficially, segregated society: armed gangs rule the village, mostly backed by Islamic militia groups, who barely try to legitimize their

mafia-type behaviour under the guise of popular resistance. Moreover, the villagers treat the illegal residents from the West Bank and Gaza, who work as low-wage labourers in their village, patronizingly at first, and after the chaos of the military siege begins, with utmost animosity.

The first encounter with *Daffawwia*—the local derogatory slang for the West Bank people—happens early in the story, when the protagonist meets the builder working on his new house. The man, who has hired a boy from the West Bank as a helper, talks openly in derision of the Jewish Israelis, but also clarifies his own assumed status compared to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The Jews, he claims, "can't tell the difference between people like us, living inside Israel, and the ones living on the West Bank. An Arab's an Arab as far as they're concerned." Addressing the protagonist, he continues, "I bet you thought I was from the West Bank too when you came in and saw me in my dirty coverall. I bet you were scared." The narrator realizes the young illegal resident is within earshot. The builder notices that and says, "Don't pay attention to the way I talk about him. . . . He's been with me for two years now. An excellent worker." Not noticing the condescension in his tone, or maybe not caring about it, the builder goes on, "You know I could do time if they caught him in my car. I'm employing a ticking bomb, brother, a terrorist" (13). This encounter foreshadows the most horrific moment of the novel, when the village elders decide to hand in all the illegal residents to the soldiers, in a vain attempt to cajole the military authorities. The military has not made any demands regarding those residents, but the villagers speculate that the reason behind the siege must be that they were suspected of helping dissidents, and so to exculpate themselves, willingly round up all the undocumented workers and, in an excruciating scene, force them to face the incoming

bullets of the Israeli soldiers. These workers, who "generally sleep on straw mats at the building sites," and as the narrator presumes, "are responsible for the prosperity of the village," are forcibly gathered by dutiful citizens, who care very little about their common ethnicity (141). When the first bullets are fired at the workers, instantly killing one of them, the rest "start yelling and crying, and try to escape to the rear, but they're blocked by the villagers," who only let go of this insane plan after a few more workers are also shot (158). How far this is from the sentiments in Darwish's "Identity Card," in which a unified Arab identity is all that is needed to defy the omnipresence of an unjust enemy; how convoluted the identity borders between friends and foes are, and how the very idea of a singular ethnic identity sounds inane.

In his analysis of the novel, Michael Keren states, "Kashua's writings include strong statements about the vulnerability of the Arab minority in Israel, the arbitrariness with which it is treated, and the failure of the Jewish nation-state to construct itself as an inclusive community," but at the same time, "Kashua refrains from the politics of victimhood epitomizing much of the intellectual discourse about the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which the world is divided into perpetrators and victims with each of these categories applied to one party in the conflict" (142). In other words, Keren argues, the novel does deliver the picture of a minority under duress, but does not simply transform circumstances into a polarity of the traumatized and the traumatizer. While I agree with him that Kashua's writing is too smart to ensnare itself in a basic moral dichotomy of evil Jews versus good Arabs, it does not refrain from addressing victimhood, but instead duplicates the size of the perceived trauma, and asks the essential question: what happens when the traumatized becomes the agent of trauma, what if survival under a traumatic condition becomes

dependent upon willfully transferring the weight of pain to another person? The narrator of

his novel leaves little ambiguity about his own sense of victimhood in his days among the

Israeli Jews, which spans farther than just a diminished career:

> I tried to survive. I'd always been a survivor. I knew how to adapt to my
>
> surroundings, working and doing what I wanted. Except that ever since those
>
> two bitter days in October [when Arab protesters in solidarity with
>
> Palestinians were shot], the task of survival had become tougher. . . . I smiled
>
> when the secretary asked, almost every morning, "So, did you throw any
>
> stones in the entrance?" I smiled at the guard who inspected my bags at the
>
> entrance to our office building. . . . I said thank you every time someone told
>
> me that "Israeli Arabs really ought to say thank you." . . . I expressed my
>
> grief over every Jewish casualty after a terrorist attack, I felt guilty, I cursed
>
> the suicide bombers, I called them cold-blooded murderers. I cursed God, the
>
> virgins, Paradise and myself. Especially myself. (21)

In the first chapter of this study, in the discussion of works by Fassin and Rechtman, we

encountered the historical engendering of the term "survivor guilt," product of the mental

anguish of Holocaust survivors, who were under the burden of living the memories of those

who could not make it. The guilt of survival is the sense of moral culpability that one has

after knowing that one's current life after the trauma was dependent on another's dark fate,

as if trauma is a zero-sum game and one's winning the chance of survival is only possible

through the others' losing.

So far in the other stories of the Palestinian collective trauma after the Oslo Accords,

we have not come upon a condition like the one that Kashua depicts, in which the Israeli

Arabs, living under immense pressures, somehow scapegoat their fellow Arabs, who do not enjoy the privilege of Israeli citizenship. Of course, the narrative of Kashua is entirely fictional, and as a matter of fact, in most cases of oppressive acts by the Israeli army in the past few decades, the Arab Israelis have stood firm in solidarity beside the residents of Gaza and the West Bank. Being fictional, however, does not reduce the significance of the traumatic condition's problem. What seems to be at play here is the survivor's guilt turned inside-out, whereby the trauma's victims are not being saved at the expense of someone else, but they intensify their common pain by giving in to the illusion that their survival depends on playing a zero-sum game. The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion of trauma emplotment is indubitably at work here: the identity marker of the traumatized—being Arab, for example, or not being Jewish—is dissipating and being replaced by another criterion of collective identity, which is more abstract and yet more tangible: citizenship. The answer to the question of whose trauma is being depicted becomes harder to find, because the borders of exclusion and inclusion overlap with one another to nullify the presence of, and to dialectically highlight, one another. The novel's ending, in which the political impasse of Israel-Palestine conflict seems to be resolved with one swift decision to give back all the Arab-dominated towns and villages to Palestine and recognize its sovereign state, is the culmination of this exclusion and inclusion of collective identities: not all Israelis were the same, not all Arabs were equal, and not all Palestinians, in this new imagined nation, are going to live in egalitarian harmony.

The ending is both tragic and comic. It is comic because, at least on the surface level, it ushers in a desired brave new world, and it is tragic, because the new utopian world has only been the fruit of series of exclusions and isolations. It does nothing to ameliorate

the history of previous segregations, but only tends to eradicate them, not knowing that decades of unheeded grievances are going to appear in the form of new layers of discrimination and oppression. The novel is comic in its thematic trajectory, as it opens in an unbalanced and restricted world and moves toward an expansive open society, but what it reaches in the end—which is a crystallization of the two-state solution—is deeply tragic. The isolation of the protagonist is at its clearest when the theme of bilingualism gives the final scene of the novel an interesting twist.

All the Arabs in the protagonist's hometown read and write in Hebrew, yet they all speak Arabic among themselves. Commenting on his father's daily habits, the narrator notes, "He's watching the Hebrew news, and when that's over, he zaps to Al Jazeera" (9). The protagonist himself owes his short-lived career success to his bilingualism. He was the only staff reporter who could speak the local language of the dissidents, whose occasional rallies were quite newsworthy. "I must have been the only journalist on the scene," he recalls, "working for an Israeli paper, since as an Arab I had no trouble getting into the villages and standing around with the demonstrators, the only journalist who was actually standing on the side that the police and soldiers were aiming their guns at" (18). As tensions grew, he gradually lost his position of trust among his fellow journalists, but at the very end of the story, when the military siege is over and the town is declared as part of the new independent state of Palestine, the narrator receives a call from his paper's editor. "I'd like you to be our man in Palestine," he is told. "You've got excellent Hebrew, and we need someone to report back to us from there now" (270). If his knowledge of Arabic was his main asset when he was an Israeli citizen, now it is his fluency in Hebrew that becomes an instrumental advantage. In an entirely comic trajectory, the story would have moved from a

linguistic segregation, in which the protagonist acts and feels like an infiltrator, to an inclusive bilingual world, where the main characters could have finally felt at home. Yet the story only leaps from one linguistic exclusion to another. The man is now asked to wear the mantle of his linguist prowess as if it somehow gives him a distinction among the other Arabs. He was an Israeli who could speak Arabic, but now he is a non-Jew who can write good Hebrew; from a bridge between the two cultures to an emissary of the Other, from a disenfranchised citizen to a privileged alien.

The motif of a means for connection used to intensify disconnection, concretized in Shehadeh's narrative via the presence of highways, and in Barghouti via the Allenby Bridge and also the telephone, is now epitomized in Kashua's story through the protagonist himself, as he is an expediter of information between the dispossessed Arabs and the Israeli media, but is also utterly disconnected from both of them. He cannot live in the Israeli metropolis anymore, where on their building's wall the message, "ARABS OUT=PEACE+SECURITY" was sprayed (17). On the other hand, he cannot bear to see, and does not understand, the internal segregations within the subjugated Arab community, and is doubly alienated from that society as well. The rise of Islamic militant groups in his village adds to the panic and trauma, as it becomes clear to the narrator that his hometown is becoming more and more similar to the demonic image that the Israeli media depicts. When during the siege, a group of young men, all carrying rifles, start roaming in the street and chant, "*Allahu Akbar*" and "*Khaybar Khaybar, ya Yahud*," the narrator shudders to see the rise of anti-Semitism that will easily justify any escalation of the armed conflict— "Khaybar" refers to a war led by the Islamic Prophet against a Jewish tribe in the Arabian peninsula that ended in staggering defeat of the tribe and the fall of their stronghold

("Judaism and Islam"). The succession of hatred, paranoia, and violence runs a full circle, from a history of settler-colonialism extending well into the twenty-first century that has given impetus to zealous Jewish practices in the name of nation-building, to the rise of the equally detrimental fundamentalism among the oppressed communities. The Arab-Israeli's narration highlights the universality of the traumatic condition by metonymically extending it to the realm of language, depicting the precarious position of understanding both languages—and partaking in both linguistic communities—and yet simultaneously remaining isolated from both. The survivor of the novel, who is the synthesis of the tragedy-comedy dialectics, is initially ousted by his compatriots as an infiltrator, and by the end is celebrated for the very same role.

The literature of Palestine after the failure of the Oslo Accords is, as I explained in this chapter, a multifaceted world of collective trauma, from seeing one's beloved land being erased and transformed under the guise of civilization, to finding oneself without the basic rights of residence and return, to observing a society shackled by its own moral deficiencies, to a collectivity dispersed among linguistic and cultural obstacles that only worsen the effects of political barriers. If the previous chapter was an example of a unified discourse, which either managed to resolve the disparity between singular experiences of trauma, or in some cases obliterated the unwanted traces of the horrific memories, this chapter bears witness to a national case of trauma, whereby there is no powerful centre around which a unified discourse is to be formed. The emplotment of the Palestinian trauma takes many shapes, moves in many directions, and instead of becoming a pillar to sustain the weight of a national identity, forms a nebula of painful memories that constitute the nation's public image of itself.

5. When Trauma Comes Home to Roost: The United States at War after 9/11

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its prior campaign in Afghanistan since 2001 have been the subject of many works of political science, international affairs, military history, and journalism. Mistakes are underscored, motivations are questioned, policies are scrutinized, allegations of atrocities are made, waves of chauvinism have ebbed and flowed, and yet the complications of these armed interventions have not been resolved or even clarified through the years. Both of the invaded countries are still struggling with their frail sovereignty, facing the incessant rise of violent factions, and the entire region is remains under the spell of constant violence that only begets more violence. Mapping the emplotment of the trauma of American wars after 9/11, which this chapter intends to do, is not an attempt to rectify the politics of war or to reclaim the American soldiers, who are the survivors of such trauma narratives, as unsung heroes. The goal is to outline a political trajectory of trauma's narrativization that is significantly different from the two previous cases of Iran and Palestine.

Here the trauma narrative is not directly expropriated for the purpose of a unified domestic hegemony, which would utilize the memories of horror to propagate a patriotic discourse. The three main works discussed below show very little, if any, sign of patriotic pride, and in the case of the novel *Green on Blue*, the very presence of American soldiers is reduced to only one minor character. The stories in this chapter are far from offering convenient moral parables, once mocked by a journalist as being "obsessed with telling

readers that war is awful, our post-9/11 conflicts were quagmires, but all our veterans were just good guys doing the best they could with a bad situation" (Peter). The trauma of American soldiers is also unlike the history of dispossession and accumulated pain of the Palestinians, discussed in the previous chapter, in the sense that the former is, simply put, the agent of an imperialistic aggression, and not its direct victim. The American narratives of these wars' traumas underline an awareness of the problematic condition of their protagonists, and their intimate knowledge of their own role as traumatizers for the locals adds, rather than subtracting, to the intensity of their own traumatic condition. All the political differences notwithstanding, in this chapter I will explain that the narration of these traumatic memories follows the same poetics of emplotment as the two preceding cases.

It is worth noting that a major reason for the evident difference between the narration of the post-9/11 war memories and the stories pertaining to Iranian and Palestinian traumas is that in the case of the United States, the national hegemony is tangibly omnipresent. A newly established state, such as Iran after its revolution, would strive to systemically expropriate a large-scale trauma, because otherwise the foundation of its hegemonic rule would be too feeble. In the case of Palestine, there is no unified national hegemony to be found; what shapes the public memory of its perennial trauma is the will to defy extinction and to control its own voice, if not its native land. The disillusioned American soldier, returning home from an unjustifiable global crusade, is neither concerned with contributing to the national discourse of "defense" nor consumed by an urge to defy silence. In an essay on the spirit of military aggression that led to the Iraq invasion, Edward Said comments on the consequences of "the whole idea of regime change as an attractive prospect for individuals, ideologies, and institutions" in the United States (*From Oslo to*

Iraq 215). His argument helps to spell out an essential aspect of the American trauma narration: the paradoxical combination of apathy and empathy. The stories of the traumatized soldiers are tinged with an overall sense of futility, present in their downplaying of the politics of the war. Yet, this attitude makes it quite hard to justify any empathy toward the wars' primary victims, the local civilians. The prospect of fixating on one's own casualties of war, Said reflects, "stimulate[s] more and still more fantasies about surgical strikes, clean war, high-technology battlefields, changing the entire map, creating democracy, and the like, all of it giving rise to ideas of omnipotence, wiping the slate clean, and being in ultimate control of what matters of 'our' side" (216). How can one critically narrate memories of one's own aggression, Said notes, without losing focus on its asymmetrical politics? How, in other words, can the traumatizers narrate their own trauma and that of their supposed adversaries simultaneously?

The American veteran narratives in this chapter grapple with this problem, pondering how to emplot their intimate, dark experiences after the fascination with the questionable quasi-ethical justifications for the wars has worn off. Said, who, in his characteristic way, is always concerned with the question of representation—in both senses of delegation and "re-presentation"—points out the old tactic of reducing the Other to an abstraction. "This makes it much easier to bomb the enemy without qualm," he plainly states (217). The American veterans are aware of the war's attrition and its long-lasting impact for the locals, yet the policy of ventriloquism they tend to espouse bears its own antithesis. The war is sometimes abstracted, universalized as a Sisyphean curse, as a way to comment on its senselessness, but such a representation runs the risk of glossing over the reality of its imperialistic cause. The novels discussed here show the conflict between

depicting the soldier's lethargy, as a legacy of two totally avoidable wars, and reporting the locals' pain, which does not always simply mirror the veteran's own trauma.

Before detailing the analysis of the literary works, one question that should be underscored and answered is why and how the post-war literatures of the twenty-first century United States did not flourish until more than a decade after the beginning of the wars, and how this particular time lapse can give us a better insight into the politics of these stories.

5.1. The Narrative Vacuum of the First Decade

In an essay published in 2012, Roger Luckhurst asks why, compared to the immediate years after the historic attacks on the World Trade Center, and even compared to earlier episodes of traumatic memory in modern times, American literature has produced so few works in response to the experiences of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Listing the names of the writers who engaged with the post-9/11 condition, from established figures like Don DeLillo and John Updike, to newcomers like Amy Waldman and Joseph O'Neill—the former wrote *The Submission* (2011), and the latter, *Netherland* (2008)—Luckhurst points out that such a manifold and audible response is absent from the era of the two wars. "No definitive literary texts have emerged from the overlapping contexts of the invasion, the Iraqi civil war, or the occupation," he writes. "Perhaps, symptomatically, it isn't yet clear how we should name, periodize, or even characterize these events" (713-14). Furthering this point of view, his essay highlights various indirect ways that literature, cinema, and other art forms in America have responded to fresh memories of these wars. Part of Luckhurst's argument is that it is either too early to see the rise of a literary movement in reaction to the

wars' history, or the experience of these wars, contrary to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the previous wars in modern American history, including the Vietnam War, has been far from coherent, and thus will probably never lead to the wave of literary reactions similar to their precedent cases. Focusing particularly on the war in Iraq (which was more intensive and extensive than the one in Afghanistan in terms of both the size of deployment and the frequency of violence), he remarks:

> The attack on the World Trade Center was *intended* to produce a distinctive aftermath, and this state of aftershock was eminently readable in the discourse of post-traumatic reaction, at individual, community, and national levels. In contrast to this highly readable event, the Iraq war existed in an odd stage of incompletion, at once a war, a civil war, and a postwar occupation, an intervention begun as an ostensibly symmetrical engagement between armies that mutated into asymmetrical guerrilla warfare, insurgency, and the classic violent aftermath of colonial withdrawal. The politics of the war remains intensely divisive and, for the American public, the sympathies deeply confused. (721)

At the present time, the situation in Iraq is hardly any less confusing than what Luckhurst states; it is, nonetheless, imperative to note the contrast he draws between the "readability" of 9/11 and the chaotic nature of the ensuing wars, which is a dichotomy also brought up by several other scholars of contemporary American literature. Mentioning that most of the works published on the subject of the post-9/11 wars were either journalistic or belonged to popular genres such as thrillers, whose writers had no direct exposure to the wars, Luckhurst conjectures that "the resistance to narrative or representation of this contemporary war

means that cultural narratives about it are often displaced or filtered through the iconography of prior wars" (722); to further lay out this point, he dedicates several pages of his article to analyzing *Tree of Smoke*, the award-winning 2007 novel by Denis Johnson about the Vietnam War, in order to show that the novel is indeed more of a consideration of the recent war in the Middle East, rather than the one it is purportedly about.

So far, many scholarly responses to the literature and art of the post-9/11 wars have more or less been along the lines of Luckhurst's essay. In her 2011 book about the American soldiers' experience in Iraq as narrated in cinema and fiction, Stacey Peebles also focuses on the similarities and differences of the new wars compared to the after-effects of the Vietnam War. In her introduction she points out, "In Vietnam, most soldiers were drafted, yet their experiences of war were often romantic, shaped by novels and films of World War II. Their ensuing disillusion was political—America wasn't quite what they thought it was," yet the case in Iraq was tellingly different. "Ironically, the all-volunteer military in Iraq often seems *already* cynical, hardened against idealistic patriotism by their knowledge of things like the Watergate and Iran-Contra affairs." These soldiers, Peebles claims, "also feel betrayed—not necessarily by their nation, which many already believe is on a fool's errand in Iraq, but by the personal resources they expect to carry them through. They are politically cynical, but personally idealistic" (3-4). Peebles's extensive analysis of films and books on the lives of these soldiers relies heavily on this counterpoint: the soldiers of Vietnam felt betrayed by the value-system their nation seemed to promote, but the ones in Iraq had to counter larger structures of value, including those of gender, race, and ethnicity. The works she focuses on, including war documentaries, memoirs, and feature films like *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007) and *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005), are

mostly shaped by a deep sense of distrust of the American political structure, yet none of these examples—with the sole exception of Brian Turner's *Here, Bullet* (2005), to which I will return shortly—achieves high critical praise as a work by a war veteran with ostensible artistic merit. The two mentioned films, for instance, do offer critiques of the war, but are less informed by the intimate experience of individuals than by a general cynicism against the war, which could as well be any modern, American war.

Suman Gupta's *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq Invasion* (2011), likewise, looks into a similar body of war literature; in particular, its fifth chapter makes a case for the fiction produced in response to the invasion. Sectioning the chapter into "Action thrillers" and "Literary fiction," he offers an argument parallel to Luckhurst's, outlining the enormous response in genre fiction to the Iraq war, which only uses the basic themes of war as a generic background for the usual thriller plots. A close analysis of these works, Gupta asserts, does not yield much literary insight into the narration of trauma, but offers "a reasonably clear sense of how war and military engagements are moulded for public consumption, with the exigencies of civil perception in mind, and for the purpose of dispersing impressions within civil society" (142). On the other hand, when he does look into the available novels in English that can offer a substantial commentary on the war, the ones he finds only address the war indirectly or tend to observe it from a safe distance: Noah Cicero's *The Human War* (2003) is about a young man uncertain on joining the military just before the official beginning of American invasion of Iraq. The story consists of his long discussions with a few people, including an old Vietnam veteran, who cautions him against enlisting. Ian MacEwan's *Saturday* (2005) tells the story of a British surgeon who comes face to face with violence against his family. Apart from allegorical references

to terrorism and counter-terrorism, the only presence of the Iraq War in the novel is in the background; the story happens entirely on 15 February 2003, the day a massive anti-war rally was held in London. While Gupta's analysis of these works is quite ingenious, they can hardly count as literature of war, let alone of war's trauma. In an essay about the insufficient number of literary works published about the wars by any direct witness of its atrocities, Levi Bollinger writes, "The entire process [of the war] has, from the start, been documented much more meticulously than any war of any previous generation," and by December 2012, "over 2,000 books about the Iraq War have been published in America," but very few could be considered as literary engagements with the war (2). The two-thousand-long list should not fool us, Bollinger notes, because it is mostly populated with works like Stephen King's *Under the Dome* (2009), which features an Iraq-war veteran in a fictional sci-fi setting in a rural American town, but is otherwise almost indistinguishable from the rest of King's oeuvre. Most of these writers, Bollinger claims, "while having access to the swarming information on the war, have not experienced it personally" (2). What is missing, Bollinger, Gupta, Peebles, and Luckhurst all seem to note, is a body of literature by those who have been directly exposed to the war, similar to what American writers produced after the Second World War and Vietnam.

They were all in for a surprise: since 2012 a new movement of war literature has sprung onto the American literary scene. Kevin Powers, who served in the U.S. Army in the early years of the Iraq war, published the novel *Yellow Birds* (2012), a fictionalized account of his own dreadful experience in the battlezone; Luckhurst does mention the novel in his essay but—being time-bound like everyone else—fails to notice it as the forerunner for a series of novels to come. In 2014 comes *Redeployment*, a collection of short stories by Phil

Klay, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq. It received the National Book Award in the same year. Michael Pitre's novel, *Fives and Twenty-Fives* (2014), another fictional account of Iraq War, was also gleaned from the author's experience as a Marine. The next year, Elliot Ackerman, a Marine veteran with eight years of service in Iraq and Afghanistan, publishes *Green on Blue* (2015), and Jessy Goolsby, an Air Force officer, writes *I'd Walk with My Friends If I could Find them* (2015). In 2016, Matthew Hefti, an Army veteran, joins this burgeoning literary wave with *A Hard and Heavy Thing*, Matt Gallagher, who had already published a well-received war memoir, *Kaboom* (2010), debuts his career as a novelist with *Youngblood*, and Roy Scranton, also an Army veteran, publishes his first novel, *War Porn*. All of these works were highly praised by critics, and almost all received local and national awards. Alongside these works of narrative literature, there are a few collections of poetry by veterans, including the one mentioned above by Brian Turner, who is one of the first post-9/11 veterans to infuse his military experience in the Middle East into his literature, about a decade ahead of the curve. Kevin Powers, the author of *Yellow Birds*, also published a poetry collection, titled *Letter Composed during a Lull in the Fighting* (2014), which was a finalist for the National Book Award. Seen together, these works of fiction, memoir, and poetry comprise a body of literature comparable to what was produced in the years after the Vietnam War.[28] A simple question, therefore, is why it took these

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[28] As it is the case for all literary movements, definitions of the post-9/11 veteran literature's core themes, styles, and approaches are fraught with difficulties, and only possible to make *ex post facto*. There are many works that, in one way or another, stand in the margins of this movement, not because they are less significant in terms of their literary value, but only because the said movement is too fresh and recent that it does not yet allow a clear and systemic delineation. For example, there are several fictional accounts of the post-9/11 wars, written not by veterans, but by professional journalists who had direct, but limited, experience of the wars, like Ben Fountain's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012). There is also a long list of memoirs by veterans, like Brian Castner's *The Long Walk* (2012), Brian Turner's *My Life as a Foreign Country* (2014), and Colby Buzzell's *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2006). These memoirs explore the same themes of masculinity, crises of collective trauma, and confrontation with the absurdity of the wars' violence. Because this literary movement is still unfolding, it is almost impossible to offer a comprehensive account of all the works that can

writers several years to come forth. Consequently, what can we learn from the lag between the war experience and the literary boom in the war literature in this specific case?

One possible reason for the sudden appearance of this literary wave after some years of dormancy is the psychological latency for the traumatic experience to assert itself. Luckhurst, citing Cathy Caruth, writes, "In trauma . . . the contemporary is ghosted or haunted by an insistent past that intrudes on, overlays, and redetermines the present" (723). The idea, simply put, is that such deeply felt experiences of violence and loss cannot be so readily available to the human consciousness, and thus find their expressive channel only indirectly and after a certain period of latency. The veterans who all suddenly appeared on the American literary stage could not have done so any sooner, because the necessary time for processing their horrific memories had to be patiently endured. There are, however, two problems with this line of reasoning: As noted in the first chapter, Caruth's theory of trauma has too many inconsistencies, the least of which being the abundance of literary works on traumatic experiences in modern and contemporary literature that do not approach an episode of trauma indirectly or via a secondary set of events or experiences. The works on Iranian and Palestinian histories of pain and horror, analyzed in the previous two chapters already provide enough examples for this. The psychoanalytic approach to trauma misses the intentionality of the writers who openly discuss their painful memories instead of repackaging them in circuitous symbols. Had these novels, poems, and memoirs on post-9/11 wars never appeared, one would be easily compelled by Luckhurst's recourse to psychoanalytic trauma theory, whereby prior episodes of mass violence are claimed to be conjured to carry the weight of representing a recent memory of pain: to write on Iraq, the

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fall under its purview. For this study, I refrain from claiming a sweeping analysis of the said movement, and only examine its themes and narrative technique that are pertinent to trauma emplotment.

writers tend to narrate something similar but not identical, like the Vietnam War. We do, however, have writers who do not shun their war experience in their narration.

The other problem with this argument is the presence of works about these war experiences during the heat of the war. As noted above, while the wave of post-war literature related to Iraq and Afghanistan mostly started to materialize by 2012 and reached its apex in 2015 and 2016, there were a few harbingers of this movement appearing as early as 2005, most notably the poems of Brian Turner, which have been constantly compared to the English poets' of the First World War—Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Siegfried Sassoon—but with a sharp difference, namely, his appetite to approach the culture of those whose land he is invading. His "deep curiosity and appreciation for Iraqi people and Arab heritage," Peebles writes, "reflects the deeply conflicted way he understands himself as both a soldier and a poet" (119). The issues apparent in Turner's poetry become the hallmark of the veteran literature that fully blooms a few years later. The hesitation and introspection of a soldier who sees himself as the agent of a brute colonialism, mixed with cynicism and unease about the entirety of the war, is countered with a profound desire to cross the wide gap of cultural alienation with the locals, whom the poet tries his best to treat not like a tourist. The poem "What Every Soldier Should Know" is a telling example:

> If you hear gunfire on a Thursday afternoon,
>
> it could be for a wedding, or it could be for you.
>
> Always enter a home with your right foot;
>
> the left is for cemeteries and unclean places.

O-guf! Tera armeek is rarely useful.

It means *Stop! Or I'll shoot.*

Sabah el khair is effective.

It means *Good morning.*

Inshallah means *Allah be willing.*

Listen well when it is spoken.

You will hear the RPG coming for you.

Not so the roadside bomb.

There are bombs under the overpasses,

in trashpiles, in bricks, in cars.

There are shopping carts with clothes soaked

in foogas, a sticky gel of homemade napalm.

Parachute bombs and artillery shells

sewn into the carcasses of dead farm animals.

Graffiti sprayed onto the overpasses:

I will kell you, American.

Men wearing vests rigged with explosives

walk up, raise their arms and say *Inshallah.*

There are men who earn eighty dollars

to attack you, five thousand to kill.

Small children who will play with you,

old men with their talk, women who offer chai—

and any one of them

may dance over your body tomorrow. (*Here, Bullet* 9-10)

The poet highlights the ironic impossibility of respecting the lives that he, as a soldier, has

come to disrupt. The direction, for instance, not to step inside the locals' houses with the left

foot brings forth this irony, and enriches it in the next four lines with a crash-course in

useful local idioms that are meant to treat the Arabs with deference. Fear, distrust, and stress

run in the veins of the poem, and reach a climactic point when the phrase *Inshallah* is

repeated in the context of horror, when a suicide bomber says it before killing the American

soldiers. Iraqis treat you with dignity, the poet maintains, as long as you treat them

respectfully, but you would be too foolish to confuse respect with love. The reflective

attitude of the poem toward the trauma of the American soldier, who stays aware of his

fundamental alienation, smells the hatred that flows in the air, and feels the isolation that he

is trapped in but he is also embodying, is the common trait of the post-9/11 veteran

literature. The psychoanalytic theory of trauma, which posits that the enormity of the war experience could not have emerged immediately into the realm of language, and had to be sought in oblique symbols or narrative lacunae, cannot explain Turner's poem, which eloquently defines the nature of the pain, the conundrum of the invading soldier's fear and hesitation—the traumatizer who is traumatized—and does all of this while the war was still ongoing. The lag in the rise of American veteran literature is not, therefore, the result of a collective psychological mechanism that pushed back the intimately felt experience of war for half a decade.

The other possible reason for the literary movement's late appearance is less psychological than political, particularly in the sense of the war's *realpolitik*. As the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter clearly states, Luckhurst and others compare the intentionality, readability, and fixity of the terrorist attacks in 9/11 with the vagueness and confusion of the two wars that followed. In a sense, it is quite difficult to pinpoint when exactly the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began; the official dates of the invasion are not helpful because the United States had been actively engaged in the long periods of unrest and violence in both countries for more than a decade before the wars. The clear historical point of the wars' ending is even more difficult to delineate. President Obama's mandate for the military withdrawal from the region does not exactly mean that either the wars were finished or that American involvement in them was over. Indeed, it has long become too difficult to even call the military engagement of American troops in the two countries as "war," as Luckhurst also points out. Thus, a literary movement in reaction to these traumatic experiences could not have surfaced any sooner, because the nature of the war was still too protean for any definitive retrospection. One could argue that a certain

passage of time was necessary, not for psychological reasons, but for the writers and their public readership to come to terms with the unexpected reality of the wars and their perplexing aftermath. But this argument is also not quite right because the condition of "unreadability" is no less alleviated in the years after 2012, and is in fact continuously becoming more convoluted, more brutal, and more unpredictable. If what was behind the latency period for the rise of American veteran literature in the twenty-first century is the impossibility of deciphering, or as Luckhurst puts it, even "periodizing," the wars, then one may ask whether the years after Luckhurst's essay have proved any more successful in achieving a historical perspective into the nature of the wars and their aftereffects.

The same poem by Turner could offer a response for the latter argument, as well. By the time that Turner published "What Every Soldier . . .," the war's landscape was as foggy and its future as capricious as the years that followed. The poet, nonetheless, manages to convey his personal cogitation—and agitation—through his verse, concretizing the very problem of unreadability and the deep anxiety that such a problem brings to the daily experience of a soldier. The poet/soldier is cognizant of his foreignness, not only when he instructs his reader a few common Arabic phrases, but also when he links those phrases, which can help build fragmentary connections with the local population, to the unexpected traps that could easily take a soldier's life, and from which no level of Arabic knowledge can obtain any security. The impasse that cannot be dissolved through any linguistic connection is highlighted in the line that reads graffiti on a wall, "*I will kell* [sic] *you, American*" (9). The message is terrifyingly clear, despite the spelling error, and is even made more menacing by the error, as it mirrors the stance of American invaders who speak the local language only for the strategic purpose of saving their own lives. The soldier/poet

is not simply ignorant of the problem of definition—what is this "war," who exactly is the enemy, and for which purpose is it being fought—but indeed is fully aware that, like him, the indigenous people's lives are disturbed by such confusing, yet seemingly simple, questions. The problem with the contours of the military excursions in Iraq and Afghanistan was not a deterrent for the writer to express his traumatic condition, and it definitely did not stop the wave of works after 2012. Why, then, did many of these works appear after the latency period in which several scholars assumed the literary response to these wars is only possible via indirect representation?

The answer, I contend, is clear in the biographies of this movement's writers. Almost all of these young men—and I should emphasize that the acclaimed figures of the post-9/11 veteran war fiction are so far all men—used their benefits from the G.I. Bill to either start or continue their higher education in humanities programs, academically training themselves to become adept writers.[29] Kevin Powers studied English at Virginia Commonwealth University, and later obtained an MFA from the University of Texas, Austin. Michael Pitre was already an undergraduate in history and creative writing at Louisiana State University when he joined the Marines, and after his discharge, finished his graduate degree while working on his first novel. Hatthew Hefti earned his BA in English,

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[29] Thus far, the only exception to this male-dominated literary movement is Kayla Williams, whose two memoirs, *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2005) and *Plenty of Time When We Get Home* (2014), are predominantly about her experience as a female soldier, and later, a female veteran. While I have not included a detailed examination of her works in this chapter, I should note that most of the issues regarding the crises of masculine identity and the problems in adjusting to the civilian life, which are among the most frequent themes of the post-9/11 veteran literature, and I will discuss in the rest of this chapter, are also present in Williams's work.

Bonnie Mann makes an insightful feminist reading of Williams' first book, in which references to sexual anatomy are analyzed in terms of their roles in propagating inherent masculine values. "A 'pussy,' of course, is a weak or weak-willed soldier," Mann writers. "To have "a big pair of balls" is to be courageous and capable. A "cooze" or a "cunt" is a selfish, superficial, unavailable woman—or for that matter any woman. . . . Williams adopts much of this language and, at least to some extent, adopts the readymade values and commitments that these frames evoke, in her life as a soldier" (150).

and later, his MFA, while enlisted in Iraq. Phil Klay joined the military after finishing his undergraduate degree in history at Dartmouth, and in his return home, enrolled in the MFA program at Hunter College. The gap between the experience of war for these writers and their literary output is neither because of a psychological latency nor because of a period of political obfuscation, but rather the result of their pursuing higher education, which is the necessary element in the materialization of their literary works. Even Turner, who, as noted above, started his literary career well ahead of his peers in the movement, was able to do so because of his prior education—he obtained an MFA from University of Oregon before serving in Iraq. The significance of this matter is not only in the quality of the published works, but also the political outlook they maintain. The veteran writers of Iraq and Afghanistan have been exposed to both the intimate cruelty of the war zone and the academic debates over the issues that come to play a crucial role in their stories. It is one thing to narrate one's memories as a veteran of the Iraq war, and a totally different thing to narrate such memories after learning about postcolonial theory, the history of Anglo-American imperialism, and the global body of resistance literature, which are themes and topics that every student (graduate or undergraduate) in art and humanities programs in North American would typically encounter. The political approach of post-9/11 veteran narratives is complicated, nuanced, and multilayered for the evident reason that their authors are at the unique position of knowing the theory and history behind what shaped their horrifying war experience. The recalcitrance of Turner's aforementioned poem, for example, in placing the soldier as either a heroic redeemer or a brute colonizer is not simply the outcome of his raw and unmediated experience, but of his ability to process this experience through his academic knowledge.

These American writers of Iraq and Afghanistan war fiction aspire to produce reports of the wars that surpass the myopia of unrefined violence and fear. Their stories, as the rest of this chapter will show, are not eulogies of bravery and patriotism. They tend to offer an account of the unresolved pain of the soldier returning home—which is not just the clinical conditions like PTSD—while penetrating the wall of alienation with the war's Other, which as American servicemen they were supposed to uphold. The confrontation with the Other, however, is not without its own problems. The challenge of recognition for these veteran writers is, in a sense, the opposite of the problem noted in the case of the Iranian Sacred Defense, whereby the emplotment had to resolve the moral enigma of fratricide. If the Iranian narratives were engaged with memories of a sacred war against their brothers in faith, and had to project it as a struggle against Western imperialism, in the American case, the fatuous pretexts for the war—e.g., bringing democracy, saving the natives from their own despotism, fighting religious extremism—are the stories' points of departure. The veteran writers know these justifications for what they truly are, and yet they have to resist whitewashing their own destructive participation in the wars. The morally troubling dialectics between apathy (for the U.S. national interests) and empathy (for the local civilians), which is itself a manifestation of tragedy and comedy, drives the emplotment of the disenchanted veterans' trauma.

In what follows, I examine the short story collection *Redeployment* by Phil Klay and the novel *Fives and Twenty Fives* by Michael Pitre, both pertaining to the American war in Iraq, and Elliot Ackerman's *Green on Blue*, which pertains to the American military incursions in Afghanistan. Together, these three representative examples of the post-9/11 veteran literature offer a comprehensive image of their literary movement. While the

chapter on Iranian post-war literature focused mostly on the process by which the painful memories of the warzone are transformed into positive justification for the war, and the study on Palestinian narratives of dispossession and discrimination aimed to shed a light on the absence of a centralized nationalist discourse and its impact on the distressed polyphony of painful memories, this chapter's analysis of American literature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan tends to pursue a relevant but distinct goal: to show the process of trauma's emplotment in a political condition, which neither completely relies on a unifying nationalist discourse, nor tries to reduce the complications of the painful memories into moral parables of pacifism. The American writers in this chapter, like the poet's voice in Turner's "What Every Soldier . . .", are unapologetically expressive about their experiences, and yet they do not pander to their intended readers' patriotic passions, nor do they implore for any forgiveness. The moral complications of these narratives are best explained, as I intend to do, by mapping the dialectical patterns of trauma emplotment. These stories display a crucial concourse by a utopian comic tendency and a disinterestedly tragic perspective. The former is apparent in both an imperialistic attitude of redeeming the natives from their local afflictions—be it Saddam Hussein's regime, the Taliban, or any of their offshoots—and also in a more abstract view of the war as a tutelage for heroism, which is evident in the abundance of male figures and their symbolic struggles with their virility and gallantry. The course of tragedy can be traced in the pervasive sense of futility that the characters of these stories express, either in their return to the world of civilians or in the gradual realization that the battle-zone experience is less like a personalized test of endurance than an objectively indifferent arena of random pain.

The academic education of these writers in humanist disciplines deepens their

reflexive engagement with war-time memories, which is visible in their learned interest in

the local culture and history of the invaded societies—the irony that a former serviceman of

the invading country is obliged to revere the identity of his supposed enemies is what

distinguishes the works of this chapter from the two preceding ones. The veteran authors are

sensitive to their own paradoxical position, and their narratives, through connecting the

traumatic experience of the soldier with the trauma of the locals present the complications

of defining the contours of trauma. Thus comes to fore the dialectics of inclusion and

exclusion of identities in demarcation of traumatic narrative of post-9/11 wars. These stories

pose the questions whether the painful memories of the soldier are extensions of the invaded

civilian's pain, whether it is possible to redraw the oppositional identities of the two sides in

terms of their shared trauma, or more fundamentally, whether there is such a thing as the

sharing of trauma. The narratives in this chapter tend to reflect on these questions in two

ways: They focus on the banalities of war, which, in their abstraction, reduce the soldier and

his adversaries into objects of an inefficient bureaucratic system.[30] The other way is to shift

the narration's perspective by ventriloquizing the fictional voices of Iraqi and Afghan

characters. In his short stories, Klay mostly follows the former path, while Ackerman

chooses the latter. Pitre's novel uses a mixture of the two. The dialectics of universality and

uniqueness is apparent in war's perpetuity in the narratives of this movement. The claim by

Luckhurst that American wars after 9/11 are almost impossible to periodize is manifested in

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[30] I should clarify that in the standard lingo of American Armed Forces, the word "soldier" is only used in reference to members of the Army, and the recruits of other military branches are referred to as "marine," "airman," and "sailor." This is particularly apropos to the chosen stories of this chapter, because characters in Pitre's and Klay's narratives are technically marines and not soldiers. However, in this chapter I use the term soldier in its general common meaning as any person recruited into military service, unless specifically noted otherwise.

these stories, when the characters constantly note that their role in the conflict is but one piece in a domino of violence that had started long before the terrorist attacks on 2001, and do not seem likely to fade out in the near future. What are called, perhaps out of convenience or inevitability, American wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, dissipate into series of local clashes with no clear winner.

5.2. *Redeployment*: Fragmented Is the New Normal

"Journalists and historians have to distort war," writes George Packer of the *New Yorker* in his review of the rise of post-9/11 American veteran literature, noting that "in order to find the plot—causation, sequence, meaning—they make war more intelligible than it really is" (71). The writer of fiction, Packer believes, is not bound by the same urge as journalists or historians to reduce the chaotic experience of war into a linear chain of comprehensible events. "Fragments are perhaps the most honest literary form available to writers who fought so recently," and no work of contemporary fiction on the subject of Iraq War has effectively produced a rendition of fragmented experiences of the war better than Phil Klay's *Redeployment*, a collection of twelve short stories that follow a wide range of characters, each of whom related to the American invasion of Iraq. Klay, described by Packer as "a writer who happened to be a marine—you can imagine him writing well about anything, not just Iraq," portrays in first-person the experiences of a marine returning home to his wife, a chaplain trying to interfere with a platoon that is committing war crimes, a civilian Foreign Service Officer dispatched to supervise construction projects in Iraq, a young veteran of Arab lineage enrolled in Amherst College, and a soldier who constantly compares his own deployment with his father's told memories of Vietnam (72). The book's

title story, "Redeployment," which in military parlance means homecoming, lays bare

several of the book's main themes: crises of masculinity, a chronic perplexity about social

norms in American civil life—as if the country is not at war, or as if the war has been

normalized to the extent that its impacts are well-contained—and most importantly, critical

psychological pressures that are not easily reducible to the medical symptoms of PTSD.

The terse and acerbic protagonist returns home from the battlefield, and instead of

being depressed, homesick, or even tired, he is simply numb. Callously he narrates his first

verbal exchanges with his wife, whom he kisses by the gate because, "I figured that was

what I was supposed to do." She asks her how he feels, "which meant, How was it? Are you

crazy now?" (8). The story depicts a microcosm of vulnerable men, whose fortitude is

already tested and exhausted in the war, and who now find themselves completely alien to

the roles in domestic life that, in a civilian context, are supposed be what defines them as

men. One of the protagonist's friends returns home only to find out his wife has abandoned

him, and the house is empty, "Not just of people, of everything: furniture, wall hangings,

everything." His friends find him drunk in the house, and help him "into the base on time

for the classes they make you take about, Don't kill yourself. Don't beat your wife." The

soldier's reaction in the class is to just say, "I can't beat my wife. I don't know where the

fuck she is" (10). The crises in the veterans' adjustment to normal life is not limited to a

disillusionment with the political agenda for which they fought, or the simple disparity

between the alert and violent everyday experience of a soldier and the life back home. The

problem is that the veteran who tastes the bitterness of such disparities is conscious of the

irony he represents, an indication of the comic-tragic pattern of emplotment. There is

supposed to be a sense of pride in a victorious soldier's homecoming, but he finds himself,

nonetheless, involved in issues as common as domestic disputes. Like any other narration of trauma, the oxymoronic interplay of ordinariness and extraordinary events is at the heart of Klay's short stories of American veterans' homecoming. When the horrific moments of loss and pain become the normal status of a soldier's daily life, so does, inversely, a humdrum stroll in a shopping mall become an extraordinary feat. "Your wife gives you some clothes to try on and you walk into the tiny dressing room. You close the door, and you don't want to open it again," because, outside, "there're people walking around by the windows like it's no big deal. People who have no idea where Fallujah is, where three members of your platoon died" (12).

The veteran's problem of masculine identity is invoked not only in reference to the exasperating adjustment to civilian life, but also to comment on the larger political framework of the war. In a story tellingly titled, "In Vietnam They Had Whores," which begins with protagonist plainly saying, "My dad only told me about Vietnam when I was going over to Iraq," we can notice two simultaneous comments on the Iraq War, both verbalized through a language of virility (119). The war is to the young boy a rite of passage toward manhood, as it was for his father before him. At the same time, this war is conspicuously different from his father's; there are no brothels to find for American soldiers in Iraq. The story's trenchant references to sexual frustration, which in some cases become satirically absurd—for instance, when a few soldiers in one platoon all get herpes because they have "been sharing a pocket pussy" (122)—contribute to the overall narrative theme of masculinity-in-crisis, but also highlight the particularity of this war, and the specific political backdrop against which the war must be seen: Iraq is a predominantly Muslim country, so there are no public brothels like in Vietnam. The same difference applies,

allegorically, to the rest of the soldier's experiences. Iraq is unlike anywhere else he imagined, because neither the young soldier nor his leaders had a clear idea of what they were facing in their invasion. Klay's depiction of the Iraq War parallel to, and in contrast with, Vietnam War, is an example of the dialectics of universality and uniqueness: the only way to observe the pain of the Iraq veteran is to see him alongside those of the previous wars; the young soldier is like his father, and is also not like him; Iraq is like Vietnam—as in both being the subject of a modern form of imperial domination by the same world power—and yet, neither is reducible to a variation of the other one.

In her study of the life narratives of the American veterans of Vietnam, Tracy Karner argues that the disillusionment with modern wars as ethically meritorious acts, like the one against Nazi Germany, effectively transformed the idea of a veteran as a fulfilled man. "Vietnam," she elaborates, "was first and foremost a division of sons from their fathers" (63). The patriarchal frame of reference in the Second World War, with its clear moral boundaries, its trust in grand narratives of the American foreign policy, and its affirmation of the traditional values of manhood, all vanished into the abyss of political skepticism, which produced the Vietnam veteran: a broken man, who had witnessed the inferno and returned home, with no one to welcome him. "None of the status or economic rewards that were bestowed on their World War II fathers were available for those returning from Vietnam," she writes. "This change in the requirements for male social esteem left these veterans bereft in their adolescence—marginalized social Others" (66).[31] Now, with

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[31] There are several clinical studies, including large-scale field works, done on the topic of masculine identity crises among the American veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While this particular field requires more time to develop, the early results of these studies do confirm the arguments that my literary analysis brings forth. For instance, see Lorber and Garcia (2010), in which the writers claim that the main reason many veterans either drop out of psychotherapeutic sessions, or never attend one, is "high degrees of endorsement of traditional masculine gender role norms, relative youth, recency of distressing events, and recent experience in the social context of the military where traditional masculinity is reinforced" (296).

the next turn of history, the same shattered man is the father to a young soldier, who comes

to see the military service in Iraq without any of the grandiose ideals his father's generation

carried to their war. A politically cynical soldier is immune to any disillusionment, as there

is no illusion to begin with, which is exactly the paradoxical point in Klay's stories. If one

knows about the pain, does that make it any less painful? To reflect on this question, the

writer addresses the veteran's trauma in relation to the pain and horror he had inflicted on

the local population, bridging the gap of references and experiences between the American

soldier and the Other he confronts. What the frail linguistic links in Turner's poem tend to

do—the graffiti in broken English and the poorly pronounced Arabic words—is achieved in

Klay's stories through a sinuous and clever play with identity politics.

In the story called, "Psychological Operations," a young veteran studying at

Amherst College comes face to face with another student, who taunts him for his

involvement in a colonialist war against a Muslim country. The twist of the story is that the

man himself is an Arab but not a Muslim. Descendant of an Egyptian Coptic Christian

family, the veteran is situated in an ironically grey zone of overlapping identities. What

makes him perhaps the most interesting of all the veterans Klay creates in his story

collection is the man's awareness of his complicated situation and his dark playfulness with

the pastiche of collective identities that claim his memories. He recalls his daily experiences

with his classmates, who are mostly a few years younger than him, as similar "to the wistful

sadness of a parent whose child is getting too old to believe in Santa Clause." Playing what

he dubs the role of "the world-weary vet," he is conscious of his invisible halo: "the harsh,

unvarnished, violent world-as-it-actually-is, outside the bubble of America and academia, a

sojourn to the Heart of Darkness that either destroys you or leaves you sadder and wiser"

(170). He is at once extremely sarcastic about his own stance as a respected veteran and vigorously defensive about his painful recollections. He lies about having nightmarish thoughts, feigns the classic symptoms of PTSD, and maintains an aura of sensitivity, while harboring memories of violence and death, whose pernicious force is not readily translatable into a comprehensible set of clinical symptoms. He is not depressed, but has amassed enough terrible memories that could depress any listener. His frankness toward the story's intended readers, and his meta-awareness regarding a pragmatic approach to exploit the reader's assumptions about a veteran's trauma, turn his narrative into a gradual discovery of his self-appraisal as a soldier in a war in which he did not believe. Immediately after explaining his assumed role in the class as a no-nonsense veteran, he confesses that "the only thing I felt I really had on these kids was the knowledge of just how nasty and awful humans are," which "gave me no added insight into, say, applying Althusserian interpellation to Gramsci's critique of ideological structures" (170-71).

One of his classmates, a black Muslim-convert girl named Zara, does not buy into the class's high estimation of him. "How could you kill your own people," she bluntly asks him, only to realize that he belongs to the Coptic minority of Egyptian Arabs. "Muslims hate us," he replies. "There are riots [in Egypt], sometimes. Like the pogroms in Russia against Jews," and adds in jest, "I can kill Muslims as much as I like" (174). The response infuriates Zara, who files a complaint against the man with the college's ethics' office for his lack of sensitivity to ethnic cultures. From then onward, ironies of identity politics grow more and more visible. The girl, who has only been a Muslim for a few weeks, berates the veteran, whom she had assumed was a Muslim, for engaging in a war against her new faith. The interaction in front of the ethics' office director, whereby the protagonist, afraid of

losing his G.I. scholarship, untruthfully claims to have PTSD in order to exonerate himself from any possible liabilities, ends peacefully, but provokes him to later offer his true confessions about his military service to Zara. As a PsyOps officer—short for Psychological Operations—his task was to use his Arabic knowledge to counter any anti-American promulgation by the local Iraqi fighter groups. His job in the battlefield, he explains, was "to go out in a Humvee strapped with speakers so we could spew our own propaganda. We'd dispense threats, promises, and a phone number for locals to call and report insurgent activities" (184). Confessing that, contrary to what she and her classmates had thought, he never actually shot a single bullet at any Iraqi does not, surprisingly, bring any comfort to the protagonist. The rest of the story reveals why he considers himself responsible for at least one death.

A group of insurgents, led by a local chieftain called Laith al-Tawhid, was hiding in a mosque in Fallujah. The American troops decide to lure them out, and the PsyOps has a plan. "I knew how to get him," he says. "His women were at home," far from the mosque, so all the soldier needed to say in his loudspeaker was to announce that they had captured and raped the insurgent's wives and daughters, which not only would enrage the man, but would put him in a dire situation, because even if he could call their bluff, his position of honour would be in danger in the eyes of his own men. "There were a hundred insurgent groups, a hundred little local chiefs trying to grab power. And I was shaming him in front of everybody. . . He didn't have a choice. And I never saw him die. I never saw him at all. I just heard the Marines shooting him down" (209-10). The reversal of the crises in masculinity, as it crushes not the American veteran confronting the domestic roles of manhood, but the Iraqi warrior, whose humiliation and death is only vicariously presented

to the reader, draws clearly upon the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion of identities on

the two sides of the war. The story does not implore its readers to take sides, and its

complication of the boundaries between identity markers intensifies the hard task of telling

apart the traumatized from the traumatizer. An Arab-American brings down another Arab,

using not a bullet, but a trick of humiliation based in their shared culture, which, instead of

making Zara's initial question irrelevant ("How do you kill your own people?"), gives it an

entirely different resonance.[32] The issue, as the story lays it out, is not *how* he could kill his

own people, but who *his people* are.

The irony of ironies is the protagonist's father's reaction to his story, as recalled

later by the young veteran. His father, who always wears "that Arab dictator mustache,"

which makes him look "exactly like Saddam Hussein," and refuses to ever shave it, harbors

an old grudge against Muslims, due to his own personal experiences back in Egypt, and

self-identifies as a proud American, or as his son puts it, after 9/11 "he became Mister Über-

America. He had flags flying at our house, and 'Support Our Troops' magnets all over the

bumper of his car" (194-95). An old-school Arab man and a model American citizen, the

father becomes the symbolic link between the son who uses Arabic traditional masculinity

as a leverage against a local fighter, and the American blind optimism in a fight against

terror. After his graduation from basic boot camp, the protagonist recalls, "my father was

prouder of me than he'd ever been" (197). In his return home after the deployment, his

father gives him a hero's welcome, takes him out to a steakhouse for a "real American

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[32] The issue of masculinity in Arab cultures in particular, and in the Middle East in general, is still a rather underdeveloped line of study. While there has been an abundance of ethnographic and literary attention to the issues of femininity (particularly when it becomes relevant to Islamic laws), the themes and questions of male identity in the region are usually eclipsed. One of the few works that tend to address this gap is Marcia Claire Inhorn's *The New Arab Man* (2012), which focuses mostly on the topic of male fertility and masculine domestic roles. For more details on current studies on this theme, see Ouzgane, ed. (2006); Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, eds. (2000).

meal"—Christian Copts observe long periods of fasting in which they abstain from eating

meat, so a steak dinner is a mild form of sacrilege—and asks him about his wartime stories.

In an impulse to tease his father, or perhaps to challenge his sense of Arab identity, the son

retells the story of his manipulative trick to kill the insurgent leader. At home, he goes over

the details of that memory, including every humiliating moment he could remember:

> "And I told my father everything. Insult by insult. What I said. All the
> things I'd learned in America, all the things I learned from him, all the things
> that'd been said to me, all the things I could think of, and I could think of a
> lot."

> "I get it," she [Zara] said again, this time in the same voice that my
> father had used when I told him and he'd said, "Enough." But with my father
> I'd kept going, described every sexual act, every foul Arabic word. I cursed
> *for him* and *at him* in English, in Egyptian, in Iraqi, in MSA [Modern
> Standard Arabic], in Koranic Arabic, in Bedouin slang, and he'd said,
> "Enough, enough," his voice shaking with rage and then terror, because I
> was standing over him, shouting in his face, and he couldn't see his son any
> more than I—standing over him and letting my rage wash out—could see my
> father. (210-11, my italics)

From the account of a son whose father retells his time in the brothels of Vietnam, to

memories of another son taunting his jingoistic father, whose attempts at negotiating his

collective identity in post-9/11 America crumbles down in an instant of painful revelations,

Klay depicts the trauma of the American veteran through a vast range of filial imbroglios.

The question of overlapping identity marker in narration, as examples from Palestine and

Iran have already established, is at the kernel of trauma's emplotment, which in Klay's

story, is crystalized in the troubling memory of the young Arab soldier, who, we must

remember, is not a Muslim, which makes his act of aggression against the local insurgents

more complicated, as he is not exactly betraying his fellow brothers-in-faith. The fact that

he is not thinking of himself as clinically traumatized, and indeed finds it convenient to

temporarily pretend to have PTSD, is a testament to the intricacies of his affliction; he may

not be deprived of a sound sleep at night, may not need a massive dose of anti-depressants,

and may be able to attend college like a normal civilian, but his sense of belonging is

fundamentally fractured. *His people* were on both sides of the trenches, and his linguistic

prowess became the verbal bridge between the two, a bridge that, of course, only allowed

death to cross over.

The interdependence of language, violence, collective identity, and masculinity in a

story such as this could conjure a broader response, as well, one that would trace the

political role of manhood in the veteran narratives back to the event that engendered the

wars: the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. If, recalling Luckhurst's point, we can

retrospectively observe 9/11 as an explicitly readable event, then perhaps reading it from a

gender-oriented perspective would be helpful. In *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons

from the War on Terror*, Bonnie Mann offers this interpretation of the terrorist attacks in

2001 and the immediate sensational response by the American public:

> Consider the images that played and replayed after 9/11. Two erect towers
>
> are penetrated over and over again by aircraft used as weapons. As the
>
> obsessive repetition of the images removed them further and further from
>
> their first showing . . . it embedded them deeper and deeper into the

collective national imaginary, where their significance was translated into the language of the symbolic. The destruction of the towers came to stand in for the violent destruction of the American phallus, their collapse for an embarrassing detumescence. . . . We come to understand that this imaginary reads the attack on the twin towers as a closely sequenced double act of penetration/rape (the planes fly into the buildings again and again) and castration (the scene climaxes and ends with the two towers collapsing) when we attend to the subsequent fantasies of revenge: cartoon drawings of missiles poised to anally penetrate Saddam Hussein, the slogan "USA: Up Saddam's Ass," a photo of soldiers spray painting a missile with the words "High Jack This Fags." A symbolic effort to redeem national sovereignty is articulated as a restoration of the power of the American phallus. (5)

The manhood-in-crisis of Klay's stories, therefore, is not only a means to depict the disparities between the expectations and the reality, or a point of reference between the post-9/11 American wars and the ones before, but also a response to the nationalist sense of sovereignty in America, which was shaken after the terrorist attacks. America, in other words, needed to "man up" in the years immediately after the shock of 2001, and now, when the shock has subsided and the young boys, who were to become men and crystalize the hope of "restoring the American phallus," have returned home, they only embody a fractured masculinity.

This is the tragedy-within-comedy of the American veteran's narration. The utopianism that was destined to run head-on into a wall of reality is the cavalier attitude of restoring an imperial sovereignty through a revival of the heteronormative rhetoric of

valiance and gallantry. The tragic recognition that arrives only at the peak of the comic euphoria is in, as the book's title suggests, the return of the soldier, when he has to face the world which has hardly changed. From the veteran, who cannot fathom the logic of shopping in a mall, to the one who looks back at Vietnam with a mix of praise and awe, for at least it helped the soldiers fulfill their sexual desires—and, therefore, their quest for manhood—to the Arab-American, who cannot help but confront his father with the reality of his place in the perplexing disarray of collective identities at war, the stories provide an extensive range of the comic-tragic pattern of trauma emplotment.

5.3. *Green on Blue*: Imagine the Other

At first glance, nothing could be farther from the veteran literature of the type Klay's stories and Turner's poetry represent than the novel *Green on Blue*, by the decorated Marine veteran, Elliot Ackerman, who used his long service in Afghanistan to draw a picture of the country devastated by decades of war. While most of the veterans in the post-9/11 war literature offer a relatively veiled version of their own lived experience in their works of fiction, Ackerman makes the bold decision of narrating his entire story from the perspective of a young Afghan boy, orphaned during the reign of the Taliban, who later becomes a draftee in the American-funded Afghan national military. The novel has only one American character, who plays a symbolically significant, but otherwise minor, role in the narrative. The rest are all native Pashtun people in Afghanistan, whose tale of continuous warfare, which has long turned the normal life into a day-to-day quest for survival, is narrated in an intentionally bare and fast-paced prose that resembles an oral diary, reflecting the short and harsh life of the characters who people the story. In an interview—done, interestingly, by

none other than Phil Klay—Ackerman plainly states his choice of perspective in the book. Recalling his time as an advisory officer in Afghanistan, he says, "I went to war with these guys, fought alongside them. Coming home, my war buddies weren't guys I could find on Facebook, or call up to get beers with at the local VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], they were trapped in Afghanistan's elliptical conflict. I'm never going to hear from those guys again. So I wanted to create a rendering of their world" (Klay "Rumpus Interview"). While the novel discards autobiographical themes in favor of an approach that risks becoming a vain case of cultural appropriation, it does audaciously take a leap in portraying the war in which the Americans were a significant player.

The novel's hero and narrator, Aziz, joins a battalion of professional Afghan military called "The Special Lashkar," as a way to avenge his older brother, Ali, who was injured in a bazaar bombing by a local militia. Bedridden and incapable of work for the rest of his life, Ali needs someone to cover his hospital bills, which are paid for by Aziz's salary in the military, so the young protagonist becomes both his brother's savior and avenger. As he goes through various levels of combat training and gradually becomes a seasoned fighter, the story unravels layers of local politics behind the factional wars in a remote area of the country, in which the entire system—a local militia chieftain called Gazan, the village elders in Gazan's territory, and the military commander of Aziz's battalion—lives in an interdependent chain of unstoppable violence. Each one needs the other to justify its own existence: the American funding poured into the local military gets around to the village elders, and indirectly to the insurgent forces, whom the Americans are trying to destroy. The local military commander is only interested in partially defeating the insurgents, because their total annihilation means an end to his lucrative American stream of cash. At one point,

Aziz explains his superior's business model. "In Pashto, Commander Sabir's type of war is called ghabban: this is when someone demands money for protection against a threat they create," he explains. "For this type of war, the Americans don't have a word. The only one that comes near is *racket*. Our war was a racket" (100). The story ends with Aziz, now a hardened fighter, killing Gazan, a village elder named Atal, and an American adviser, who is known by the locals as Mr. Jack. Aziz's delight at taking revenge does not last long, because he soon finds out that his action was part of a larger orchestration by his commander, Sabir, who now asks him to become the local militia chief, to fill Gazan's vacuum and continue the sham war between the insurgents and the local military to keep the American funds flowing. The protagonist, dismayed by the realization that he has become his own enemy, meets his disabled brother at the hospital for the last time before facing his doomed fate, as a pawn in the perpetual game of war.

While the choice of native narrator and the almost total eclipse of the American troops make the novel stand out in the post-9/11 veteran literature, it does share most of the key themes and questions that works like Klay's short stories exhibit. In particular, the issue of frail masculinities and the symbolic values attached to them, alongside the male familial relations—brothers, sons, and fathers—play a significant role in Ackerman's novel. He uses the cataclysmic episodes in the protagonist's relationship with his father, brother, and later, an old man who becomes a figurative father to him, to unearth the mental framework of life in war and its unrelenting impact on the characters' sense of identity and fate. The readers are introduced to *Pashtunwali*, the common ethical code of the Pashtun people of Afghanistan, which, in the absence of any modern rule of law, works as the unwritten legal framework of the society. It is nothing but a series of general principles, based on which the

uncomplicated provincial communities shape their policies. At its core are the two principles of *nang* and *badal*, the former pertains to one's sense of honour and dignity, and the latter is an act of revenge against anyone who assaults the said dignity.[33] "Once," the narrator recalls, "an older child split my lip in a fight. When my father saw this, he took me to the boy's home. Standing at their front gate, he demanded that the father take a lash to his son." This is how the young Aziz learns about the basic rules of *Pashtunwali*. "On the walk home, my father spoke to me of badal, revenge. He told me how a man, a Pashtun man, had an obligation to take badal when his nang, his honor, was challenged" (7). Long after the father's death, it is *badal* that gives meaning to the son's actions and decisions. However, his main determination for *badal*, against the local warlord, Gazan, is not for himself, but for his brother, whose injury has a particularly significant link to the theme of masculinity. The brother did not only lose a leg in the bombing, but was also castrated. "As a man," says the military recruiter in the hospital, "your brother is no longer complete" (20). It is the revenge against the deprivation of his brother's manhood that drives Aziz to join the military and, a few years later, kill Gazan; his revenge is not for a life taken or a limb lost, but for destroyed virility.

If Klay had only indirectly presented the lives and deaths of Iraqis through his American characters at pains to confront their own trauma, Ackerman traverses the minefield of mutual recognition to offer a story wholly dedicated to the American-induced trauma in daily Afghan life. In a rare note of sarcasm, the narrator, remembering the early

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[33] For a detailed account of *Pashtunwali*, its history, and its mechanism of implementation, see Benson and Siddiqui (2014), wherein the authors explain how this system of law fills the vacuum of a coercive central authority.

days of American invasion after 9/11—although he never mentions the 9/11 incident, and seems to be ignorant of, or indifferent to, it—says,

> Militants accused men of being informants and beheaded them in front of their families. Americans accused men of being militants and disappeared them in the night on helicopters. The militants fought to protect us from the Americans and the Americans fought to protect us from the militants, and being so protected, life was very dangerous. . . The merchants in the bazaar picked no side. The politics of their war never changed—survival. (12)

The very term "war" becomes quite meaningless in the context of modern Afghanistan, as the period between the end of a war and the beginning of the next is never clear; Luckhurst's problem of definition and prioritization of American post-9/11 wars looms large in this novel, too. Thus, "survival," the omnipresent theme of all trauma literature, becomes the only clear reference to understand the politics of rural Afghanistan. When Aziz ponders the ethical nature of his role in the war and concludes, "There was no cause in it except the cause of survival," one finds it hard to ignore the similarity between his attitude toward the history of violence and that of Klay's returning soldiers (85). Survival is what a veteran like Ackerman understands well, and in his hands, the story of a young man's survival within the moral framework of honour and revenge becomes the testament to the trauma to which the United States contributes directly, and also in many indirect ways. The only American character in the novel, Mr. Jack, whom Michiko Kakutani, the *New York Times* reviewer, describes as verging "on caricature: an oblivious, vaguely condescending figure who thinks money can solve everything," plays a pivotal role in connecting the

trauma of Afghanistan to the American soldier's trauma; he is the embodiment of the inclusion-exclusion narrative pattern in the novel.

The protagonist's first impression of Mr. Jack reveals the cliché of an American foreign official, who dabbles in the local culture without having any firm understanding of it. "His Pashto was like a child's. He invented unusual pronunciation for common words" (34). When the recruits were to be spread in two squads, Aziz learns they are called "Comanche" and "Tomahawk," as per request of Mr. Jack. "He had a great affection for the American West," Aziz explains. "He thought we Afghans did not understand what it meant to be named after the Indians of his country, but we understood. To us, it seemed a small but misguided sort of insult. For our tribes had never been conquered" (51). The brusque reference to the American history of colonial aggression—which brings to mind Barghouti's similar universalizing note in the previous chapter about the history of his nation's conflict with colonialism—accomplishes two goals at the same time: it lays bare the universality-within-uniqueness of the narrator's trauma, as it connects his experience to an age-old tradition of military aggression, and it also points to a key complication: in Afghanistan, the tribal life-style is only tamed but never demolished by the American forces, which highlights the futility of Mr. Jack's mission to quell the unrest that was much larger than he could fathom.

The American's death in the novel, which was not out of spite, but only a matter of contingency, lends the book's title its meaning. A Green-on-Blue casualty, in the American military parlance, is when one's troops are attacked by allies. As the colour code signifies, blue is one's own forces, red is the enemy, and green is a neutral force, which in the case of this story, indicates the Afghan military, trained and equipped by the Americans. Minutes

before killing him along with the village elder and the insurgent leader, Aziz looks at Mr.
Jack and offers an observation of his character. "I'd seen Mr. Jack many times from afar in
Shkin," he notes. "He was a sort of celebrity to me. I gladly shook his hand, but as I did my
awe for him melted away. His friendliness, American Pashto, and awkward wardrobe made
him ridiculous" (217). The narrative marks the hero's maturation via the asymmetric
commentaries he makes on the American adviser. At first, the man is a total stranger,
despite his fluency in the local language. In the end, Mr. Jack is still a misfit, but now his
halo of strangeness has faded away. He is approachable, even ridiculous, and of course,
mortal. In fact, the protagonist does not even show the slightest indication of shame,
remorse, or panic at the idea of having murdered an American official. His emotions toward
the local elder, whom he treats with a mixture of deference, pity, and prudence, and the
militia leader, is quite complicated. Regarding the latter, in particular, Aziz harbours an
animosity rooted in the *Pashtunwali* moral code, but he also realizes the man is nothing but
his (Aziz's) own predecessor. The protagonist's troublesome mixture of emotions for both
Atal and Gazan is not too far from Oedipus's surge of guilt after discovering his act of
patricide. Yet, none of this complication applies to the murdering of the American. "As for
Mr. Jack," Aziz says, "another American would surely replace him, causing little
interruption in Commander Sabir's plans." The only reflection he offers on his action,
which was technically treason, is, "And as I thought of all the ways one could be killed in
this war, and of all those who could do it, I couldn't think of a single way to die which
wasn't a green on blue. The Americans had a hand in creating all of it" (226).

Compared to Klay's stories, the balance of comedy and tragedy in Ackerman's
novel is weighted in favour of the latter. In chapter two, I explained how survival is in and

of itself evidence of the interaction between the two trajectories of tragedy and comedy. In stories of American soldiers returning home, the two trajectories are relatively easy to distinguish, because of the time lapse between them in the narrative: only after the soldier comes back must he face a tragic dénouement for the comic utopianism of his political worldview—and his personal rite of passage toward manhood. But in the story of Afghanistan under the reign of the American military, the tragedy does not strike the characters, or the readers for that matter, as a sudden realization of a silent *nemesis*. By the same token, the comic upheaval, the imaginary ascension toward a political status that transcends the vicious circle of war, is presented as an already shattered dream. In a short conversation with a low-rank member of the insurgent militia, Aziz receives this answer to his question about the man's choice of profession: "Yes, we all work in the same way," he says, referring to the war's unending loop. "But I remember when there were other ways to have a livelihood. There were other things. How we did them, I can't say, it was so long ago. I remember only that we did" (181). The comic ideal is present only in the ellipsis of memory. The old Afghan has not lost the imaginative capacity to picture his nation without war, yet he finds it almost impossible to add any detail to this vague picture of an ideal Afghanistan. As for Aziz himself, who was born during the Russian military invasion of his country, he does not have any tangible point of comparison to envision a utopia. Survival, which is basically an attempt to reconcile with tragedy and to outlive it, is, for Aziz, the boundaries of what his life is all about.

Nang and *badal*, the moral system of upholding one's dignity and restoring it, in case it is disrupted, through depriving the dignity—or life—of someone else, is itself a manifestation of the comic-tragic pattern. The ideal of honour—closely tied to masculinity,

of course—is only obtainable if its absence is imaginable. Vengeance, in this moral universe, does not necessarily have a sentimental value; one does not exact revenge out of a grudge, but from a duty to restore an unbalanced order. Therefore, the revenge one takes on another is the realization of a disinterested world order, in which a zero-sum value of collective honour is always meant to be maintained. Comedy is born within tragedy whenever a man decides to inflict any damage upon another man's *nang*, and so he upends the stability that must be then restored through a countering damage against the inflictor, which itself turns into motion the next emergence of comedy, and so on. The wheel of violence turns indefinitely, setting into motion a drama of survival. A survivor, in *Green on Blue*, is both an upholder and a violator of the tragic order. To explore the dialectic nature of the survivor's role in this narrative, we can examine one of the minor characters, an old villager named Mumtaz.

In his time residing in the village, as part of a covert operation to find Gazan's hideout, Aziz sojourns in the house of the old man, who spends his evenings retelling the stories of his youth to the young protagonist. Living alone in a decrepit house, with only a dog to keep him company, Mumtaz is also a survivor. Yet, contrary to Aziz, he has decided not to play a role in the incessant sequence of honour and vengeance, in a fraught attempt to break this cycle once and for all. "We were mujahideen and treated as heroes," he recalls. In an operation against the Russians, Mumtaz and his brother plant a mine in the road, knowing a Russian cargo would pass the next day, only to discover an Afghan truck has crossed over it in the middle of the night. The truck "was civilian and full of lumber that now burned in a pyre." The villagers get wind of who was behind the attack, and in a decision based on *badal*, require Mumtaz's family to pay a ransom for the truck and "a life

for a life" to be the *badal* for the deceased truck driver. Mumtaz's brother runs away instead of facing inevitable death in the hands of the village elders. He dies anyway a few months later, in another, almost indistinguishable, violent incident. Before leaving, Mumtaz says, "My brother grabbed the back of my neck and pulled me close to him. . . . He looked at me and spoke as if from its other side: Your badal is to take none. Break that chain. Leave the war. Care for Father" (162-65). He does as his brother implored, but at the expense of not having any family, and so not producing any heirs to carry his family honour. "There may be little to admire in my life," he opines. "I am a poor man without a family, but the war has no hold on me" (166). Mumtaz breaks the cycle of violence not only by not committing any vengeful punishment, but also through deciding not to have children. This makes him, concomitantly, a gentler person and a lesser "man."

The spectacle of Afghanistan's trauma, reflected in the mirror of the American veteran, who pursues the task of voicing the former's pains at the expense of portraying American forces as the traumatizers, is forcefully, but also problematically, revealed in *Green on Blue*. The novel's incisive style, which gives its protagonist the aura of a man who has somehow leaped from childhood to maturity, not able to afford an adolescence, provides a keyhole view into a world of calculated brutality that is at once futile and inevitable. It would be too simplistic to censure Ackerman for appropriating a foreign culture, particularly one that is all but destroyed by his compatriots in a protracted twenty-first-century styled colonialism, mostly because the novel is critically aware of its own ironic position. Mr. Jack and his doting on the symbols of the Native Americans, his absurd death, and his fungiblity, which is echoed in his rather inane and stereotypical name, is the novel's mirror-in-mirror of the war's trauma; one's painful memory is visible in the afflictions of

the other, *ad infinitum*. Without being explicitly claimed, the American writer's own war trauma is present in the narrative of the Afghan man, caught in the never-ending cycle of violence.

Nevertheless, the overtly minimal presence of the American forces showcases the limits of the novel's empathy. One may wonder what the story would look like, had Ackerman included more American characters in it. Would it overshadow the portrayal of the local Afghan characters' pains, or would it, inversely, highlight the political details of their trauma? As far as the American presence is but a caricature of an imperialistic force, the combination of a curious orientalist and a macho warrior, and as long as the historical justifications for the perennial war are sought in the primitive local laws, rather than being ingrained in the day-to-day involvement of foreign forces, Ackerman's empathetic approach runs against its own apathy for laying out the particularity of the war. It is the perpetuation of *nang* and *badal* that generate the trauma, rather than the violent aspirations for "regime change." Mirroring one's own trauma, particularly when one is the assailant and not the assailed, in the Other's painful memory, is a risky venture, morally and politically: The American soldier/writer is obviously critical of his nation's history of foreign intervention, reflected in the callous and conceited Mr. Jack, but reducing the concrete role of the United States in Afghanistan out of apathy for its cause renders the locals' pains more abstract, perhaps against the author's intention.

5.4. *Fives and Twenty-Fives*: The Interpreter's War

In portraying the Sisyphean cycle of the war, when the military verbiage of "mission" and its accomplishment become completely devoid of meaning, Michael Pitre's novel *Fives and*

Twenty-Fives offers a mixture of Klay's perspective of the American veteran returning to an alienated home, and Ackerman's representation of the local civilian stuck in an incongruous history of violence. In its rendition of the Iraq War, not just the vicious cycle of painful memories that engenders new pains, but the war in its entirety, the Operation Iraqi Freedom (as the Iraq War was officially called by the U.S.), is likened to infinite repetitions of the same scene in an imaginary horror film: Following a marine platoon in Anbar Province, tasked with the seemingly elementary job of filling the potholes on the road, formed by explosions, the reader of Pitre's debut novel realizes how this task, which is the least war-like of all the things a group of marines could do, is an allegory of the war itself. The routine job of finding the potholes, performing the visual check for any improvised explosive traps—called the "fives and twenty-fives" check—detonating the explosives that are placed within the pothole by the local insurgent groups, and then filling it with concrete, is repeated by the same platoon over and over again. The story painstakingly details how the mission was indeed dangerous, as the long processes of road construction were always fraught with potential ambushes. Yet, even in the most dangerous situations, the platoon does no more than repair roads that had been damaged by explosives, only to find the same road damaged again, in dire need of maintenance. The Sisyphus of the American war in Iraq is not punished by any deity; the tumbling boulder that he has to roll up every morning is not an existential question of his *raison d'être*. It is, nonetheless, a war with little purpose, no achievement, and immense agony. The lack of an equivalent to a divine curse for the platoon in charge of this dangerously bootless mission intensifies the traumatic cycle of tragedy and comedy. The will to change encounters the indomitable force of a disinterested order, which is not even sanctified by a god. It is a human-against-human tragedy,

nullifying the utopian ambition that was illusory in the first place. The potholes are repaired, they are shelled again, filled again, and so on. Nobody wins.

Asked after his discharge from the military, the platoon's lieutenant tries to explain his job in Iraq for a group of curious civilians: "Bombs. Insurgents planted bombs in the road. . . . Basically *re*seeding the *old* potholes. So our mission was to get rid of the bombs first, then patch." When he is asked how many potholes he filled during his entire deployment, he replies, "Six hundred and forty-seven"; and in response to the question of how many potholes had new bombs planted in them, telegraphically he says, "Six hundred forty-seven" (147). He does not mention to the curious crowd that he lost several people during these repetitive tasks. In his recollections of the mission, he silently ponders, "Every inch of that place, every grain of sand, wanted desperately to kill us" (103). The novel's narrative is driven by a combination of three perspectives: the lieutenant, who is now using his G. I. Bill fund to pursue an MBA degree; a medic corpsman, who, after witnessing too many casualties, develops an opiate addiction that leads to his dishonorable discharge from service; and, a young Iraqi man, serving as the interpreter for the marine platoon. The third of these narrators is the most fully developed, and the most paradoxical, character. The son of a once well-off engineer in Saddam Hussein's Ministry of Agriculture, the boy was enjoying a relatively happy life, finishing his English degree in University of Baghdad, when the American invasion disrupted everything. His memories of the work with American troops is dotted with insertions from his study notes on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the book on which he was planning to write a dissertation.

In order to highlight the patterns of trauma emplotment, there are two main points to discuss: the journey of the Iraqi interpreter, which features the inclusion-exclusion pattern

of emplotment, and the work's intermittent allusions to other contemporary socio-political events, particularly the unfolding of the Arab Spring, which not only complicates the legacy of American intervention in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, but also expands the political geography of ongoing traumas that are simultaneously distinct and interconnected to the Iraq War. The former issue deserves particular attention because it outlines the cycle of violence similar to Ackerman's depiction of the *Pashtunwali* codes of honour. In Pitre's novel, the faction wars between Sunnis and Shias, which were not directly engendered by the American invasion, but were revived in their bloodiest form after the political vacuum left by Saddam's death, are not abstract theological conflicts between two sets of religious beliefs. Belonging to either Ansar al-Sunnah or the Sadrist Army—the former a hardline Sunni group, and the latter a Shiite militia headed by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr—has little to do with one's personal beliefs. The young interpreter, named Kateb, who goes by the *nom de guerre* "Dodge," has no chance of escaping the factions that require his loyalty, other than taking refuge among the Americans. A fervent fan of American pop-culture, who wears t-shirts with Metallica and AC/DC logos, and used to "organize rock music shows in Baghdad for [his] university friends," is left in the rubble of the war, living clandestinely in the office of his deceased professor (166). After fleeting Baghdad with two of his friends, by a twist of fate, he comes to live with two old men. "After the first war with the Americans," says Haji Fasil, one of his two hosts, "Abu Abdul and I joined the uprising. Saddam's helicopters came and slaughtered us. We had families, then. Wives and children. All dead. I ran away. The Mukhabarat [i.e., the Baathist intelligence service] found Abu Abdul and cut out his tongue. I escaped" (165). The Iraq War in Pitre's novel, like Ackerman's Afghanistan, is but a protracted chapter in a long history of horror. Metaphoric

universalization of the Iraq War is achieved through placing the survival of the war alongside the past generation's survival from the previous chapters of collective violence. The similarity between these events—i.e., civilians are always swept up in a gargantuan war machine, or local residents become diminutive collateral damage regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations—overshadows their local differences; nonetheless, the unique trauma of the Iraqi locals becomes more striking through such comparative associations. We should also note the simultaneous allegorical and literal survival of the characters in the above anecdote. The two old men literally survived the danger of Saddam's counterinsurgency, and the one who managed to keep his tongue—and is therefore able to recount the traumatic memory—is also an allegorical survivor, in the sense that his post-traumatic recollection opens a window to the dark memories of his entire nation.

The meeting of a former resistance fighter and the son of a Baathist official is only the beginning of the fateful twists in Kateb's voyages in the novel. Kateb's father and elder brother now work for the insurgent group that is responsible for planting the roadside bombs, the very same ones that American marines are tasked with cleaning up. Kateb—whose name means "writer"—is caught in the deep web of broken loyalties and overlapping identities. An Iraqi whose passion is to read classic American fiction, who has little personal faith in the religious dogma that at least superficially gives meaning to the war, has to see himself as a traitor one way or the other. Someone has to make the bomb, and someone else must destroy it: there is little room for an interpreter to mediate between the two, as it turns out that their antagonism is not just the product of a linguistic barrier. The allegorical role of a translator, a bridge between the invaders and the locals, is highlighted in the novel through the gradual shift in responsibilities given to Kateb. When he is deployed for the first time,

his job is described as such: "Those guys over at Engineer Support shoot up a lot of cars by accident. You'll go and apologize for them" (77). Near the end of the novel, when an armed conflict that led to serious casualties for their platoon is under official investigation, among other pieces of reports, there is a transcript of the interview with Dodge. He is asked what tasks he was given by the American lieutenant when shooting broke out. "They gave me a gun," he replies. "And did you fire the weapon?" he is asked. His initial answer is recorded as "inaudible," and when pressed for a clear response, he says, "Yes. I fired the weapon" (354). He was originally employed for the single job of appeasing the locals for mistaken shootings, but ends up joining a shoot-out. His initial task to reduce the intensity of the interactions between the American troops and the Iraqi civilians turns out to be as futile as the Sisyphean mission of the platoon. The isolation of the translator, whose entire purpose in the novel was to build connections, is a clear indication of the intersecting trajectories of tragedy and comedy. The plotline initially progresses in an inclusive course of coexistence between the foreign soldiers and the native residents, supposedly facilitated by a local interpreter. In the end, however, the tragic *nemesis* that undoes the utopian vision of camaraderie is the ill-fated task of interpretation.

Thinking about how easily he could have been killed by a local Shiite militia team, which overnight captured the local outpost that previously belonged to a Sunni faction, Kateb muses over the last line of "Dover Beach": "I remembered my Matthew Arnold and smiled. *Where ignorant armies clash by night*" (135). The clashes in *Fives and Twenty-Fives* are haphazard and deadly, yet the darkness of their operation is not illuminated by the young interpreter's attempt to clarify each side's position to the other. Inversely, it is Kateb who is in serious need of rectification. He is not a latter-day Arnold, observing the

emblematic brutalities of the world from a safe distance. Kateb personifies the converse condition of Klay's PsyOps veteran: Instead of an Arab-American caught in the web of collective belongings in his personal war against the Iraqis, he is an Iraqi in desperate flight from his compatriots, who in several occasions intended to kill him. But he is no less afflicted by similar agonies of trespassing the boundaries of his collective identity and, as a survival tactic, constantly re-inventing himself. Kateb's first appearance in the novel is highlighted by a rejection letter from the American Bureau of Consular Affairs, informing him that his visa request is denied because there is no record of his service to the U.S. Armed Forces that could verify his status as an interpreter (27). As the story progresses, it is revealed that the problem is because of Kateb's angry departure from the platoon, without being officially discharged. He had left the Americans after the fight alongside them became unbearable.

The story's pattern of universality-uniqueness in trauma emplotment is perceptible also in the direct metonymic reference to the early uprisings in the Arab world that would soon be called the Arab Spring. Weary of his circumstances in Iraq, and hopeless for a chance to travel to the United States, Kateb desperately flees to other Arab countries, tries in vain to change his accent, and pretends to be Syrian. He finds a temporary place in Tunisia exactly when the street protests against the Tunisian President Ben-Ali are reaching its climax. Eventually, he is dragged into the streets among the crowd of protestors, and in spite of his disbelief in the ongoing revolution, starts helping the other young Arabs with the distribution of the news about the protests. "They see me and call out. Our friend, they say. He is Iraqi and has seen much worse than this," Kateb says, recalling the reaction of his Tunisian friends. "Our Iraqi friend speaks perfect English. . . . He can talk to Western

journalists should we find any" (162). While this scene is reminiscent of the final episode of

Sayed Kashua's novel in the previous chapter, whereby the Palestinian is deemed a valuable

asset by the Israeli media for his ability to bridge a linguistic gap, in the case of the Iraqi

translator, the bilingual prowess offers a singular moment of metonymic association

between two histories of violence in the contemporary Middle East. The link between the

Iraq War and the Tunisian uprising is the traumatized man, whose complex history of

communal identification is evaded in favor of his ability to be a translator. Throughout the

story, Kateb comes to assume two names, walks the fine line between two identities, and

finally, far from his homeland, lives two different lives: in his own privacy, he is still the

student trying to finish a thesis on Mark Twain, and on the streets, he is a veteran

interpreter, who unwillingly helps the protestors in their communication with the

international media. "Always," he says, "I am speaking English on behalf of fools" (209).

Pitre's parallel accounts of the American veterans ruminating over a painful war

that, redundantly and absurdly, amounted to nothing more than filling six hundred potholes,

and the plight of an Iraqi, who was forced to witness his nation fractured beyond repair and

his own life turned into a sequence of survivor tales, use both the narrative strategies of

Klay in depicting the soldiers' homecoming, and Ackerman's approach of representing the

war's Other. His narrative of the war expands the possibilities of tracing the post-9/11 wars'

trauma: he places the American invasion of Iraq in the middle of a long chain of political

disasters that had started years ago, and still continue to develop. The reverberations of

Brian Turner's poetry are audible in Pitre's narrative—whether he has actually read those

poems or not—as the reader notices the sensitivity of a soldier/writer in portraying the

traumatizers who are also traumatized. The movement of post-9/11 veteran fiction in

America is still an ongoing project, and in the years to come we may see a broadening of the themes and topics that it covers. The next books by these writers may approach other subjects, which are topically relevant to the American wars in the Middle East; the scope of veteran's literature can grow to include many of the long-term consequences of military interventions of the United States. Yet, with all their topical variations, these narratives offer a coherent account of a political trauma through the same tripartite dialectical patterns of trauma emplotment.

Conclusion

Trauma, the disruptive pain that does not heal by itself and leaves an indelible mark on one's memory, has been extended in the past decades to describe abruptly horrific experiences on the social level. The problems in investigating trauma, as this project's three national cases testify, are partly due to the fact that traumatic memories can be seen as both perilous and cherishable, as they can outline a history of pain, but also that of positive struggle. We are now well beyond any debates over the authenticity of traumatic experiences, not because our contemporary era is particularly more laden with violence and horror than any previous times, but because as a phenomenological framework to understand the politics of pain, trauma is introduced and incorporated in the public discourse, and it offers a powerful rhetoric to express a wide range of perceived horrors. Noting that narration of trauma contains innately incorrigible paradoxes, particularly around the question of representation, I examined how the politics of traumatic remembrance affects the poetics of its emplotment, and vice versa. Focusing on the central figure of the survivor, who embodies the most fundamental dialectical opposition in the narration of trauma, I explored the different political trajectories within contemporary world literature. The examples from Iranian post-war narratives showcase a clear pattern of hegemonic expropriation, in which the mytho-historical religious traditions and the modern anti-imperialist sentiments contribute to an apologetic representation of a recent war.

The case of Palestinian literature after the Oslo Accords demonstrates a history of accumulated trauma, which complicates the pivotal position of survivors, as they carry the burden of their own traumatic experiences and that of their proclaimed, but not yet fully realized, nation. The American veterans' narratives of the two post-9/11 wars add another level of complication to the matter of trauma emplotment's politics. These narratives are noteworthy not only because of the already dominant hegemonic status of their nation regarding the traumatic experiences, which was nonexistent in the other two cases, but also because of their own problematic approach to wartime experience. The stories' oscillation between the critique of the wars and the attempt at reclamation through empathy with the enemy, which is not always successful, makes a case in delineating a crucial aspect of the survivor's role in emplotment, namely, the recognition's limits.

There are many possible directions to extend this study. There is no shortage of political histories of pain in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—the ethnic clashes in the Balkans during the 1990s, the ongoing war in Syria, the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar, the history of genocide in Rwanda, the U.S. intervention in Latin American nations during the Cold War and its establishment of local dictatorships, and so on. The narrative framework offered in this study is not overly rigid in its applicability for different political contexts. Indeed, part of the goal of introducing this framework has been to allow the minutiae of each historical condition to be expressed in detail, so that the final analysis of each case of traumatic experience will be embedded in its own particular settings. As explored in the first chapter, the concept of trauma has been fraught with so many irreconcilable difficulties that any theoretical perspective offered for its explanation has to achieve a relative comprehensibility through a systematic omission of

some of its aspects. This was the reason my project tended to steer away from any direct attempt at defining trauma in general, and instead focused on its dynamics of narration. The underlying notion behind this study is that it is possible to detect sets of similar configurations in the process of selecting, arranging, and prioritizing memories of violence and pain, on both the individual and the collective levels, while maintaining enough flexibility to avoid the implication that all trauma narratives are similar, regardless of their local politics.

The most fundamental of the three dialectical patterns, and the one that effectively engenders the other two, is that of tragedy and comedy. As explained in the second chapter, and exemplified in detail in chapters three to five, the narrator of trauma builds an anticipation for redemption or reclamation within a trajectory of demise and decline. Stories of trauma are neither entirely tragic nor fully comic, yet they offer an intersection of the downward and upward vectors of these two basic plot patterns. The dialectical interaction of tragic and comic plot modes leads to a clear appraisal of the axis of trauma narrative, which is the survivor. I also explained how the character of survivor becomes the locus of simultaneous allegorical and literal readings, which makes the case for a complicated inclusion and exclusion of collective identities in interpretation of the trauma's scope and belonging. The three large-scale national histories of trauma demonstrate how the politics of belonging—whether ethnic, racial, religious, or gender—works its way through the emplotment of traumatic memories.

As briefly mentioned in the third chapter, the Iraqi side of the Iran-Iraq War is thematically pertinent to this project, and the only reason I refrained from including it was to ensure the scope of my work does not surpass the limits of a doctoral dissertation.

Furthermore, a study of the Iraqi war narratives can bridge the discussions of my third and fifth chapters. The majority of works in the contemporary literature of Iraq, particularly the recent ones, do not restrict their narrative focus to the war against Iran, but broaden it to include the American invasion in 1991 and the much larger campaign in 2003. While the country is still grappling with ongoing episodes of mass violence, and its political stability is far from secure, it is nothing short of amazing how fast the Iraqi literature is growing. One example, which can be studied in future extensions of this project, is the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Ahmed Saadawi, 2013), winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction—informally known as the Arabic Booker. It narrates the gothic-inspired tale of a man, who collects body parts of the bombing victims in Baghdad to create a synthetic creature. The clear reference to Mary Shelley's novel and the politically ingenious twist, as it turns out that the creature hunts his murderers—or more exactly, those who murdered the previous owners of his body parts—make the novel a suitable case to analyze the poetics and politics of trauma emplotment. Another recent novel is *The President's Gardens* (Muhsin al-Ramli, 2012, trans. 2017), which recounts the epic tale of three Iraqi childhood friends, from their engagement in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, until their traumatic lives, and mysterious deaths, in the aftermath of the American invasion in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The book, noted for its political frankness in depicting the ordinary lives of Iraqi citizens, is informed by the author's own traumatic history, as a few of the narrated events resemble his own personal ordeals—that author's brother, for instance, was executed by Saddam Hussein in 1990 (Yassin-Kassab).

Another possible future direction for this study is to extend it not by exploring other geopolitical cases or national histories of trauma, but by expanding the scope of study over

different media. This study focused on narration within the strictly defined form of print media, particularly novels, memoirs, and short stories. But there is no theoretical or methodological obstacle to extending the findings and approaches of this study to the analysis of cinema, television, social media, and other forms of public expression. All three cases of traumatic histories of Iran, Palestine, and the U.S. have produced a large body of cinematic works in response to the memories of violence. While I have only briefly alluded to a few examples outside narrative print literature, there are many works of trauma narrative in the medium of film, which can be analyzed using the same theoretical framework I have introduced and implemented in this project.

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