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American and Iraqi Prose Fiction of the Iraq War: Traumas of the Self, Traumas of the Nation

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

War is so omnipresent in our contemporary world that the story of war is too important to be left to fiction writers to frame and give meaning for. This dissertation provides an analysis of two dominant patterns in contemporary Iraqi and American prose fictional representations of the Iraq War: the individualistic trauma hero narrative and the nationalistic, collective narrative. I argue that the trauma hero myth that dominates American representations of the Iraq War psychologizes and de-politicizes war experience alienating the victim of trauma by decontextualizing their experience and negating the Other. On the other hand, the sweeping nationalistic narrative in Iraqi war writing overstates the political dimension of the war experience of Iraqis, representing them as collectivities under war, which negates their individual experiences as mere trajectories for the collective trauma of the nation. These two narrative patterns epistemologically disserve readers by mystifying war and framing war experience according to different ideological agenda. Examining the Iraqi and American literary traditions of war writing before and after 2003, the dissertation contextualizes the development of these patterns exposing their discursive limitations. Reading Iraqi and American narratives of the Iraq War against each other provides a comparative understanding of the war experience from opposite sides. In addition to reading the texts as narratives and counternarratives of certain ideological constructions of the war story, I examine texts that exemplify these patterns and others that oppose and undermine them creatively. I read selected novels and short story collections that represent civilian and military people's perspectives on the war. I find similar tropes, stereotypes and some genuine intercultural connections in the texts and the cultures they come from. The study highlights how this literature can help veterans and non-military individuals navigate their war traumas and restore their sense of identity and meaning to their

lives. However, I stress the critical drawback of indulging in cultures that perpetuate trauma and alienate individuals to serve the existing power structures. Studying the literature of the Iraq War comparatively is necessary for a cross-cultural understanding of the human experience of war and for a productive cultural conversation to emerge.

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Chapter One

Introduction

"We have walked, walked and walked for war.
A lover defending his beloved...
That's how the Iraqi when he falls in love,
He would die so that no aggressor touches his beloved..."

(A popular Iraqi song from the 1980s War, my translation)

"After the war the boy, now a veteran and a man, returns to the world of peace haunted by his experience, wracked by the central compulsion of trauma and atrocity: the struggle between the need to bear witness to his shattering encounter with violence, and the compulsion to repress it...

The truth of war, the veteran comes to learn, is a truth beyond words, a truth that can only be known by having *been there*, an unspeakable truth he must bear for society.

So goes the myth of the trauma hero."

Roy Scranton "The Trauma Hero"

"All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory".

Viet Thanh Nguyen

In a controversial essay published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* in 2015, Roy Scranton, a scholar and a veteran of the Iraq war attacks what he calls the "trauma hero myth" that dominates American war literature. This myth entails a narrative pattern that essentializes the personal trauma of combat of a (white) American male hero around whom the entire story of war is narrated, erasing the traumas of (female and non-American) others. Reviewing books such as Chris Kyle's *American Sniper*, Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, Phil Klay's *Redeployment* and other popular narratives of the Iraq war, Scranton attributes their moral and literary "failure" to "all the readers and citizens who expect veterans to play out for them the ritual fort-da of

trauma and recovery, and to carry for them the collective guilt of war. Such an expectation is the privilege of those who can afford to have others do their killing for them" ("The Trauma Hero"). He traces this "myth" to the Romantics, following its manifestations in English and American war literature through writings of the two World Wars, the Vietnam War and Iraq. He undermines the economy of war as "sentimental education" for the innocent American hero who comes to know the "unknowable" truth of war by being there, turning his experience into a narrative that navigates his trauma through remembering and re-presenting war in a narrative fiction. This turning of the "conformist service comedy into a shoot-and-cry narrative," to quote critic Jim Holston, "not only keeps the [military ideological] machine functioning but appropriates the suffering of its primary victims" (5). Myth, according to Roland Barthes is "constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things in it" (142), it is "depoliticized speech" (142), a "pure ideological system" (126). As an ideological system, the myth of the traumatized hero de-historicizes war and secures consent and public support for the powers behind it.

Epistemologically, the trauma hero myth essentializes the soldier's experience as the only way to know war and restricts the agency to speak about it to those who have experienced it personally. This "fetishization of experience," as David Buchanan calls it (15), negates and marginalizes the traumas of others, alienating the soldier by mystifying and depoliticizing his or her experience. If the experience is unspeakable, the individual soldier cannot communicate his/her trauma or empathize with the traumas of others. He/she is left to deal with it him/herself. Similar to the predicament of the individual under capitalism, this alienation of the soldier in relation to military ideology is compensated by subscribing to a larger narrative, the national myth." For the reader of war literature, national myths are "scripts for action." Their "heroes model a political response to crisis which the [reader] is invited to emulate—or at least consent

to" (Slotkin 2). Instead of looking at the big picture and making an informed understanding of the war he/she has experienced, it isolates his/her ordeal as a personal, idiosyncratic, uncommunicable experience that the soldier has to face individually.

"Military violence," according to Richard Slotkin, has a "regenerative power to the myth of the American nation" (15). Indeed, the dominant mythic narrative of mainstream American culture makes war central to the Americans' image of themselves (Rehm 10). This narrative pattern, Scranton argues, turns the perpetrator soldier into a victim, privileging those who fight American wars with the agency to represent themselves and shape their function in the collective memory of the American people. The trauma hero myth creates genre expectations that drive readers to look for the mystique and thrill of war and its horrors. These expectations create among audience and writers a thirst for "what it was like," instead of why, in the first place, the war happens. Scranton calls for a multifocal representation of war that questions its politics and includes the voice of the Other. Juxtaposing American soldiers' narratives with those of Iraqi civilians can promote empathy and understanding (Haytock). This juxtaposition of different experiences of the same war is necessary to turn the discussion about war and trauma into a cultural conversation instead of the dominant mode of complaining over the traumatized soldier victims and the intensification of their traumas by the society to which they return. This inclusion of literature that considers the cost of war from the Other's viewpoint transforms the discourse about the war "from an American monologue into a conversation among many equals," to quote Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh Nguyen (158). This intercultural conversation of war, trauma and war literature is what motivates the current study.

War has been a constant living experience for me personally. The personal hopes, illusions and disappointments that accompanied the 2003 War shape my understanding of the

political life in Iraq before, during, and after that war. Coming from Iraq where I have lived the experience of war and dictatorship firsthand, I try not to minimize this personal aspect in the discourse around the war that I enter. However, the story of this war is not simply personal, just like the traumas articulated in the texts that I study do not strictly belong to their writers. Cathy Caruth rightly claims that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (*Unclaimed* 24). This implication of the traumas of the other is what motivates this comparative intervention in the academic discourse over the literary representations of the Iraq War. However, I claim that the personal motive in the arguments I articulate in this dissertation aligns with the critical viewpoints I raise and defend.

The critical conversation that Scranton, Buchanan and others have started is directed against a growing body of literary and cultural representations of the Iraq war that reproduce and essentialize the trauma hero narrative. Most of this literature is written by veterans and/ or embedded journalists who accompanied the occupying forces. This literature is encouraged by mainstream American cultural institutions such as the National Endowment of the Arts and MFA college writing programs. The problem with this rising genre is that instead of reflecting on the American experience of the Iraq War by allowing Americans to understand the nuances of this war and learn from it, the genre mystifies this war as an unknowable individual experience alienating and gendering the American subject and negating the existence of the Other. The mystification of war is even made more emphatic in many narratives as they invest in "military pornography" (Peeble 25) that fetishizes thrilling violence and redeems war as a likable experience. Hence the invitation (by Scranton and others) to open the dialogue about the war to

engage Iraqi voices in the conversation over the cultural and intellectual lessons of the war on their country.

This invitation was met recently by the translation of several important texts by emerging and established Iraqi authors into English. Works such as Ahmed Sadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2018), Hassan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition* (2016) and *Iraq+100*, In'aam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* (2010), Ali Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* (2011), Muhsin al-Ramli's *The President Gardens* (2017), Lu'ay Hamza Abbas' *Closing His Eyes* (2013), Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2014) and *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019) represent a rising wave in translation that no generation of Iraqi literature has seen before. These translated works are only a sample of an influx of fictional narratives in Iraq after 2003, the majority of which focuses on war and revisits the recent history of the country before, during and after it. After 2003, prose fiction emerges as one of the main cultural media to preserve the memories of the past and to imagine possibilities for the future of the country. Mostly, Iraqi representations of the war are openly political. The traumas of war in Iraq have usually been represented as collective disasters for the nation. Fictional narratives express the anxiety of an age of political transformation and overlapping ideologies. Individual stories do feature in these narratives, but they are mostly trajectories for collective national traumas. Representations of violence, terror and individual suffering are generally dominant. The tendency to exhibit and expose violence, to "open the wound" and leave it open, so to speak, is a common trope among post 2003 war narratives. While this seems natural in post-conflict societies, overemphasizing victimhood narratives naturalizes violence and horror and feeds into a culture of masochistic pornography of violence and trauma. This influx of Iraqi prose fictional representations of the war characteristically differs from American accounts of the war due to

cultural and practical/factual reasons. However, the two literatures of war share significant thematic and formal similarities that need to be studied. Questions of collective and individualistic constructions of identity, gender, and relationship to space and the environment dominate narratives of war in the two countries. These common themes, the differences and similarities in their representations to the trauma of the War need to be discussed before a fair and creative cultural "conversation among equals" can be pursued.

This dissertation examines prose fictional representations of the Iraq War by American and Iraqi writers. I argue that this body of literature epistemologically mystifies and depoliticizes war by psychologizing the experience of trauma on one hand and depersonalizing the suffering of individuals by rendering them into collectivities on the other. The refraining from politics in American war narratives; and the overemphasis of the political in the Iraqi narratives of the same war both involve discursive and rhetorical limitations. These seemingly opposite tendencies in American and Iraqi war literature participate in creating a culture of trauma and victimhood that renders war mysterious and unavoidable. They focus on war as a spectacle, thrilling, horrible and inevitable reality. This normalization of war essentializes gender constructions that develop because of it and normalizes the destruction it causes to the environment and to people's sense of identity. Read against each other, the texts show significant insights to the experience of war, but also grave discursive limitations. The two literary patterns of representations serve the dominant ideologies and alienate the subject (the self) by isolating her experience into individual trauma that she has to live with in one case; and by prioritizing collective narratives of national identity that marginalizes individual identity in the other.

The argument can be divided into a set of sub-arguments. I read the refraining from political criticism of the war as a response to the dominant culture of trauma and PTSD

narratives in the United States; and the erasure of the individual in Iraqi narratives as a manifestation to the failure of the national project. I argue that psychoanalytical trauma theory, in spite of its limitations, can help shed critical lights on the experiences of the soldiers *and* the other "real" victims of the Iraq War, (i.e., Iraqi women, children and other civilians) *only* if it opens up to other economic, social and political dimensions of the experience. However, the culture of trauma these texts derive from and (re)create delimits the potential for understanding war and activism against war culture by rendering war into a traumatic personal experience for the traumatized self. To deconstruct the binary of perpetrator/victim, a more political criticism of war as a military-capitalist enterprise is necessary. In addition to being fair to the traumas of those civilians, such criticism reads soldiers' experiences too as traumas of the political war enterprise. In addition to that, I argue that by presenting war as a journey to manhood on one hand and by identifying women with the motherland on the other, these narratives replicate the notion of the masculinity of war and negation of women whose traumas get marginalized or erased. Men, too, are gendered and alienated in war. Their constructed masculinity dictates the way they respond to trauma. They usually project their alienation, anxiety and vulnerability on others. This can be done by a discursive-analytic reading to the roles of female characters in the narratives of the Iraq War. Finally, I read space as a signifier of trauma in war. Buildings get destroyed in war, with all the memories they signify, all their material and non-material significance, affecting people's sense of their places in the world. Cities get changed, erased and/or reshaped. The individual's relationship to space is necessary to negotiate her sense of identity and meaning of her experiences. For soldiers, space is usually an Other, an abstraction of war and the enemy, for non-combatant victims of war, traumatized space, so to speak, indicates the erasure of identity. The destruction of cities and buildings marks the collapse of the unifying

national myth. Hence, the need for a discussion of the (mis)representation of space in traumatic narratives or how space becomes a traumatic agent for othering and alienation, a factor of the trauma experience itself. These sub-arguments make the body of my critical reading of the selected texts. To deal with these questions and to establish my argument within existing intellectual debates, I introduce my theoretical kit now.

The emerging body of literary representations of the war in Iraqi and American prose fiction merits a discursive analysis of its dominant patterns and its underlining discursive agenda. This study engages the subject of trauma by interconnecting several theoretical approaches due to the interdisciplinary nature of the questions that compose the argument above and the rhetorical energies that dominate the studied texts. This dissertation is informed by a selective body of theoretical approaches that, put together, can illuminate the texts I am reading and shed some critical light on their rhetorical (mis)functions and discursive limitations. I intersect general discursive and rhetorical analysis of the texts with Marxian and post/neocolonial criticism of the imperial culture of the age that contextualize them. This approach is necessary due to the geopolitical nature of the Iraq war as a neocolonial intervention, “a variation on an old colonial theme” (Evans, Emitt 47). This macro-political reading is enhanced by a micro-political analysis of the subjugation of the body in the selected texts, a reading that benefits from Foucauldian biopolitics and feminist criticism in general. By biopolitics, Foucault means systems of supervision, interventions and regulatory controls over the population and the human body that developed in Europe in the last two centuries. The power over life and death that distinguished the sovereign in the past “was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life... Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the

beginning of an era of "biopower" (Foucault *History of Sexuality V. I*, 139-140). The concept of biopolitics is important to the understanding of texts that represent the subjugation of the body to the discourse of war. As “the central activity of war is injuring and the central goal in war is to out-injure the opponent” (Scarry12), Foucault’s concept of biopolitics gives a name to the exercise of power over the lives of human subjects. The concept concretizes the abstract discourse of power by focusing on its physical and biological implications on the human body.

The reading I propose is not simply to prove these texts as examples of this or that theory, but to shed more critical light on the texts and the “genre” or current they represent as well as to use them to evaluate the theory and question its applicability beyond its cultural context. Ultimately, the dissertation aspires to perform a meta-criticism to the very theoretical premises of the culture and theory of war trauma in the United States and the theorization for a nationalistic literature in Iraq by engaging interdisciplinary approaches and theories. Exposing ideology is a big part of what this study is about. While speaking about ideology in a politically charged medium/genre like war writing is not original, putting contemporary texts from different contexts with different, opposing ideologies can expose the limitations of the genre/mode of war writing and illustrates the changing nature of ideological literary media, in addition to the primary goal of providing a critical reading to the studied texts. Because of the texts’ investment in a culture of trauma, I start by introducing and discussing psychological trauma theory.

By “war trauma theory,” I mean the Euro-American tradition of thinking about war in terms of its psychological impact on individuals, a tradition that goes back to romantic constructions of individualism in European thought and later to the developments in psychological and psychoanalytic studies. Recently, the study of war literature has been dominated by the study of psychological trauma or/and PTSD. The concept of *trauma* originally

refers to a “bodily wound” in ancient Greek (Ward, 3). In recent cultural studies, it refers to the psychoanalytic concept signifying a wound inflicted on the mind, not the body (Caruth 3). In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Sigmund Freud discusses the psychological effects of war relating the recurrence of nightmares among WWI veterans to a tendency to go back and process the repressed feelings of fear and shock delayed and repressed at the critical time of combat. Freud’s treatment of “shell-shocked” veterans displays a pattern resembling the “traumatic neurosis” of people going through life-threatening incidents (6). The suffering of a “grave physical and motor symptoms” that follows encountering a catastrophic situation or a “shocking incident” was described as “post-traumatic Syndrome” (Caruth 16). Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations” and other symptoms (11). Communicating trauma authentically is impossible, is beyond the ability of language, which creates a crisis of representation. The truth of trauma can be found in the ellipses, the silences and the blank spots of the constructed narrative of the traumatized. As Elaine Scarry puts it: “pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4). Trauma, unlike pain, last longer and is retrospective not immediate. The traumatic event resists the victim’s ability to communicate because of the urgent need to avoid or ease it. Upon revisiting the traumatic event afterward through constructive, narrative memory, language can provide a vehicle for communicating and or representing trauma. Rereading Freud’s discussion of trauma through post-structural theory, Caruth proposes a cultural trauma theory arguing against the “political and ethical paralysis” (10) of contemporary theory and criticism. The integration of trauma studies, she argues, will bring theory back to the real, to the more effective and ethical understanding of history and culture. She contends that personal and collective histories are

impossible without trauma. History, she conceives, is “inherently traumatic” (Craps, 1). Huge cultural shocks like war can be forgotten, but as traumas, they remain latent in the traumatized collective unconscious. Necessary as it is for the formation of identity, remembering the traumatic past, if ever possible, is constructive and representational. Memory reconstructs an image, represents a trace of the traumatic event, not the “reality” of the trauma. Critic Ruth Leys insists that “memory conceived as truth-telling is overestimated… but memory conceived as narration is crucial” (118). Literary representations of trauma are examples of constructive imagining of traumatic experiences that formulate identity. Like any formation of identity, trauma narratives allow for multiple myths to be part of the fictional story of the self and the other.

Narrative language is therefore necessary for representing trauma. Language (read: literature) communicates through metaphors and associations. If it is imperfect as a human communication medium it is still one of the only authentic means to communicate pain and traumatic experiences proximately. As Jefferey Alexander puts it:

> Much as these memory residues surface through free association in psychoanalytic treatment, they appear in public life through the creation of literature… It should not be surprising, then, that literary interpretation, with its hermeneutic approach to symbolic patterns, has been offered as a kind of academic counterpart to the psychoanalytic intervention (6).

Literature and psychoanalysis both approach trauma through language. This linguistic approach registers the trauma experience as both collective and idiosyncratic experience at the same time: literature as the medium to approach the collective imaginary of the (writer’s) people; and psychoanalysis as a scientific approach to fathom the traumatized mind. By synchronizing the two mediums/systems of knowledge, and by informing the conversation with larger structural frames of understanding the human experience, psychoanalysis and literature can help illuminate

the multivalent, nuanced phenomenon of war as experienced and communicated by individuals. Nancy Hollander contends that “psychoanalysis can help to explain the impact of trauma and the convergence of ideological distortion and unconscious defenses that reinforce the bystander phenomenon and compromise the functioning of a healthy democracy” (158). With all its hermeneutic and therapeutic potential, psychoanalysis alone cannot solve our problems according to Marxian critic Fredric Jameson, “there are, one would think, far more damaging things to be said about our social system than are available through the use of psychological categories” (*Postmodernism* 13). Indeed, psychoanalysis can be liberating and transformative if it accounts for both the political, the social *and* the “unconscious dynamics” of the traumatic experience. Indeed, subjectivity is constituted of the interplay between the psychic and social reality, “the imaginary dimensions of the unconscious, on the one hand, and the socio-symbolic order, on the other” (Hollander 158). Hence the need to enlarge the scope and perspective of trauma theory to include more structural factors and phenomena that are equally traumatic.

Collective wounds and disasters construct collective or cultural traumatic responses. Cultural traumas are “processes of meaning making and attribution, a contentious contest in which various individuals and groups struggle to define a situation and to manage and control it” (Eyerman “Social Theory” 43). They are “discursive process[s] where the emotions which are triggered by a traumatic occurrence are worked through and an attempt is made to heal the collective wound" (Ibid 43-44). Literature is essentially useful in this process of re-narration. Works of fiction and the visual arts are especially important in articulating and communicating a form of experience that had been made invisible, (Ibid 49). “Carrier groups” (Alexander 11) are important in the processes of narrativization and memory-making of the traumatic event. These groups create an interpersonal space of solidarity among traumatized individuals and

collectivities. Jeffery Alexander, borrowing the term from Max Weber, defines carrier groups as "the collective agents of the trauma process. He maintains that as witnesses to the trauma Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests, they are situated in particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims—for "meaning-making"—in the public sphere. "Carrier groups may be elites, but they may also be denigrated and marginalized classes. A carrier group can be generational… It can be national, pitting one's own nation against a putative enemy. It can be institutional, representing one particular social sector or organization against others in a fragmented and polarized social order" (Alexander 11).

From a critical postcolonial view, trauma theory, in general, is criticized as blindly attentive mainly for "Western" experiences of trauma and based on essentialist definitions inherent to Western culture and European modernity. This restriction of the concept of cultural trauma marginalizes non-western experiences (Craps, 2), annexing them to the mainstream "Western" understanding of what trauma means. This "moral travesty" of distinguishing between victims to "our"/ "us" or "Western," and "them" or "non-Western" is characteristic, for example, of the huge body of trauma studies applied to the Holocaust victims, compared to non-Western traumas. In fact, the field of trauma studies is, in part, an offshoot of Holocaust and Jewish studies that fails to move beyond "Western" standards of victimhood.[1] As a system of knowledge, trauma theory is a product of a power-knowledge community nexus.[2] Indeed, "the question is not whether someone actually is a victim of trauma but how the criteria for deciding who is a victim come into being and who manages them." (Laqueur 19). Postcolonial criticism to trauma theory takes different forms and focus points, but its main strain is the attempt to stretch the critical spectrum of trauma theory to include other traumas and to lessen the stress on (Euro-American) essentialisms. Stef Craps, in P*ostcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2012)

highlights the marginalization of nonwestern and minority traumatic experiences in trauma studies. He criticizes "trauma theory's general blindness to or lack of interest in, the traumas visited upon members of non-Western cultures" (11–12) calling for "rethinking trauma studies from a postcolonial perspective and providing nuanced readings of a wide variety of narratives of trauma and witnessing from around the world" (127). Although this shortcoming has been overcome by increasing inclusion of other traumas into trauma theory by Caruth and other critics recently, the culture of trauma this theory has created essentializes Western norms and experiences.

Views on trauma range from impossibility of communicating trauma according to Caruth and other "memitic" (Clark 6) readings of traumatic experiences to others that hold trauma and its narrativization not only communicable but also having a therapeutic potential (Clark 7). Theories of trauma and literature that perpetuate its therapeutic capacity encourage a culture of trauma-based approach to war that delimits structural and political understanding of war experience. Individual traumas remain the mainstream model for theoretical and practical trauma studies. Except for Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), postcolonial thinkers have rarely dealt in-depth with psychological aspects of war trauma.

In his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon speaks of the difficulties of applying Western psychiatry to colonized patients, criticizing the business of psychiatric treatment in colonized Algiers as a "pacifying attempt to "cure" the native, "to make him thoroughly a part of a social background of the colonial type" (250). Fanon uses his "field" experience of the dehumanizing effects of French colonialism of Algiers on his "patients" or analysands to inform his general knowledge of the cultural and political effects of colonialization over the Algerians and other colonized "peoples." Following Carl Marx, Fanon calls for national intellectuals to connect to

the unorganized lower classes of society to politicize and activate them. Combining psychoanalytical insights of the individual psyche and the collectivist Marxist mobilization rhetoric, he calls for solidarity among the colonized as a response to the negation and alienation of the subject under colonialism.

The actual engagement with the question of trauma in the colonial experience is in Fanon's fifth chapter "Colonial War and Mental Disorder" in which he inserts psychoanalytical descriptions and notes of specific case studies of "traumatized" persons. Cases of French settlers, soldiers and policemen treated by Fanon along with Algerian prisoners, rebels, and laypeople are narrated in that chapter. He differentiates between the effect of conventional warfare and colonial wars on individuals. Colonialism practices "a systematic negation of the other," denying the colonized "all attributes of humanity" (250). Decolonization for Fanon is a violent cultural, political and social response to the trauma of colonialism. "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force." The use of violence "rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (94).

At the collective, public level, Fanon speaks of decolonization as a unifying process for the colonized people on a national basis. His critique of colonialism extends to criticize national rhetoric of the postcolonial nations. The nation he speaks of is born out of the anti-colonial struggle. While colonialism separates and divides, the violent anti-colonial struggle unites colonized people and brings them together. It involves the "liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism" (94). Violence continues with the "young" independent nation," which "evolves during the first years in an atmosphere of the battlefield, " (95).

Although Fanon does not use the term trauma or the concept of PTSD specifically in his writing, the focus for him and for the postcolonial school of criticism, in this regard, is the

deconstruction of the political rhetoric of psychoanalytic (trauma) studies as part of the power/knowledge complex that dominates Western thought and scholarship. Building on Fanon's view of European psychiatry as a "pacifying attempt to 'cure' the native," this dissertation is an attempt to decolonize trauma studies in the United States that highlight the traumas of the perpetrators and erase the colonized other, providing a critical postcolonial reading of the culture of trauma that I consider epistemologically violent.

To historicize the narratives that I study in this dissertation, one cannot ignore the overarching context of (late) capitalism that defines the material and ideological frame in which they are produced. Marxist criticism comes handy especially that I am focusing on one of the key relationships in Marxist thinking—that of the individual to the society run and controlled by capitalism. I argue that the concept of the individual which is a key concept to the experience of trauma as represented by the texts I examine is an ideological construction. This does not mean that individuals do not exist, but that the constructed identity of individualism is an ideological "*interpellation or hailing*" (Althusser 190 italics in the original) of the subject who is always-already subjugated to ideology. Simply put, interpellation is the demand, the call, the hail or the expectation that society/ideology inflict on the subject. One of the earliest definitions of ideology is Marx and Engels' famous description of the concept as the ruling class consciousness (xx), that falsely represents the social reality to which a people or a society belong. Later Marxists develop the definition of ideology as the 'false consciousness' of the lower classes in their subscription to the ruling class' worldview. According to Slavoj Žižek, the concept of ideology implies, a "constitutive naivete: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it" (Žižek *Sublime* 24). Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

uses the concept of "hegemony" to describe the domination of the ruling class ideology over the population by their consent. Hegemonic relationships differ from oppressive rule. For the purpose of this study, this difference can highlight a key difference between pre2003 Iraqi war literature and its American counterpart. Hegemony functions by having the subjects subscribe by their will to the ideology of the ruler. This happens by manipulation of the subject's consciousness by non-repressive apparatuses that structuralist Marxist thinker Louis Althusser (1918-1990) calls Ideological State Apparatuses (242). Literature, the education system, the communication media are some examples of these apparatuses. War literature in cultures where individualism leads is a space for bestowing fictional agency on the subject. These key concepts of Marxian criticism enable a better reading of individualistic tendencies in American trauma narratives. Individualism may result in a sense of "illusion of empowerment among the otherwise disempowered" (Greene 118). Individualistic myths like the trauma hero narrative alienates the subjects as the predicament is their private affair. Ideologies of individualism that dominate American culture "serve to reconcile structural strain" (Greene 120) deflecting the attention from more structural causes of social and political problems and creating a disengaged "bystander population" (Hollander 157). Underlying these ideologies that become the global culture of today's world is "a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world." The underside of this culture is "blood, torture, death, and terror" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 5).

However, the alternative that Marxism provides for the capitalist individualist thinking is a dialectical, structural attention to the collectivity of phenomena in their historical context. Collectivities themselves can turn into abstractions by ideologies that alienate and marginalize the subject. A mass of people can be both a collective locus of belonging and an abstraction of

individuals. An example for this is nationalism as presented in most of Iraqi war literature that I examine below. War literature here is an ideological space where individuals are hailed or interpellated as members of a collectivity that needs to be defended. This contradiction invites more theoretical intervention as the argument here is not to choose between individualistic and collectivist thinking but to imagine alternatives beyond them. The texts I select to study in this dissertation illustrate the need for a re-reading of trauma theory beyond the individual/collective binary.

The position of trauma studies at the heart of the power/knowledge complex invites a discussion of Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) discourse analysis. Foucault's criticism of the structural power/knowledge complex that governs and drives Western (Euro-American) thought led to important findings regarding the extent to which systems of knowledge (such as literature) serve dominant powers and reduces individual agency. The human body becomes the site of discourse. Representing the human body in pain (Scarry) and analyzing the discourses of power that subjugates the body to pain, control or annihilation becomes the battlefront in post-Foucauldian thinking. In war experiences, the body of the subject is the site of political trauma, which turns the body into both private by nature and public/political by discourse. Unlike Marxian analysis of power relations, Foucault views that power is not absolutely oppressive, but it functions through manufacturing "subjects" or "individuals." In his (1982) essay "Subject and Power" Foucault holds that power is two-directional, that a "subject" means both someone with agency and something which is controlled, subjugated. Power functions by turning the subject into an object (of knowledge, of power). Objectification takes different modes: objective" knowledge of the subject (e. g. "scientific" claims by some psychoanalysts that trauma is inexpressible and incommunicable which objectifies the individual subject as a thing that is

known to the system of knowledge-- psychoanalysis). The second way of objectifying subjects to power is through the separation and distinction such as those drawn between mad and sane, delinquents and law-abiding citizens. These binary constructions of subjectivity are “not exactly for or against the ‘individual’ but rather they are struggles against the ‘government of individualization’” (781). The best example in regard to this dissertation is the binary oppositions war indicates on its subjects between “us” and “them;” between grievable and ingrievable losses. The third mode of objectification is through individuals turning themselves into subjects by subscribing to larger structures and identities (i.e. identifying with a nationality, a religion, or an orientation-based narrative. Examples for all these types of objectification are plenty in the ensuing text discussions. The very body of the subject is politicized and governed by codes and regulations set by the sovereign. According to Foucault, “the state's power (and that's one of the reasons for its strength) is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power. Never, I think, in the history of human societies…has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques and of totalization procedures” (782). This combination is best manifested in the manufacturing of traumatized individuals through the discourse of war trauma culture. In war, subjects are hailed to their collective, nationalistic identities; in trauma, they are individualized and singled out as independent agents. The way out of this is not by siding with one or the other, but to continue with Foucault,

> [m]aybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state” (785).

The objective of this dissertation is to go beyond this double-bind, this binary opposition of collective/individual trauma narrativization into imagining spaces beyond these demarcations of war discourse. Foucault's findings in his archaeologies of western thought and civil governing open huge potential for critical schools of thought that will help us better understand the texts we read in this dissertation and the discursive powers beyond them. His ideas are still valuable in understanding the predicaments of women and other traumatized bodies in war and other violent experiences.

Building on Foucault's study of disciplinary power and biopolitics in modern societies, Italian philosopher Georgio Agamben recovers an ancient figure of Roman law to provide a model for the subjugation of the unaccountable-for lives of individuals under states of exception (such as war, dictatorial regimes). The subject becomes a *homo sacer*, or that "*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (*Homo Sacer* 8), a figure defined by the exclusion from divine law and human law. This figure becomes the bearer of bare life (Masmoudi 6-7). Individuals in democratic and despotic states can fall into the category of "bare life" according to Agamben, as and when the sovereign deems necessary. Bare life, Agamben contends, is the product of the state of exception when the sovereign suspends the application of law (*Homo Sacer* 83). The state of exception is the "state power's immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts" which has become "the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (Agamben, *State* 2).

Critic Ikram Masmoudi uses the concept to read the predicament of many bare lives in the Iraqi narratives of war and dictatorship. I add to her analysis a reading of Iraqi bare lives in American narratives of the Iraq War, shifting the focus from subjugating Iraqi lives to the state of the exception by the sovereign (the dictator, the American occupation) *to* the erasure of these

lives as un-grievable Others in American narratives that represent the war as primarily an American experience. Following Agamben's reading of Nazi Germany as a continuing state of exception, I read the literary representations of life under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein as well as the U.S. occupation of Iraq as narratives of the same exceptional state where individuals, unless the sovereign allows, "do not even have the status of persons" (Agamben, *State* 3).

In addition to Foucault, Agamben, I engage feminist critical reading of the power structures of war literature in my reading of the texts. Feminist thinkers use Foucauldian ideas to critically deconstruct the patriarchy of state and society. Gender theory that evolved in dialogue with feminist criticism is equally significant for our purposes as the war experience genders individuals subjugating them to roles and expectations to which they have to conform. As Joshua Goldstein contends, gender norms "often shape men, women, and children to the needs of the war system" (unpaginated). War constructs gender identities and gender expectations like no other experience. Masculinity and femininity are structured not simply as dichotomies of men fighting wars and women being impacted by them, but as different responses to the traumas that war inflicts on its subjects.

Space is another site for political and discursive struggle in war, in addition to the human and social body. Environmental criticism and space/ landscape theories stress the relationship of individuals to their surrounding space. War as a destructive experience to space is often read through human loss and individual traumas. Individuals, however, do not exist stripped off their contexts. Intimacy and identification with one's environment define the difference between space as an abstract concept and place as a site of memory and connectivity. Ecocriticism examines the impact of war (as a human activity) on the environment. War literature represents space through remembering and imagination. The concept of "Imagined geographies," used by Eduard Said

refers to the perception of space through discourse. Similar to the ways the "Orient" is imagined and created via discourse, trauma narratives imagine and recreate the trauma space discursively. I read American imagining of the Iraqi space in most of the war narratives I examine as imagined geography that constructs Iraq as an "Other" space; an inimical site of trauma. On the other hand, Iraqis' sense of the place, traumatized by war as it is, is essential to their construction/revival of their identity. However, it is often abstracted into the collective homeland instead of figuring as the intimate home. In addition to this postcolonial reading to of? space, I examine how the environment allows for a negotiation of the dialectic of public and private spaces that governs the representations of war experiences in Iraqi and American texts.

The scope of this study is contemporary Iraqi and American prose fictional representations of the War. The selection of prose fiction instead of poetry, memoir, or other literary forms is driven by the narrative aspect of the genre that corresponds to the narrativity of traumatic experiences. By turning into narrative trauma takes its meaning and is integrated into the survivor's life story (Leys 105). Traumatic memories, therefore, are structured as narrative fictions with a beginning that contextualizes the experience, a central event around which a plot is constructed, and a denouement where the traumatic event is registered to memory, processed, and healed. Without this narrativization of trauma, without articulation, they stay latent in the psyche. This structural parallel between narrative fiction and traumatic experiences allowed narrative fiction to become one of the prescribed means of navigating and healing traumatic experiences Citation. I chose stories and novels for the interconnections between the two as well as the narrative spaces that these genres provide. The main focus is the (2003) War and the insurgency and civil war that followed. To understand the literary discourse about this war, it is important briefly to revisit the literature and culture of previous Iraqi and American wars to build

a sense of connection and context. I study selected texts that represent the war from its two sides: the Iraqi and the American. The selection of prose fiction (novels and short stories) responds to the popularity of the two genres in representing the Iraq War and their interconnectedness. The two genres differ in length, in their treatment of time and space, their attention to and elaboration of narrative details; however, they share several formal and thematic characteristics and express similar sentiments and aesthetic agenda. Both genres rely on a linguistic form that builds and narrates fictional stories to signify real-world concerns. Many of the studied authors write in the two forms alternatively. The structure these two genres share provides a fictional space that negotiates traumatic identities in the two post-traumatic cultures. This, however, does not mean that other literary or cultural genres are less useful in their representations of war and trauma. The selection is based on the fact that prose fiction is one of the most influential means of cultural remembrance, not only because of its popularity in the two cultures but specifically because of its imaginative narrative structure that give readers the ingredients and space that make their identity narratives and that give meanings to their experiences. The novels and the short stories of the war participate in creating what can be called "imagined trauma communities," among readers, to slightly shift the use of the well-known term by Benedict Anderson. In the case of the trauma narratives, they create a posttraumatic identity, a space necessary for post-conflict communities to heal and build their futures. They create a space for self-expression and creative communication of the collective traumatized identity of people who share the traumatic experiences. As a linguistic art, prose fiction articulates these meanings and creates these narratives in a rhetorical way. Language and literature create symbolic and imaginary spaces to negotiate "real" problems and dilemmas. They might create the illusion of

the ability to solve real-world problems, but they are mere compensatory spaces, attempts to better and improve human life and human consciousness.

Many Iraqi texts studied here are not translated into English (or any other language). The selection of such texts is to highlight aspects of Iraqi literature of war that goes unnoticed to most critics who study the country's corpus of literature relying mostly on translated texts. Translation is subject to several (inter)cultural factors that filter which texts are translated and why. The inclusion of texts in the original widens the perspective of the critical reader of the corpus of war literature in the country. All translated quotations from Arabic are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Some of the limits of the present study include the language of the texts I examine and the points of reference when I discuss war. War has taken many forms in recent times. The old definitions of a militarized struggle between two or more states is no longer applicable to contemporary warfare that emerge to take different, everchanging forms. My working definition of war is any form of organized violence that aims at achieving political results. General as it seems, this working definition allows us to discuss different forms of political violence that is essentially critical to the understanding and representation of trauma. Also, by "war literature" I mean any literary writing representing, informed by or engaged with the experience of war primarily. Direct experiences of war and combat are part of the work I examine, but my scope is not limited to these direct experiences specifically. Forced exile, illegal migrations and the traumas they exercise on victims are consequences of the Iraq war(s) that deserve equal attention. While this inclusion stretches the definition of war literature, my focus is on texts that communicate the experience of trauma caused by this war. I am not suggesting that all experiences are equal, but that all traumas deserve attention and understanding. Iraqi texts that

will be read here are limited to texts in Arabic (and their English translations). This, unfortunately, excludes texts written in Kurdish and other Iraqi languages. So, when I refer to Iraqi fiction, Iraqi literature or Iraqi culture, I usually refer to the body of culture I can access either in Arabic or in English translations.

The main focus of the current project is the Iraq War (2003-present). Officially the war started on 3/20/2003. The US troops were withdrawn by the end of 2011. However, the insurgency and civil war that resulted from the American invasion continues today in many parts of Iraq. American troops were redeployed in 2014 and continue to occupy military bases in the country. Other wars and violent experiences (such as the attacks of 9/11, the Afghanistan War) are dealt with in many contemporary prose fictional representations of war. Important as these experiences are, they lie beyond the focus of the current study. Therefore, unless otherwise mentioned, references to the "War" mean the war of 2003. Finally, it is worth mentioning that by "American," I primarily refer to the culture, literature, and people of the United States of America.

The rising wave of the Iraq War narratives have not been met with comparable critical or scholarly work. Very little academic research has been directed to this literature. In most cases, the literature of the Iraq War is studied separately on each side reemphasizing the dominant tropes in each culture. Much of the criticism narratives of this war receive focuses on the American side of the conflict. American studies of these narratives usually categorize them within a current of American literature that emerged after 9/11. Named after the traumatic attacks of 2001 or by the more official title of the ensuing War on Terror that followed these attacks, this very categorization of the Iraq War literature frames this war as a legitimate response to 9/11 or an episode in the continuous "War on Terror" which ignores the historical

disconnection between the two events, the fact that Iraq had nothing to do with these attacks. This mainstream "framing" of the war in line with the rhetoric of the state is characteristic of media representations of war in general and the Iraq War in particular.

In her *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable*? Judith Butler critiques the framing of war and state violence in media that *other* groups of people and negate their very existence by denying them empathy or grievability. Frames exclude certain groups by focusing on a center that matter, and a periphery that does not. A photograph, as Susan Sontag indicates, does not represent a whole picture. It frames, edits and filters the story behind it. The repetition of representations of violence that bombard media reduces the connection people feel with the victims of violence as these are continuously framed to be *others*. Although her focus was media coverage and photography (discussing Susan Sontag's ideas, reflecting on the Abu Ghraib scandal photograph coverage, media responses and other examples of framing of contemporary war and violence) literary representations of the Iraq War can hardly escape the premises of her discussion.

In his *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel* (2015) Daniel O'Gorman disagrees with Butler's notion of the other-self binary in American fiction of the War on Terror, rejecting the connection between the media coverage that excludes others and state power (25). On the opposite, O'Gorman suggests that "literature might help to challenge the reductive 'us and them' binaries often present in the framing of identity and difference after 9/11" (175). He argues that the complexities of texts that allow different voices or points of view to play against each other undermine the privileging of a singular voice or perspective. I use this model in my final chapter where multiple voice narratives provide a counternarrative to the singular voice of the trauma hero narrative. However, the very representation of others by only

American texts limits the book's potential for deconstructing the us/them binary. His discussion exposes the need to invite other voices to represent themselves rather than read and defend their representations by American writers. Hence the necessity to include Iraqi texts to the conversation about the Iraq War, not simply to dismantle a theoretical binary, but to create a cross-cultural space for understanding and empathy. O'Gorman's analysis of Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* in which he invokes the concept of "imagined geographies" is helpful to my discussion of space in this novel and other texts.

David A. Buchanan's *Going Scapegoat: Post-9/11 War Literature, Language and Culture* (2016) engages the critical debate of combat depiction in American literature of the Iraq War that he also categorizes under 9/11 asking: When does a literature of a war emerge? And who has the right to write about war? Buchanan challenges the epistemology of American war narratives by questioning soldier's special knowledge of the combat experience, the fetishization of the experience of soldiers or what he calls "combat gnosticism" (the belief that the experience of war is impossible to communicate to those who have not seen it (15). This fetishizing of combat experience scapegoats Iraqis as Others. This happens by, for example, appropriating racist metaphorical references to Native Americans to Iraqis in the war media and literature. Using Kenneth Burke's notion of scapegoating (a socio-psychological mechanism of singling out a person or a group for blame) the author examines three novels of the Iraq War: Ben Fountain's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, David Abrams's *FOBBIT* and Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*. Buchanan's reading proves the damaging of the fetishization of the combat experience to the critical potential of war literature. The ability of the texts and the genre to critically challenge American militarism is limited by the genre expectation that these texts follow and reproduce. Buchanan's ambivalence in critically engaging the texts is

methodologically helpful in reading war narratives without losing sight of the underlining ideological workings that dominate them.

One of the early scholarly engagements with the literature of the Iraq War is Stacey Peebles' *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq* (2011). Using a catchphrase from Anthony Swofford's memoir narrative of the first Gulf War *Jarhead* (2003) as a title, Peebles examines the growing body of prose fiction, film, internet blogs, poetry and memoirs that represent the American soldiers' experience in the two Iraq wars of 1990 and 2003. She highlights themes of masculinity, trauma, and PTSD in this literature. The book shows how these themes find new expressions in this new generation of American war literature (and cultural representation) as she examines "a selection of contemporary war stories... [and shows] how these newest stories have a new twist, even as they address familiar, even ancient subjects" (21). The main twist that Peeble proves to be new to this "genre" is the intervention of advanced communication technology and social media as factors in the production, development and reception of this growing body of cultural production. Because of technological advancements, soldiers and the American public viewed the Iraq War differently from previous wars. The war was instantly covered by visual media. This instant and hasty coverage affected the literary representation of the war limiting their ability to contemplate their experiences thoroughly. The immediacy of the experience while giving freshness to the writing is characterized by a tendency to visualize war in pornographic passing representations that fetishizes thrilling violence (23). The immediate access to the experience increases the thrill. Other than that, the literature she examines centralizes the experience of the soldier as essential to the understanding of war, reiterating the narrative of the trauma hero myth.

The book does a good job though in comparing and connecting the experiences of the "Persian Gulf War of 1990 to the Iraq War of 2003, a connection that is usually overlooked by American discussions of Iraq. Through this historical continuity and through pairing texts from different genres/media, Peeble discusses the kaleidoscopic nature of war representations (48). Importantly, she stresses the need to include an Iraqi perspective to the story of these two wars. In passing, she goes over a few Iraqi texts (that she could access in translation) representing the other point of view of the war including poetry by Sinan Antoon, Dunya Mikhail, and Abdul Razaq al-Rubaiee. Admitting the insufficiency of these few texts to represent the complexity of the "Other" she calls for future studies to engage more Iraqi perspectives on the war. "For Iraqis writing about war," she states, "there may be no separation between home front and the front lines," (22). This makes the war experience different from the experiences of the American soldiers and the American public of the same war.

The main problem with this book, in addition to the essentializing of the experience of the soldiers whose "stories have the power to change [American] national narrative,"(4) is the broad scope of its thesis and coverage. The four chapters of the book vary from war memoirs, gender, and sexuality in war literature, the question of the Other and war trauma in cinema. Aspiring to cover a whole lot of literary and cultural representations of two complex and different wars, the book surrenders the need for a unifying central argument. Peeble reiterates the myth of the trauma hero in her concluding words telling readers that: "war matters, and soldiers' stories tell us why and how. Then and now, we have to listen" (174). In spite of that, *Welcome to the Suck* remains one of the leading first attempts to scholarly examine the rising body of literature of the Iraq War.

In his *Public War, Private Conscience: The Ethics of Political Violence*, Andrew Fiala

philosophically examines the "paradigm conflict" between public welfare and private morality in war. War is a utilitarian public affair that engages individuals with ethical and moral conscience that does not adhere to the utilitarian needs of war. Organized by states and fought by individuals, the problem of war is that its public logic is “fundamentally at odds with the moral logic of private life... from the standpoint of the public good, war can appear as necessary response to evil. But from the standpoint of the individual, war appears as a folly, horror, and madness (*Public War*, viii). Fiala argues that this conflict between the public and the private is unavoidable. Human beings are constantly caught in this tragic conflict. In the case of the relationship of the individual soldier to the institution of the army, “selective conscientious objection” is the only proper ethical choice. While this may not prevent the traumas war causes, it is a step in the right direction” (Fiala, 154-55).

In addition to these leading studies, the subject has been discussed in doctoral and magisterial studies in the United States and other countries. Lena Simone Gunther studies Military Memoirs of American soldiers of the Iraq War in her dissertation-based book *War Experience and Trauma in American Literature: A Study of American Military Memoirs of Operation Iraqi Freedom* (2014). Although it focusses on memoirs, the study is an example of how trauma-driven academic studies engage war literature fetishizing experiences in the battlefield. Many of these memoirs would find their way to fictional representations of the “experiences” that not only transform the soldiers from innocence to experience, but that feeds the insatiable need of the public to read about war and violence through individual experiences.

Unlike the soldier experiences that met relatively adequate critical and scholarly studies, Iraqi stories of the war have not been met with enough scholarly or critical attention, at least not in English. Only recently the question of Iraqi literary representation started to gain attention in

academia. In December 2008 the Phillips-Universität in Marburg, Germany held a conference entitled "Cultural Voices of a Fragmented Nation: War, Trauma and Remembrance in Contemporary Iraq." *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma, and Memory in Iraqi Culture* (2012) grew from this conference. The essays of the collection share an interest in preserving memories of individual and collective traumas mirrored through cultural and literary representations of the era the book culturally documents. The essays, extracts and the testimonies of the collection depict the status of cultural production in Iraq under and after the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Some of the essays go back into history, others converse with key current cultural and literary texts navigating traumas of war, dictatorship and occupation. The book represents a starting step that helps in shedding light at the background of the current cultural scene in the country. A current theme that unifies many of the essays and contributions is the cultural trauma of living under these circumstances in a culture striving to define itself and express the yearnings and anxieties of its society.

Ikram Masmoudi's *War and Occupation in Iraqi Fiction* (2015) is one of the first and most important scholarly engagements with contemporary Iraqi fiction in English. The book depicts how Iraqi war fiction presents Iraqis in relation to war and dictatorship. It revisits the recent history of Iraq through literary narratives of war, dictatorship, and occupation. Theoretically, Masmoudi applies Giorgio Agamben's (b. 1942) concept of "the bare life" to Iraqi prose fictional representations of life under the regime of Saddam Husein and the American occupation in 2003. Agamben develops the concept through a reading of Michel Foucault's biopolitics (how political discourse subjugates biological bodies) and the ancient Roman legal subjugation of the *homo sacer* (a subject whose life can be taken by anyone without any legal or religious liability because s/he is deemed accursed by the sovereign). Following Agamben's

description of human life under totalitarian states *and* Western liberal democracies as life in the category of *homines sacri* (sacred people who occupy a space between life and death depending on the suspension of law by the sovereign, or "the state of exception") (6), Masmoudi defines "bare life" as "life exposed and abandoned to violence" (4). A bare life is killable and unredeemable whenever the sovereign chooses. The texts she studies illustrates that this state of exception characterizes the Iraqi lives for a long time. She organizes her study thematically to understand the relationship of the Iraqi subject to the sovereign as represented in fiction. Focusing on post-2003 novels, Masmoudi examines four categories of Iraqis living this "bare life" as represented in fiction*:* army deserters during the 1980s war, soldiers who fought and lost the Gulf War (1990-91); Iraqi civilians becoming suicide bombers following the 2003 American occupation; and the prisoners of war detained by the Americans after 2003. Masmoudi's leading study opens the door for other interesting questions to pursue. Her study of pre-2003 texts is helpful to my study. I find useful her discussion of "bare life" among Iraqi subjects which I intend to develop in this dissertation by comparatively including American narratives of the war. I read the lives of Iraqi subjects in the text I examine as "bare lives" subjugated to the will of the sovereign, the political-military war enterprise. While the lives of American soldiers are not equally bare or lacking agency, they are also subjected to similar structures that determine their fates.

In addition to these emerging studies, Muḥsin Jāsim Mūsawī's *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (2006) provides an account of Iraqi culture in the twentieth century. Combining literary history, personal knowledge (as he was a leading figure in Iraq's cultural apparatuses until the mid-1990s) to cultural analysis of the dominating patterns in Iraqi culture, Mūsawī explores the connection between Iraqi identity and power throughout the twentieth

century. The book examines how state-imposed unifying secular nationalism has resulted in a fragmentary counterculture that can be seen in the possible disintegration of the country after the American invasion. The unity of the country was not established on steady and gradual socio-political reforms but enforced by a despotic totalitarian regime. The book tracks this secular national discourse that uses intellectuals and cultural production to alleviate sectarian and ethnic divides among the population of Iraq—a discourse that developed into a form of despotic nationalism, a secularization, read: Ba'athification, of culture and literature that resulted in the rise of propaganda literary production in the Iran War era. Although the book is not strictly related to war narratives, the cultural-historical coverage it provides to the topic of nationalism is significant to the dialectic of the public and the individual experience that dominate the Iraqi representations of war and trauma. Therefore, it will prove a useful resource to my argument about the role of nationalism in forming Iraqis' sense of identity, thus by subjugating their individual lives to the state's ideology.

In her very recent dissertation (May 2019) "Novel Perspectives of the Iraq War," Olivia Ruth Clark speaks of a first and second wave of novel representations of the Iraq war, classifying texts in respect to their involvement in reiterating the trauma hero myth. Building on criticism of the genre by Roy Scranton, David Buchanan, and others, Clark includes Iraqi voices in her valuable contribution to the field, using texts that managed to get translated into English as more relevant to American readers. One shining example of her illuminating analysis of recent narratives of the Iraq war is her reading of Roy Scranton's *War Porn*, which is one of the first detailed critical engagement the novel has deservedly received. More Importantly, Clark takes the conversation a step further by including careful informed reading of some Iraqi texts that provides a counter-narrative to the American story of the war. I follow Clark in that this

inclusion of the Iraqi voices as counter narrative to the mainstream American narratives of the war. I add to that my reading of texts that treat the war story as primarily an Iraqi experience. That is, these are Iraqi texts that do not function to counter any central American narrative but strive to make sense and communicate the war experience as primarily an Iraqi collective and individual trauma. I do not share her view that "solutions to extant misperceptions are available via counternarratives" (iii). I argue that counternarratives are important in expanding the spectrum of the conversation but solutions are to be found beyond the binaries set by the genre of war writing. One point I strongly disagree with the Clark is the reading of *The Rope* (2016), a political novel by Kanan Makiya, one of the engineers and enthusiast supporters of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, "as a treatise on modern Iraqi national identity" (121).[3] While Clark uses mainstream Iraqi and American texts, my dissertation reads a spectrum of both well-known and rarely studied texts that expose the workings of the myths of traumatized hero and nationalism.

In addition to these academic and scholarly studies about Iraqi and American literature of the Iraq war, there have been some minor work such as academic papers, journal articles that introduce and engage this or that text. These will be listed in the bibliography section below and will be engaged as needed. This survey reveals the scarcity of literary critical analysis of this rising current of literature. The abovementioned studies either focus their attention on one side of the story of the war or generalize and survey literary and cultural texts with less critical focus on comparative aspects of the narratives. Hence, the present study proposes to fill a scholarly gap in reading the fiction representation of the Iraq War story comparatively.

After this introductory chapter, I start chapter two by tracing the myths of the nation and the trauma hero in pre-2003 literary representations of war in Iraq and the United States to

provide a historical depth and context to my argument. Chapter three reads early representations of the Iraq War in America as attempts to construct a national/cultural trauma narrative. The American texts I examine do that by framing the Iraq War within the constructed national trauma of the attacks of September 11, 2001, forgetting Iraq and erasing its traumas. The two Iraqi texts I engage in this chapter represent the 2003 war as a cultural trauma too. One does that by constructing a psychological trauma narrative of a past war of national defense and the other by mythologically attempting to revive the failing narrative of the defeated nation. Finally, Chapter Four looks for alternative voices that represent the war story beyond the myths of the nation and the traumatized self, seeking a way out of the binary oppositions of the individual self and the collectivity within which most Iraq war representations contains themselves.

Notes

1. Cathy Caruth reads Sigmund Freud's Moses and Monotheism in his book of this title as a narrative of cultural trauma that reflects his own displacement from Austria during WWII and the rise of Nazism. Freud's "unclaimed" traumatic experience is expressed indirectly through his cultural-historical analysis of the Jewish displacement and the formation of Judaism as a trauma-based lentity. See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience.* Chapter one pp. (10-24).
2. Roger Luckhurst speaks of lobbying as a factor in the reification of PTSD as an official diagnosis in the DSM 1980: "The reification of PTSD was historically and culturally specific," a direct result of professional lobbying and political influence of advocates for compensation for Vietnam veterans ("Narrative Matters" 295).
3. The novel, translated to Arabic as *al-Fitna*, the trial/affliction, is criticized by many as a disguised and failed political apology for the war that Makiya has called for, an attempt to fictionalize the very recent history of the country that the political writer helped create. Instead of apologizing openly for the mistakes of the war, the author writes a mediocre political account, with minor fictional twists, hoping to make up for the failures of the invasion, the destruction of the country and his role in it. For a critical review of the novel see Haitham Husein's review. For more information on Makiya's debates with Edward Said see Rabbani pp. 342–350. See also: Nabeel Abraham's "Interview with Said.

Chapter Two

War, Nation, and Trauma in Iraqi and American Fiction before 2003

> "Literature is not only a manifestation of a political consciousness but also an acting force in its making. This making includes exposure of failures, consolidation of values, and grafting means and methods of dynamism, democracy, and progress" (Mūhsin al-Mūsawī *Reading Iraq* 117).

To understand the patterns of prose fictional representations of the Iraq War in Iraq and the United States, I try to contextualize the literary traditions that shape war literature and culture in the two countries before 2003. The focus here is on the dialectical representation of war as individual and or collective/national trauma. The relationship of the individual to the collective differs immensely in the two countries, but the experiences of the war, the existential fear of death and the suffering individuals face by collective warring forces, and the anxiety over collective annihilation of entire communities are universal conditions of war experiences. Drawing on the similarity of the patterns of war representation in the two cultures, this literary-historical survey provides historical depth and context to the post- Iraq War trauma fictional narratives. The literary traditions established by texts I survey in this chapter provides reference points to writers of the Iraq War fiction, the background against which they draw meaning to their experiences and struggle. I argue that war writing in Iraq before 2003 develops a collective-individual conflict that shapes fictional representations of war with more attention to the collective trauma of the Iraqi people. This is governed by the context of the project of nation-building that dominates political life in the country in the twentieth century. War has been a "cohesive instrument of nation-building" endeavors (Jabar 121). Contrary to that, war representation in the United States develops an individual-oriented cultural representation of war

experiences. This is dictated by several factors in American cultural history that the second part of this chapter explores. These traditions of war writing shape and affect fictional war writing of the war between the two countries in 2003.

2. 1. Iraq: Narrating the Nation at War:

Since the inception of the modern state of Iraq in 1920 war has been a recurrent theme in modern Iraqi literature and part of the national myth that constituted the modern state. The rise of national ideology in the country was influenced by nineteenth-century European national movements and ideologies that were borrowed/translated during the *Nahdah* (renaissance) of the Arab world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "*Thawrat al-Ishreen*" or the popular revolt of 1920 is usually remembered as the first "Iraqi" response to British colonization. That war is largely celebrated as the emblem of the national myth. Modernity gradually interpenetrated the cultural and sociopolitical life in the country growing a national consciousness among the growing bourgeoisie. One cultural form of representing this national consciousness that underlies the national class structure is the novel genre. Following Benedict Anderson's argument of the role of print capitalism and specifically the novel genre in forming the national consciousness and the imagining of the nation, one can say that in modern-day Iraq, the novel genre accompanied the birth of the nation and participated in creating the national discourse/ myth. Similar to the situation in other postcolonial states, in Iraq, the national cause continues to be a central theme in the genre ever since. Fredric Jameson in his "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" speaks of a "national allegory" that dominates all "Third-World" literature which signifies collective, nationalist meanings behind its narrative plots and thematic structures. Jameson applies his Marxian analysis to "third world" cultures: their historical development and their different modes of production that shape their literatures

and the ways these literatures engage with the public and private spheres of human experience. Despite the controversy [1] around Jameson's "sweeping hypothesis," the claim applies to the case of Iraqi literature where one can detect national allegories in texts dealing with war and other collective traumas—many of which are to be studied in this chapter. The dominance of this nationalist allegory is not because this literature is still not well developed to be equal to "first world literatures" but simply because the problems it deals with, the realities it navigates and intercommunicates with are dominated by national struggles. The very existence of Iraq as a nation and as a culture is threatened by wars, dictatorship and foreign invasion. Politics and collective consciousness are relevant in people's daily life. The converging of public and private affairs in the country allows very limited space for expressing individual experiences without engaging collective issues. Unlike (mostly) postmodernist American life that is characterized by isolated individuals (consumers) who are affected less by public affairs than their private businesses, Iraqis live their daily lives with anxieties and fear, if not actual traumatic circumstances due to war, political violence. Therefore, admitting the allegorical nature of much of Iraqi literature is not a reduction of its value or judging it on a cultural scale that celebrates postmodernist depoliticized literature at the peak of a hierarchy. Instead, admitting this characteristic contextualizes the phenomenon and allows us a better understanding of the reasons behind it and the means writers use to communicate or escape it as we will see in the following chapters.

Historically, *Jalāl Khālid* (1928) by Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid (1901-1937), the first Iraqi (Jayyusi, 51; Zangana, x; Mahmoud 36), was also the first Iraqi novel with a national allegory *per se*. The book is dedicated to young Iraqis who were fighting the British occupiers and defending their country, to the "Iraqi youth, on whom we depend in our struggle to establish

freedom and justice" (al-Sayyid). The novel follows Jalal who spends some time in India and comes back to Iraq after the failure of the 1920 revolution against the British occupation. Reflecting on the collective trauma of the British colonization, the novel focuses on *inbi'aath* (or resurrection) which refers to the writer's vision of the role of the intellectual to resurrect his people and lead them to a better future. *Jalal Khalid* is characterized by its weak narrative technique and classical literary style. However, it is mainly celebrated by critics as a first attempt in the genre. The novel establishes the view of literature as a cultural means to further the national interest of the country, the function of the intellectual as an active public (political) figure who sacrifices individual interests for the public good, a vision that continues to dominate the cultural scene in the country for a long time to come.

Nationalism dominated the novel genre ever since, accompanied with the experiences of wars that the country has been through: the two World Wars, the 1948, 1967 and 1973 wars in Palestine, and the 1980-1988 war against Iran. Ghāʾib T″uʿma Farmān's 1966 novel *al-Nakhla wa-'l-jīran* (the Palm Tree and the Neighbors) is regarded as the first "true artistic beginning of the novel in Iraq" (Jayyusi 51). The novel depicts life in urban Baghdad at the aftermath of WWII and the transformations happening to the society because of that war and the advance of modernization. War appears indirectly in the novel through the impact of the British military camp on the city's life and the socio-economic transformations that took place because of that presence. While the novel communicates a "limited political message" and no clear nationalist energies, it certainly implies a collective cause and strife in the background of the suffering of its characters to survive their tumultuous lifetime transformations.

The rising nationalism led to the independence of Iraq in the 1930s which was thwarted by WWII when the British reinvaded the country to crush a nationalist revolt in 1941. After

WWII, Iraq participated in three Arab wars against the new state of Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973. These wars were indirect combat experiences for Iraqi writers and readers. They were fought relatively far from Iraqi land. However, their impact was felt in intellectual discussions, public national media that thrived in the trans-Arabic, postcolonial age. Their traumatic impact on the individual level was not well represented in novels or short stories. They were mainly received and discussed as public, political issues. The defeat of postcolonial Arab states by the emerging colonial state of Israel in these wars represented a collective trauma. Edward Said argues that the modern Arabic novel emerged in this historical juncture after the *Naksa* of 1948 when the writer assumes the role of the "producer of thought and language whose radical intention was to guarantee survival [of the imagined Arabic Nation and national culture that] was in imminent danger of extinction" (*Reflections* 48).

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (a Palestinian-Iraqi) author writes about the trauma of the Palestinian refugees in his *In Search of Walid Masoud* (1978). Set in Europe, 1940s Palestine, Damascus and Baghdad, the novel threads together the story of postcolonial Arabic trauma across several Arab metropolises. Jabra explores the Arab intellectual's response to the collective traumas of (post)colonial wars in the Arab World—"the Arabic Homeland" as pan-Arabic rhetoric of the time would call it. The main plotline in the novel is the disappearance of writer and activist Walid Masoud, which could be read allegorically in relation to the disappearance of the Palestinian people because of settler colonialism in their land and the erasure, the forced disappearance of their identity. Masoud's deserted car is discovered in Syria, he is remembered to have lived and moved between Baghdad, Damascus, Palestine and Europe. His friends and lovers remember him and reflect on his commitment to his people and their national cause. Before his disappearance, Masoud renounces life in Europe to return to Palestine in the mid-

1940s. After the "Zionists" win the 1948 war, he moves and settles in Baghdad leading a successful career as a political intellectual. His life in Baghdad gives a portrait of intellectual life in Arab metropolises at the time. Starting a career as a public intellectual through his writing, Masoud is taken captive by the Israelis in the 1967 war. Tortured and expelled from his homeland, he becomes the ultimate Palestinian trauma victim. In the context of postcolonial thought and decolonial political activism, Masoud's experience strengthens his loyalty to the Fedayeen—the Palestinian resistance. In addition to the postcolonial struggle, Masoud's story takes place against the background of the upper-class intellectual life in Baghdad.

Besides Jabra's strong representation of war trauma, popular representations of Arab Israeli wars are mostly traditional propaganda literature that celebrates heroism, bravery, and sacrifice for the sacred cause of pan-Arab Nationalism. The nationalist military coups that took place in the country and the political instability at the time did not allow specific trends or uniform patterns to develop. Revolutionary movements soon turn into despotic military dictatorships, leading to the Ba'athist rein that shaped the cultural and political life of the country for the next half of the twentieth century. The collective danger these wars represented for Iraq and other Arab countries allowed the dictatorial regimes to focus on this external danger and suppress any movement to achieve human or individual rights in the country. Culturally, this meant, among other things, the unification of cultural discourse and literary rhetoric to serve the national cause. Critic Bāsim 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥammūdī (who is going to play a significant role in furthering the state rhetoric in the 1980s) writes that

> The critic has the right to reject any literary writing with bad content, i.e., writing that celebrates the inner glow of the creative writer instead of/at the expense of the concerns and interests of the nation and its millions of masses aspiring to a better future. This pushes the critic to celebrate any literary initiative that serves the goal of marching in the path of unifying the [Arab] nation, given that it has the minimum aesthetic qualities (13).

It is important here to stress that the mass of people here is an abstraction of a collectivity of individuals whose lives, agencies and rights are decided by the state. Instead of representing their individual experiences, dreams, and aspirations, the literature this critic calls for is a representation of the political cause of the ruling class. The pleas of representing the masses and the external threat continued to feature in state-sponsored literature and media during the Iran war in the 1980s.

Before the 1980s war, this discourse was not as harshly imposed as it has become when an actual war and threat to the country was happening. A few voices manage to speak up and produce less ideological literary representations of the war traumas of the time. Muhammad Khudair's (1968) short story "*al-Urjooha* (the Swing)" approaches war as the background to the narrative. In the story, Sattaar, a young soldier in an unidentified war carries the news of the death of a companion soldier, Ali, to the latter's family. When he sees Haleema, the young daughter of the dead soldier, Sattaar is unable to deliver the sad news. The narrative moves slowly without addressing the main point: without Sattaar ever communicating the news of the death -Sattaar's very name indicates this sense of keeping secrets for protection- disassociating the family (and the reader) from the troubling news. The moral dilemma of the narrator (communicating the news of death to a child) resembles the aesthetical problem of the author, how to communicate the experience of trauma and loss to readers in an aesthetic prose form. The prose poetically communicates the sense of identification with the dead soldier's daughter, Haleema, who simply accepts the fact of her loss by closing her eyes and imagining her father, as the visitor asks her to do while he is swinging her. The river, by which Haleema's house and the swing stands, signifies continuity of life in spite of the troubling presence of death. War is represented by the absence of the father. Following Caruth and popular trauma theory, one can

argue that the silences in the text are the very spaces where trauma is expressed. The reader feels this heavily-present absence that Haleema can feel but cannot express. When asked to imagine her father, Haleema asks Sattaar

> ‘Show me my father, now. I see him coming from his bag over there coming toward us.’
> ‘With no head, no limbs, no clothes, like smoke.’
> Yes, Yes.
> ‘Let him come close. Pretend to be asleep and don’t scare him’ (36).

This dissociation from the outside world by retreating to the imaginative capacity of the brain to neutralize the trauma of the loss is a coping mechanism that helps to navigate the trauma of the loss of the father. This psychoanalytic reading of the text is not to confuse fictional characters with clinical patients, but to highlight narrative examples where the representation of a traumatic experience approaches real-life problems effectively. The swing is symbolically necessary to soothe the pain of the loss. Closing the eyes is necessary to open the possibility to dream, to dissociate from reality and loss. The way the narrative communicates the trauma of the father’s death resembles Sattaar’s act of swinging Haleema to help her process the news.

"The Swing" does not politicize war or the reason for the death of Haleema's father, not because of its disinterest in politics, but as an attempt to universalize the response it imagines to cope and deal with death and trauma. By individualizing the experience of loss, the writer diverges from mainstream representations of war that celebrates heroic deeds and fake nationalist victories. The trauma of loss is abstracted to unknown time and space. It is not clear which specific war experience lies in the background, therefore, no clear national cause or ideological energies can be detected in the text. The non-specificity of the experience implies a collective representation of all possible wars. Except the reference to *a* war and the military to which both men belong, the story implies no nationalist allegory. However, published in the late 1960s, it

could refer to any of the Arab-Israeli wars or the government campaign against the Kurdish rebels in the Northern part of Iraq. What is important in the story is the powerful anti-war message it communicates and the specific individual trauma it creates. This disinterest in political discourse or ideology, this attention to individual trauma, are attributes of Khudair's writing that war literature in the country would lack for a long time to come.

Before moving to the 1980s, a quick note on the economic dimension of the cultural and historical transformations that I survey here is necessary. Literature and culture in the country generally reflect a state-run economic mode of production in their deep structures. The revenue state economy or what Faleh A. Jabar calls the "command economy" (132) that started with the discovery of commercial-scale oil reserves in the first half of the twentieth century, results in unlimited wealth by collecting revenues that get concentrated in the hands of the governing elites who control its distribution and determine the state expending on social programs and public life. This class allows for a military/ militia dictatorship to grow and control the state. The citizens are less engaged as they receive the benefits that the state collects and distributes rather than produce their own wealth. Dependence on the state strengthened the latter. The mainstream literature and cultural production that comes out of this mode of economic life is unapologetically propagandistic, furthering the ideologies of those in power.

The Iraq-Iran war 1980-1988 is the main experience represented in contemporary Iraqi war writing with a dominance of political and national-allegorical writing.[2] Generally, writing about this war splits into two main political positions. Novels and short stories become "sites of struggle between state-sponsored narratives of the Iran-Iraq war and alternative discourses which seek to displace the hegemonic narrative of the state" (Moosavi 2). The main tendency in both sides of war fiction is the representation of combat experiences. The novels and short stories I

examine focus on the direct experience of their protagonists without zooming out to have a sense of the whole picture. This does not mean that there is no politics whatsoever in these texts. The political dimension is latent in all war narratives no matter what political positions they come from. The main differences lie in the nature of the wars these texts represent. In addition to its longevity, that war was a traditional combat experience of ground forces. The main field of the war was the long border between the two countries. However, the home front was a site for bombardment and indirect warfare. Draft was mandatory and the state cultural apparatuses exploited every possible means to further its war rhetoric. Literature that represented the war and people's experiences in it had to fit within the criteria of that rhetoric. The war against Iran was presented as a sacred defense mission to protect the homeland against an aggressive Other, despite the fact that Iraq started the war. The politics of that war was thus rarely considered. Instead, it was presented as an aggression by the Iranians and the only rightful, the only logical response is defense. This limited the scope of creative space for embedded and other writers of the war literature to discuss the experiences of combat on the individual level and its political signification apart from the official discourse. However, this limitation did not prevent them from engaging one political aspect of the conflict, i.e. the mainstream political attitude. The trope of the national allegory that Jameson talks about is stressed over and over in the narratives of the Iran War that I study here.

The mainstream tendency adopted the state rhetoric of the war as a national struggle. The state used the cultural sphere as a site of war promotion (Moosavi 23). Literature was embedded within state rhetoric. According to exiled Iraqi critic Salam ‘Abbūd,

> [T]he circles of the state’s cultural apparatuses were well connected: The state launches its war project, writers create literary texts from this project, critics attach cultural and intellectual value to these texts, the state then gives cultural prizes and honors. The only losers in this circle are the people. They are left to enjoy the

> catastrophes of the war and the culture that represents that war. (*Thaqafat al- Unf Fi al-Iraq* 198, my translation).

The project of embedded literature and journalism resulted in a huge corpus of print literature that was unprecedented in the country producing a "war literature" phenomenon (Ibrāhīm 5). Dramas, novels, paintings, and sculpture were used to indoctrinate patriotic ideas (Jabar 128). Hundreds of novels, poetry anthologies and short story collections were printed by the Ministry of Culture and Information every year (ʻAbbūd). Prizes and state rewards were established (Jabar 128) to honor 'the achievements' of the literature of the Second Qadissiyah Battle (or Saddam's Qadissiyah) as the state propaganda labeled the war against Iran, referring to the battle between Arab Muslims and the Sassanian Persian empire in the seventh century (Mūsawī, *Reading Iraq* 83), turning the early Muslim conquests into fodder for modern Arab nationalism. One project initiated by the ministry of culture was a series of short story volumes known as *Qisas Taht Laheeb Al Naar* (Stories under Fire Flames) in which many young and unestablished writers invade the literary scene to publish propaganda literature that mostly celebrates the war as a necessary evil that people have to endure (Al-Asadi). This type of literature not only misrepresented the political causes of the war -attempting to brainwash readers to the state's discourse, but it celebrates war and destruction as being what writer Ahmad Khalaf labels 'the beautiful destruction' (qtd. in ʻAbbūd 11) or what poet Sami Mahdi calls 'the beautiful Iraqi death" (Khiḍr 104). These are statements of the ideological aesthetics of this sort of literature that saw beauty in the destruction and traumas of war as long as the war serves the national cause as defined by the state's discourse. No nuance or variety in the way the war was allowed to be featured in this discourse veered away from the national discourse. One major theorist in this respect, critic and cultural official Mūhsin al-Mūsawī, asks writers and artists to be clear in their attitudes to the war. The writer has to be either with "the homeland and the humanitarian cause"

it is fighting for or against them. “When he stands against them he cannot write; when he writes he makes nothing of value” (*al-Mar’ī* 79-80). Individual traumas have to be defined within this propaganda project. Anything that fails to meet that limitation have no value in official culture. Loss, destruction and suffering are allowed to be expressed when they relate to the collective struggle, since the private, the domestic affairs have little value in time of an existential threat of a national war. This aesthetics builds on what critic Bāsim ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥammūdī, a prominent “culture official” at the time theorizes that war literature to be:

> The image of the individual breaking of the self in the past [before the Ba’thist rule] is gone forever in the country that has successfully built new social relations, huge transformations that have positive outcomes. The storyteller has thus moved from the suffering of the individual self to the problems of the nation, to the suffering of the big homeland not the small home (40).

The culture of the war these state officials prescribe is non-apologetic for the traumas the war inflicts on individuals. Writers are either to adopt the national cause or what they write loses value.

One example of the propaganda texts these “theorists” endorsed is Abdul Khaliq al-Rikabi’s short story “*Ha’it al-Banadiq*” (the wall of the rifles) in which the protagonist is a young man returning from a city to his village after the news of the death of his father. The return journey occurs with news of the war against Iran in the air, and convoys of military tanks and trucks are sharing the road with passenger vehicles, moving to the frontlines. The boy reflects on his difference with his late father and remembers why he decides to leave the village for good. The father belongs to a line of military family from whom he has inherited a collection of rifles that he heartedly preserves. Through the inner stream of thoughts of the returning youngman, readers are introduced to the history of the family, and the rifles they possess. The family’s rifles reflect the history of the country and the heroic wars and battles Iraq has been

through. The boy's grandfather has collected rifles from the time of the tribal revolts against the Ottomans and the British occupation in the early twentieth century. The father added to the collection rifles from the wars he had undergone and developed an obsession with these rifles and military weaponry in general. The only wish of the dead man, which the son remembers him telling emphatically, is to continue to preserve and embrace this heritage and the values it represents. The boy reflects on times when he felt embarrassed by his father's sickening obsession with useless old rifles that he keeps greasing and maintaining. The story dramatizes this generational, city-village difference between the father and the son, re-iterating the war discourse of the state by the re-association of the boy with the image of the father and the cause he represents. The difference dissolves for the greater cause. The allegorical position of the military-uniformed father indicates the idea of the nation as the father figure for all citizens who may feel divided from it at times but eventually re-embrace its legacy and its greater cause. The narrative closes by the young man standing in his father's forsaken workshop where he used to grease his rifles and hand-make bullets. The boy looks to the wall with a dozen of rifles hanged on each side of his father's picture in his military suit realizing to the first time how similar he is to his dead father. The ending is definite. The identification with the father figure, or the national cause results from the boy's realization of the similarity between himself and his father. The story ends when he decides to finish his father's unfinished work of building a gun's bullet using a cartridge shell that the father has obtained from a veteran of the 1973 war with Israel. The father dies before finishing it and the boy, having the news of the war with Iran in his mind and identifying with his father's cause, decides to finish it: "I looked exactly like him. Except I was younger! For seconds, I moved my eyes among my father's face, the rifles and the case. After we exchanged looks, I quickly closed the door and started to work" (44).

In "*Hai't al-Banadiq*" (the Wall of Rifles) war is not a trauma yet. It is a challenge, an opportunity for the boy to follow in his father's lead and rise up to the expectations of his family. It might be said rightly that the story was written in an early stage of the war when it was not clear how traumatic it would end up becoming; however; the negation of the individual in the story is unforgivable. We do not know much about the father except for his obsession with rifles. The same can be said about the boy, who will end up becoming a copy of his father and grandfather, adding extra rifles to the wall. This negation of the individual, who dissolves in the collectivity embraces the state rhetoric of a sacred war of national defense.

Al-Rikabi's other story, "Istirahat Muharib" (the Break Time of the Warrior) starts by a disabled young man remembering the "calamity" that he has been through and that resulted in his injury and disability before the narrative time moves to when that happened (*al-Mari'i* vol. 2, 471). Al-Rikabi uses the same pattern of a young man returning from the city to his unidentified village near the border between Iran and Iraq. The reason for the return is different in this story. The boy finds his village dying of drought and thirst after the Iranians (the "Other" or the enemy- in the text is not clearly stated who the enemy is, but it can be easily inferred from the context) have cut off the stream of a local river that crosses the border and waters the village and the nearby fields. The Iraqi villagers are represented as so peaceful that they refuse to use force to solve the problem. Instead, the entire village goes out to pray for Heaven to bestow their land with rain (al-Rikabi, "*Istirahat Muharib*", *al-Mari'i*. vol.2, 474-5). The villagers' peaceful attitude does not change things, so the protagonist heroically decides to fix things himself. He tells his father that he is going to sneak behind enemy lines and destroy the small dam they have built on the river. They go together without even having a rifle because "they were peaceful," and they "did not intend to fight" (Ibid 475). The young man achieves the mission but gets shot

by the nearby border police. He only gains consciousness the next day when he finds himself in the village surrounded by people. He remembers all that the day Iraqi military forces start crossing the village towards the borderline. The war has started, and he, a disabled person now, can only watch from a distance and reflect on it. Thus, the environmental crisis of drought (that can partly explain many of the wars and conflicts in Iraq and the Middle East in general) is approached in a very conventional way. Instead of invoking larger structural analysis of the global phenomenon, its reasons or imagining possible other routes to solve it, the text (like many others in this regard) strict themselves to traditional conflict narratives—such as nationalism and classical tribal struggle for resources.

This short, allegorical story is an example of many texts in this line of reasoning for the start of the war, depicting Iranians as the ones who cause the peace-loving Iraqi state and society to unwillingly go to war. The young man's heroic act is the dominant motif in war propaganda literature. His injury is but a collateral damage, a necessary sacrifice, nothing important to compare to what has been achieved: the regaining of the villagers' dignity and right to the natural resources of their land. His achievement, however, is at his individual expense. He loses the ability to walk because of the bullet that settled near his spine (*al-Mari'i*. vol.2, 485). The only movement he does is between corners of his own house. This remains the case until two soldiers, resting for a while in the village after the battle has started, carry him to see the river, now full of water after the Iraqi forces have moved the borderline and destroyed the dam. Heroic and brave as it is, the man's individual action does not permanently solve the problem. It only can be solved by the moving army. The individual's inability to move, contrasted to the moving army illustrates the story's message that only collective actions (like war) can solve political problems. As the title suggests, this fighter can rest now that the army is taking care of the collective

problem.

"*Istirahat Muharib*" starts from where the last story ends: the protagonist, another young man, has made up his mind to work, to do something about the injustice he sees from the very beginning. He does not go through the slight inner conflict that the protagonist of "*Ha'it al-Banadiq*" (the Wall of Rifles) has gone through. The father figure appears in this text not in any sense of a generational conflict or difference between traditional village values and modernist city youth like in the former story, but as a reaffirmation of the boy doing the right thing. While the heroic individual act is traumatic to the boy, the only compensation for that is the victory the country has achieved by military force.

In addition to their propagandist nature, these pro-war texts hardly feature any traumatic experience of individual soldiers, not because they deny these traumas but because of the focus on how secondary they are compared to the great heroic acts needed to prevent a more traumatic national experience if the war is lost. The individual is identified with the nation, which is another way of negating the individual trauma. As Wārid Badr Al-Sālim, an embedded war writer, puts it: "thus is war, we lost our youth but we won our homeland" (*Thakirat al-Ghad* 50). But this was not the case. The "homeland" itself was eventually lost because writers and intellectuals, among other things, sold out to support a dictatorial war-thirsty regime, betraying their humanistic intellectual roles. The heroic myths they planted in the imagination of young readers ("the Wall of Rifles" used to be a mandatory literary reading piece for high school students across the country before 2003) turned into collective and individual traumas that the country has not recovered from yet.

While al-Rikabi has arguably restored his honesty in other works he has written after the war, the stories written by him and other propaganda writers during the 1980s war will remain

examples of how literature can betray the human cause by identifying with dictatorial and oppressive discourses under tired pleas and clichés of nationalist ideology. It is true that the national, collective cause, some might argue, is a legitimate cause to be defended depending on one's political attitudes. However, a fair, critical and nuanced representation of war as primarily a political phenomenon is, I argue, of primary necessity. The more urgent question is not who is right or wrong to defend this or that attitude, but why, to begin with, do we have to pick one of the two positions. It is the need to take the conversation about war beyond the binary of individual and collective traumas that we need to stress to understand wars and the discourses that produce them.

The opposite stand to the Iran War, the antiwar position held mainly by exiled writers, saw the war as an extension of the regime's tyrannical practices against Iraqi people. Mostly, antiwar writing was published in exile after the war has ended and after the writers who experienced the war and its traumas had successfully fled the country and settled in exile. While the propaganda war writing celebrates small and collective victories and heroism; the anti-war trend highlights individual losses and personal experiences. However, both represent latent or expressed national and collective concerns. In both tendencies and to varying levels, individual narratives are trajectories for collective national traumas.

Janān Jāsim Ḥalāwī novel *Layl al-Bilad* (the Nighttime of the Country, 1993) starts with a gloomy atmosphere in al-Basra where the Iran war can be felt approaching in the air. The narrative starts with Abdalla, the main character, before his draft. In basic training, Abdalla is jailed for not being a member of the Ba'ath Party. The narrative grows with the advance of the Iran war as Abdalla is deployed to al-Amara front where he gets injured. The second half of the narrative follows Abdalla's suffering in the northern front where the war is fought against local

Kurdish militias and communist rebels. Abdalla is caught by the communists along with another prisoner. They spend a year in the captivity of the rebels before they join their captors to fight an attack against the camp by another militia, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). Joining the rebel's fight is an act of desertion to the military cause Abdallah was drafted to. Like Yossarian's desertion in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, Abdalla's rejection of the war and his decisions to join the communist rebels is partly a survival defense tactic, but also a responsible ethical attitude to the unjust war of the regime, a desperate individual decision that is, philosophically at least, the right thing to do (Fiala 154).

The communists lose the battle and Abdalla flees to the Iranian side where he joins the rest of the communist rebels, celebrated now as a member of their rebellious force. Abdallah is badly injured in an offensive. The Communist Party decides to smuggle Abdalla with a group of party members to the Soviet Union through Turkey and Syria. The group is found by Turkish police and Abdalla returns to Iran. With a burnt face and an injured back, he then asks the rebels to help smuggle him back to what remains of al-Basra. The ending shows how these traumas impact Abdallah who becomes only a ghost inhabiting the ruins of his destroyed city. The surreal ending scene captures Abdallah found by the American forces who have just arrived to yet another war, that is, the 1991 war or to refer to the title, another nighttime of the country.

Indeed, the title of the novel indicates the national allegorical structure that underlies the narrative. Clearly, what happens to Abdalla summarizes what the country is undergoing. The very name Abdallah, sometimes shortened by Abd (literally meaning slave) indicates the situation of the individual in this collective trauma, a slave to collective forces larger than himself, be that the nation or the party (Ba'thist or Communist). It is very important to stress the difference in the concept of the Individual between the American and Iraqi cultures because they

are not the same. In the totalitarian culture of pre-2003 Iraq, the notion of the individual self in the psychoanalytical (western) sense is rarely represented except in the form of revolution and resistance. Abdallah's unconformity during his military service and his desertion (joining the rebels) indicates revolutionary idealism more than individualistic tendencies. Living bare lives under the despotic regime that inflicts conditions of the exception (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 83), individuals exist in the margins of Iraqi war writing, having no agency and rarely thinking of themselves as individuals. Either way, one thing is certain: the suffering Abdallah goes through is constant and the nighttime of the country continues. It is true that Abdalla, or the individual Iraqi citizen, is victimized by this unjust inhuman war; but still, the war is a national trauma no matter what side one observes it from. The whole country is traumatized and destroyed by it. To indicate that, the novel moves spatially all over the geography of the country to stress the fact that what has been experienced is not an isolated experience of one individual, a certain group or a city, but the whole country. The collective-individual binary dominates the narrative as Abdalla is constantly subjugated not only by the state war discourse but also by his comrades, the communist rebels. In both cases, he is forced to fight a war in which he does not believe, subjected by a bigger cause to which he does not subscribe. In the basic training camp, an officer asks him why he is not a member of the (Ba'aath) Party: "the Party is not a matter of politics. The Party is the homeland." His answer was: "You're right Sir, but I will stay independent." Choosing the ethical stand of being independent does not work for the coercive Party-army machine of the dictatorial regime. The narrative moves to the stream of consciousness of the officer who internalizes the ideology of the warring party-army complex:

> 'Independent,' that's a political word: a big word for a coward, imprisoned, mistreated soldier. 'Independent' from the Party, the government, the state, the army; who the fuck are you but a worm, a piece of shit, a scam, and

> ‘independent!’ who the fuck are you to be independent? You son of a decadent carcass, bastard… [The officer then asks him loudly]:
>
> “Who are you to be independent?
>
> -I am nothing, Sir.
>
> -Of course, you’re nothing, you piece of shit, you woman! (*Ḥalāwī*I 81)

The situation Abdalla is put through summarizes the exiled Iraqi writer’s view of the relationship of Iraqi individuals to the state discourse at the time of that war: as individuals, they are nothing. Abdalla’s small rebellion, refusing to belong to this repressive machine of the Party is an attempt to give meaning to his nothingness, to matter through defiance and difference (83-84). What is interesting about this novel, what makes it slightly different from other representations of the war is not only its political attitude but its investment in this divide between the individual and the collective. The novel does, in fact, touch on the psychological impact of the war on Abdalla’s psyche and mental stability (239). We see him paying less attention and care at dire and critical situations: “his feeling of the needlessness of his existence as an individual drives him to hide his feelings, concerns and ideas” (239). However, the novel’s reliance on the events allows limited space to pursue this line of the narrative. In other words, the continuity of the war (and the scope of the novel) allows the characters no time to process their trauma thoroughly. Put otherwise, one can say that the writer, because of the concern with the collective traumas of the country and the intention to document an alternative history of the war that defies the mainstream narrative of the state, fails to develop narrative spaces to process and navigate individual traumas psychologically. We only have discarded glances at Abdalla’s psyche as we breathlessly follow him through the hardships he and the country have been undergoing.

In addition to creating an alternative history of the war, a cultural trauma narrative, the

novel depicts interesting tropes and tendencies of how the state discourse marginalizes and subjugates individuals. Nationalist narratives are usually masculine, erotic and male. As Palestinian feminist critic Amal Amireh notes, the patriotic lover is usually a groom, a defender of the nation that is metaphorized as a beloved woman (750). The military rhetoric in the novel imposes a masculine-feminine divide between those who are committed to the cause and others who are more feminine and less of men, or mere nothings. Choosing not to subscribe to this narrative, Abdallah is derided and punished by his superior officer. During his basic training, he is imprisoned because he has shaved his mustache, the symbol of masculinity that the state discourse attaches to men comparing Iraqis to the image of the dictator, the ultimate symbol of the state masculine discourse. More than that, women in the novel are quite silenced and shut down because of the dominating masculine discourse of the war. The only female characters that appear in the story are prostitutes. Nawal is a Kurdish prostitute whom Abdalla picks up from Baghdad and brings with him to live with his family in al-Basra as his fiancée. Because of her inability to speak Arabic, Nawal is silenced and used as sex partner with no agency of her own. Abdalla rarely reflects on their relationship or what the future may hold for them. The novel leaves her story open-ended. Another prostitute appears in the novel at the training camp where soldiers bribe the guards to go for a nearby hideout where they have sex and go back to their dire military life. The subjugation and commodification of women's bodies in war is not new or unique (Sanborn 18). However, stressing it in this antiwar novel undermines the state discourse of the military being the guardian of honor in the traditional, masculine sense of the word.

The Iran war continues to be the subject of more Iraqi fictional writings to this day. One can even argue that among the best literary representations of that war are the ones written much later than the time the war has officially ended.[3] The collapse of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 and

the time-lapse allowed more space for writers to process and reproduce their recollections of the traumas of that bloody war. After 2003, the Iran War is remembered generally in light of/as the background for subsequent wars. This remembering is always complemented with memories of what happens after that war and how the cycle of violence continues to the present. Remembering this old war is always a means to talk about the present one, especially with the passage of time that allows writers to see the big picture of the events. Indeed, "the intrinsic multi-temporality of traumatic memory translates into something like this structural law: one wartime will always be seen through the lens of another" (Luckhurst “In War Time” 724). While the current events look hazy and no one is certain of the direction they are heading to, the past is more fixed and easy to talk about, especially since it is so much related to the present. Therefore, the collective and individual traumas of the Iran War (1980-1988) will reappear in this study as we study more recent Iraqi war texts. Just as the Iran war is arguably one reason for subsequent wars in Iraq’s recent history, the literary representations of that war and the traumas that resulted from it make up the tradition against which contemporary Iraqi war fiction thrives.

War literature in Iraq before 2003 developed common patterns and literary conventions that still dominate the literary representation of war today. The most important dynamic conflict in war writing in the country is the conflict of public and individual narratives, a conflict that results in the desertion of nationalism as the pole of public trauma narrative in the country, which allows the rise of individual and ethno-sectarian identity representations. Other thematic patterns include the subjugation and commodification of gendered bodies to the cause of the war, and the total destruction of the environment that accompanies combat. These themes will be discussed in detail when I examine Iraqi war literature after 2003.

2. 2. American War Fiction: A Long Narrative of Trauma

The dialectic of collective-individualistic narrative of war memory, the "paradigm conflict" (Fiala viii) between the public and the private that dominates Iraqi war culture discussed in the previous section manifests itself quite vividly in American literature of war too. While the collective drive is more prevalent in a totalitarian state where nationalist and collectivist ideologies shape and control public and private lives, individualism leads the cultural representations of war in the more capitalist and democratic United States. Indeed, the rise of individualist ideologies in American culture reflects the rise of capitalist economics. "Self-interest creates demand... Less fortunate, individualistic citizens engaging in 'selfish behaviors' and making 'individualistic attributions' are less likely to question the overall equity of the resource distribution system" (Greene 120). The capitalist mode of production encourages liberal values and spread individualistic ideologies. War is a public, political exercise of power that uses individual lives as the tool for achieving political purposes. War literature in such a culture expresses a conflict between public goals and causes (that lead to and justify war) and private experiences, wounds, losses, and traumas. This dialectical relationship, this dichotomy is inherent in the experience of war that is at the same time a public endeavor undertaken by, and influencing individual lives. In American history, war has been "integral to the way the nation developed" (Chambers 777). The country has been "involved in some kind of war for an estimated 226 years of its 243 years as a nation" (Clark 323). War "is the fuel that secures one of the imperatives of the American spirit – progress" (Rehlicki, 95). In American Myth, wars are

> the expression of the belief that Americans can do anything they desire, can build nations and rebuild societies, can speed progress, bring freedom and democracy to the world, so long as they are united, organized, and willing to devote all their human and material resources to the end desired." (Robertson 1982, 349)"

In colonial America, war was the means of survival for the newly arrived settlers. This continues with the growth of the myth of the frontier, the idea that America is capable of ever-expanding and growing as long as Americans keep striving to reach beyond their (geographical and other) limits. This myth justifies American genocides against indigenous peoples, and continues to justify other American wars:

> Americans still tell tales of and believe in the unity, the great purposes, and the ultimate destiny of the American nation. Very often they are tales of organized, mass action; tales of war which embody nationalism and the vision of freedom. American wars are revolutions, the Civil War on a world scale. The end and the purpose of those wars is freedom, the destruction of slavery (whatever its form), and the construction of individual and national independence. (Robertson 1982, 349).

Clearly, such a mythic system of just-war ideology subjugates and alienates the individual, the agent and the victim of war. However, the advance of Capitalism in American life and the transformation of the state from the project of nation-building (that requires subscribing to collective goals) into an expanding capitalist empire encouraged the rise of Individualism. One place to epitomize this conflict is the giant body of American war literature. The mainstream American war literature develops a pattern of inclusion to different political and ideological attitudes to war, creating the myth of the traumatized hero as the catalyst for incorporating supporting and opposing war positions. Pro and anti-war texts that I examine essentialize the individual experience as the sole medium to understand and represent war, minimalizing the trauma of war to specific individual psychological wounds, excluding political, economic and cultural understanding of war as a collective political experience.

The American corpus of war fiction illustrates the developments of this myth as the synthesis to this problematic relationship between public and individual traumas. The concern

for public aspects of the war experience can be seen in patriotic literature, especially earlier accounts of wars that take place on American soil pertaining the existence of the nation such as the War of Independence and the Civil War). This myth can also be seen in developing heroic characters who combine individualistic attributes of heroism with sacrificial attitudes for the public good. Indeed "individual personality rather than group identity and responsibility'' is one of the key ''value orientations distinctive to American culture… the individual [is] an integral agent, relatively autonomous and morally responsible'' (Williams *American Society* 482). It is clearly not accurate to attribute a certain trait to such a dynamic and multifaceted culture as the culture of the United States; however, generalizations are helpful to understand and analyze large-scale phenomena. This individualistic sentiment can be traced to early transcendentalist writings of Nineteenth century iconic intellectual figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Their notions of self-reliance, independence and individualistic agency supersedes collective social and national causes. Society is seen to corrupt the individual. The latter is seen as the center of existence, the manifestation of the transcendental Being and the producer of meaning.

However, the nation, the collective imagined community of the United States is a significant concern for much of nineteenth-century American war literature, especially since that was the time for the conception of the nation. The American War of Independence (1775–1783) was one of the first collective traumatic experience in American cultural memory. Early American literature creates, among other things, a national history for the new nation, a folkloric tradition and a national imaginary. Works of fiction as early as Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," (1819) show much attention to the inherent conflict between the collective idea of the nation and the independence of individual citizens. One of the earliest "American" works of

fiction, the story depicts the birth of the American nation as a sort of fantastic dream. "Rip Van Winkle" marks the earliest fictional account of life around the first “American” war, the War of Independence. While the story has less to do with the subject of trauma of combat in the modern sense, its historical significance as a marker of American “literary nationalism” (Hazlett 560), as “the first legend to seize the American imagination” (Fiedler 339) and its concern for the collective/individual divide in the life of early Americans puts the story at the beginning of any attempt to historicize American fictional engagements with war, trauma and national memory.

The story follows Rip Van Winkle, a villager in colonial America who falls asleep in a cave in the Catskill Mountains near New York while escaping his domestic life and deserting his nagging wife. He wakes up 20 years later, having missed the American Revolutionary War and the independence of his country. The man discovers that shocking changes have happened during his magical sleep. When he returns to his village, he recognizes no one. He arrives just after an election, and people ask how he has voted. He declares himself a faithful subject of King George III of Britain, unaware of the American Revolution and the political change it has accomplished and nearly gets himself into trouble with the people of his town until one elderly woman recognizes him as the long-lost Rip Van Winkle. The man learns that most of his friends were killed fighting in the American Revolution. He is also disturbed to find his son, now grown up and having his very name. He becomes bewildered about his true identity. Who is he after all, and what has happened to him?

> The poor fellow was now completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man. In the midst of his bewilderment, the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was, and what was his name?
>
> “God knows,” exclaimed he, at his wit’s end; “I’m not myself—I’m somebody else—that’s me yonder—no—that’s somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my

> gun, and every thing's changed, and I'm changed, and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (Irving 21).

This feeling of anxiety and bewilderment over one's identity is typical of identity narratives. Although what happens here is not strictly traumatic in the modern sense, this bewilderment is key to the question of identity construction that the story attempts to address. The story can be read, among other things, as a national allegory of what America is or meant to be, a reflection on the transformation that has just taken place and the future that awaits. At the same time, the sense of individualism expressed in the text is characteristic of subsequent American war literature. The two drives, to attend to the public; to attend to the individual experiences grew together with the growth of American war literature.

In addition to its position in American literary history as a first contribution in the genre of short story (that grows to become "the quintessential American literary genre" (Updike, cover) the story is recognized for its irony and satirical tone. The relief Van Winkle feels at being "liberated" from his wife, the connection he makes between King George III and George Washington are markers of the satire he has against the radical aspirations people of his time attach to the revolutionary ideals of the new independent nation. "The story concludes by resolving national history and personal memory into folk temporality (Warner 791). As an early example of national allegory, "Rip Van Winkle"

> produces the narrative being of a folk people, the whiteness of which results from its being drawn, in the different temporality of a common antiquity, from the very European colonial and national lineages that, as politics, had made the New York scene too historical. The personal histories of individual people founder [sic] in broken memory, bad records, and generational crisis; yet the popular continuum belongs to a national people that is also a race" (Warner 791).

Irving uses an ancient Dutch myth to create a contemporary "American" legend. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler claims that "[e]ver since, the typical male

protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat" Fiedler, 317). This archetypal American hero is the essence of what American war literature will later develops, the "trauma hero myth" (Scranton). The story becomes a traditional national literary archetype for evading domesticity by going to war, fishing, hunting or just evading civilization and heading to the jungle, the archetypal American frontier. This escape from society to find one's self becomes the alternative to facing social and political problems. Importantly, Rip Van Winkle does not participate in the War of Independence, his liberation (from domestic tyranny of his nagging wife) happens only by escape, a motif that will repeatedly occur in later American fictional treatments of the conflict between public and private life-traumas.

Indeed, "war has been a regular part of American history, integral to the way the nation developed" (Chambers 777). The main wars of the Nineteenth century in the United States, i.e. the Revolutionary War (of Independence) (1775–1783), the (1812-1815)War against Britain, the Mexican - American War (1846-1848) and the Civil War (1861-1865) were direct experiences that took place on American soil and caused the death and suffering of combatant and non-combatant Americans. If war creates states that make wars as it is usually said in political and social sciences (Tilly 42; Cohen 329-358) then these conflicts created and demarcated the United States as we know it. In one way or another these wars also define what it means to be American, that is, they were part of the collective meaning-making that the new nation struggles to perform in its attempt to rise for nationhood and later to becoming an empire. While the War of Independence is the declaration of America as a nation, the Civil War is the conflict that defines the meaning, the spirit of the nation and the direction it was heading. Nation-building in the American experience is synonymous to state-building, both started and continued with wars and

collective conflicts.

Generally, American war literature in the Nineteenth century celebrates war and the nation in light of chivalrous, romantic notions of courage, heroism, glory, and sacrifice. Such values obviously adhere to the collective good, the sacrifice of the self, or self-interests for the sake of the collective/public good. These values contradict the advancing individualistic sentiment of the modern age. Hence the movement from the collective to the individualistic perspective that starts to dominate American war literature with the advance of modernism in American culture. Since the Nineteenth century, the narrative of American war literature becomes a narrative of American individuals facing, escaping or justifying war. Summarizing the characteristics of modern American novels, Wallis R. Sanborn III holds that "'the modern temperament is individualistic' …hence the use of the optic of one specific textual character...to present mass conflicts from the perspective of the individual, thus to humanize that which is not human, to stabilize that which is not stable, modern warfare" (Sanborn, 3). The best example of this individual optic of the war story in the late Nineteenth century is Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage.*

Crane's 1895 novel is one of the first realist war novels in American literature. Representing the experiences of soldiers in the Civil War (1861-1865) the novel avoids the idealism writers of the time usually attach to war. It questions abstract notions of glory and honor by focusing on the experiences of a newly enlisted soldier who navigates his path to manhood by enduring combat and learning from it. In this novel, Crane is more concerned with the inner feelings and experiences of the foot soldier than the external world of the war. The proximity in depicting combat as well as the psychological engagement of the soldiers with war distinguish the novel. The narrative starts by featuring the inner discourse of the protagonist, Henry Fleming,

who reflects on and feels ashamed of his feelings of fear and cowardice in facing death. Fleming runs from the first combat experience, justifying his escape as a natural instinctive act of self-preservation. He later regrets it and yearns for "a wound, a red badge of courage" (Crane 60) that proves his manhood among his peers. Later Fleming gets a non-combat wound and is satisfied that no one knows about it, that "[h]e had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man" (Crane 95) in his peers' eyes. Throughout the novel, Fleming navigates his fears and ends up adopting the rhetoric of the war and "becoming a man." In the final combat scene, he leads up a charge that his company makes holding the flag for his comrades and distinguishing himself as a courageous, dashing hero. Fleming starts by naturally fearing death and caring for himself, grows over this fear to "maturity," that is, to adapt the military code and the rhetoric of war. The development of his character in the text, the innocence-to-experience journey, the "maturity" he gains are signs of his conformity and acceptance of his individual role as a cog in the giant machine of the army.

The novel stresses the dichotomy of public and individual experiences of war. The third-person narrator keeps referring to Henry Fleming and his peers as the "youth" or the "young soldier" (Crane 2; 3; 7; 8; 9; 10) to abstract their individuality. Readers only know Fleming's name in chapter eleven in the book (Crane 76) as if the name, the individual signifier of the character is not equally important as the role he (and his peers) play in the narrative. This changes later as the inner feelings of the protagonist are stressed and highlighted. The novel psychologizes war to decontextualize it. By focusing on Fleming's inner experience of the war, the novel contributes to a long tradition of combat fetishism of war as a journey to experience and manhood. In addition to abstracting soldiers into adjectives instead of names and individual characters, the novel does not mention the names or dates of the battles fought by these soldiers.

The warring sides of the battle, the Unionists and the Confederates armies are presented as simple colors with no distinct cultures or ideologies. The real enemy in the novel is not the southern confederates but war itself (Sanborn 67). This abstraction de-historicizes the war, generalizing the experience to all wars instead of a specific one. Crane avoids the politics of the war because of the controversial nature of that war because it was an inner American conflict. Concepts such as nationalism would not fit in defining what the war was about. Instead of creating a novelistic alternative history to the Civil War, instead of dissecting or understanding it as a collective historical trauma, the novel creates a specific account of the war, generalizing its truistic/ cliché message that war is chaos and evil. However, the notion of the individual being a "cog in the [military] machine" is stressed in the text. In chapter one, Henry remembers his mother telling him that he is "jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others" (Crane, 5). The irony of his fake wound serving as his badge of courage is a critique to his "egoistic" anxiety over his individual safety. He only overcomes it in combat when he loses his sense of being alone and feels himself a "member" of his group, not an individual. "He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire" (Crane 36).

The attention to the private, to the psychological impact of war on individuals that seems liberating for individuals, would prove to be alienating and misdirecting the attention to the reasons of the collective traumas they go through because of war. This pattern-shift can be detected with the transformation of America from a recently independent, isolated growing nation into an empire in the early twentieth century. With that transformation, the meaning of war shifts from nation-building and preserving what it means to be an American into surviving individually under the capitalist Empire that the United State has become in the twentieth

century. The national-allegories and the collectivist tendencies of earlier literary representations of war in American literature are similar to what we see in Iraqi texts of the twentieth century, both contributing to the project of nation-building. However, the dialectic of the individual and the collective has never disappeared in American culture of war, as we will see in literary and cultural responses to national traumas such as the attacks of September 11, 2001. The dialectical tension between the two continues. As the safety and security of the nation was not existentially threatened throughout subsequent American wars, individualism and individual traumas become ideological dictum that alienates Americans from the ramifications of the collective conflicts they go through by fighting the wars of the empire. Mainstream American culture succeeded in incorporating all major representations of the war to the canon, developing the depoliticizing myth of the trauma hero. It is quit

In the twentieth century, American wars become external projects of a growing empire. Except for the perceived threat of the Japanese empire, they represent no real threat to the United State as a nation. WWII is generally seen as a "just war" against fascist tyrannical regimes. Still, the war resulted in the deaths of millions of American men and women. Despite these human losses, despite the social, economic and cultural transformations the war brought upon American life, by the end of WWII, the United States emerged as a global capitalist power. Subsequent American wars were attempts to further and secure this position despite the humanitarian costs of these wars. In novels treating war, the concern with the public aspect of the war experience changes to more individualistic accounts. Patriotism retreats to more pop literary and cultural forms such as songs and movies. Mainstream literary/fictional representations of war in America grow more ambivalent about the collective aspect of the story of war and trauma. Americans in the post-War decades fought in foreign lands, far away from home and family. Such experiences

of war differ from previous accounts where the homeland is the frontline. Patriotic and propaganda literature is faced with the growing sense of opposition to these wars and to the growing military bureaucracy that they develop. The myth of the traumatized hero provides a solution for this conflict between the public and private experiences of war. American war ideology finds a way to circulate its narrative by allowing opposite voices to lead the cultural representation of war as long as they further and reproduce the traumatized American hero narrative.

Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* is one example of the individualistic opposition to the absurd discourse of the war. The 1961 novel is based on the experience of the author in WWII as a B25 Bombardier. The novel is distinguished for its ironical representation of the war, a feature that departs from traditional and realistic war fiction. Largely considered the best novel of WWII (Scranton, *the Trauma Hero and the Lost War* 163), the novel does not attempt to portray the "reality" of combat but to mock the illogical, insane military discourse and inhuman subjugation of individuals in that discourse. The main storyline focuses on the life of Yossarian, a B 25 pilot, and his fellow group of bombardiers on an Italian island in WWII. Yossarian is "traumatized" by the death of his comrade Snowden, whose death is narrated in doses throughout the narrative. The circling around the main traumatic event of the novel, the "evasive narration" of Snowden's death becomes a "classic trope of trauma narratives" (Gibbs 52). Yossarian's friends think he is crazy because of his fear that millions of people are trying to kill him. He takes the war too personally, emphasizing the individualistic approach to war. The war being raged against him. He is moved by no national ideals or principles. But, at the same time, he sees himself just one of its possible targets (Heller 7), thus including other possible targets to the limited individualistic approach. In addition, Yossarian and the other bombers in the Air Force squadron are trapped by

the absurd bureaucracy of their unit and the violent and dangerous bombarding missions they have to conduct. This entrapment is expressed in the catchy title phrase, the rule of "Catch 22" which refers to a circular, paradoxical reasoning that traps the victims of that rule and benefits those who make and control it (Heller 24). The best explanation of the reasoning of catch 22 is in this passage:

> There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to (Heller 23-24).

Anyone of Yossarian's team has the right to claim insanity to avoid participating in the bombarding missions, but his claim would be rejected because he has to be sane to want to avoid that insanity. The irony of this illogical reasoning governs the lives of Yossarian and his group. Indeed, irony is "one dominating form of modern understanding" which "originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (Fussell 38).

The entrapment of the individual in soldier within the abstract illogical system of the war is established as the main motif in the novel. This paradoxical rule can be seen in different situations in the novel, illustrating the absurdity of war and military rules. However, the real paradox that the catch 22 tries to evade is the depiction of the bombardier, the most destructive agent of modern warfare as the victim of trauma, not the perpetrator. Indeed, as Roy Scranton puts it, "Yossarian, as an American bombardier, is a representative figure of this almost unimaginable destructive power, yet his cultural role is not as an agent of collective violence, but its victim" (Scranton, *the Trauma Hero and the Lost War* 164). This other "shoot-and-cry"

narrative, “provides US readers with heightened affect and a political alibi” (Holston 3). It is in the figure of the anti-establishment hero, the free, independent character of Yossarian that American war ideology finds the right medium to further its war rhetoric in a time when patriotism and nationalism are obsolete causes. By focusing on the story of this American hero, the novel frames the story of war, erasing or excluding the stories and traumas of those whom he bombs. The individual account compensates for the political understanding of war. The collective engulfing power that controls the traumatized individual is not nationalism anymore. Instead, capitalist interests of military-industrial corporations govern and control war as a business. The trauma hero is the “imaginary solution” to the contradictions of capitalism and nationalism (Scranton, *the Trauma Hero and the Lost War* 17).

Troubled by the death of another friend of his squadron and the constant rise of the number of the missions each one of its members must fly, Yossarian refuses to fly any more missions. When he is arrested, the colonel offers him to get court-martialed or released on the condition that he approves the colonel’s plan to raise the required number of missions to eighty. Realizing the inescapability of the system, the futility of getting away in an honest, legal way, Yossarian chooses to escape the whole system. To reject the rule of Catch 22, to gain control of his life, to make an ethical choice, he decides to desert and moves to neutral Sweden. Yossarian’s escape is individual. Public concerns and abstract principles (such as nationalism, duty) are ideological constraints that chain him; to escape them is the only ethical and rightful response to an illogical, absurd war. When a “conscientious objection” (Fiala, 154) is not working because of the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the military, desertion is the ethical choice. Yossarian’s experience and attitude to the war are existentialist expressions of man’s responsibility towards the violence and inhumanity of the institutions he functions within. The

novel exposes the absurdity of living a bureaucratically controlled, inauthentic life. The only exit is to desert. Desertion is how Yossarian chooses to defy collective subjugating values of the war system, for his individualistic interest that ultimately serves the interests of others.

In addition to this main plot, the novel touches on other aspects of the absurdity of the war. Among these are prostitution and warmongering. Seeking sexual release from the pressure of their daily lives, the men in Yossarian's unit go to nearby brothels. One of the men falls in love with a prostitute but is killed in his next mission. Prostitution is a recurrent topic in American war fiction (Sanborn 18). War conditions sexualize men and women. The proximity of death unleashes the rather controlled desire to have sex. The exceptional conditions of war (the absence of the family or marriage institutions for instance) enable soldiers to seek easy ways to quench this desire. In the dire conditions of combat in WWII civilians in areas of military combat were deprived of necessary economic means of survival. Prostitution thrives when men who are deprived of a "normal" sex life find themselves surrounded by women who have nothing to hold on to, except their sexualized bodies. Male soldiers seek to release their bodies of the life-and-death pressures of combat (Sanborn 18). This line of the narrative exposes the alienation individuals feel under the war system. Sex is but an escape from this alienation, an outlet that the system allows to release individuals off the stress and trauma they endure because of it. Another subplot in the novel focusses on an officer's black-market trade in which he uses available means to benefit from the war circumstances. Milo uses the squadron planes in an illegal food transportation business all over Europe. While the men in the squadron suffer the hardships of the war, his business flourishes. This storyline is clearly allegorical to the role of warmongering and capitalist interests in the war. In this novel and in modern and contemporary American war novels in general, capitalism emerges as the dominant ideology superseding

nationalism. Individuals, in the novel, are subjected to trauma and injustice because of the business interests of military-industrial corporations. While the war continues, “[b]usiness boomed on every battlefront” (Heller 139). Indeed war “threatens to become a way of life, dominated by the business interests of global military-industrial corporations” (Holbing 18).

Catch 22 “leads to a vision of “human responsibility issuing from indignation” (Cacicedo 357). Yossarian’s escape is not like Rip Van Winkle’s in Washington Irving’s above-discussed story. His escape is an escape *to* ethical responsibility, to rid himself of the destructive absurd system of the war machine: "Let the bastards thrive," says Yossarian, "since I can't do a thing to stop them but embarrass them by running away" (Heller 462). Instead of running from his ethical responsibilities by losing himself to the system, he is "running to them: There's nothing negative about running away to save my life" (Heller 461). While this escape may seem to undermine the war ideology, the false awareness or the distance that Yossarian expresses from this ideology of “the bastards” is when ideology functions best. As Slavoj Žižek, commenting on *MASH*, a 1970 American war film, puts it

> an ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it [that]'not all is ideology, beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person' is *the very form of ideology*, of its 'practical efficiency (*Plague of Fantasies* 27).

Žižek rightly maintains that ideology subtly functions by suspending the political for the sake of the aesthetics of the text, that “only references to such trans-ideological kernel which makes an ideology “workable” (28).

Yossarian’s escape is an individual solution to a collective problem-war, an opposition to the business model of war that continues to serve the interests of military capitalist corporations. However, by choosing to end the novel with an ethical (Fiala), rightful attitude to war made by

an individual, Heller embraces the perpetrator trauma narrative tradition over the nuanced collective consideration of the war story. The novel essentializes the combat experience of American “trauma heroes,” framing the story of the war and excluding the voices of others. Finally, Yossarian’s fictional-ethical decision to desert, arguably, compensates for the guilt of Heller who, in reality, did not.

The myth of the traumatized individual grows with the growth of the corpus of American war literature in the twentieth century. To move slightly from the mainstream war texts, one can discuss Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) as another narrative of individual and collective trauma. The novel focusses on individual experience of war trauma, intersecting it with the collective trauma of Native American people and culture. This addition is necessary as it expands the possibilities of war trauma representations from the mainstream to including the voice of others, of incorporating traumas of war victims afar from the traumatized white American hero. The novel is based on the oral traditions and ceremonial practices of the Navajo and Pueblo peoples who live in parts of New Mexico and Arizona.

The main plot of the novel follows the story of a Tayo, a white-Pueblo who has just returned from WWII. Tayo’s status as a “mixed blood” (Chavkin 11;13) is a source of discomfort and discrimination. He is mistreated by his native community as an illegal bastard son. He lost his mother when he was four and has never known his white father. In the war, Tayo and his cousin Rocky served in the Philippines and were held by the Japanese as POW before the end of the war in 1945. After the war, Tayo is told by doctors that he suffers from "battle fatigue" or what would later be called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Tayo suffers from hallucination, vomiting and a sense of guilt over his survival of the war and the death of his cousin Rocky and his uncle Josiah. Tayo had promised his uncle to protect Rocky. His sense of

guilt extends from this personal loss to the collective trouble he has put his people through. During the war in the Philippines when he was trying to carry his injured cousin, heavy rain was causing them trouble. Tayo cursed the rain, which mythically results in a drought in his native Pueblo reservation. Nature is an active force in the novel. Silko, among other things, provides a critical narrative of the war's ecosystem. Following the natives' spiritual understanding of the world, drought, rain, wind and other elements of nature are active (but not personified) characters in the novel. However, this spiritual tradition is challenged by mainstream (white) American culture. Tayo's hybrid position between these cultures causes him to suffer immensely. Since the very first contact with the white culture in school, native children are told that their culture and traditions are invalid interpretations of the world that they have to forget about them and be "civilized." As they grow up, native kids seek the pleasures of the white culture; they enroll in the army to get accepted into white culture, to avoid discrimination. This tolerance happens only as long as they wear military uniform, once the war ends, the Native Americans return to their life under discrimination and prejudice. They have to deal with their traumas on their own. The individual's plight of being stuck (divided) between two cultures is established.

After being hospitalized for a while without a cure to his ailment, Tayo returns home to the pueblo reservation to stay with his Auntie and Grandma. Upon returning, he meets other WWII veterans from the reservation. They exchange memories about their time in the war, how they were treated differently as soldiers, the discrimination they suffer after the war and how they gained nothing from fighting the white man's war. Alcohol is one of the cures that the white American culture offers for Tayo and his friends to deal with and forget their traumas. Along with other addictive substances, it is one of the usual alternatives traumatized individuals turn to

“to relieve symptoms of anxiety, irritability, and depression” (Volpicelli et al 256-57). However, just like the white man's medicine, alcohol proves to be destructive as Tayo ends up stabbing Emo, one of his veteran friends over a bar fight. The contact of white settler culture and Native American cultures is destructive on the individual level and traumatic on the collective level. If the time of the first colonial contact is long gone, the cultural trauma is still there. The collectivist trauma of the story is the continuous contact of white and Native American cultures. The destruction caused by this contact is personified by the character of the hybrid Tayo and the suffering he undergoes. The contact is not a historical moment according to the novel, but a continuous colonial trauma endured by both victims and perpetrators. This contact is proved destructive to the lives of the natives and the natural world ever since the arrival of the white colonialists to what they consider the “New” World. The victims of this trauma are not only the Native Americans but also the white folks:

> The destroyers had only to set it into motion, and to sit back to count the casualties. But it was more than a body count; the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. And always they had been fooling themselves, and they knew it (Silko 178).

The enemy in the novel is not one group, one collectivity of people or one nation. Just as in other anti-war novels discussed above, the enemy is abstracted into “war” and “destruction.” The “destroyers” are the real enemy. They do not only cause war and destruction but also “work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other” (Silko 213). It is this sort of destruction that the novel opposes and exposes, the destruction of collective memory and culture. It is the “destroyers” in Silko’s words; military capitalist interests in Joseph Heller’s words, who are the real enemy.

The collective trauma of the war is highlighted by the individual story of Tayo. A traditional medicine man named Ku'oosh is called to cure Tayo of his battle fatigue (or PTSD) with a ceremony, the traditional way men who have been to wars are treated in this particular Native American culture. The ceremony does not work for Tayo because of the hybrid nature of his character, the traits he has gained from the destructive white culture and the horrific amount of death and destruction he has seen in the war. These, he cannot communicate to the old medicine man; "even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous" (Silko 36). Ku'oosh's ceremony fails and the elders tell Tayo that he needs a stronger one; they send him to a man named Betonie who tells him that the ceremony needs to be changed to adapt to the changing times. For the second ceremony to be fulfilled, Tayo needs to get back his uncle's lost cattle. In his way south, he meets a woman who helps him, sleeps with him, and provides him with shelter and guidance. When he returns home after achieving his mission, the elders tell him that the woman who helped him is the mythical A'moo'ooh and that they will be blessed (Silko 239). Tayo's heroic role of bringing the cattle and resetting things to the way they were is an indication of his role as a community hero. Bringing the lost cattle is a biblical reference to the parable of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11-18). A perpetrator of war himself and a member of a victimized collectivity, Tayo's trauma can be interpreted as a Christian sacrifice necessary to compensate for the original sin of colonizing the native America. It is through his individual trauma and ceremony that the collective national wound can be healed.

Tayo, cured after bringing the cattle and completing the ceremony, moves to live with the woman, and his friends from the military spread word that he has gone insane and needs to be

hospitalized. Emo threatens to kill him. Tayo hides and hitchhike his way to avoid the endless circle of killing and revenge with the help of the natural elements. He succeeds in evading Emo and his group. He refrains from participating in another killing when Emo is torturing a friend over letting Tayo escape. Moved to stand up to Emo and stop him, Tayo controls himself, remains quiet in his hiding place near a deserted uranium mine, avoiding another act of killing. The ceremony is completed. Tayo is cured of his disorder. The respect Tayo shows to the natural world is returned by the interference of the natural elements to his favor. The uranium mine symbolizes the epitome of the destructiveness of white culture, the atomic bomb. It also refers to the exploitation of nature by the civilized world and the danger it causes to the Native Americans.

The novel weaves several narrative lines of war's traumatic memories, realistic present-time narrative, mythical Native American storytelling, and poems. Events follow the narrator's stream of thinking, not a chronological order. This multi-vocal collectivist viewpoint narrative method is necessary to communicate the storylines of the collective-individual trauma. The movement in time echoes the movement of thoughts in Tayo's trauma-stricken, dysfunctional mind, and his path to healing and completing the ceremony. Storytelling is essential in the novel. The ceremony to cure Tayo that the book revolves around is expressed as an act of telling the story of the trauma that Tayo and his people have been through. Telling stories is a means to preserve cultural memory, transform knowledge, wisdom and experiences of the world to the next generations. By telling the story of his war experience to other members of his community, Tayo makes sense of his experience, passes knowledge and creates a form to his grief and anxiety. Memory is essential to preserve identity and the necessary respect and reverence between people and nature. Josiah, Tayo's uncle, tells him that the "old people used to say that

droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave" (Silko 42). Based on the significance of the tradition of oral storytelling to the native culture, Silko's *Ceremony* tries to restore the memory and cultural identity of the Pueblo people through the act of telling the story of their cultural trauma, the violent contact with white culture. Intersecting this collective trauma with the individual trauma of an American war veteran turns the novel from an ethnic narrative of identity into an American cultural trauma narrative.

Ceremony is a protest against the discrimination against Native Americans, especially those who served in WWII without recognition of their traumas and sacrifices (Sanborn, 56), a protest against the destruction of nature and the natural resources of Native American territories by white Americans and also a warning against the Vietnam War (Sanborn 56). However, the main message of the novel is to preserve Native American cultural memory, spiritual traditions, and ethnic identity, not by defying and rejecting modern culture, but by changing and adapting to the changing times. As the medicine man Betonie puts it, the ceremony has to be changed to adapt the changing conditions of the age. In other words, the right response to the collective trauma that the Pueblo people have suffered is to preserve their culture and restore their values. One key value in their belief system, one element that Silko seems to argue as the cure to the collective trauma of the war is to restore people's respect for nature and the planet's ecosystem.

The novel is an example of the impact of the "trauma hero myth" on American culture in the late twentieth century. The appeal of the myth invites non-canonical fictional interventions to participate in writing the American story of war. Silko's *Ceremony* has made it to the canon now. The novel represents a voice that slightly shifts the dominant paradigm of white Americans fighting wars and writing of their traumas and suffering because of these wars. The widespread celebration of this novel as an American narrative corresponds to the ideological inclusions of

ethnic minorities into the fabric of the American nation, a step in the continuing project of nation-building and reinvigoration. Richard Slotkin, speaking of the national mythology in American war films states that "the United States could neither recruit nor finance an army of millions without the active participation of racial and ethnic minorities. The official ideologists of America's Great War, therefore, offered them a new social bargain: recognition as Americans in exchange for wartime service" (Slotkin 3). The inclusion of *Ceremony* and other Native American (or any other minority representation for that matter) in mainstream representations of American war experiences corresponds to this ideological function of war literature and culture.

Obviously, no survey of American war literature can give justice to such a huge corpus of various writings. However, the trauma hero myth continues to dominate American cultural representations of American wars. Instead of allowing Americans to understand and make sense of their wars and the cultural conflicts, the political reasons behind them, this myth continues to grow, depoliticizing war by essentializing the individual experience of combat soldiers. As a carrier of American war ideology, the myth of the traumatized hero finds intricate means to appeal to the consuming readership of war literature. By including the Native American story to the canon of American war literature, it enlarges the paradigm of the great, inclusive national narrative. The inclusion of the other in the narrative of the perpetrator trauma is misrepresenting (the Native Americans) because it excludes the story of the real others of that war, the Filipinos and other victims whose traumas turn into guilt for the perpetrating, traumatized hero.

Notes

1. Aijaz Ahmed's famous response essay to Jameson's article is one of the strongest Marxian and postcolonial critiques to Jameson's thesis. Ahmed "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" See also Robert Tally's "Fredric Jameson and the Controversy over 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.'".
2. Fredric Jameson refers to the rising nationalisms in the Iraq-Iran war in his article about national allegory in third world literature, predicting that the only thing these nationalisms could be replaced with is "perhaps some global American Postmodernist culture," which is arguably what happened after the collapse of the Ba'athist brand of nationalism in Iraq in 2003. See Jameson, "Third-world Literature." p. 82.
3. Examples for post-2003 texts that engage and remember the Iran War include Ali Bader's *Asatithat al-Wahm* (Professors of Illusion 2012), Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), Nasif Falak's *Khidirqad wa -l-Asr al-Zeitooni* (Khidirqad and the Olive Age 2008) and many others.

Chapter Three

The Iraq War as Cultural Trauma: Early Representations and Dominant Ideologies

As I discussed in chapter one, American and Iraqi war literatures develop patterns of representations that revolve around ideas of individual and collective traumas respectively. Dominated by individualism as an ideological marker of Americanism, the American war literature I examine generally tends to depoliticize war, it does so as a rhetorical strategy or as an intentional narrowing of the scope of representation to the more concrete experience of individuals, distancing itself from political institutions. The Iraqi literature examined here, on the other hand, is dominated by such institutions. Therefore, the articulation of public/collective interests is prevalent, especially in representing collective disasters like war. However, early literary representations of the Iraq War (2003-2011) are overt political (ideological) attempts to mold the canon of the literature of this war. In this chapter, I argue that early American and Iraqi representations of the Iraq War invest in what Jeffery Alexander (et al) calls "cultural trauma." American texts frame the war generally as a response to the trauma of the events of September 11, 2001. Iraqi texts, on the other hand, seem to prioritize the national narrative, the war as a cultural, national trauma, over the personal agonies. In both cases, incorporating the public dimension of the war trauma is not part of a nuanced articulation of a complex, multifaceted experience but an ideological intervention to shape the meaning and memory of the war. Rather than sharing a point of similarity by such investment in the public discourses over the war, these early interventions rhetorically alienate individuals and erase others.

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" (Smelser 38). According to Jeffery Alexander,

> Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidary relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the sufferings of others. Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be, societies expand the circle of the we. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others' trauma, and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. By denying the reality of others' suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others. In other words, by refusing [others] to participate in what I will describe as the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone" (1).

Cultural traumas are "processes of meaning making and attribution, a contentious contest in which various individuals and groups struggle to define a situation and to manage and control it" (Eyerman "Social Theory" 43). American and Iraqi writers of war fiction transfer, communicate and shape the memory of the war for readers and communities, engaging in "meaning-making" of the constructed collective trauma of that war. The texts I study here are prose-fictional constructions of trauma that merit a critical reading that revisits the meanings they create and expose the ideological/discursive energies that motivate and shape their processes of meaning-making.

3. 1. Traumatized American Heroes: The War as a Response to the Trauma of September 11

The American war story is often "the tale of the individual white male heterosexual soldier, a story of his personal experience of disillusionment and loss. In American war narratives, war functions as a mirror for American masculine selfhood and nationhood" (Haytock 336). The fetishism of the personal war experience allows what James Camble calls "combat gnosticism"-a term that "addresses the navel-gazing focus on combat experience as a spiritually essential quality in war literature studies" (Buchanan 10). The dominant mode of what could be described as "experience fetishism" (Buchanan 15) in representing war grows in a context of

attempts to forget the political failures of war by focusing on the details. This “a politics of forgetting” as Roy Scranton describes it, “actively elides the question of what U.S. soldiers were fighting for and the bigger problem of who they were killing, in favor of the more narrow and manageable question of ‘what it was like’” (Trauma Hero Myth). On the surface, this experience fetishism goes with “the myth of traumatic amnesia,” or “the inability to remember an intensely painful experience” (Pederson 334). By sticking to the details, the author prioritizes individual suffering of American soldiers and veterans, giving them agency. However, this kind of amnesia is ideologically constructed omission, a cultural attempt to forget the Iraq war and channel its memory into isolated personal narratives, or worse, a response by these naïve young individuals to a bigger cause- the trauma of September Eleven. Jeffery Alexander warns against falling into a “naturalistic fallacy” (8) when applying psychoanalytical individual trauma modules to collective, social constructs. American critic William Spanos describes the ways that the memory of the Vietnam war has come to “haunt America as a contradiction that menaced the legitimacy of its perennial self- representation as the exceptionalist and “redeemer nation:” (ix). Spanos speaks of an attempt in the dominant American culture (including the government, the media, Hollywood, and even educational institutions) to "forget Vietnam" in the aftermath of the war on that country (ix).

Similarly, American literature of the 2003 war in Iraq tends to forget, package and reduce the war into individual experiences of traumatized American heroes. Unlike previous wars that usually take a decade or a generation before developing a canon of literary representation, the 2003 war was depoliticized and packaged in embedded literature before the war has even concluded. In this section, I read earlier interventions in American literature of the Iraq War that attempt to shape the canon of the genre/era, literary/fictional representations of war that package

the war story as individual trauma, betraying collectivities of American and Iraqi victims of the war violence. These texts frame the Iraq war as a response to the national trauma of Nine-Eleven, epistemically falling into the rhetoric of supporting the nation-at-war. The trauma motif is the prevalent narrative theme in these texts.

Despite the difficulty to define trauma, the essentialization of combat experience, and the alienation of the individual by insisting on the personal aspect of their condition, trauma theory can help shed critical lights on the experiences of both the soldiers and the other victims of the Iraq War, (i.e., non-combatant civilians). As Roy Scranton puts it, the trauma hero serves a "scapegoat function, discharging national blood-guilt by substituting the victim of trauma, the soldier, for the victim of violence, the enemy" ("the Trauma Hero"). This is not only a "de-realization of the loss" of the other, a mechanism to dehumanize and exclude them from the narrative (Butler, *Precarious Life* 148), but a betrayal of the suffering of American soldiers who were agents but also victims of a war culture that packages their suffering under patriotic response to cultural trauma (of September 11) but isolates their private agonies under the ideological banner of individualism. Depoliticizing war narratives by attending to individual traumatic details distances the American people from the political reasons of the war and the accountability for the political mistakes before, during and after its conclusion (assuming that the war is actually over). Distancing people from political discourse and collective awareness is an ideological tactic of the power structures. The refraining from political criticism of the war in the "shoot and cry" narrative feeds readers with "heightened affect and a political alibi" (Holston 3). To deconstruct the binary of perpetrator/victim, more political criticism of war as a military-capitalist enterprise is necessary.

Fictional narratives of the Iraq War psychologize the experience of war and prioritize its individual dimension in order not to break with the mainstream political discourse about the war and American role in it. This mainstream narrative presents the war as a preemptive response to the hostile policies of the regime of Saddam Husein that includes allegations of developing Weapons of Massive Destruction (WMD) that were never proven right during or after the war. After this failure, the official narrative shifted from eliminating this alleged threat to a mission of liberating the Iraqi people from a brutal dictatorship. This liberation narrative could hardly be supported in good faith by any literary account. Here come the intricate ways ideology infiltrate the public conception of the war. Literary and cultural representations of the war present it as a complex, multifaceted experience that cannot be communicated thoroughly except by people who have experienced it firsthand. This complexity distances the subject (of the war discourse) from having any firm political or ethical attitude. This very distance, this ambivalence to war is the function of ideology (Žižek *The Plague* 26-7). War narratives that lack any plausible political attitude to the war indulge in the details of the experience, shifting the epistemology of war from a public affair that needs an informative public dialogue to an idiosyncratic personal experience of combat veterans.

I argue that this psychologizing of war is a cultural disassociation, a form of an unconscious “First World” national allegory in which American national (collective) psyche, so to speak, is expressing a traumatic reaction to the unjustified, undefined “War on Terror” that America is a perpetrator in and the American public is victimized by (in addition to the other “real” victims). This allegorical function of the war narrative is not new to the American tradition of war literature. As Vietnamese-American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen puts it American Vietnam War stories are "melodramas of beset manhood [that] substitute the experience of the

white male combat soldier… for the experiences of the nation and its multitudes (152). Elements of this allegorical pattern/structure of trauma-induced narratives include patriotic sentiments/ references, American exceptionalism, the experience of war as a passage to manhood, maturity and experience, and employment of classical American motifs such as the Western/frontier myth. The expected/ collective reaction to the trauma of the war is dissociation from the traumatic experience in an attempt to avoid discussing it as a political failure and directing the discussion instead to the individual dimension of the experience, the suffering and survival of veterans. The war is represented as primarily an American affair in which Iraqis do not actively appear as agents. War fiction has been a useful ideological tool for the American empire before, during and after the Iraq War. Along with war movies, TV military thrillers and video games, fiction was a tool to entice/tempt young people to think about war as a rewarding, patriotic adventure. Responding to the question of how the United States could "induce soldiers and marines to leave their homes, travel across an ocean, land on foreign soil, and, while risking one's own life, try to take the life of a stranger," scholar John Pettegrew explains:

> Distancing the killers from their targets … has been one overarching response to this pressing problem of American empire…..Alongside the technological enterprise of separating the killers from the killed has been the equally vast cultural project of closing in on the action of war, capturing its violence, and aggrandizing its destructiveness and passions....If warfighters cannot "just be turned on" to kill in battle, perhaps they can be prompted to do so by reading, hearing, and seeing how others have done it before them. War literature has played a critical role in this representational dynamic (37).

If the ideological function of this kind of literature is to zoom-in on the combat experience to avoid the big picture and distance the perpetrator from the victim, it is the role of criticism to zoom out, to contextualize and draw connections and comparisons between the two, in the hope of creating more meaning and understanding of all that.

During the 2003 war, fiction is used by state/military-sponsored programs to mold/ shape the meaning of war for the people who participate in it and for the American public as we will see in the project (and the book) of *Operation Homecoming*, a military-literary writing project, that will be discussed below. Generated partly from that "still-dominant matrix of U. S. military-industrial capitalism and the geopolitics that has grown from it," (Luckhurst "In War Times"734) the Iraq war was marketed as the reasonable reaction to terrorist attacks. After the war, narrative fiction is used to forget the war as a collective political mistake. Connecting the Iraq War to the traumatic attacks of September 11 is an attempt to forget the blunders of the former by remembering the atrocity of the latter. It functions ideologically by framing the memories of the war in line with the mainstream ideology of the traumatized American nation. Veterans were encouraged to remember and narrate their stories in a way that helps the American people to forget the war, not to remember and learn from it. People are urged to discuss the grandeur of the experience, the thrill, the weight, the fear; but not the political lessons, crimes, mistakes and failures of the military and political institutions. The emphasis given to the individual experience of combatants via the media framing, via the editing and circulation of the "war literature" industry encourages and interpellates them to adhere to the imagined idiosyncrasy of that experience, not the political outcomes of their decisions and actions. Instead of questioning the "military-corporate synergy" (Colla) that sends them to a pointless war, veteran writers think of their experiences in person. The experience-fetishizing question drives numerous narrative representations of the war story, shifting it from becoming a space for reflection on war as a multifaceted political experience to a personal odyssey of trauma and survival. Instead of asking why the war happens in the first place, the public is encouraged reflect on what society should do more to help individual veterans, those heroes who fight "American wars" and defend "the

American way of life," in other words; those who do the dirty work of empire. While there is nothing wrong in welfare programs and public support for veterans, it is a disservice to their sacrifices to ignore the politics of the wars they keep being utilized for. A sense of self-blaming by the society corresponds to the survivor's guilt in the trauma and PTSD literature. The individual trauma of the veteran is met by a sense of guilt by society that is interpellated (or hailed) by the governing military-industrial enterprise to support the war and its failing policies under the "support-the-troops" ideology. The sense of survival guilt induces the public to refrain from any critical engagement of the topic of war leaving it to the more authoritative accounts of those who have been there. Psychologizing the war dissociates the American people from its sociopolitical consequences and their responsibility for the war as a democratic society. Despite the massive protests that opposed the Iraq War in the United States before its beginning, the American public is more detached from the war than it was, read, in the Vietnam War. In that war, draft was compulsory, and most Americans felt the impact of the war in one way or another. This is not the case in the Iraq War, a war of all-voluntary armed forces. This detachment of the American public is not simply unconscious or unintended, but a deliberate rhetorical choice in most official or mainstream war literature. This public disengagement with the Iraq War leaves a space for fiction, a fertile medium for ideology to frame the war story in a more conformist way. "Supporting-the-troops" rhetoric is a lip-service patriotic position that needs to be challenged by simply not sending them to pointless wars that breed other unending conflicts. Projects such as Operation Homecoming are clear ideological state interventions to forget the war or to channel its memories into harmless depoliticized literature. Instead of remembering the war's context and helping society to learn from it, these narratives misrepresent it by prioritizing individual

accounts over the political discourse, by establishing the framing of the war as a response to the cultural trauma of September 11.

Operation Homecoming is a result of a therapeutic writing program for veterans and returning military personnel conducted by the United States National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, the Boeing Corporation, veteran support groups, MFA programs, and publishers. The initiative was to write the literature of the current American wars by those who experience them with specific attention to the homecoming phase of the war. John Parrish Peede, director of the project explains the significance of the program: "Literature is that writing which lasts. And from our earliest surviving writing, war and homecomings were what moved us," (Dorning). The idea for the project started in April 2003 (*Operation Homecoming* xi). As the empire was *going* to the Iraq war, its cultural apparatuses were preparing the *homecoming* narrative, packaging the war to the American people as an odyssey of American patriotism and individualism. In her preface to the book Dana Gioia, chairman of the NEA, writes:

> One cannot tell the story of our nation without also telling the story of our wars. And these often harrowing tales are best told by the men and women who lived them. Today's American military is the best trained and best educated in our nation's history. They have witnessed events that are changing both our nation and the world. Their perspectives enlarge and refine our sense of current history. It is time to let them speak (*Operation Homecoming* xv).

This discourse of "letting them speak" and "giving a voice" to the men and women who experienced the war is a way of framing of the "carrier group" (Alexander 11) that is supposed to communicate the trauma to the American people. The narrative of the nation is closely connected to the individual stories of the "men and women who lived them." It links the story of America to the story of its wars (told through individual voices of its agents/perpetrators and admitting the

national-allegorical function of these stories (Haytock 337). The framing and polishing of the "carrier group" is the first step in the project of molding, creating and manufacturing this voice instead of giving it to inexperienced writers (we know that they were trained, co-edited, reviewed and selectively filtered before they were left to speak). Using the elitist/ layman argument is a preemptive defense against critiques of any kind. The volume's preface illustrates the ideological agenda for the project to establish a canon for literary writing of the recent American wars, "manufacturing a consensus," to use Noam Chomsky's famous phrase, about these wars among people through the "support-the-troops" rhetoric.

"*Operation Homecoming* is a book about war," Gioia states (xv), but it's not about politics. A result of more than fifty writing workshops in about twenty-five military bases with more than two thousand submissions to select from, the book is diversely designed to resist any generalization. In such a diverse array of writings that comprise "a chorus of one hundred voices heard as much in counterpoint as in harmony" (xiv) there is something to support any political stand to the war, and "something to contradict every viewpoint" about it (xiv) making each viewpoint equally relative and indefinite. In a 2004 essay, poet Eleanor Wilner questions the seemingly unquestionable program:

> What we have here is a program that seems designed to be proof against all criticism, as if to raise any questions about it is to seem to target those deserving soldiers and the writers who have signed on. But what if we look behind these unassailable shields? Are these returning troops once again being used as a shield against the scrutiny of the very policy which put them in harm's way in the first place? Will Operation Homecoming serve them? Will it serve poetry? Or is it designed to serve quite another purpose? (Wilner 37).

These rhetorical questions reveal what this project and book is really about. The other purpose, one can argue, is furthering the state rhetoric of an illegitimate war that can hardly be defended.

Kevin Bowen, a Vietnam vet and poet called *Operation Homecoming* a “pre-emptive move” to create “an official literature coming through the military and Pentagon”… a project that supports a “generation of propaganda” (Dorning, "War through their eyes-and words"). He questions the ability of soldiers who are still in the military to be critical of this institution especially when military public affairs officers were to review their submissions (Ibid). Critic Elliot Colla describes the project as a sign of a military-literary complex, a form of “embedded literature” in which “a public-private, Military-industrial- literary synergy with the Boeing Corporation, ‘a major recipient of [Americans’] tax dollars and a corporation that profits from war’” whereby literature is embedded to create a canon for the contemporary American wars. In this new canon, Colla continues, the Iraq invasion and occupation “appear as almost exclusively American events… Iraqis are largely absent from the frame”. However, Colla modifies his claim of a cultural conspiracy beyond current American war literature saying that if it is too extreme, the only alternative is that Americans "accept embedded literature because we prefer stories about 'us' and not 'them: We accept tales of combatant privilege because we would rather imagine ourselves being the ones holding the guns than those who are not."

Operation Homecoming is pioneering the direction American writing of the recent wars and the way they are remembered. The anthology includes emails, personal narratives, poems, and fictional pieces that divide into three general groupings: narratives about the beginnings, the start of the war or the deployment of each and every one of the writers; narratives of the encounter with the other, the what-it-is-like testimonies, and narratives of homecomings and reintegration into American life. The book is comprised of different texts that makes it difficult to make a generalization about it. However, one can discuss examples to analyze the rhetorical function it is entitled to perform. The first chapter in the book “And Now It Begins” opens with a

photograph of the north tower of the World Trade Center with the tip of the Empire State Building in New York City framing the story of recent American wars as a response to the collective (cultural) trauma of September 11. Susan Sontag famously describes the function of photography as a way for representing by exclusion: “to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude” (Sontag 46). Judith Butler adds that narrative and photographic representations create norms that “are enacted through visual and narrative frames, and framing presupposes decisions or practices that leave substantial losses outside the frame” (*Frames of War* 75). In *Operation Homecoming*, the ideological framing of the war story begins even before the narrative texts start. The war odyssey begins at these iconic towers as the symbols of America. Emphatically the book stresses the message that the Iraq war story starts at the ruins of the New York towers, with no justification whatsoever of the connection between that country and the terrorist attacks. Framing the war as a response to this trauma shifts the position of victimhood and grievability, excluding Iraqi lives lost because of the war. September 11 is established as the departure traumatic point for the narratives of the anthology. Editor Andrew Carroll starts the introduction of the book thus:

> ‘Emotionally:' U. S. Navy Captain William J. Toti writes of those who serve in the American armed forces, "we pretend we're bulletproof." Toti was at the Pentagon on the morning of September 11 when a commercial airliner carrying fifty-nine innocent civilians slammed into the building at more than five hundred miles an hour. It would be months before he could speak about the carnage he had seen, and he did not express how fully traumatized he was by the terrorist attack until he began putting his feelings down on paper. Some veterans, particularly those who have witnessed firsthand the horrors of war, go their entire lives without ever discussing their experiences (*Operation Homecoming* xix).

Jumping from the traumatized witness testimony of terrorist attacks and the veterans’ inability to talk about their war traumas confuses the two as the same thing. Without any denial of the right to grieve, to express anger or communicate the pain of individuals of the terrorist attacks of

September 11, 2001, I read the framing the Iraq war as a response to these attacks as an epistemic deception of readers of the anthology, a disservice to these losses and traumas. This emotional framing of the war as a response to the anger and trauma of the 2001 attacks and their impact on Americans continues throughout the volume as writers (and most often their editorial introductions) relate how they came up with the decision to enlist because of anger of the terrorist attacks (xx, 4, 9, 41, 85). In Paul A. Stieglitz's "Get Some" the narrator speaks of his re-enrollment

> *Two days after 9/11* I went to the recruiter and asked about coming back in with broken time. *Like everyone else* I was pissed off beyond belief about the attack ... They let me back in with a reduction in rank to corporal and I joined again on November 12. People always ask why I came back in. As long as I can remember, I've wanted to fight in a war. I figured if I could put my desires to good use, it would be okay, so I joined up with the Marines. When I got to my first battalion it felt like home. After 9/11, I returned because I knew there was going to be some major shit going down and the Marines were going to be doing most of the hard-core fighting, as always. Fuck if I was going to miss it (*Operation Homecoming* 41, emphasis added).

"Pissed off" is clearly not a marker of PTSD but a form of blind and dangerous patriotic anger. Transforming this anger into a vengeful act of enlisting for an illegitimate war is submission to the state ideology. Always wanting to fight a war regardless of the reasoning behind it or knowing/mentioning the enemy means the act of enlisting has nothing to do with the traumatic attacks. Narratives of cultural traumas build on a transformation of what Hiro Saito, borrowing from Raymond Williams calls "'structures of feeling' about a traumatic event from 'pity' to 'sympathy' among members of a given group who have not been directe[ly] exposed to it" (Saito 359).[1] However, the book's framing of the trauma of September 11 builds on the feeling of patriotic anger as the structure of feeling of the time, thus justifying any perpetration as an understandable expression of anger. Because the book is not about September 11 but using it as a justification, it has no room for pity or sympathy, but anger and revenge. Anger as a patriotic

emotion is directed to an anonymous other, the American hero just wants a fight to quench his anger. It does not matter who this other is, or how disconnected to the 2001 attacks. Crises like September 11 are opportunities to redefine the national identity. In the course of doing so, "national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge" (Alexander 8). Terrorist attacks are public acts of violence. Individual responses to them serve the public good as defined by the state rhetoric. Anger is directed to an inimical other. To respond to these attacks in this way is to dissolve the public into the private serving the very purpose of the war ideology that identifies the interest of the individual with the state (as interpreted by those in power).

Killing others is the patriotic way of the narrator to put his "desires to good use." Excited to have his "first kill" (46), the narrator was disappointed that there was not enough fight in the war: "And now those goddamn Iraqis don't even have the class to meet us at the border… Most of the guys here just want a chance to kill someone, and now it looks like we came all this way and aren't even going to get a Combat Action Ribbon" (38-39). One can hardly ignore the analogy to Stephen Crane's *the Red Badge of Courage* here. While the hero in Crane's novel suffers to get his badge in, arguably a legitimate war, the protagonist here decontextualizes the war, centralizes the thrill of the action and jumps to wanting a ribbon of valor for a war that has just started. The narrative moves as the Marines unit proceeds into the Iraqi desert. A side/secondary sergeant-private conflict develops in the story to give it some tension, however, this quickly resolves into a celebration of the sergeant's Americanness:

> He's a real American hero. His parents are Puerto Rican immigrants who came to America when he was five or so and settled in Brooklyn. Never call him Puerto Rican or Mexican or Hispanic. All he is, he says, is American. I've never heard him speak Spanish. He came into the Marines as a cook and quickly worked his way to sergeant. And then after 9/11, he wanted to get back at those motherfuckers and went about it the only way

> he knew how, by transferring to the infantry. All he ever talks about is killing and fighting. He really lives the Marine Corps (39).

This passage almost sums up everything *Operation Homecoming* celebrates: the American way of life versus the Other's, the American dream, toxic masculinity of the American military heroes, the patriotic anger created by 9/11. Analyzing a picture in a French magazine of an African-French soldier saluting the French flag, Roland Barthes famously read the constructed meaning of the photograph as a celebration of French imperialism (115). Similarly, beyond this portrayal of this "American hero" lies the greatest myth of American imperialism. But, against the inclusive rhetoric of the picture from the 1950s that claims the variety of the subjects' origin of the great empire, this portrayal of Americanness is stressed by negating the linguistic and cultural background of this subject, a negation necessary to the new definition of what it means to be American—to dissolve in the hegemonic melting pot of mainstream, white, English-centered American culture. It uses classic elements of American narrative and visual culture such as the Western frontier, the migrant who dissolves into the American melting pot and transforming the public good of the nation into the private action of the patriotic hero. The narrator then moves to describe the little action that they encountered: "our mission was not to clear the town or route, but merely to go through it and this was a sidetrack, self-defense" (47). The "sidetrack" is the way he describes his first kill and his way to process and forget it: "that guy is a memory to me now. Only the present matters, and I've got more people to shoot" (47). This justification of the heartless killing of a nameless-other rest on a culture that justifies and explains such acts by referencing psychological trauma theory. The way the protagonist makes sense of his acts follows the usually described way that intense events are registered to the psyche according to psychological trauma theory/myth. Judith Herman notes that trauma

frequently numbs perceptions (43). “Soldiers are forced to disregard feelings like sadness, rage or grief, they need to keep focused on their duties” (De Loof 39). As a combat soldier, the narrator does not process everything he faces during intense situations, he just focuses on the essential, the more critical fact that he needs to survive and shoot more people. It is afterwards that he has to process and deal with the consequences. This is how the war story is presented to the American public. It is not time to reflect on and think of the war beyond the immediate, the necessary response of supporting the troops (and the institutions on whose behalf they act). Victims, losses, traumas (especially of the others) are past incidents for the American hero who needs to focus on the present. This presentism of the war story de-historicizes the war. Framing it within responses to the September 11 trauma is an epistemic deception of the reader.

The last part of the story attempts to redeem the protagonist’s actions morally by expressing empathy with a dying Iraqi kid whom the moving convoy could not help (48-49). In a cathartic final twist in the narrative before closing the story in the way most common in the American war narratives I examine, the narrator emphasizes the need to “man up” and not let his mates know about his sickness after seeing the dying kid. This twist/glimpse of a humane persona behind the tough masculine characterization of the protagonist distances the hero from the toxic masculinity of the military culture. This distance is the very space for ideology to function according to Žižek (*The Plague* 26-27). It humanizes him, providing readers with a moral closure that does nothing to expose war, but everything to redeem the hero/ agent who is transformed into the trauma victim who has to live with his survival guilt.

In another text of the anthology, an Air Force lieutenant colonel Chris Cohoes writes an e-mail to his two young boys in which he “marveled at the ancient history of the land that passed below him as he flew across Iraq: "Have you ever heard of Mesopotamia?" he asks his sons.

"This is where civilization began on earth (the Sumerians)!" "Heard of Babylon?" Cohoes continues:

> The city was built about 3,800 years ago by King Hammurabi. King Nebuchadnezzar (I can't say it either) built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon about 2,600 years ago. It is one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World. This is where many great battles took place. The Romans fought here. One of the Egyptian Pharaohs fought here. Now I'm fighting here (233-4)

Had this been only a personal email between a father and his sons, it would not deserve much attention, but since the audience has changed once the private email is published in a literary anthology, it is necessary to say a word or two about its implied ideological messages. First, lumping the totality of the Iraq population that the pilot flies over under a country of an ancient civilization de-realizes/erases their current existence. The pilot exercises what Achille Mbembe (b.1957) calls “vertical sovereignty” or the exercise of colonial occupation by “a separation of the airspace from the ground” (28). Similarly, by culturally separating the abstract past from the gruesome present (and his role in it) the narrator is not only performing colonial surveillance in which “the eye acting as weapon” (Ibid 28), but more importantly, the meaning maker, and the carrier of the memory. This “vertical sovereignty” corresponds to an implied hierarchy in the protagonist’s cultural sovereignty by telling the story not of the present-day Iraq, but the imagined ancient Mesopotamia. This educational gesture of teaching his sons a lesson in history de-historicizes the war to the readers of the anthology. By erasing the colonized from the story of their colonization, the meaning of the war is shaped and framed accordingly. The text frames the war story for those kids and for the readership as primarily an American affair. Iraqis are absent from this narrative of the war on their country. Especially in comparison to how the narrator’s side is depicted. Second, the email personalizes the pilot by naming him, by the warm editorial introduction that precedes his emails and by naming the two addressed young sons (Cavan and

Crew), using intimacy and driving readers to emotionally identify with the father trying to educate his sons about this other place and culture. Being an *Other*, Iraq is not short of tourist excitement for the bombardier father. For a moment, we forget that he is a perpetrator, an air force pilot probably responsible for the death of many lives. Cohoes reminds his sons that he is not complaining, admitting the privilege he has, not over Iraqis (because these do not exist in the text) but his privilege as a pilot compared to the ground forces: “some of those Marines are only seven years older than you are, Cavan. All I could think about was you two hunkering down in the mountains with rockets landing all around” (232). He then moves to explain how helping these “Americans in trouble” felt. “More than great (233). Third and most importantly, the sense of imperial pride of being an American fighter, comparing himself to the different empires that fought over Mesopotamia is not implied ideology, but stated colonial conceit. It is true that a father’s email to his kids is not the space for a political lecture on war and ideology, but changing the email’s audience means that the same simplifications of war and the greatness of the American empire is being fed to a larger readership who could use more than this simplification to make sense of the political blunders of the Iraq War.[2]

Narratives of the Iraq War would eventually grow in American fictional representations of the Iraq War out of the official discourse that Operation Homecoming represents in later works that differently present the trauma hero narrative as will be discussed below. For now, I discuss another example of this growing genre of war writing that, according Sam Sacks in a review, “has been cultivated in the hot-house of creative-writing programs” (First Person Shooters”). Sacks’ review that covers famous titles of "nearly all recent war writing” finds “No wonder so much of it looks alike”(Ibid). The problem with this institutionally-bred genre of writing is that it “avoids placing the Terror Wars within a larger political or ideological context”

(Buchanan 197). To see another example of this, a less “embedded” version of war writing, I discuss Kevin Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2011) as one of the most celebrated and canonized fictional narratives of the Iraq war in recent American literature.

Powers’ *The Yellow Birds* (2012) follows in the direction of *Operation Homecoming* and the tradition of American war writing that reifies combat experience of soldiers moving them from war agents and perpetrators to trauma victims. Written in the context of flourishing mainstream MFA and creative writing programs, the novel poeticizes the story of the Iraq war. A poet himself, Powers’ *The Yellow Birds* presents the war in a very lyrical, poetic style—a stylistic feature of American war writing in general (Clark 97). The novel sentimentalizes the story of the war, contemplating his personal experience through language. He has served with the US Army in Mosul and Tal Afar, Iraq. He received an M.F.A. in poetry after he left the army. The novel is an attempt to communicate Powers’ war experience to a detached “innocent/ bystander” American readership. In the author's note of *The Yellow Birds* Powers states that the novel “began as an attempt to reckon with one question: What was it like over there?" (Powers 2). In a *New York Times* review, Benjamin Percy puts *the Yellow Birds* next to Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Tim Obrien’s classic *The Things They Carried*, reaffirming the need to create the canon of recent American war literature. Powers’ war experience is introduced as his primary credential to join this great canon: "At the age of 17, Kevin Powers enlisted in the Army and eventually served as a machine-gunner in Iraq...Now he has channeled his experience into “*The Yellow Birds*” (“On the Ground”). The review concludes with affirming Powers’ position as an authority of the reality of war and human experience and the calling of (American) readers to listen to his voice: “Kevin Powers has something to say, something deeply moving about the frailty of man and the brutality of war, and we should all lean closer and listen” (Percyoct). Other

reviewers marveled at the position of the novel in the canon comparing it to *All Quiet on the Western Front, the Red Badge of Courage* and other classics of western war literature (Powers, "Acclaim for *the Yellow Birds*"). Other reviewers consider it a "A must-read book," bearing witness to the Iraq War and eking out "some scant but vital vision of humanity from its shame and incomprehensible violence" (Burnside).

The novel is set between Al Tafar, an imaginary town in northern Iraq and Powers' hometown near Richmond, Virginia. It commemorates the loss of Private Daniel Murphy (or Murph) who dies in the war and is remembered by his friend, the narrator John Bartle. The title refers to a marching song of the US military that Powers quotes at the beginning of the book: "A yellow bird/With a yellow bill/Was perched upon/my windowsill. /I lured him in/With a piece of bread/And then I smashed/His fucking head" (unpaginated). The bird metaphor in the title is a scapegoating rhetorical device that positions Murph and Bartle as the victims of the war machine, not its perpetrating agents. Reversing the marching song's depiction of the tough soldier taking action and not showing affection/mercy to the bird, the title transforms the soldiers into the victimized/traumatized birds by the abstract agency of the war. This title coupled with the cover of the paperback edition that shows a cartoonish silhouette of two lonely soldiers against a massive orange-brown desert centralizes the war of these two against the losses of other birds of every color that their war smashes. The framing of the Iraq War as a response to the attacks of September 11 is not stated but implied in the title of the first chapter in the novel: "September 2004, Al Tafar, Ninevah Province, Iraq." Indeed "it is less of a title and more of a label, a tag of war's particular setting… [w]ith the biblical implications of 'Ninevah' and the 9/11 implications of 'September'" (Buchanan 77). Interestingly, the word "September" is repeated six times in this rather short chapter. The structure of the novel is fragmentary and nonlinear: short

chapters gradually leading to the exposition of the details of Murph's death which readers discover early in the book. Flashbacks and flashforwards highlight the suffering of soldiers and the separation between veterans and American society.

Murph's death is the central event in the narrative. However, it is the circumstances of that event that the narrative dramatically builds towards the end of the book when readers find the reason behind Bartle's complex sense of guilt and responsibility for that death. Before deployment to Iraq, Bartle makes a promise to Murph's mother to take care of her son, his close friend, and to bring him back home (Powers 47). The responsibility Bartle feels is because of his failure to keep this naïve and "ridiculous promise" (Powers 155). He also feels responsible for his part in the cover-up he and a platoon's sergeant Sterling did to Murph's death by disposing of his mutilated body in the Tigris River so that his mother would not see what has happened to him. To make things worse, Bartle has written Murph's mother a fake letter from her son to cover up for the degrading way he was killed. The cover-up act comments on the official attempt by the American government to prevent news coverage of the lost American victims of the war, a one man's intervention to prevent the image of the American hero from being sacrileged/desecrated in the eyes of the American public. However, as a fictional narrative metaphor, it shows how this death and cover-up help Murph and Bartle transform from the perpetrator agents of the war to its victims. Indeed, the very first sentence of the novel starts with Bartle giving total agency to the abstract concept of war instead of its acting human agents:

> THE WAR TRIED to kill us in the spring. As grass greened the plains of Nineveh and the weather warmed, we patrolled the low-slung hills beyond the cities and towns… Then, in the summer, the war tried to kill us as the heat blanched all color from the plains. The sun pressed into our skin, and the war sent its citizens rustling into the shade of white buildings...it tried to kill us everyday, but it had not succeeded" (Powers 3).

War turns from being the setting of the novel (as a rhetorical text) into the acting agent detaching the characters (and their author) from their responsibility as agents of the war. Poets and creative writers often speak of war as an agent. As a literary device, this personification of war may seem poetically intriguing, but as a rhetorical device, personifying the war only adds ambiguity and subtracts agency and accountability out of soldiers and other war agents, collapsing "invader and invaded into the generalized victims of a war's assault on "us" (Holston 8). War does not kill or try to kill. People do. Most likely, people who occupy and patrol the plains and cities of another country. Attributing acts of killing to an abstract concept depoliticizes the violence the soldiers' presence represents. Portraying the hostility of the environment, the heat of the sun and the Iraqi desert trying to kill the cool, innocent American youth who are not accustomed to these extreme circumstances is another layer of abstraction that erases the human other and depoliticizes the story of war. It is the environment, the sun and the desert that tries to kill them, not Iraqis whose country was invaded.

According to Damon Barta, the novel offers a compelling anatomy of what he calls "'innocensus,' a symbiotic relationship between the recurrent myth of American innocence and perennial consensus for military aggression" (Barta 80). In *the Yellow Birds* Bartle "loses his innocence in combat only to return to a populace that maintains its own by treating him as a necessary abjection of the war state" (Ibid 80). Because he is unable to reintegrate into American society, Bartle is arrested for the very attempt to protect their innocence of what their war consensus entails. Instead of liberating the "American public conditioned by a myth of innocence," (Ibid 80) Bartle's act of covering the ugly truth of war results in his own trauma. His (and Sterling's) act is not a revolt against a corrupt or an evil system, but a personal undertaking of the dirty business of war propaganda (forging a letter to Murph's mother) that

instead of challenging the myth of "American innocence" partakes in furthering the rhetoric of the war state, claiming the personal moral burden and responsibility.

The erasure of the other is a distinctive characteristic of the novel. The death of Iraqis in the novel is a common instance that does not require attention or guilt. Murph and Bartle are in the habit of counting the death of American soldiers because they matter as countable and grievable deaths. Counting and contemplating these deaths is like a ritual they do to avoid becoming other numbers themselves. Speaking of the death of their Iraqi translator, Malik, Murph rhetorically asks Bartle if his death counts. Bartle responds: "No. I don't think so" (11). He later reflects on the cruelty of his ambivalence to Malik's death. But he justifies it by his youth "as a boy of twenty-one from my position of safety" and his attention to what is essential - surviving the war himself (11). This reflection is supposed to redeem his careless, innocent behavior and educate readers on how the war has changed him. The war has become a form of sentimental education for the hero whose "internal experiences" of the war are "evidence of developing sensibility" (Scranton "Trauma Hero"). The reasons for Malik's uncounted life and death is his lack of Americanness, his status as a "throwaway body" (Williams, *How to Find* 50). As an Iraqi interpreter working for the American forces, Malik is in a liminal position, he is not an enemy or a total "other," but he does not belong to the Americans despite working for them. Like Ibrahim in Shakir Nūrī's *The Green Zone* (to be discussed below), Malik is at the intersection of different axes of powers and sovereignties under the emergency state of the war when his life can be desecrated without counting as a real loss. Malik's life is a "bare life," to use Agamben's phrase (Homo Sacer 8). His life is one that can be spared without (Bartle and Murph) counting him among the losses.

Malik is not the only “throwaway,” or bare life in the book whose death is characterized by “the absence of the climate of mourning” (Yaeger 81). Later in the book, Bartle and Sterling coldheartedly kill an Iraqi hermit, a coachman who helps them find Murph’s body and dispose of him to the river. Sterling shoots the man in the face and they walk away without thinking of him for a minute (Powers 211). The man is merely an object to them (Williams, *How to find* 51). They shoot him because they can, because they want to keep the secret of their misdeed. The careless act of killing the coachman reminds of the western narrative in American cultural history where the cowboy kills because he can get away with it, because he thinks he *is* the law and the state. Compared to Malik the interpreter, the old man does not even have a name in the novel. He is simply a “nobody,” a “bare life” that does not count or cause any remorse or sense of guilt. The only feeling the narrative attaches to the death of Malik and the other Iraqis is pity. The two are not close enough to raise sympathy or incur trauma for the narrator and his friend. As Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* establishes the position of the other in Western war literature: "We" are all here on this side; "the enemy" is over there. "We" are individuals with names and personal identities; "he" is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal; he is grotesque. Our appearances are natural; his, bizarre. He is not as good as we are (82).

Fussel’s comment on the war’s function of othering is reminiscent of Fanon’s analysis of colonialism that segregates and establishes categories among victims (*Black Skin*). This othering becomes epistemologically dangerous as it denies readers the possibility to know the other side of the war. Later in the novel, Sterling kills himself. Bartle struggles with PTSD and survivor’s guilt; he is imprisoned because of what he did in covering the death of his American friend, nothing else. No poetic justice is achieved for the bare lives of the Iraqis lost in the narrative.

Their deaths and losses are givens because war does that to everybody. In an interview, Powers was asked about the exclusion of the Iraqi point of view in a novel of the war *in Iraq*. His answer was that this was intentional for the sake of focusing on what he best knows and putting limits to the scope of his narrative. Presenting this careless act of killing could be read as a rhetorical critique of the war and the "crimes" committed in it, but it never moves beyond the cliché representation of war as a hellish, immoral reality. Iraqi people are othered and erased, constantly dubbed collectively under the derogatory name *Hajji* (Powers 169) [3] from this narrative of the Iraq War. Even references to Iraq as an actual place is replaced by the imaginary town of Al Tafar, a modification of the name of Tal Afar, a real town near Mosul, Iraq. This "fictional naming… identifies [the town] as a non-place, an unknown region on the edge of foreign territory where war permeates both landscape and city scape unequivocally" (Mann 343).

In addition to erasing Iraqis from the narrative of the war on their country, rendering them ingrievable beings, de-realizing their losses, to use Butler's expression again (*Precarious Life* 148) and rendering their country into a non-place, the novel objectifies and erases American others that do not conform to the conventions of the masculine war hero narrative. Before his disappearance, Murphy develops the habit of watching this medical nurse in the camp, marveling at her bodily beauty and the joy that he gets by watching her treating victims, wanting "to find a place where compassion still happened" (Powers 165). By keeping her away from the main course of the narrative, depriving her of a name, a voice and any other characteristic other than physical beauty and the voyeuristic joy she represents to Murph and Bartle, the narrator objectifies the woman and de-realizes her loss when it happens (Powers 171). However, the woman at least has the privilege of getting some sympathy from Bartle and Murph; unlike Malik

and the other Iraqi *hajjis*, she is one of their tribe. The transformation of feelings from pity to sympathy establishes the woman's death as traumatic to the two "victims" of the war.

The death of the female medic in front of Murph changes him entirely. He has lost his last bastion of hope for holding his sanity. The impact of the war and the amount of killing is too much for him. He starts thinking of death, writing his names on walls in the military camp so that he can be remembered. Sterling tells Bartle that "Murph's a dead man" (Powers 155) before he actually dies, that he has gone home in his mind. In one patrol in Al Tafar, Murph goes AWOL (away without leave), rendering the streets of the Iraqi city on his own. He is later found dead and mutilated. The immediate response to the trauma Murph has experienced is numbness of his most basic feelings, a state of dissociation from the outside, immediate stimuli and a neutralization of the instinctual drive to survive. Numbness, "a condition where the capacity to feel pain is temporarily suspended" (Eyerman "Social Theory" 42) is a textbook symptom of PTSD (Herman *Trauma and Recovery* 43). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *the Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud develops his theory of a basic drive to human life beyond Eros, or the drive to achieve pleasure. "Thanatos" or the death drive/instinct, he contends, is the drive for self-destruction, a basic (unconscious) psychological wish to return to the original state of not-being (or nothingness) that explains some human (read: Murph's) behavior.[4]

Murph's trauma is typical to the expectations of American trauma hero myth. It is positively individual. "War" has abstractly "tried to kill" soldiers, Bartle has succeeded to "keep his shit together;" Murph could not. He has lost it. He must die for not being tough or masculine enough, for not growing up out of the experience, for not passing the test to becoming a man. In comparison, Bartle emerges as a mature, traumatized but experienced hero. Sterling, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the institution. He is someone that was long before precast to fit the

military requirement of a professional killing machine, as we see in his killing of the hermit after disposing of Murph's body: no regrets, no guilts, and no sense of hesitation. Sterling is also the representative of the expertise and wisdom of the army as institution. He knows of Murph's worsening case of instability. He expects his death, advises Bartle to worry about his own survival as Murph is a lost cause. Sterling also acts beyond the rules by deciding to dispose of Murph's body on his own, to protect his image, and to protect society from the trauma of his disrespectful death. The reason for Sterling's feeling of guilt that leads to his suicide later is not clearly stated. But suicide cleanses his record by turning him into another victim, a traumatized hero too. Rhetorically, Sterling functions as the micro-representative of power in the novel: his ideological role is redeemed by his suicide. The scapegoating technique of the war rhetoric is intact. Who is to blame but abstract war if the only representative of power is cleansed by guilt-driven suicide! Suicide is a clear marker of long and harsh struggle with guilt, a solitary solution to the problem of survival with unbearable load of psychological guilt and trauma. It not only resolves the unease of the reader at sympathizing with a perpetrator army official in an unjust war, but it also positions Bartle as the lone survivor who has to take the responsibility for what happens to Murph's body, attracting readers' sympathy and identification with the central trauma hero of the novel. Trauma culture thus isolates the survivor of war, creating an atmosphere that rather than allowing to make sense of war and learning from its failures, reiterates the givens of war culture that the only survival technique is to man up and grow over one's moral and psychological wounds.

In addition to the loneliness of struggling with the massive trauma of war and his experiences in it by himself, people's positive responses to Bartle and his trauma are added

reasons for his intense sense of guilt. However, it is the guilt for what happens to Murph, not what he has done:

> "I feel like I'm being eaten from the inside out and I can't tell anyone what's going on because everyone is so grateful to me all the time and I feel like I'm ungrateful or something. Or like I'll give away that I don't deserve anyone's gratitude and really they should hate me for what I've done but everyone loves me for it and it's driving me crazy." (Powers 144).

This sense of survivor's guilt is a given symptom of war trauma **(**De Loof 59), a sense of remorse for being unworthy of survival when others could not outlive war. Referring to Murph's death, Bartle keeps asking "why him and not me?" (Powers 62). Murph's death functions as a trauma that sanctifies Bartle's role in the war (and Powers' for that matter). Because of it, Bartle emerges as the traumatized hero that readers can sympathize with, instead of the perpetrator he is. His guilt, his role in the cover-up to Murph's death are embellishments to his complicit role in the war, necessary to humanize him.

Powers follows the modernist American tradition of war writing that avoids abstract concepts such as honor, bravery and patriotism [5] by attending to such details as names of places, differences between the home and the Iraq war front, dates, and locations that mark the titles of the novel's chapters. The Iraqi space is clearly othered and depicted to be nightmarish, threatening and aggressive. "To most foreign observers, the landscape of Iraq is relentlessly empty and ugly, like a physical extension of the country's trauma" (Packer). The novel does not invest in philosophical notions about war, life and death, replacing that with colorful aesthetic use of language of description. However, the basic given abstraction in the text is the recurrent reference to war as an agent itself. This move is classical rhetorical trick to shift attention from real problems to abstracted ones. Powers' "late modernist novel" focuses on American soldiers

and “turns the US destruction of Iraq into an impressionistic tragedy of American suffering, then slips into the degraded realism of an imperial romance (Holston 4).

The trauma hero tradition embraced and developed in *Operation Homecoming, the Yellow Birds* and other fictional representations of the Iraq War that follow in their lead serves a "scapegoat function, discharging national blood- guilt by substituting the victim of trauma, the soldier, for the victim of violence, the enemy" (Scranton “Trauma Hero”). Before moving to more recent, nuanced and multifaceted American representations of the war that move beyond the trauma hero narrative, it is time to see how the war is represented by this de-realized/often erased enemy, the Iraqi other.

3. 2. Iraq: A Traumatized Nation and Erased Individuals

Unlike American narratives of the war that are characterized by the focus on the individual dimension of the war trauma experienced by the American soldier who is transformed from a perpetrator into a traumatized hero, Iraqi representations of the war are dominated by the cultural (national) trauma of the occupation experienced by Iraqis as war victims. As “a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon [Iraqis’] group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1), the 2003 Iraq War is a text-book definition of cultural trauma. The occupation war, the collapse of the regime and the disintegration of the state is a collective trauma, “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson 153-154). While some Americans see the Iraq War as a response to the trauma of September 11, Iraqis, like most of the rest of the world, find no connection between the two events. Iraqi narratives of the war contextualize it, instead, within

the tumultuous recent history of the country that witnessed three devastating wars in the last thirty years, two of them were led by the United States.

Within that framing, a review of contemporary Iraqi literature in 2002 almost sums it up: "The conditions of war and dictatorship in Iraq have posed a challenge that is met through writing against all odds," writes Iraqi critic Ferial Ghazoul just a few months before the 2003 War. Ghazoul's review of contemporary Iraqi literature contextualizes the corpus of literature in the country within the two preceding gulf wars, the economic sanctions on the country that lasted for more than a decade impairing economic, social and cultural life. Her remarks are still valid points of departure in discussing the impact of war and trauma on Iraqi writing today. The passage is worth quoting in full:

> Writing has become a mode of intellectual survival and an instrument of maintaining sanity in an insane world…Iraqi fiction today is decentered, par excellence. Despite this fragmentation, Iraqi writers both within and without possesses a single point of focus, a single point of departure, namely their country, even though the roads taken vary. Iraq in its present reality and its past legacy constitute for them a collective obsession. Looking within, gazing at losses, analyzing the downfall, searching for answers, exploring Iraqi history in the hope of finding an explanation of the national predicament -are all markers of Iraqi fiction today... Thus a streak of allusive, allegoric, and symbolic narration can be detected even in classic examples of Iraqi realism. This tendency has become now the hallmark of writing. Even when the text is autobiographical, the private seems to implicate wider public issues. When the description of a scene gives a first impression of neutrality, it is charged, nevertheless, with undertones and subtexts... Rape or Platonic love, indulgence or sterility, signify typologies of power relations (Ghazoul 3-4).

While most American writers see the war as a present matter without contextual knowledge other than their own personal narratives, Iraqis see the history of their nation/country repeating itself. They see the continuation of the past with different actors. This notion of the repeated (eternal) return of history prevails the two novels I discuss in this chapter. Most post-2003 Iraqi narrative fiction shares the central topic of the "imminent danger of extinction" (Said, *Reflections* 48) of

the nation and the national culture. It is a phase of writing that critic Hussain al-Sagaaf calls “the agony of Iraq” phase (“the Iraqi Novel”). Iraqi war writing often expresses the viewpoint of a collective civilian population traumatized and victimized by a complex abstract entity—war. In these narratives, the nation-state, instead of an individual, is the victim and the locus of the trauma. The individual trauma is a trajectory for the collective one. The existential experience of the human body in pain, loss, and suffering is overshadowed by a collective mourning of a lost national identity. Different narratives take different paths to engage the issue of war and trauma in the Iraqi context. While some of these prioritize the collective cause marginalizing individual voices of victims as human beings before being Iraqis; other narratives represent these voices individually. In both cases, the voice of the collective trauma is always there. War for most Iraqis in the past three decades has been an existential threat to the collectivity, and war’s literary representations are mostly allegories of this collective trauma and routes for processing and healing from it.

The 2003 invasion was not a conventional war. It is not specifically known when the war ended (or whether it did!). The war was “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” (Luckhurst “In War Times” 721). In writing about the 2003 war, people usually confuse the U.S. invasion seen as part of the “war on terror,” the Iraqi regime's defense and collapse, and the complex war of resistance/ sectarian conflict/civil war that continues to this day. Unlike previous wars in Iraq, the 2003 war was so complicated that its first (and often forgotten) phase gets conflated with the more enduring and complex array of conflicts that followed 2003. Because of this complexity, and because of the need to gauge and discuss the

past conflicts and uncovered histories that led to the war and the collapse of the state in 2003, before a thorough engagement with the current war(s), Iraqi writers prefer to write about (or include) the past experiences in their narratives, following what Roger Luckhurst describes as a structural law of the genre of war writing: “one wartime will always be seen through the lens of another" (“In War Time” 724). This is why most Iraqi novels that engage the theme of war after 2003 choose to tackle the richer, longer and the more defined 1980s war with Iran.

Because the 2003 War is lost for Iraqis in the sense that they did not experience the war existentially but were objects of killing and traumatization, because the war “did not take place” for them in the conventional sense of being in combat (to use the statement of Jean Baudrillard about the 1991 Gulf War), [6] the war experience is represented narratively either by going to previous wars as in Ḥusayn Sarmak Hassan’s *Mā ba‘da al-jaḥīm* (Beyond Hell) or by representing the more felt outcome of the 2003 invasion, the civil war/insurgency/resistance that followed as I will discuss in Shakir Nūrī’s *al-Mintaqa al-Khadhra’* (the Green Zone). The “real” war, i.e., the combat operations between Iraqi and coalition/American forces is lost and overlooked as an experience that no one wants to remember. In this section, I argue that *Beyond Hell* and *the Green Zone* engage the collective trauma of the Iraq War using individual pain and suffering as allegories for the trauma of the nation. *Beyond Hell* represents the traumatic past of the Iran War (1980-1988) as an indirect representation of the 2003 invasion. It uses the theme of the individual trauma in the war to communicate and process the collective trauma of the 2003 war of occupation.

The two novels I discuss in this section use the experience of war trauma subjugating the traumatized hero/victim to the collective trauma of the country/imagined community to which they belong. Dramatizing the inner conflicts of the heroes/victims, they create a micro-trauma to

allegorize the macro catastrophe of the war on the national scale. This is illustrated by the symbolism of female figures as the homeland, the motherland...the traumatization of the Iraqi space that becomes a wasteland battlefield, the transformations of the protagonists and the celebration of their self-denial identification with the national cause.

Unlike American representations of the war that de-historicize the war, *Beyond Hell* is dominated by the idea of the eternal return of history. The writer's treatment of a past war is a rhetorical commentary on the 2003 war that he, like many Iraqis, did not experience existentially as they did in the longer experience of the Iran war, which was not only longer, but more distant and with clear-cut identities and defined lines of engagement. The 2003 war that the novel indirectly refers to is a shorter experience (the military operations against the official forces of the former regime took only a few weeks). The scale of violence and horror and overwhelming use of extreme power in the 2003 war did not allow the Iraqis to remember the war or to live it as a conventional combat experience that they can learn from or contemplate philosophically/intellectually.

Ḥusayn Sarmak Hassan is one of the few Iraqi intellectuals (the carrier group of cultural traumas according to Ron Eyerman: *Cultural Trauma* 3) who discusses psychological trauma in his writing. Hassan not only encourages Iraqi writers to use the model of psychological trauma narrative but also writes a novel that specifically does that. *Mā baʿda al-jaḥīm* (Beyond Hell) is set in the 1980s war with Iran using the writer's personal experience, but in many ways, the novel *is* about the present 2003 war. Specifically, it is about the trauma of war. As one reviewer of the novel rightly points out, the title indicates the point that if war is hell, trauma is beyond that (Al-Ubaidi). The fact that the author has himself experienced the 1980s war (drafting was mandatory before 2003) and that he is a distinguished psychiatrist is relevant. In fact, PTSD among Iraqi

prisoners of war (POW) was the subject of his Master's thesis in 1989. In his non-fiction writings, Hassan (b.1956) has called for Iraqi writers and intellectuals to address the psychological impact of war on Iraqis. In the dedication to the novel, the writer establishes the authority of his direct experience of the war he is writing about, added to his professional experience in the topic of the psychological impact of war on soldiers, contextualizing these factors with the historicity of this war narrative as a response to the 2003 war. This experience-fetishism and urge to represent "our" traumas is a call to include Iraqi experiences in the established global literature/culture of trauma narratives. Rather than a rewriting of the trauma narrative to express the agonies and suffering of Iraqi individual and collective traumas, the novel adapts an established module of representation that builds on universalized notions of individualism, and psychoanalytic facticity marring it with collective nationalistic causes and ideologies.

Beyond Hell narrates the experience of one Iraqi soldier who endures symptoms of PTSD after an extremely violent war incident. The main narrative line is the story of Shamil's trauma as a soldier in the war against Iran and its impact on his family and social life. The novel self-consciously addresses the question of psychological trauma that the continuing wars inflict on Iraqi individuals. The novel is an important addition to this aspect of war writing in the country that usually represents war as an overwhelming external experience, focusing on its sociopolitical or cultural dimensions as discussed in chapter two above. Important as these dimensions of the war are, they overshadow and erase the individual experience of war completely. The psychological dimension of the experience is a significant part of the trauma inflicted on soldiers during the war. Even texts that engage psychological experiences and effects of combat are rarely entirely built on the theme of psychological trauma in the same way that

Beyond Hell is. Shamil witnesses so many atrocities in the war among which the central traumatic scene of the corpse of his friend Salaam being eaten by a black dog (53). This scene haunts Shamil in his daily life and appears in recurrent nightmares. In the psychological literature of trauma and PTSD, dreams and nightmares function as attempts by the unconscious to settle the traumatic experience and give it meaning. "Because the soldier's mind is unable to give the overwhelming event a meaning, he reenacts the moments of terror through dreams. By help of recreating the traumatic scene through his nightmares, he tries to grasp the near-death experience" (De Loof 7). The trauma distorts the thin line between the frontline and the home-front, alienating Shamil who finds himself more at ease at the battlefield than in civilian life. He mistreats his son and isolates himself from his family, spending his leave days at a friend's place in al-Basra instead of visiting his family as other soldiers do (132). The narrative moves to Siddeeqa, Shamil's faithful and understanding wife who suffers from cancer but hides it from her husband. Ahmed, Shamil's son, grows up to be drafted himself and follows in his father's steps. The war continues to consume generations of Iraqis. Just like Bartle's guilt in Kevin Powers *the Yellow Birds*, Shamil's survival guilt is due to the death of his friend and his inability to do anything about it. The (narrative) fact that he lives while his friend does not, leaves Shamil with the burden of responsibility to make his (friend's) death matters. The author does that symbolically by dramatizing this death as a trauma narrative, allegorizing the collective national trauma of the country that is destroyed and eaten by dogs (53).

By returning to the past, the novel comments on the present war. War breeds war, sons inherit their fathers' wars just like the way Ahmed inherits his father's role, donning military attire that resembles his father's, and meeting a destiny similar to his father's. Similar to the generational transfer of the national duty in al-Rikabi's "the wall of Rifles," Ahmed inherits his

father's duties to the homeland. During the eight years of the war, Ahmed grows up and is drafted. In the same war.

History repeats itself and Iraqis find themselves in yet another war. The writer dedicates the novel to "the brave fighters of the great (immortal) battle of Um Qasr" (referring to the first and often forgotten battle in the 2003 war). The dedication illustrates the rhetorical function of commenting on the recent war despite the representation of a different war in the text itself. In addition to the dedication that frames the story in the context of the war of 2003, one can feel that many statements in the novel are commentaries on the present time. In a sentence whereby the narrator comments on the central traumatic event of the novel, the death of Salaam, his close friend, one can hardly miss the charge of political commentary on the present: "a dog is stronger than man. Dogs control our destinies now" (53). The derogatory use of "dogs" (in Arabic) to describe the current political power/elites, stretching the metaphor of the black dog (recurrent in many war narratives) dismembering the body of his friend Salaam, to the way the dogs of the occupation-brought political elites of the present-day Iraq dismember the body of the Iraqi nation.

Hassan dedicates the novel to the victims of the 2003 war by apologetically asking the rhetorical question whether "meditations [such as his book!] commit a grand betrayal to the spilled blood" (5). Here, the writer is trying to preserve the memory of their sacrifices and the sacrifices of all Iraqi victims of different wars by engaging one of their traumatic experiences aesthetically. In a note that he adds to the dedication, he indicates that "events in this novel are realistic, but they are much less truthful than the realities of the three bloody wars that I have fought defending my homeland. Its heroes are real ones; I have extracted their pains from the sea of pains and sorrows of the great, resisting Iraqi people" (5).

In the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) the soldiers of the two countries underwent a long trench-life that was defined by attacks, counterattacks, and interludes of unstable peace. In the novel, the trench represents a correlative/alternative to the home. It is usually featured as an intimate place that combines the cynicism, absurdity, and horrors of combat life and distance from home. As the frontier [7] of the homeland, trench life is usually romanticized as in the example when Shamil describes Salaam's impact on the unit: Salaam writes poems on used cardboard, encourages soldiers to plant flowers, and to bring and exchange books to the extent that they start a small library in the trench (74). However, the novel's naturalizing of the war by making the trench a more intimate space is an ideological attempt to inject the elements of peaceful life into the life of constant wars under the Ba'athist regime. This trope can be seen in this and many other texts that undertake the national cause as their core narrative endeavor. Combat terminology is prevalent in this war novel that follow the tradition of war writing in the Iran war era. Words such as the "trench," the "no man's land," attacks, bombardment and other traditional combat terms are common. The soldiers would visit their houses regularly, which made the war a concurrent ritual of the everyday life of millions of Iraqis, affecting their social, economic and cultural daily lives, and making their traumas completely different from those of the American soldiers.

The novel tackles the past with an ambivalent political attitude, unlike many narratives that preceded or followed 2003 which were either propaganda praise for the previous regime and its totalitarian ideology or an oppositional narrative that undermine the war ideology and the catastrophic outcomes that it brought upon the country and the people for more than thirty years. Important as the last group of narratives are in uncovering the despotic nature of the dictatorial Ba'athist regime and its ideology; they necessarily (perhaps unintentionally) support and justify

the current regime of warlords, sectarian divides and ethnic cleansing that was established by the American occupation after 2003. Hassan's novel succeeds in avoiding this ideological trap by taking a middle-ground position that maintains the national myths and ideology but does not embrace the former regime and its despotic institutions. The novel indicates, marginally, but realistically that corruption and persecution of individuals prevailed in the war institutions of the time. An example of this state-military persecution of individuals is when the military officers in the novel keep telling their men that the "soldier's brain is unused and that it better stay so" (47), or the reference to the long reach and control of the governing Ba'ath Party into military institutions. In the war, the role of institutions is tactical to achieving the strategies of the war and nothing more. The responsibility of the medical support team, for instance, is "transferring the wounded to save their lives and to prepare them for a new holocaust. As for the martyrs (the dead), they are the responsibility of God or the dogs of the battlefield" (39). Shamil, the protagonist, deals with this repression and persecution pragmatically as a reality that he has to live with and accept. This neutral attitude to the repressive institutions is what Salaam, Shamil's friend and role model, rejects. Salaam, the "poet-warrior," as the novel describes him, is the example of an extraordinary individual who combines resistance to repressive forces that try to suppress his individuality and the patriotic hero who is proud of his nation and national integrity. Salaam refuses to become a member of the Ba'ath Party, a mandatory requirement for anyone in the military. He succeeds, in a way that the novel does not reveal, in convincing his commander to stop asking him to do that.

In addition to the main storyline of Shamil's trauma, the novel incorporates a few narrative intervals (two short stories and a literary article) that function as narrative spaces that indirectly comment on the war situation of the main story. In the story of "the Peculiar Bird" (59-

62), a beautifully colorful bird is seen by the narrator in the no-man's land during a bombardment engagement with the enemy. The bird strangely sticks to the bush where he lives despite all the ongoing fire crossing over its nest. A few days later, the narrator sees the bird carrying a baby bird that has just hatched. The bird rests on the soldiers' terrace to get some rest and relief, "feeling safe and flying towards the inside of the country" (62). Clearly the story functions within the general signification of the novel as a national allegory. The bird taking care of its young ones, sticking to the duty of saving their lives, is an instinctual act similar to what the soldiers are doing in a war of "national defense" (as it was portrayed by state rhetoric). The bird (for unknown reasons) cannot find peace except inside the country, the homeland, or by moving in its direction. Another story (145-150) that intersects in the narrative is by Ahmed, Shamil's son and his narrative double. Both stories are published by Salaam (one by Shamil's friend and the other by the other/same Salaam, Ahmed's friend that we read about by the end of the book). In addition to these stories, we read a "literary" article entitled "an Iraqi Surrealism." It, too, is by Salaam, whom the novel defines as a "reserve Iraqi poet" (65), combining his cultural role as a poet and his propaganda function as an embedded poet in a war machine. The article is the only place we can hear Salaam's voice directly. Otherwise, his character and role remain less developed than Shamil and the rest of the characters. The article tries to philosophize war and theorize the meaning of reality created by the horrors of the war. War destroys "established psychological responses" to different stimuli. It creates reactions and realizations to savage 'facts/truths' hard to catch by the receptors of the mind." In war, the hallucination of the traumatized individuals presents "a psychological reality that is more real than reality/truth itself" (66).

In addition to the movement between the main narrative line and these interventions, the narrative voice in the novel moves between a third-person narrator, Shamil the "trauma hero" and his wife Siddeeqa. This movement allows the reader to see Shamil's trauma and its impact on his family from different angles. It also allows a deeper understanding of the suffering of Siddeeqa, the wife and the mother who spends much time and effort to reconcile her husband's troubled mood and her duties to the rest of her family. Siddeeqa is acting as a mother to both her son and daughter as well as to her moody and unstable husband. Late in the novel, we discover that she has been hiding her ailment/cancer from her husband so as not to add to his trouble. This conventional celebratory portrayal of the long-suffering female character in the novel adds nothing new to the traditional view of the woman as a symbol for the nation, the motherland—a notion often critiqued by feminist Arab writers (Amireh 750). Despite the narrative voice shifting to center her subjectivity at intervals, Siddeeqa's agony remains secondary to the more important suffering of her traumatized man. Unlike Shamil, her character does not evolve or develop to be more nuanced and realistic. She remains the perfect, loving mother and the faithful, protective wife who does not show a single sign of anger or care for her own problem because she has to care for her son and husband.

Among the signs of Shamil's trauma is his sense of "survival guilt" and dissociation from the outside world. Shamil's guilt of surviving when his best friend could not, results in a sense of apathy to everything around him. Hassan defines survival guilt in an article in *al-Naqed al-Iraqi* (the Iraqi Critic) as "a true hellish feeling experienced by anyone who survives an overwhelming catastrophe that takes the lives of people related to the survivor. The individual starts to ask the question: why did they die, and I stayed alive?" (Hassan "Irada al-Jobouri"). Shamil thinks of committing suicide after his life lost its meaning (78). Asked by his wife to do her a favor,

Shamil brings a butcher to prepare a lamb he sacrifices as a religious sign of gratitude for his survival. During the ritual of skinning and dismembering the lamb, he remembers the traumatic scene of his friend's guts being eaten by the black dog while watching the streets dogs eat the spilled guts of the sacrificed animal. Shamil explodes upon seeing this trigger of traumatic memory and asks the butcher to leave (95). He fails to forget the trauma memory or to let go of it. The novel stresses that the traumatic experience for Shamil is deeply registered in his memory. Trauma in this war-trauma novel is not registered in repressed feelings, omissions or lacunas in the text (Pederson 338) but expressed agonizing memories. Shamil not only remembers the traumatic event, but he cannot escape the memory of what happens to his friend's body. One failed escape for Shamil was alcohol (29), but that results in more trouble as it intensifies his feelings of guilt and absurdity of survival. In a visit to a psychiatric, Shamil is told that his case is not unusual, a "psychological disorder common in all wars known as 'Uqba al-Shada'id al-Faji'a,'" a fancy translation of PTSD that the writer insists on using (100). The psychiatrist tells him that he first needs to get away from the source of the trauma- the war, but Shamil knows the impossibility of that choice. However, he goes out in a better mood thinking that knowing what is happening to him is an important first step. The writer's background in psychology is relevant here. His role as a psychiatrist and as a writer is to talk his ideas out, to approach the world through language. By intersecting these two systems of knowledge (literature and psychoanalysis), Hassan approaches his traumatic memory of the three wars he has witnessed, creating an individual narrative of trauma that is at the same time allegorical of the collective trauma of his country.

Dissociation in Shamil's character is manifested by his refusal to accept the death of his friend Salaam. His immediate response to the event is shock, disbelief, and emotional numbness.

After leaving his family and spending his leave days at al-Basra, close to his deployment position, he receives a letter from Siddeeqa telling him about his son Ahmed who has now been deployed to the northern front of the war. She tells him that Ahmed is now a man of letters following in his father's example and that he has a poet friend that she describes in identical terms to her husband's dead friend Salaam. To complicate things more, the friend's name is Salaam too. Shamil is shocked by the news and the description of this surreal similarity between the two. He thinks that they might have mistaken Salaam's body for someone else and that his friend has somehow survived and disappeared only to reappear in this surreal way in another corner of the war. Shamil visits a mate that was responsible for delivering Salaam's corpse to the latter's family. This friend assures him that his doubts have no grounds, and everybody is worried about him. They are worried that Shamil does not visit his family anymore and that he does not accept the fact of the death of their friend. To cover up for the reason for asking about Salaam's death after this long time, Shamil comes up with a lie that he has heard someone by the name and voice of his dead friend in the Iranian radio (Iranian radio used to broadcast names and identifying information for the Iraqi POW they hold so that their families could know of their whereabouts). To his surprise, Shamil's friend approves of his made-up story, telling him that he himself had heard the man and also thought of their dead friend but then dismissed the idea for it was too surreal to be believed after he has himself delivered the dead body to Salaam's family. This distorted attitude to reality and the rejection of the loss of his friend by imagining an alternative reality illustrates the distorting impact of the trauma on Shamil's mind. His symptoms invoke what Freud has described in "Mourning and Melancholia," as the melancholic reaction to loss: "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love" (Freud 153).

More than that, the novel supports this distortion of reality by surreally presenting clues and signs that indicate this alternative reality or verisimilitude (Ghazoul 3). This move beyond the mundane "real" indicates the surreal and absurd life under war not only in Shamil's distorted psyche but also in the outside world of the novel, which corresponds to the novel's attempt to identify the individual experience of the war with its collective reality.

Shamil lives the war as an external reality, as a public concern/issue, a challenge to the existence of the individual and the imagined national community at the same time. War or the "ghoul" as the author keeps calling it consumes and devours the country and its individual citizens. It destroys the personality of the protagonist by the trauma of what happens to his friend, by what it does to his family-life especially in his relationship to his son who grows to become another victim of the war. This damage that happens to the hero's ego in his private and intimate life is compensated by imagining" the survival and victory of the collective ego (the homeland or the imagined community-the nation). Private, intimate life loses its meaning. Shamil and the other soldiers live "for the sake of this dust/soil [of the homeland]" (79). In war, as the novel presents it, private space is destroyed. It becomes less meaningful to speak of the private in isolation from the more public, the more structural reality of the war. The ghoul of war interferes with everything. It does not stop at destroying streets, buildings, and cities, but also enters the protagonist's bed when he fails to have an erection (84). This failure suggests that the trauma of war crushes Shamil's sense of and performance of masculinity. In a masculine society where values like manhood and honor have to do with being able to provide and satisfy his household's needs, Shamil's manhood is symbolically castrated by the war. As an individual, he is first being symbolically castrated by the patriarchal institution of the army and then he is crushed by the war that this institution puts him through. This is specifically illustrated by the

traumatic event that he has experienced which reflects on his life. He retreats to himself, gets violent with his son and deserts his family. Unlike Abdalla's desertion the army in Jinan Jasim Ḥalāwī's *the Nighttime of the Country*, Shamil deserts his family, failing to fit in, and finding a fictitious replacement in belonging to the big, abstract family, the nation (as defined by the big other army). The battlefield/trench becomes an alternative home for Shamil and the other soldiers, where things make more sense. He feels at home there. Unlike at his house where he is less able to perform any positive or meaningful role, he understands his role at the military, the dynamics of power and the range of expectations. The story ends with the disintegration of the family, the symbol of the traumatized collectivity that endures endless wars. Siddeeqa's health deteriorates as she has been hiding her uterus cancer (symbolizing the barrenness/sterility inflicted by war) with angelic self-denial and sacrifice, another indication of the novel's failure to meaningfully center any non-passive adult female subjectivity. By the end, no hope is left for the family except for Sanaa, the young daughter who thinks that her father's problem is a severe headache.

In the last few pages, the narrative moves quickly. Shamil decides to go back to his family and restore control over his life but the war does not allow him to do so. He decides to go to Ahmed's military unit in the northern front to bring him home to the waiting Sideeqa. Ahmed does the same thing, in the opposite direction. He and his father die by the same gunshot that kills them in two different war fronts in the north and south of the country in a surreal way that the novel does not clarify or develop enough to create the intended effect.

The writer focuses on developing the theme of his novel (the experience of trauma and its impact) over the organic development of the characters. Except for Shamil, almost all other characters are one-dimensional types. This could be explained by the short span of the novel

(156 pages). Shamil's character evolves and grows, stabilizes and erupts depending on the memories and stimuli of the trauma he has been through. Unlike him, Salaam, for instance, is more like a symbol, a role model than a real person. The meaning of his name "peace," and the set of ideas he stands for are the opposite of everything the ghoul of war represents. He does not grow or change throughout the novel. He does not show any sign of human weakness or waning of the values and ideas he believes in. The same thing could be said about Siddeeqa who remains the novel's exemplary of the perfect Iraqi women (the symbol of the nation). She does not evolve, grow or show any sign of weakness or self-involvement in spite of the ailment she suffers from and the suffering and the compromises she has to undergo. Instead of developing these characters and enriching their appeal, the writer focuses on Shamil's trauma experience and its allegorical reference/allusion to the trauma of the nation.

One major take on the novel is the complete erasure/ absence of the other from the narrative of the war. Similar to many American narratives of the Iraq War, this novel completely erases and abstracts the other. There is no reference to the Iranians in the text, as if the war is happening against an unknown enemy, or as if the enemy was the ghoul of war itself. This abstraction of the war is common in war narratives that engage war rhetorically without dismantling it as a human phenomenon that takes place among human agents with choices and responsibilities. As much as this abstraction provides a creative, poetic space to discuss war, it prevents/removes any realistic political discussion of war and the moral responsibilities of its agents. The absence of the voice of the other in this war narrative removes their traumas and pains from the story of this war, which is a recurrent flaw of war literature, especially literature that prioritizes the combat experience of soldiers at the expense of other victims of the war. At the same time, this absence indicates my argument that the novel is not actually about the 1980s

war with Iran, but a narrative of the cultural trauma of the 2003 war too. This can be seen in the dedication to the "heroes" of the Um Qasr battle, the derogatory references to the dogs eating the corpse of the murdered nation and other examples discussed above.

The individual trauma represented in the novel is clearly a metaphor for the collective trauma of the nation. The novel follows in the tradition of identifying individual struggles and pains for collective causes and greater myths. The national-allegorical structure in the novel marginalizes the traumas and suffering of individuals. Just like the erasure of Siddeeqa's problem for the sake of the more important trauma of her husband, Iraqi individuals are alienated in this war narrative that admits their traumas but deems them secondary to the collective trauma of the nation. The erasure of the Iranian other in the novel flattens the war story as a one-dimensional representation of history. Employing the "trauma hero" model to represent a traumatized Iraqi individual is a faithful imitation of the American model, an adoption of the colonizer's mindset. It fails to realize the pain of the individual that is presented as a stereotypical national hero. Despite all these limitations of the novel, and if only for the introduction of psychological trauma and PTSD as a narrative theme in the war story, *Beyond Hell* remains one of the important additions to Iraqi war literature.

Collective traumas like the Iraq War are not natural incidents. They are not traumatic by nature but become so through socially constructed narrative(s) that communicate and surround them. In Shakir Nūrī's *al-Mintaqa al-Khadra* (The Green Zone) the national trauma prevails over the personal agonies of war victims. Like Hassan's *Beyond Hell*, the novel engages in the process of creating the collective narrative of the cultural trauma of the 2003 war. "Trauma creation" (Alexander 1), is a process of producing a common, unifying narrative around a shocking event that redefines the life, identity and the future of the collectivity. Like other texts

that avoid the first phase of the war that "did not take place" (to use Baudrillard's phrase again), the novel represents the conditions of life in the post-occupation insurgency/resistance/civil war era. The context in which the novel was written (2005-2009) marks the hardest years of the civil strife when the very unity and survival of the country were questioned. The complexity and existential threats of the war to the country and its people indicate the need to set things straight historically by writing the Iraqi people's version of the war story. The collapse of the state and its nationalistic ideology in 2003 meant the loss of the gravitational pole that brings Iraqis together and the ideological frame that unites them into an "imagined community" (Anderson). The novel epitomizes the collective trauma of the war primarily as a cultural trauma in which Iraq as a nation and Iraqis as a collectivity are traumatized. It is an attempt to redefine nationalism by romantically restoring the heroic past.

The Green Zone narrates the experiences of five Iraqi interpreters: Ibrahim, Kamil, Viviane, Rasheed and Murad working with the American forces mainly in checkpoints at the gates of the Green Zone quarter of Baghdad that the Americans have established to be the center of their administration and the political process they run in the country after 2003. The group of interpreters closely interact with five American Marines. Neil, Bachelor, Jimmy, Richard, and Batista are represented beyond clichés of the perpetrator American other. Instead, they develop some deeper connections with the Iraqi group, expressing nonconforming opinions of war and their role in it. Among these Americans that allegorize the melting-pot image of America, Neil, an African American who enlists specifically to use the money to start a career in music. A Muslim-American himself, Neil shows great solidarity for the local people.

Presenting the perspectives of American and Iraqi individuals humanizes both and advances a nuanced, nonconforming political understanding of the war. The individual agonies

of these few Americans and their interpreters take place at the backdrop of collective traumas to countless Iraqis. In a liminal position of belonging between Iraq and the American forces, the interpreters become an object of rage, doubts, verbal and physical abuse on the one hand; and constant threats of elimination on the other. They are estranged and removed from the local people by stigmas of betrayal and treason. One saying in the novel goes like this: "Kill the agent before the occupier" (109). Unlike interpreters with Green Cards or American citizenships, local interpreters have to wear disguises, facial masks, fake names, and identities. They are distrusted and frequently subjected to security checks, screening, and interrogation by the Americans. The female interpreters are treated as sexual objects by the teams they work for (57). The work contracts they have secure no compensation in case of death or injury. In a few words, like Malik in Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, Iraqi interpreters live completely bare, ingrievable lives. But unlike Malik who is silenced and marginalized, the leading interpreter Ibrahim leads his way out of this bare, meaningless life into creating his own meaning.

It is this bare life, this mistreatment, lack of accountability or compensation for the loss that drives the dramatic transformation in the character of Ibrahim, the protagonist. Added to his guilt for the trauma of his people that he is being part of, Ibrahim is torn between his patriotic, nationalist feelings and his pragmatic need to secure a living. A former librarian and teacher of English, he finds no better job than working for the occupying forces after the collapse of the regime and the disintegration of the state. The novel stresses this economic aspect of life under the occupation that destroyed economic life outside the Green Zone establishing a foster, parasitic neoliberal economic relations based on "imposed market capitalism that yielded [the] entire econom[y] to foreign corporations" (Hollander 157). Life in the Green Zone is in sharp contrast with the rest of the country. Opposite to the devastating war conditions in the country,

the novel portraits a growing bourgeois life in the Green Zone among American and Iraqi high-ranking officials, intelligence officers, politicians, warmongers, contractors, translators, smugglers of relics and artifacts, embedded journalists, private security companies and the new political elites in the country (29-31). Ibrahim and his group of interpreters interact mainly with their American team but also participate in this life of leisure, frequenting the few pubs and bars in the Green Zone and attending parties organized by their commander Colonel David. David, the commander of the Green Zone falls in love with a leading Iraqi interpreter named Betty (Basima Francis). Because of her relationship with the commander, Betty becomes the manager of all nine thousand interpreters working for the coalition forces, managing their records and providing information about them. David teaches her to dance tango and their story becomes a magnet for rumors and gossip in the Green Zone. Ibrahim thinks of their relationship as a slave-master affair (56), concluding that real human connection cannot grow in such circumstances. The affair, the marriage and especially the tango dance are clearly allegorical of the wedding of the new Iraq to the American values. Indeed, Nūrī uses the dance as a paradigm for "the relationship between the occupier and the occupied where the local elites are supposed to mimic the movements of the Americans and learn from them how to become good governors" (Masmoudi 148). Colonel David, the representative of the occupation authority complains that the elites working with the Americans lack symbolic (bourgeois) capital of knowing how to dance. "In the eyes of the occupier, they remain unprepared to lead the dance and, by extension, to lead their own country" (Masmoudi 148). The choice of the tango is because of the duo and partnership it requires. The failure of this partnership is symbolized in the ending of the novel at a tango ball turned into debris because of the resistance deeply rooted in the culture and the spirit

of the country whose people do not necessarily know how to tango, but they sure know how to walk on fire.

Ibrahim develops a rather plausible crush on a fellow Iraqi interpreter, Viviane, who later tells him her real name, Alyaa'. The intricate, in-between position of the two interpreters, the shared fears, anxieties and threats they both undergo encourage their connectedness. Viviane shares Ibrahim's patriotism and guilt of betraying his nationalistic values. Commenting on the tango dance of Colonel David and the lead interpreter Miss Betty, Viviane says: 'I don't want to be part of the dance of the occupation. They dance as though they have possessed the country in this dance', she objects (Nūrī 117; Masmoudi's translation 149). Viviane and Ibrahim continue to feel suffocated in the Green Zone by the militarized life, the constant threat, the sense of un-belonging there and the emotional connection to the outside where they ironically cannot freely go. They manage to walk out of the Green Zone a few times, hardly escaping explosions and life-threatening incidents. Viviane's family gets threats about their daughter's work. They ask her to quit but she chooses to stay with Ibrahim. The two get married and Colonel David gives them a house to stay in temporarily in the Green Zone. Before their honeymoon ends Viviane visits her family and gets kidnapped. Ibrahim and the Americans try to find her but to no avail. He visits his home village (Tel al-Yaqut), close to the remains of an ancient temple of the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna. He reflects on his first beloved whom he calls by the goddess' name, linking the two to his lost wife Viviane. Near the ruins of the temple in his village, Ibrahim gets a surreal message from masked militants who identify him as an interpreter, threaten to kill him then disappear. Ferial Ghazoul comments on the use of the surreal and the fantastic in Iraqi fiction

> "The new Iraqi fiction has veered towards the fantastic, the surrealist, the Kafkaesque, the labyrinthine, the uncanny, not out of renunciation of the real, but out of verisimilitude. Life in Iraq is depicted in juxtaposed scenes rather than plots. Contiguity is privileged over causality. Writers mix genres, creating a sense of hybridity and defamiliarization. In recent Iraqi fiction the confidence in a hopeful future has given away to a consciousness of the absurd and monstrous, but the relationship of the writer to reality remains that of fidelity" (3-4).

The surreal appearance of the militants adds a level of fantasy to the rather realistic narrative. Readers are not sure whether this is the paranoid unconscious mind of the frightened narrator or a fantastic addition that pulls the narrative one level beyond the accepted norms of reality in the novel's world. He magically hears Inanna telling him to obey their instructions or else he would be killed (163-164). Later he gets a call from the "resistance" asking for information about an American contractor that frequents the Green Zone. After the contractor gets killed, Ibrahim goes back to the village to meet the *muqawama* (guerilla resistance) and ask for Viviane. They promise him to find and release her once he completes a final mission for them, getting the parts of a suicide vest inside the Green Zone piece by piece.

In his visits to the village, Ibrahim finds that the villagers have returned to an ancient ritual dance their ancestors used to perform in the past, a combination of Sufi prayers and dances that include reckless acts of self-inflicted violence. "Had the Americans know about this dance, they would have not invaded our country," says Ibrahim (60). The Ziran dance [8] has taken a new meaning after the occupation. Walking on fire has come to mean not only accepting the pain of the body to satisfy the soul, a form of submission to God but also a practical holy war prayer of resistance that reads like this: "You[God] be the witness that I burn the ground under the[occupiers] feet" (172). While he is not religious, Ibrahim finds in this dance a bigger meaning, a sense of belonging to a collectivity where the dancers dissolve into a collectivity of believers united in faith with God.

Tired of his inner conflict of where his true self should be in the divide between the neoliberal bourgeois, occupying the world of the Green Zone and the resisting, nationalistic cause represented by the rest of the country and especially his own village people, Ibrahim decides to do more than getting the vest inside the Green Zone. Revenging for all the victims of the occupation, for Viviane, for the villagers of Tel al-Yaqut, for the discriminated-against interpreters, even for Neil and his American friends who are the cogs of the imperial war machine, Ibrahim walks into the marble hall of a big party in the Green Zone, performing his solo dance of vengeance.

If cultural trauma is "a contentious discursive process framed by a dichotomy between perpetrator and victim which is spurred by a powerful, unforgettable occurrence" (Eyerman "Social Theory" 43-44), structurally, *The Green Zone* is built on a set of dichotomies and binary oppositions between the self and the other; the Green Zone and the rest of the country, the red zone; the tango dance of the occupation and their pet government versus the local Ziran dance of the resistance; the institution of war (embodied in colonel David) and the individual Iraqis and Americans who work for but oppose him; the present (America and the American occupation) versus the past (Iraq and its civilizations); the pragmatic affair of David and Betty (a master-slave relation) versus the patriotic, "authentic" love of Ibrahim and Viviane; and finally the pragmatic approach to life and death (represented by the Americans fearing the resistance and not knowing how to stop them in opposition to the heroic approach to life and death by the resistance. It takes more than this section in this chapter to deconstruct all these hierarchical oppositions, but I can generally claim that all these oppositions lead to an expected result in which the worse part of their hierarchies, the less authentic (or impressive, for these are clearly rhetorical statements) side of each one deteriorates and ends in a dramatic failure. Ironically, this

only takes place by eliminating the individual body (suicide) for the sake of the collective body (the nation). The advocated, dreamt-of outcome in the text is the victory of the secular, national resistance represented by Ibrahim who turns the Green Zone into a red one by his performance of the Ziran dance that overcomes the imported Tango of the occupiers, connecting the past of Iraq into its free future that moves over the failures of the present. The victory of the people (Iraqis and Americans) over the institution and special interests of the Green Zone contractors, corporations and warmongers is only achieved by adhering to heroic, self-sacrificial values over pragmatic interests.

The rhetoric beyond these oppositions is creating a narrative of the cultural trauma of the war, a space to negotiate, process and overcome it by dramatically restoring the heroic self. The name of the protagonist is clearly allegorical to/of the biblical (Qur'anic) Abraham. Ibrahim's home village is not far from the birthplace of the prophet, whom he was named after (180). The references to Abraham's hometown, the Mesopotamian city Ur (70) and the American threats to destroy its remains indicate the role of Abraham in the novel not as a religious reference but as a national Mesopotamian patriarch, a symbol for the nation. This appropriation of religious and (pre)historical figures into the national narrative of the imagined community is a characteristic of the "romantic paradigm" that interprets Iraqi history as a continuity of the glorious past and that ended up in creating the "crisis state" of the pre-2003 Iraq (al-Musawi *Reading Iraq* 3). The people in Ibrahim's village used to expect him to become worthy of the name by achieving great things, which he thinks he has failed to do (180). This and many other references to the Mesopotamian prophet in the text lead to the identification of the protagonist with Abraham, which leads to his ceremonial walk on fire at the final and more dramatic scene in the novel. The fire in the novel, a metaphor for the collective trauma of Iraqis, is a test in their way to glory, just

like Abraham's fire in the Quran and the Old Testament was a test. The notions of glory and heroism are essential to national narratives. But more than a celebration of the heroic self, the novel adds the recognition of the other of that heroism.

The other-self dichotomy is central in the novel. It is manifested in the slave/master relationship of Colonel David and Miss Betty. Betty sweats herself to prove valuable to Colonel David and the Americans. He appoints her to control the administrative work of the interpreters, making sure they stay divided and establish no connections or empathy among themselves or with the local population (119). The nature of their relationship is best manifested in the symbolic tango dance they keep performing every now and then. By learning the language of the master, Betty secures her position in the neocolonial reality of the occupation, symbolizing the attitude of parasitic new political elites who assume power by imitating and connecting to the new masters. In spite of that, the novel does not present her completely as a villain. As a Christian Iraqi, her life becomes very difficult after the war and the insurgency that usually attacks Christians as agents of the occupation. She not only likes the role of the slave in the relationship, but she also needs it: "The victim desperately needs the perpetrator, they are partners in a party" (107). In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) Hegel provides a dialectic analysis of the self and the other using the metaphor of the master (lord) and the slave. The self needs the other for the recognition it gets to have freedom and agency. In the master/slave model, domination has the central role in the interhuman relation. But mutual recognition is necessary because of the dialectic nature of the relationship (Hegel 113). In the context of colonial relations, Frantz Fanon uses the Hegelian dialectic to challenge the rhetoric of the colonizers. "Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask

themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (Fanon, *Wretched* 249-250). The novel juxtaposes formulations of identity in the colonized Iraq that differently respond to this question of who the subject is. Betty's response to this question is a negation of her native identity and subscription to the victorious ideology of the other. By striving to prove her loyalty to the master (Colonel David), she yearns for recognition by the other. This recognition is an attempt to rid herself of the alienation of being a Christian in a place where Iraqi Christians are being displaced and accused of being allies to the invaders. This recognition is false and misguided, the novel illustrates, as it does not disturb the dominating master-slave discourse. Fanon calls for reversing the master-slave dialectic with violence. The slave needs a challenge to his humanity, he wants a conflict, a riot" (*Black Skin* 221). The challenge gives the slave (read: the colonized) the cause to fight for, a cause that moves him "beyond life toward a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth" (*Black Skin* 218).

It is precisely this challenge, this bigger cause that Ibrahim needs, finds and acts upon in the novel. Ibrahim's response to the question of identity posed by the colonial presence is a reconnection to the national identity, choosing to join the resistance. Violent resistance is a cleansing force according to Fanon. "It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude" (The Wretched 94). The novel also allows the possibility of "cross-traumatic solidarity" (Dalley 27) with the traumatized (American) other without desperately wanting their recognition.

This Hegelian notion of the reciprocal relationship with the other is also key to understand the role of Neil and the other Americans in the novel. Born to a Muslim, African American father, Neil expresses solidarity with the local Iraqis. He describes people in al-Sadr

city: “Oh god! They look just like black folk in their crowded busy lifestyle. They’re like us…This neighborhood protects itself by human armor just like a *Zinji* neighborhood (African ghetto)” (35). Neil ends up deserting the Marines and hiding somewhere in al-Sadr city, among people that look and behave like his own folk (169). He tells Ibrahim that he will not fight Ibrahim’s village because he does not fight people that he respects (176). Ibrahim thinks that Neil’s interest in music cultivates the human barbaric nature that he possesses as a man going to war. “He wanted to become one of us, understand us… he was only American in his appearance” (35). Neil and his American mates use to laugh at the news of what people from Ibrahim’s village do: “You are just like [Native] Indians, your heads are full of imagination, embers, fire, violence, and terrorism.” But Neil is more sympathetic with him: you are just like black folk, your dignity is above everything” (175). The novel continues to build a sense of solidarity between Neil, the representative of the other America, the one that belongs to people who recognize the steadfastness of Iraqis. With this recognition from the other, with this challenge to his subjectivity, and with his multiple trips to his home village and the temple of Inanna, the Iraqi goddess of love and war, the heroic self of Ibrahim can now emerge. This loaded patriotic heroism reminds of the “blind patriotism” (Mailer) [9] that we saw in official war literature discussed above (the 1980s Iraqi war narratives such as *Qisas Tahta Laheeb al-Nar* (Stories under Fire Flames) and in official American literature of the Iraq War such as *Operation Homecoming*).

The spatial dichotomy is another important factor of the trauma depicted in the novel. The writer stresses the significance of representing the traumatized Iraqi spaces saying that every “square meter in Iraq needs a novel to be written about it” (Bin al-Waleed). The title centralizes the Green Zone as a very iconic place in the post-war era. The center of the main events of the

novel, the Green Zone is not simply the setting for the trauma but a suffocating traumatizing factor. The very name of the highly protected region signifies peace, security, and prosperity in contrast with the rest of the country. As a (neo) colonial space, the Green Zone is a metaphor, a signifier to the project of building the new Iraq, in the American way. As a militarized space it is also the complete opposite of that, an indicator of the failure of that project and a signifier of the trauma that accompanies it. It is the headquarters of the American forces, their new political process and the neocolonial parasitic bourgeoisie that grows along with this project. The novel stresses the contrast between the Green Zone and the rest of the country, best represented by shabby places such as al-Sadr city (a crowded suburb in Baghdad), and Ibrahim's fictional village Tel al-Yaqut. Unlike these real places, Tel al-Yaqut remains a mythical place in the novel, associated with Sufi rituals, ancient goddesses and surreal resistance. The conflict between the Green Zone and Tel al-Yaqut is embodied in Ibrahim's inner dialogues and the transformation he undergoes.

In the novel, the "spatialization of the occupation" to use a phrase from Frantz Fanon is built on this contrast of the Green Zone and the rest of the occupied country. This contrast corresponds to the differences in people's relationship to the "necropower" (power over death) (Mbembé) in each of the two spaces. Those who live in the Green Zone have the power to end the lives of those who do not. At the same time, their power is not absolute because of the situation of the war and the resistance. People outside the Green Zone live "bare lives" but have their strategies of resistance. Discussing the spatial structure of colonial presence, Fanon indicates that colonial occupation entails a division of space into compartments:

> The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity… they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two

> terms, one is superfluous. The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt... The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners.
>
> The town belonging to the colonized people…the native town … the medina… is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread… of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs (Fanon, *Wretched* 38-39).

This spatialization involves boundaries "regulated by the language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action (Mbembé 26). It is true that "[l]ate-modern colonial occupation" is different from what Fanon had in mind, especially in "its combining of the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical," (Ibid 27) but the spatial compartmentalization of the Iraqi space under the American occupation takes similar routes. The novel highlights and dramatizes this drastic contrast as it is reflected in the experience of the protagonist Ibrahim who finds himself a stranger in what he used to think his homeland. He walks into the Green Zone "entering another planet, isolated, built on mountains of doubt and uncertainty" (44). Ibrahim, Viviane and the rest of Iraqis do not actually belong to the Green Zone. The rage they develop is not different from the rage of colonized slaves who have to work for the white master without belonging to his side of the city.

In addition to the spatial disparity between the Green Zone and the rest of the country, temporal differences also contextualize the cultural trauma that the novel narrativizes. The Green Zone belongs to the present, superficial reality of the occupation while the rest of Iraq belongs to history and immortality. In cultural trauma theorization, historical triumphs and traumas are necessary for constructing the collectivity's narrative of itself:

> Because they refer retrospectively to liminal horizons of the social community, triumph and trauma have to be imagined, renarrated, and visualized in myths, pictures, and figures. Thus, the triumphant and sovereign subjectivity is embodied in the figure of the hero, who lives beyond the rules and establishes a new order. In contrast, the traumatic reference to the past is represented by the memory of victims who have been treated as objects, as cases of a category without a face, a name, a place (Giesen 114).

As social constructs, cultural traumas make more sense when they are read in historical context. Ibrahim's contextualizing of the current trauma of Iraq is marked by countless references to ancient Mesopotamia (72-75), Islamic encounters (75), the Moghuls invasion (70; 83), the Ottoman rule (87) and the British occupation of the country (77). The narrator links the past with the present as he recollects that, nineteen times. Baghdad or the country has fallen to a foreign invasion in the past. People would write the two graffiti numbers 1258 and 2003 standing for the dates of the two times Baghdad has fallen to the Moghuls and the Americans. Ibrahim's visit to Ur is a historical reference to the repeated notion of the eternal return of history. His other visit to a cemetery of British soldiers from WWI in al-Imarah (121-128) is an indicator that the current trauma of the American occupation is just another episode in the ups and downs of Iraq's long history. While the Britons left only cemeteries of their soldiers, The Americans are going to have a similar fate. History is an essential part of the novel's construction of the Iraq war as a collective cultural trauma.

One way the novel collectivizes the trauma of the war is by grouping Iraqi traumas together in collectivities in opposition to individualizing the pain and trauma of few Americans. Batista, a member of the group of Marines with whom Ibrahim works, undergoes difficult psychological pain, nightmares and traumatic memory over his act of killing many Iraqis with a machine gun. He asks Ibrahim to take him to a local church where he confesses his crimes and goes out of the church relieved (149). In addition to ignoring individual traumas of the Iraqi

victims of the shooting (in comparison to its dramatization of American individual trauma), the novel follows the American model of stressing the traumas of the individual American soldiers whose personal traumatic experience transforms them from perpetrators into traumatized victims. It is true that war victims are not restricted to any side of the war, and that the novel does a good thing in humanizing the Other; but that is happening at the expense of erasing Iraqi individuals whose traumas are collective, showing no distinctive triggers of sympathy. In an incident in the novel, Ibrahim accompanies an American team to the Baghdad morgue. They locate the headless corpse of Bachelor, one of the group of Marines for whom he used to work, lying among countless, formless corpses of Iraqis (130). The loss, the grievability for the American individual is denied to the rest of the formless bodies that make up a collectivity, rather than a singular, more articulate trauma.

The way Ibrahim's trauma is presented in the novel is clearly not personal. He is not individually affected by the war but always as part of the collectivity of his people. Individually, he uses the war as an opportunity to secure a living. This does not mean that he could not have endured psychological traumatic impact by what happens to him in the novel, but the way his experience and transformation are presented and dramatized is building a case for a collective, not a personal trauma narrative. It is his sense of guilt for his pragmatic choice that transforms him into a hero, a trait that he denies but impatiently desires for and finally achieves in his self-sacrificial final act. Ibrahim's inability to differentiate the public from the individual that drives his fatal act of exploding himself in a room full of warmongers and war bureaucrats. Ibrahim's guilt is not simply a personal grief over the losses and traumas he has been to, but for the lack of a bigger cause that gives meaning to these losses and traumas. He is searching for meaning, for an idea that deserves to shed one's blood for (107). His daydreams and nightmares include

stories about the glory of Iraq and its people. He loves and chooses Viviane for her Iraqiness and for sharing his patriotic sentiments. The sense of dissociation he feels in performing his Ziran dance actually and metaphorically (exploding himself in the final scene) is a secular trance in the love of the nation.

As we saw in previous examples of patriotic narratives coming from a patriotic sense of collective existential threat to the nation; blind patriotism is presented as a structure of feeling responding to the cultural trauma the narrative is trying to construct. This construction/reification of the national identity is important but dangerous as it erases individuality and merges the self with the collectivity. When the collectivity is led by a dominant ideology that turns the individual into a conforming subject as in the case of Ibrahim in this novel, patriotic anger blinds the subject to his individuality. It leads him to negate himself for the sake of the imagined collectivity. The act of suicide becomes reasonable, justifying suicidal bombing in reality that results in the death of thousands of innocent lives while partially achieving its goals of killing and hurting the enemy. The most dangerous thing about this justification of blind suicidal patriotism is the secularization of the act of suicidal bombing by imagining the utopian future of the nation as a fictional correlative to the heaven of the fanatic suicide bomber in reality. However, Nūrī does not simply advocate for suicidal bombing. He is trying to explain the reasoning for such desperate course of action. When the Americans kill a father in front of his family or rape a daughter in her house, “they make the terrorists in their labs” (203).

The cultural trauma of the war crushes and silences individual pains and agonies. The best example for this is the representation of women in the novel which follows the tradition of war literature in using women as symbols and metaphorical representations of the national loss/trauma. Indeed, “under patriarchy male narcissism defends itself by projecting its

vulnerability onto woman" (Radstone 468). In addition to projecting Ibrahim's weakness upon her, Viviane (Alyaa')'s individual trauma almost disappears from the narrative that centralizes the trauma of the male hero. However, the novel does comment on the pain and abuse of Viviane's body. In a liminal position of intersecting currents of persecution, othering, and discrimination, Viviane is portrayed as a victim. However, her victimhood is only en route to the main victimhood rhetoric of the tragic hero Ibrahim who positively secures the revenge and poetic justice for her and other victims. Inside and outside the Green Zone Viviane's body is an objectified target for control and/or intrusion. Her symbolic connection with the goddess Inanna transcends her pain into a metaphor, centralizing the more realistic pain of the protagonist. Although Viviane is less symbolic than Inanna or Ibrahim's former lover who carries the goddess's name, her status as dependent on his story is proven in the absence of a singular voice in her part. Throughout the narrative, Viviane supports Ibrahim's ideas, providing an external voice to his inner convictions and unvoiced patriotic sentiments. While Ibrahim undergoes an inner conflict over his relationship to the occupiers," Viviane never shows any inner dialogue. She only confirms to Ibrahim's anxieties, approving to his points all the time. Her attitude toward the occupation is similar to Ibrahim's, but she does not develop the language he uses. Unlike Ibrahim, she does not evolve, grow or transform. Instead of dramatizing her personal pain and suffering, or mourning her loss narratively, the novel uses her trauma as a symbol. By linking her to the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war, Vivane's character is established as the symbol of the cultural trauma of Iraq.

The Ziran dance can be interpreted as the novel's metaphor for the role of original, authentic art in creating meaning and narrativizing identity and belonging. The novel portraits the Ziran dance in a very secular, nationalistic sense. No mentioning of the religious or mystical

meanings attached to this Sufi dance. The Ziran is a ritualistic exercise of dissolving in the collectivity of the existence, linked to the Sufi idea of the annihilation (*fanaa'*) of the self into the divine reality: "none of the [dancers] controls the moves of the body as they do not control the soul. What happens when the two are united, the body becoming no more than a bridge that carries the souls to heaven, through the Ziran dance" (188). "Heaven" here is, arguably, the liberated Iraq after the defeat of the occupation, not simply a religious or spiritual heaven. It is the dreamt-of life that the bare-life, the *homo sacer,* Ibrahim, can achieve, ironically, only through suicide. The novel borrows and secularizes the mystical language of Sufism to call for resisting the chains of the reality of the occupation. Controlling and mastering the body is the first step in the Sufi discipline. The group of Sufi dancers drive their bodies through extreme exercise to the edges of their capabilities, to the point in which walking on fire embers becomes as easy as exploding oneself with a suicide vest.

"What is loss?" Ibrahim wonders. "It is the human being without hope" (194). But he finds hope in the Ziran dance, in the resistance and the ideology of the people clinging to their land and ready to make it turn into a fire if necessary. "Every time our men dance it means they are thinking of something great" (186). In his search for meaning, his attempt to make sense of his dire situation at the nexus of multiple axes of oppression, Ibrahim articulates his personal agony as part of a bigger image, a trajectory for a greater trauma—the cultural trauma of the destruction of Iraq. Importantly, Ibrahim's desperate transgression is against the Green Zone bourgeoisie, not the American soldiers who are the tools for this class. A very bold statement against transnational neoliberalism. He dedicates his act for all the victims of this war, Iraqi or American:

> "This time, for the sake of Viviane, I decided to bury my cowardice forever, I will not go to the ballroom shaking and empty-handed like any rat. I will shed my humiliation for once, hold my bead high and avenge all the victims: Murad and Richard, who lost their limbs; Bachelor, who died from a splinter; and Vivianee and all the corpses piled up at the central morgue. (200 tr. by Masmoudi 175).

The problem with the national, collective traumas that we see developed in these early representations of the Iraq War of 2003 is that "[in] the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge" (Alexander 8). It is true that narratives of collective traumas are important to preserve national memory and identity, but they are also dangerous. Because by "denying the reality of others' suffering" according to Alexander, "social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone" (1). Nationalism blinds, excludes and destroys individual voices and pains. Representing a more balanced account of the war, a more fruitful "conversation among equals" requires more than what the nationalistic paradigm can allow. The next chapter examines narratives of the Iraq War that distrust such paradigms and aspires for more nuanced representation of the agonies of traumatized people.

Notes

1. Williams' concept describes "a particular quality of social experience" in an age or a generation that is distinct from other qualities and relationships. This emotional or affective aspect of lived experience distinguishes it from both material and social conceptualization. It is the inarticulate answer to the "what-is-it-like" question. See Raymond Williams. "Structures of feeling." Marxism and Literature. Oxford University Press, 1978. P. 131.
2. While this text is not exactly framed as fictional in the Anthology, I would argue that all war narratives, in a sense, are fictional. They cut, frame and collage. They manufacture and edit facts and information for a rhetorical purpose.
3. David Buchanan dedicates an entire chapter to study/deconstruct the rhetorical uses of the word *hajji* in the American war literature of the era. See pp. 155-194.
4. Discussing the characters' behavior according to the premises of popular trauma theory is not a way to prove or disprove theory, but a way to uncover its impact on producing conformist war literature. It is important to mention that applying psychoanalytical concepts to literary characters is clearly not the best "scientific" way to prove or refute them. However, psychoanalysis as a human science existed and developed by analyzing and stretching literary metaphors such as the Oedipus complex. My concern in discussing textual examples with hypotheses of trauma theory is to expose the cultural ramifications and ideological energies that underlie the uses of these concepts in a literary context.
5. The difference between abstractions and real-world issues is an old theme in American war literature. Famously, Ernest Hemingway calls for writing that avoids abstract notions

and concepts in covering war and replacing that with concrete facts, names of places, numbers, dates and other factual details:

> There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates (185).

This emphasis on the concrete aspects of the reality to be narrated can lead to avoiding political aspects as they could be considered abstract and not related to the physical experience. Indeed, "this is part of what's wrong with a lot of mainstream and MFA-produced American contemporary fiction and poetry, not just American war fiction. It emphasizes representing the concrete and individual experience, instead of allowing us to question the politics that make it happen in the first place. Politics is called "too abstract" by many of those who teach this kind of writing, and abstraction is to be avoided" (Kahf, M. Comment on an earlier version of this dissertation).

6. In his book *The Gulf War Did not Take Place* (1995) French thinker Jean Baudrillard argues that due to the virtual nature of the American campaign of the 1991 and the destructive use of overwhelming force, Iraqis did not experience that war the way previous wars were experienced. Instead, they were spectators to a giant killing-machine destroying their country and smashing everything in its way. They did not see an enemy to combat. They did not experience that war because it was won before it even began (62). On the other side, the war was virtual for American military personnel who fought the war from behind their screens, radars, and long-distance ballistic missiles and military maps, more than a combat experience between two armies. This overwhelming nature of postmodern war is what made him say the war did not happen. That does not mean that

the destructive effects of the war did not happen (70). What Baudrillard is saying is that the unmatched/unrivaled unbalanced use of force by the American-led coalition forces deprived Iraqis of experiencing the war existentially. In addition, the American people (and others who “saw” the war on screens) did not experience it realistically. It did not happen to them either. It was a virtual experience, a news event that could (or could not) have happened. This helped cleanse/purify the war, package it in a propaganda frame presented to the less engaged American and global audience. The 2003 war too was not itself a war in the proper (traditional) sense of the word for many Iraqis, despite the fact that it was more “real” than the 1991 air campaign. The speed of the operation itself, its outcomes that were predetermined made it a matter of time before it was over.

7. The frontier” here is clearly different from the concept of the frontier in American war fiction. Shamil and his friends are defending their country not expanding an empire. For more on the theory and concept of the frontier and its importance in American culture see Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."
8. The Ziran dance is a folkloric dance, a combination of folkloric tradition and mystical Sufi exercises in many places in the Middle East. Performed barefoot on fire as a proof of the mind’s complete indulgence in the mystical experience, the practice is usually accompanied by “music and rhythm of the drums slowly turning the performer into a state of trance so that he is not burned. He repeats words such as 'Allah is Truth' until he loses consciousness and reaches an ecstatic condition of purification and liberation from his body” (Masmoudi 173).
9. In an interview with Fox News, Norman Mailer speaks of two forms of patriotic sentiment: “There are these two kinds of patriotism. There's blind patriotism, unflagging

patriotism. And then there's the patriotism that says I live in a democracy and it's very important for the health and the life of this democracy that it get better all the time, not get worse." — Norman Mailer "Look Back at the Legendary Liberal Author."

Chapter Four

War beyond Trauma: Reimagining the Nation, the Self and the Other

As I have argued in the previous chapters of this dissertation, the two dominant narrative patterns in Iraqi and American representations of the Iraq War are the trauma hero myth in American fiction and the national-allegorical narrative in Iraqi fiction. In this chapter, I study prose fictional narratives that go beyond these two patterns in representing the human experience under the Iraq War from a multiplicity of different perspectives. I examine texts that undermine the binary oppositions of the individual vs. collective experiences of war and the self vs. the Other that respectively dominate war literature in the two countries. The texts I study here provide a counternarrative to the mainstream modes of representing war discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation. However, including these counternarratives, I try not to ignore their rhetorical limitations as cultural texts in an ideologically contested territory. These narratives move the discourse of war literature a step further beyond the myths of the Iraqi nation and the traumatized American hero, imagining new narrative trajectories for narrating/representing war that enhances the human understanding of the self and the Other.

The main theme in this chapter is subverting mainstream narrative myths in the culture of war in the two countries and imagining alternatives. Giving up the myth of the nation as prescribed by the discourse of etatist nationalism—"an official Arabist ideology, which, in the case of the Ba'ath regime, has an authoritarian cast" (Jabar 121); and which is officially defeated as the state collapsed in 2003—the Iraqi writers whose texts I study here create more inclusive alternative narratives to read and narrate the nation. In these narratives, the national allegory is not completely dead, but it is taking new forms and appropriating to different, emerging

ideologies. In short, the nation they imagine is post-national. The rising ideological alternative is a global form of political and economic neoliberalism that represents the interests of the American occupation. With the ethnic and sectarian structuring of the post-2003 Iraq, neoliberalism has led to further destruction of the state and disintegration of the society. The Iraqi texts I read here are examples of the way this ideology shape discourses and counter-discourses that secure its omnipresence on the way cultural experiences and phenomena are shaped and communicated. The American text I examine in section two of this chapter (compared to an Iraqi text that could, arguably, be read to represent an American voice) is a sound deconstruction of the trauma hero myth and the self-other binary dominant in American war literature.

4. 1. War beyond Nation: Horror in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *the Corpse Exhibition*

Traumatic narratives are retrospective in general. According to trauma theory, the experience resides latently in memory until it is triggered by an incentive that brings the repressed feelings out. Horror, on the other hand, is immediate. It is the portrayal of the shock and aura of fear as it affects the subject. Since ancient time, horror has been a narrative paradigm that incites fear and pity among audiences and readers. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that

> fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place (XIV).

More recent cultural and critical theorization of the function of horror finds shame and shock in consuming horror instead of pity. Susan Sontag speaks of “shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror” (42). Except for those who can alleviate the pain wrought by the horror in the image, those who have the right to look at horror—the “rest of us are voyeurs,

whether or not we mean to be. In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering" (42).

The paradigm of horror and the grotesque dominates much of the post-2003 writing in Iraq. It can be found in the spectacular portrayal of horrific events as well as in the structures of the narratives that I will study below. Retrospective traumatic representation of the war may wait for a generation or two to appear, to make deeper sense of what has happened, but what this trend of Iraqi literature has produced is the shocking, disturbing narrative of horror registered cinematically in real-time. The oozing wounds of the discarded corpses and body parts that fill out the streets of war-torn Baghdad and other Iraqi cities can hardly wait for a narrative that gives value and meaning to their losses. I argue that the immediacy and the emotional charge of the narrative in the texts I study here correspond to the immediacy and urgency of the experience they communicate. The approach to the war is not conventional in depicting combat experiences but centers on the home front narrative of the civil war trauma.

Narratives of violence and horror become a register for the violent reality and the disintegration of the state and society (Abbas and Abboudi). Indeed, "representations of the body's violent dismemberment and mutilation are a recurring feature of post-2003 Iraqi cultural production." "[P]ortrayals of decapitations, dismembered limbs, tortured bodies, and charred remains of corpses" (Bahoora186) are common images. Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2014; trans. 2018) and Hasan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition* (2015; trans. 2016) are two iconic examples for post-2003 Iraqi literature, not only for their commercial success and critical acclaim,[1] but specifically for their investing in this mode of representing war through graphic violence and horror. By focusing on the subjugation of the human body to political

violence through gripping narrative mediums, the two narrative books succeed in universalizing the suffering of countless nameless Iraqis. They give their losses a communicable meaning through an aesthetic form. To expose and exhibit the stories of these victims, to communicate their individual and collective traumas to a universal audience, the writers invest in globalized patterns, frames and narrative traditions (magical realism and the "gothic") that better communicate their rhetorical and aesthetic messages to wider readerships.

The reality of the war, Saadawi and Blasim's texts illustrate, is not out there in daily life to report and represent. Instead, it is the intersection of the daily, mundane life with the surreal, the fantastic and the extraordinary. The technical medium of magical realism that they both utilize is a twist for understanding and engaging "the real" through fantasy, a style of writing that "expands fictional reality to include events we used to call magic in realism (Faris 17). The employment of this style in the two books is significant.

> Because magical realism is frequently a cultural hybrid, it exemplifies many of the problematic relations that exist between selves and others in postcolonial literature. And because its narrative mode destabilizes the dominant mode of realism, it implicitly attempts to abolish the ethnographic literary authority of Western representation (Faris 4).

The real is no longer the appropriate frame of representation to the daily traumas of the war. Similarly, the gothic or "the art of exciting surprise and horror" (Scott 91) is also proven useful in these two representations of the Iraq War as an aesthetic entertaining device as well as a counternarrative to the rationality and objectivity of mainstream narratives of the Iraq War.

> "Although it initially seems incongruous or misplaced, there is an appropriate and useful role for Gothic terror in the postcolonial project. The terror generated by Gothic romances stems primarily from the realization that what was previously accepted as safe, such as the domestic sphere, a metaphor for the security and reliability of the narrative, is actually dangerously unstable. This revelation of instability undermines the security of the established order" (McInnis 86).

The texts represent the traumatized Iraqi individual and society subjected to the monstrous cycle of violence, fear, and distrust that reproduces itself endlessly. Exposing the horror of war graphically is not only an aesthetic medium. Horror is not only represented for its dramatic functions, but as a way to expose the "dark side" of human nature. The old conflict of good versus evil is presented in its darkest aspect: the human being exposing the evil inside him-/herself, armed with modern-day technology of warfare. The idea of violence reproducing itself in a way that renders human beings into beastly creatures, and the breeding of evil through the reiteration of violence and horror, dominate *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *the Corpse Exhibition*. Instead of preaching against the war or identifying a self/other binary, the two books present war as an existentially threatening experience that unmasks the human faculty to commit terror. Saadawi's and Blasim's narratives dive into the depths of evil in the characters' unconscious to entertain readers by thrill and awe. The representation of horror rhetorically transfers the experience of trauma to the reader instead of simply representing or talking about it. To inflict the war's horror on the reader is to communicate its unexplainable nature, to submit to the fact that wars are hard to define or justify. They may be recreated narratively so that one may understand or grasp their essence through literature. This approach to war and trauma aims at exposing and challenging notions of "reality," by showing how the surreal, the fantastic can be more authentic and shocking than what we consider "real," or believable.

Drawing on the "failed national project" (Bahoora 196) that dominated Iraqi literature before (and after) 2003, these texts reimagine the Iraqi nation differently. In their retrieval of the traumatic past, they try to restore the lost "nation" by imagining a community united in trauma and victimhood. The nationalism they allegorize and try to recover is centered on a common trauma that brings Iraqis together as victims of a shared atrocity. It is not based on exclusion and

othering, but on unification through common suffering and trauma. The corporal brutality in these texts "establishes the centrality of a dismembering violence… in the form of a decapitation, to the contemporary Iraqi experience" (Bahoora 185).

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad* these nameless, faceless bodies make up the ultimate symbol of the horrific, faceless war, the Whatsitsname. This monstrous figure in the novel that starts with an explosion in Baghdad in 2005 is a personification of all the horrors and savagery of the sectarian civil war. "[M]ade up of the body parts of people who had been killed… a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths, so they could rest in peace, the Whatsitsname was created to obtain revenge on their behalf" (Saadawi 130). He/ it is an embodiment of the most basic emotions that war incites in people: fear, anxiety and the drive to project these emotions into anger and violence against others.

The novel starts in al-Battawin, a poor Baghdad neighborhood where the main events of the novel take place. Explosions, blood, and the smell of "roasting human flesh" (Sadawi 20) constantly reappear in the narrative. Hadi al-Attaagh is a poor junk dealer who is traumatized by the death of his close friend Nahem Abdaki whose body was lost after an explosion. Traumatized by this loss, Hadi turns inwards, drinking and avoiding contact with others until he develops an exotic interest in collecting the left-behind body parts of explosions. Trying to figuratively recover the lost body of his friend, to give him a proper burial, he starts stitching together parts that he collects, creating an unidentified being. This is how the writer describes for the first time the main character of the novel: the Whatitsname

> has the body of a naked man, with viscous liquids, light in color, oozing from parts of it. There was only a little blood-some small dried patches on the arms and legs, and some grazes and bruises around the shoulders and neck. It was hard to say what color the skin was-it didn't have a uniform color. Hadi moved farther into the narrow space around the body and sat down close to the head. The area where the nose should have been was badly disfigured, as if a wild animal had bitten a chunk out of it. Hadi opened

> the canvas sack and took out the thing. In recent days he had spent hours looking for one like it, yet he was still uneasy handling it. It was a fresh nose, still coated in congealed, dark red blood. His hand trembling, he positioned it in the black hole in the corpse's face. It was a perfect fit, as if the corpse had its own nose back (Saadawi 26).

This horrible creature is supernaturally inhabited by a wandering lost soul. Hasib Mohamed Jaafar is a hotel gate-keeper killed in another big explosion. His soul was trying to find a body to rest in before burial or else things get messy in the afterlife. Failing to find its lost body, the soul searches, and searches to settle at Hadi's creation for a shortage of alternatives. Before Hadi returns to his ragged lodging, the creature is alive, the monster unleashed. Hadi, identified by the narrator and almost all who know him as a liar, spreads this story of his creation to entertain and excite friends, to buy him food and pay for his drink. The unreliability of Hadi, the narrator of the tale who is later confused with his creature by the authorities mystifies the tale and adds to the intrigue of the detective game of the novel. Added to this detective game, the novel combines different narrative styles and techniques: the romance, the science-fictional narrative, the gothic, horrific thriller, and the social critique of life in post-2003 Iraq.

By creating the Whatsitsname, Hadi is trying to undo what war does to its victims: to revive the dead, or at least to give them the right for a proper burial. Hadi claims good intentions beyond creating the Whatsitsname:

> "I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them.
> "But it wasn't a complete corpse. You made it complete," someone objected.
> "I made it complete so it wouldn't be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial," Hadi explained (Saadawi 27).

Instead of disposing of the dead bodies as is daily done in war-torn Iraq, his mission is to collect these parts and restore their dignity. Opposite to what Bartle and Lieutenant Sterling do to protect their society from the gruesome reality of the Iraq War by disposing of Murph's mutilated corpse in Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, Hadi is bringing together discarded body parts to

make his society face the horror it participates in creating. He finds in these disregarded body parts a collectivity of a grievable human being. Judith Butler, as I have mentioned in reading other texts in this study, identifies contemporary life under the conditions of continuous war as precarious. She holds that "grievability is a condition of a life's emergence and sustenance…Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life" (*Frames* 15). By dividing the losses of human beings in war into tribes of belonging and othering, ideological frames of war representation de-realize the loss of others. The novel attempts, among other things, to speak on behalf of these losses, to give them a voice and a body, albeit a distorted, beastly one. In doing so, the writer (through Hadi) creates the monstrous being that he cannot control, giving the novel its central metaphor, the unleashed horrific monster that is infinitely nurtured by the same cycle of vengeful violence. The Whatsitsname's mission, he/it tells Hadi, is to revenge for his/its body parts. Taking too long to do that (or achieving the mission for one part) means that this part would melt away and fall down. This means that he/it has to constantly find replacements for these falling parts by murdering those who stand in his way to achieving this mission.

Among the Whatsitsname's first victims, the narrator describes the corpses of three unidentified beggars: "Each of the beggars had his hands around the neck of the man in front of him. It looked like some weird tableau or theatrical scene. Their clothes were dirty and tattered, and their heads hung forward (Saadawi 69). In addition to the well-developed metaphor of the Frankenstein monster, the novel develops other important characters that act differently depending on their corresponding roles while leaving others (such as the beggars in this example) as mere caricatures who lack names, distinctive human characteristics or any sort of development. Understood within the surreal parameters of the novel, this tendency to flatten less

important characters rhetorically comments on what the war does to people, dividing them into those who matter and those who lack significance or grievability depending on one's perspective.

The bareness of the lives of these victims is established by their very description as "beggars," as "madmen" (79) instead of having individual names and selfhoods. Their death is not grievable to anyone in the novel. People look at their corpses with disdain (70). Al-Saidi, the manager of the "Truth" magazine tells Mahmoud al-Swadi, the conscientious journalist, that they do not really matter. The "madmen" had "become famous in death if not in life" (79). "The beggars," Mahmoud corrects him. "Yes, the beggars. The traffic lights will miss them and the taxis in the traffic jams," Saidi said with a chuckle (79). Saidi asks Mahmoud to forget their story and look for other ones that are "more worthwhile," to focus on the more thrilling story of the Whatsitsname. We discover later that these were among the first victims of the Whatsitsname who has killed them for standing in his way and trying to beat him up.

Compared to Blasim's short story "The Corpse Exhibition" that I discuss below, the theatricality of this scene is another reminder of the cycle of violence in the novel. The beggars here stand for ethnic and sectarian groups fighting each other in an endless war. They are mere types, stripped human lives that become objects for death and the chaos and confusion of the civil war. Their death means nothing other than the spectacle it creates for others. The absurdity of the scene of their death is shown in this theatricality, in the spectacle it creates for outsiders to watch. Death and violence become a voyeuristic pleasure, a spectacle: "If Hazem Abboud had seen this and taken a picture, he would have won an international prize for it" (69). While we know from the text that Aboud hasn't taken the picture or won this prize of representing this violence in the novel, we do know that Saadawi himself did win the prize in reality (The International Prize for Arabic Fiction).

Innocence is questioned throughout the novel as everybody is participating in the ongoing violence. The Whatsitsname's justification for killing the "innocent" beggars (130-31) foreshadows the confusion of his mission and his transformation into a ruthless killing machine performing "the only justice there is in this country" (135). The implied meaning here is that pursuing and executing justice by a (super) hero, a post-human creature is counterproductive and anti-democratic. This dream of a superhero provides quick responses to dire questions of injustice as the Whatsitsname declares "I'm the answer to the call of the poor," (142) "I'm the model citizen that the Iraqi state has failed to produce," (146) "I'm the first true Iraqi citizen," "the long-awaited savior" (147). As the Whatsitsname kept replacing his body parts by killing criminals, he gradually becomes one of the. The lines that define what a criminal is become hazy, more like justifications for his/its own survival. Since nobody is totally innocent of the violence, everybody becomes subject to the Frankensteinian monster of the Civil war.

The novel visualizes war in pornographic representations that fetishize thrilling violence. Although the "lure of war since ancient time is a 'lust of the eye… [a form of] eye fucking'' or "war pornography" (Broyles: Peeble 23), the immediate access to the experience increases the thrill. The graphic representation of trauma shocks and disturbs the reader to communicate the traumatic experience. Horror and awe in the novel are entertaining aesthetic vehicles that communicate the immediacy of trauma to the reader.

As a narrative of the Iraq War, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* imagines the retrieval of the traumatized nation-state through fiction. It tries to restore the national identity by opening the fresh wounds of the war so that people can understand the past, heal the wounds and construct an alternative to their lost identity. However, the form of identity it represents is fluid and inclusive. The changing body parts of the Whatsitsname indicate this fluidity. He/it is not a fixed being but

a changing amalgamation of a collectivity of human parts. The novel stresses the need to revisit the notion of national identity so that a sort of civil reconciliation could be reached. Saadawi borrows the myth of Marry Shelley's monstrous creation to create a metaphor for the violence the war has inflicted on Iraqis. Globalizing the severity of the Iraq War conditions and localizing the global myth of the Frankenstein, the novel argues that the traumatized society has created the monster of violence because of the heightened fear and distrust of the Other. The other in the novel is not the American occupiers but the local partners in the civil war conflict. Fear of the other is the reason behind much of the violence portrayed in the novel. Instead of othering as a means to distinguish the self in classical forms of nationalism, the novel calls for encompassing and accepting others in the discourse of the new nation. Speaking of the death of hundreds of people on the al-A'immah bridge in Baghdad that connects two areas of the capital populated by a Sunni majority on one side and a Shiite one on the other, [2] a TV commentator states:

> The people on the bridge died because they were frightened of dying. Every day we're dying from the same fear of dying. The groups that have given shelter and support to al-Qaeda have done so because they are frightened of another group, and this other group has created and mobilized militias to protect itself from al-Qaeda. It has created a death machine working in the other direction because it's afraid of the Other (123).

Here, the novel stresses that fear of others, lack of understanding of differences and political manipulation of ignorance and sectarian differences create and maintain the monster of the civil war.

Violence is a manifestation of power. Unlike other war narratives that criticize those who have (and apply) power on others through violence, the novel reflects on the exchange of violence among people who fear each other and translate their fears into rage and violence against others. Zeroing the sectarian divide by depicting both Sunnis and Shiites as equally responsible for the violence, the novel paves the ground for a democratic reconciliation.

However, by doing this it depicts Iraqis to be the primary perpetrators of their traumas, holding the occupation as a secondary factor that is "kind of in the way" (Clark 137). Focusing on the post-2003 sectarian conflicts and other socio-political conditions overlooks the context of the American invasion that destroyed the entire state of Iraq and its functioning institutions that maintain the social fabric and control the use of violence.

The problem with this logic of "dying because of the fear of dying;" applying the Whatsitsname's earthly justice that would not spare anybody –since nobody is completely innocent— is that it evens crimes and killings as equal transgressions to an unidentified ideal code. Clearly, the rhetorical use of these textual manipulations of justice is an attempt to subvert the rhetoric of sectarian killing and ethnic cleansing in real life, to get into the mind of the war criminal, to deconstruct their dogmatic justifications for their and their tribe's crimes. Graphic representations of violence are meant to communicate the fear and disgust created by the war. By deconstructing the reasons for the continuous war and violence, by referencing real war crimes and catastrophes in different parts of Baghdad, the iconic Iraqi space, the novel tries to use the shared traumas of the people, their common emotional geography of fear and anxiety to restore national identity and civil reconciliation in a war-torn society.

The novel uses traumas from the country's past, weaves them with the present horror and violence to produce an Iraqi saga that represents the nuances, the different aspects of the Iraqi ordeal. In interviews and public talks, Saadawi speaks of the importance of history to illustrate the current problem of horror and violence. He thinks it is a simplification to read the American invasion as the only reason for what is going on in the country ("Writers at Manchester"). In the novel, the impact of the past can be seen in a key subplot in the novel concerning the old Christian woman Elishiva who has lost her son Daniel in the war with Iran in the 1980s. Elishiva

refuses to believe that her son has died in that war, insisting on waiting for him after all these years. When the Whatsitsname is magically brought to life in the Hadi's ragged house, next to hers, she thinks him/it to be her long-gone son Daniel. She takes him in, gives him Daniel's clothes and thanks her guarding saint for his gift. The latter knowing no better and having nowhere to go accepts the old woman's hospitality and plays along. Elishiva's character is very interesting in her commitment to the place. Home for her cannot be replaced by any "better life" in exile as her family and relatives keep asking her to emigrate. Like Rahma, the Iraqi grandmother in Ina'am Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, Elishiva represents the classic nationalist commitment to the homeland. Nationalism at its purest, most conventional form is presented by characters like Elisiva, a motherly figure, a guardian of ethical commitment to the place that Hadi, among others, want to sell and make some money of. The past haunts Elishiva as it haunts Iraq. Her imagined relationship to the metaphysical world of her saints and her absent son is but a symptom of the country's chronic attachment to the metaphysical hope of the savior—manifested in the novel by the Whatsitsname figure. The metaphysical, magic-realist world of the novel is not just an escape from reality but one perceived layer of this reality. "What we consider real is our perception of reality," says Saadawi ("Writers at Manchester"), it might be influenced by whatever emotional, religious or spiritual stimuli. What we consider beyond reality is but one dimension of the human experience that takes a form that may not conform to rationality or accepted knowledge, but this does not make it less real or engaging.

The trauma of the past is also manifested in the character of Abu Zeidoon, the local Ba'thist who was known in the past to force young men in al-Bataween to enlist for the army during the 1980s war. Elishiva and other women in the area hold him responsible for the death and losses of their men who died or disappeared in that war. Abu Zeidoon is thus partially

responsible for the death of Daniel whose name and story the Wahtsitsname hears from Elishiva. The man becomes the Whatsitsname's second victim, which marks the beginning of his mission of achieving justice to those who caused the death and suffering to his constituent parts. Elishiva undergoes an inner moral conflict over forgiving the man or expressing gratification and satisfaction after his murder by the Whatsitsname. Despite her Christian ethics of forgiveness, she enjoys the sense of revenge over this small act of justice.

Weaving this thread of past trauma with the present civil war of 2005-2009, the novel disregards the American invasion as only a passing phase among equally traumatic events. The war is represented as a civil strife among parties. By choosing the civil war as a specific setting, and by keeping aside the role of the Americans who are depicted as merely a party in a multiparty struggle, the novel fails to contextualize the struggle into the wider scope of the war as first and foremost a war of occupation and its consequences. The Americans are constantly referred to along with the Iraqi government or the newly formed Iraqi forces as allies, not as the invaders, the masters, and controllers of the war game. The grotesque spectacle of the violent society is realistic to a certain extent, but also a masochistic voyeuristic invitation to self-blaming the Iraqi society for what happens to them after 2003.

For American readers, this representation may provide a counter-image to what they are used to read in novels about the Iraq war, a form of what can be described as reversing the colonial gaze (Clark 118). Unlike individualistic narratives of the traumatized heroes, the novel portrays Americans in the collective, associating them with death, fear, and manipulation. However, they are never portrayed as enemies or perpetrators of violence and trauma. Despite his metaphysical powers, he never targets them in his mission to achieve justice. He himself is "frightened by the Americans. He knew they operated with considerable independence and no

one could hold them to account for what they did. As suddenly as the wind could shift, they could throw you down a dark hole" (Saadawi 69). Their role is more a potential unidentified threat of power than a violent presence, a structural reason for the instability and the continuing violence of the civil war. A friend tells Hadi to stop spreading rumors about the Whatsitsname or else "when the Americans grab you, you've no idea where they'll take you, God alone knows what charge they'll pin on you" (Saadawi 85). The power structure in the novel's world is thus built on the presence of the American forces, the corrupt government they planted in Baghdad of parasitic corrupt politicians and rising corrupt bourgeoisie.

It is important to mention that it is Hadi al-Attaagh who unleashes the monster of the Whatsitsname. Hadi's last name, which is lost in the English translation as a mere job-description "the junk-dealer" indicates a low social status of belonging to a class that is called by this belittling expression. The plural form of the name, *al-Attagha* is a popular derisive word that describes lower-class Iraqis (especially from southern, mainly Shiite belongings), "those who buy everything old, used or unusable" (al-Jaffal) are mocked for their status and socio-economic backgrounds, and especially for their alleged undeserved rise into power after 2003.[3] Ahmed Saadawi himself belongs to al-Thawara city (also known as al-Sadr city), one of the poorest parts of Baghdad inhabited by people of this background. If he is not mocking his own people in this direct way, his description falls into this derogatory narrative. However, Hadi is not a negative character but a leading, round character that acts and navigates his difficult social life with wit and integrity. He is responsible for creating the central figure that everything in the novel revolves around. If he is partly responsible for creating the monster; he is proven to have done it for sound reasons. The traumatic event of his best friend's murder is the reason behind his

creative but grotesque notion of stitching discarded body parts together to give their losses meaning and a form of grievability.

In addition to Hadi's last name, the last name of another positive character in the novel, the journalist Mahmoud al-Swaadi also refers to *sawaad al-naas* or the mass of the people. Another possible meaning could be referring to *ardh al-sawaad*, a historical name of Iraq referring to the greenery of the land compared to the surrounding desert. In any case, Mahmoud's name, his disposition and his role as the communicator, the meaning-maker of the Whatsitsname's story connects him to the people more. He is the intellectual figure that, as his boss tells him in an email by the end of the novel, is predicted to be the true savior and future president of Iraq. While this narrative piece is thrown on readers at the very end with no elaboration, foreshadowing or development, it can be read as an indication that, it is through meaning-making of what is going on that Iraq can be saved, that Iraqi traumas can be healed, not by a supernatural uncontrollable justice machine, but by intellectual examination and negotiation of the ongoing social ruptures and bleeding wounds.

To sum up, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* approaches the story of the Iraq war differently by narrating the collapse of the classical myth of the nation and imagining more inclusive ways to conceive the new Iraqi citizenry. Weaving detective story techniques, horror and gothic elements with social drama narrative, the novel portrays a more nuanced and multifaceted representation of the war story. Politically it leads into a form of social reconciliation between sects and ethnicities in the Iraqi society but leaves the American occupation out (or on the margin) of the war picture. While this is important for the society to accept its responsibility for the ongoing violence and imagine ways to get over their differences, it is an ideological limitation for the novel as a cultural text representing a historical moment. Neoliberal ideology is presented in the

portrayal of the parasitic class of the corrupt Green Zone bourgeoise (the best example for is Mahmoud's manager al-Saidi. Mahmoud's relationship with his boss is characterized by envy and the will to imitate him and leads a similar lifestyle. Al-Saidi's connections to the Americans illustrate the network of corruption that the new regime of occupation is maintaining as a status quo. Mahmoud's peaceful will to exercise change from within the corrupt system (by telling truth to power in his journalistic reports and articles), and the failure of the alternative ways indicates the way ideology shapes ways of thinking about the possibility of reform instead of regime change.

The novel's portrayal of gender roles is very traditional. The motherly figure of Elishiva, clinging to her ruinous house (allegorizing the old Iraq), refusing to migrate and bestowing spiritual bless on the place is a classical role for the mother representing the nation. The other female figure in the novel that is a little bit more complicated than Elishiva is Nawal al-Wazir. Nawal represents a more refined woman with social and political aspirations. Al-Saidi's mistress and object of Mahmoud's sexual fantasies, Nawal remains at the fringes of the narrative, a round well-developed character who has no major role in the central plot of the novel. Other than these cliché female figures, gender plays very minimum role in the text.

Space is more intimate and personalized in the novel than most other texts studied in this dissertation. The novel takes place mostly in Baghdad. The choice of al-Battaween to be the center of the narrative reflects the role of this central place in the formation of the collective memory of modern Iraq. The Jewish ragged-house occupied by Hadi al-Attagh and Elishiva is iconic in representing layers of Iraqi history. Removing an Islamic portrait of a Qura'nic decorated verse that covers a Christian icon, Hadi discovers some deeper layer of religious iconography in the wall. Digging for this finding and removing the covering layer, he finds a

Jewish icon, indicating the complex structure of Iraq's history and society. Another interesting use of the space is in the *Urooba* (pan-Arabism) hotel which is, like most places in the country after the war, is ruined and neglected. After its owner sells the place to move from the city, the new owner changes the name into al-Rasool (God's Messenger) hotel. Clearly, the name changing indicates the change in the dominant ideology from pan-Arabic Ba'athism in the past to pan-Islamism in the present.

Frankenstein in Baghdad narrates the Iraq War as an ongoing show, traumatizing as it is, the horror of what is going on allows no time to reflect, to process and heal the trauma. The monster of the war is devouring everything. The Americans and the government are losing control and Baghdad is being abandoned by everyone. Before a traumatized self (or nation) can emerge to navigate and process the trauma, the monster of the civil war needs to be tamed and controlled first.

Hasan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition* is another strong statement of the human experience of war in Iraq. While Saadawi has the chance to elaborate and develop some of his characters to better communicate his rhetorical message of exposing the violence of the war, Blasim's stories are direct and shocking in their description of experiences of war and trauma. They are snippets of the larger war narrative. Blasim documents the horrible experiences of marginalized and neglected people (Irving). His writing reflects all these experiences in a realistically shocking way (Editrice). If the genre of the short story does not allow for extensive character development, Blasim compensates for that by the amount of shock and awe he inflicts on readers in a limited narrative space. A reviewer describes *The Corpse Exhibition* as "brilliant and disturbing . . . bitter, furious and unforgettable, the stories seem to have been carved out of the country's suppurating history like pieces of ragged flesh." ("Fiction Chronicle). The book

documents the brutality of life under the former Iraqi regime, the individual experience of war and suffering in the ongoing civil strife. Set up against the bleak background of more than thirty years of inhuman living conditions in the country, the stories of the book tell a different version of the story of the war. It gives a "nightmarish" narrative of Iraqi war criminals and victims, characters that are tools of the grinding machine of the war (Svenska). Instead of simply condemning war or criminalizing an "Other," the writer uses fantasy to dig into the psychological horrific "realities" of individuals living under its extreme conditions. Characters in the book differ in their psychological depth, symbolic significance, moral and political consciousness. However, they share their subjugation to horror as the driving force of daily life under war. Blasim's response to war and the absurdity of Being is telling stories of its horror. He feels a responsibility to do so. For him "the dead have the right to tell their stories," (Svenska), and he is the one entitled to do it. Storytelling is Blasim's medium to reach into the collective unconscious of people and allow them to speak. His stories condemn war by exposing it, by creatively recreating its horrible, disgusting essence. Through the graphic depiction of its conditions, the reader comes close to experiencing war, identifying with the authenticity in which the war experiences are recreated in the stories.

In his introduction to the Arabic edition of the collection, Adnan al-Mubarak rightly describes Blasim's style as cinematic. His "story-telling camera" simply chooses from the reality he is dealing with (Blasim, *Ma'radh* 5). The only editing and filtering he does are via the stylistic choices and the creative usage of language. Everything he speaks of is affirmably real according to him. He does not explain, defend or elaborate on the things he speaks of. The stories are collected fragments of the reality of the war experience, its impacts on the psyches of individuals

and the writer himself. However, these fragments are collected and knit together via the writer's creative style and narrative techniques (Ibid 5). Narrative voice?

In *the Corpse Exhibition* the narrative does not merely document the daily life of the people or the country, but it also invests in the psychological depths of the people's unconscious, recreating their dreams and nightmares in a narrative form. Just like in Sadaawi's text, what is real in the world of the stories is not simply what we understand to be real. Horror is an essential part of the reality of war. "Realistic" narratives of warfare and victimhood do not express the real horror of war, they only speak about it. Blasim's approach builds on the real but moves beyond it, using the tradition of "magical realism" or what he calls "nightmarish realism," (Svenska) is not merely a fictional technique for him. It is an aspect, a dimension of reality. It has its own authenticity in the experiences of the characters and the people they represent. Blasim "portraits the disorder and chaos that… characterizes the recent history of Iraq… in a way-through shock-that seeks to negate the distance between the reality of the depicted events and that of the reader" (Milich, "Narrating" 293). Indeed, the "narratological devices employed for this purpose combine the techniques of European ghost stories and horror films with events taken from various media reports, thus tying together fact and fiction" (Milich, "Narrating" 293).

The title of Blasim's collection and the graphic nature of the stories make them function rhetorically as a narrative exhibition of war and its impact on individuals. As the title rightly indicates, Blasim shows and exhibits the horror of war instead of talking about it. Percy Lubbock argues that "[t]he art of fiction does not begin until the [writer] thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself (63)". For Blasim, the difference between the "real," "the surreal," and "the metaphysical" is very arbitrary (Svenska). In his stories, graphic narrative images and metaphors are used as windows to show "the reality" that Blasim is more

concerned with, the human condition under war, tyranny, and terror. This approach risks investing in a trend of voyeuristic pornography of violence. Indeed, if we agree with Susan Sontag that images of suffering should be looked at only by “those who could do something to alleviate it” (42), Blasim’s imagery of violence is to be rejected as mere voyeuristic war pornography. However, exhibiting the horror of the Iraq War can create empathy and connection with the victims through imagining their suffering. Unlike photography that uses real people’s wounds and pains to attract attention, literature imagines and communicates through the power of language to create and develop images and metaphors that bring the imagined world of the text to the reader, affecting empathy and identification.

The title metaphor in *The Corpse Exhibition* is also the title of the first story of the collection. It summarizes the book’s rhetoric as a fictional exhibition of the war itself. The story is about a secret society that takes the chance of the chaos of the war and terrorist attacks to kill and exhibit corpses of their victims “aesthetically” (1). The group has no ideology except killing for killing’ sake, indicating the absurdity of the ongoing war that lost its justifications and turned into a horror show. The first narrator, an apprentice and a victim of the society, reports the story of his introductory interview with a prominent member of the group. The narrative voice moves to the latter who explains to the narrator the “philosophy” of the group and what he is expected to do: "Every body you finish off is a work of art waiting for you to add the final touch, so that you can shine like a precious jewel amid the wreckage of this country. To display a corpse for others to see is the ultimate in the creativity we are seeking and that we are trying to study and benefit from (5).

The narrator talks about killing as an art form with its own aesthetics and philosophy. The irony continues as he explains the group’s “achievements” of killing for the sake of killing, for

the shock and awe it causes, and for its expression of the absurdity and fragility of life. After the graphic details of the "aesthetic" killing and exhibiting stories of other members, the first narrator closes the story by telling of his own death: "he thrust the knife into my stomach and said, you're shaking (10)." These last words, as if addressing the reactions of audiences of a horror movie addresses the reader as the subject of the violence, hailing or interpellating her as the potential object of death and horror of war. This rhetorical bridging of the fourth wall that divides audience/readers from the fictional scene is important to create identification with the victims, achieving the rhetorical function of the text, to entice empathy.

Just like the way the group shows and exhibits their killings "aesthetically" by "original," unprecedented methods, horrific and shocking graphic style, Blasim's stories exhibit decayed corpses and dismantled bodies throughout the book. His stories are samples of the larger narrative of war. Similar to the careful way the group chooses their victims, the way they exhibit their bodies, Blasim chooses, studies and masterfully exhibits his stories, the corpses of his own war exhibition. Every Iraqi individual has dozens of stories worth telling and exhibiting according to the writer. "Every citizen should write a novel" according to a blurb of one of his recent narrative books (*The Dictionary Man*). The "exhibition" metaphor of this story introduces the following horrors, disgust, and shock that the reader will encounter throughout the book. The reader explores death visually by reading about victims and their stories.

Readers are not told what to think of war but shown its effects on its victims vividly. This message that underlies all the stories of the collection exposes the latent evil in human beings that is bred by the extreme conditions of the war. The story's victims and perpetrators are, unlike Saadawi's novel that allows for character development, nameless and one dimensional. Because of the genre limitation of the narrative segments (the short stories), they are not allowed

the narrative space to develop. They are simple tools/parts in the giant war machine. Their lives are “bare lives” worth no naming or nuanced development. Their function is like the function of a horror museum of dark evil, a mummies-show that is worth nothing beyond the awe of the spectacle. This is how Blasim describes the corpse of a dead woman by the “Satan’s Knife,” the nick (and the only) name of a member of the secret killing-and-corpse-exhibiting society in the title story:

> One rainy winter's morning a crowd of passersby and drivers stopped to look at that woman. She was naked and fat, and her child, also naked, was suckling at her left breast. He put the woman under a dead palm tree in the central reservation of a busy street. There was no trace of a wound or a bullet on the woman's body or on the baby's. She and her baby looked as alive as a brook of pure water. That's a genius we lack in this century (Blasim, *The Corpse Exhibition* 6).

Like all image-representation, this graphic presentation of violence necessarily cuts off the complex lives and histories of the victims from the exhibited image. The limitations of time, space and genre allows no room for contextualizing the scene. Susan Sontag famously describes the function of photography as a way for representing by exclusion: “to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude” (46). Judith Butler adds that narrative and photographic frames create norms that “are enacted through visual and narrative frames, and framing presupposes decisions or practices that leave substantial losses outside the frame” (*Frames of War* 75). Blasim’s stories are unapologetically limited by their genre frames and boundaries. However, they attempt to cross the fourth wall of the genre, to shock and awe their readers by inviting them to imagine themselves as the victims of the horror they are exposed to. The density of the sensation the story creates compensates for this limitation. Rewarding and admirable as this approach might be, it risks turning war and its violence into a thrilling, likable spectacle.

Portrayed as the trauma-inducing space, the corpse exhibition in the title metaphor, Iraq is not the only place that inflicts trauma on Iraqis. Even those who manage to escape the war-torn

country find themselves in yet more dire and inhumane conditions that worth narrative representation. In the short story "*Shahinat Berlin*" ("The Truck to Berlin)[4] a dreadful illegal border-trafficking nightmare is told. The narrator explains how he would represent the story if he were to write it again: “This story took place in darkness. If I were to rewrite it, I would write only the cries of horror and the other “mysterious noises that accompanied the massacre" (Blasim, *The Madman of Freedom Square* 69). Here, the implication is that language is incapable of depicting, communicating the trauma of what happens in the narrative. The irony here is that as poetic and entertaining as a linguistic text this is, it subscribes to the myth of the incommunicability of trauma through language (Caruth11). Darkness is the setting here as in many of Blasim’s stories. Early on, we sense the potential terror latent in the events. The narrator contextualizes the event thus: “In those years, a vile and bestial cruelty prevailed, driven by fear of dying of starvation. I felt I was in danger of *turning into a rat*” (Blasim, *Ma’radh* 21; *Madman* 69-emphasis added). The narrator is an Iraqi young man living temporarily in Turkey, dreaming of crossing the European borders to have a better life. However, stories of trauma and suffering that happen to those who cross the Turkish borders illegally stop him from pursuing his dream. The most devastating and shocking story is one he has heard from Ali the Afghan. The tale of the truck to Berlin is considered by many to be mere fiction. However, for the narrator, it is not only true but is more authentic than any of the black-comic stories of human trafficking and border crossing that the media spread. The story involves thirty-five Iraqi young men who made a deal with a reputable smuggler to take them to Berlin for $4000 for each. The journey started smoothly as arranged: they hide in the back of the truck in the day, and the smugglers help them out in the night. The smugglers keep maneuvering through different roads to avoid police and checkpoints. The trouble starts the third day of the journey when the truck changed its speed

suddenly, then changed its direction, started moving slowly in an unknown direction (for the men trapped inside) and stopped eventually for a long time. Gradually, tension grows among the trapped men. It was "[a]s if there was a monster breathing heavily in the darkness" (25). With the passing of time, they started to do strange things: "One of them takes off his golden watch and hid it, another fastened his shoelaces as if preparing for something" (25 a). In a sense, they were expecting what is going to happen next. Some of them "tried to break down the truck door, while others kept shouting and banging on the walls. One of them was begging and pleading for a gulp of water. The sound of farts and insults. Quranic verses and prayers recited in loud voices" (74). Up to this point, the story is a traditional narrative of illegal border crossing. In fact, it echoes Gassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* in its plot and the destiny of its characters, except for one of them; which creates the main shocking difference: the monster that this horrific experience has created. Blasim continues:

> I am not writing now about those sounds and smells which come and go along the paths of secret migration, but about that resounding scream which suddenly burst from the chaos.… It was a scream that emerged from caves whose secrets have never been unraveled. When they heard the scream, they tried to imagine the source of the voice, neither human nor animal, which had rocked the darkness of the truck" (Blasim, *Madman* 74).

Here, horror is released with the repressed animalistic/beastly instinct of survival in the trapped men. A Serbian policeman who was there when the truck's door was open a few days afterward, claims to have seen a young man jumping out of the door into the forest, "running on all four," "turning into a grey wolf shortly before disappearing" (Ibid 75). However, nobody believes the old policeman, not even his wife. The official account of the police is that

> a young man soaked in blood jumped down from inside and ran like a madman towards the forest. The police chased him but he disappeared into the vast forest. In the truck there were thirty-four bodies. They had not been torn apart with knives or any other weapon. Rather it was the cloaks and beaks of eagles, the teeth of crocodiles and other

> unknown instruments that had been at work on them. The truck was full of shit and piss and blood, livers ripped apart, eyes gouged out, intestines" (Blasim, *Madman* 75).

The narrator insists that this is not only some allegory of horror but reality itself. (Blasim, Madman 69) The forest is a traditional symbol of the darkness of the human soul, its potential for evil or the unknown and the unexpected. The beast that runs into the Serbian forest (reportedly crossing the Hungarian borders- representing a latent threat to Europe) highlights the humanitarian suffering of refugees at the European borders (Milich, "Narrating" 295). Man can be easily turned into a beast when subjected to nonhuman conditions. The horror of what happens in the truck; the horror that is created by subjugating people to extreme inhuman conditions is a threat to humanity; a lurking beast in the forest, the margin of the "civilized world." The horror element in the story reveals the instability and "undermines the security of the established order" (McInnis 86). The story is clearly an account of what extreme trauma can do to its victims. Numbing all human emotions and judgments for the sake of survival is the immediate reaction to trauma. Blasim seeks to disturb his readers "through shocking turns of events and a skillfully composed narrative that builds suspense he also seeks to disturb his readers, leaving them haunted or at least forcing them to reflect" (Milich, "Narrating" 295).

Following the national-allegorical reading of the stories as trajectories for the collective trauma of the Iraq War, the truck in this story is a metaphor for the country that turns the life of its inhabitants into a living hell. The he-wolf that comes out of the truck, similar to Saadawi's monster is the new Iraqi citizen, a monstrous product of war and trauma. However, other than this plausible metaphorical reading that follows the national-allegory model, the place in the story has nothing to do with Iraq. The only connection is that the victims are Iraqis by origin, that they share the destiny of many Iraqis whose lives become bare due to inhuman conditions. This

is important as the discourse shifts from a national trauma into a representation of a universal problem of today's world—illegal migration. This problem, produced in part because of environmental changes and neoliberal politico-economic and most importantly, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, is not only an Iraqi problem. Events in the story take place near the Turkish-European borders, indicating a global discourse beyond the limits of one national trauma. This post-national framing of the problem signifies the need to move the discourse from one nation to a global conversation.

Blasim's text addresses a global readership, borrowing western global themes and narrative traditions and literary techniques of the horror genre, the fantasy of magic realism. The implied rhetoric is that, the problems you face and will face in the near future (like massive migrations) are being manufactured now in the acts of war and economic draining of other parts of the world where the political and economic ideologies have been brutally exercised, and that the world, especially Europe will soon reap what it has helped to produce. The text also addresses Iraqi readers as it communicates to them their own individual and collective traumas, exhibiting their failed national project. By doing that, it manages to communicate the trauma of the Iraq War in a shocking style and disturbing language.

Like Saadawi and other writers who use the opportunity of the war to produce great, thrilling literature, Blasim rhetorically explains through one of his characters that the war is an opportunity for terrorist groups to thrive: "You must understand properly that this country presents one of the century's rare opportunities. Our work may not last long. As soon as the situation stabilizes, we'll have to move on to another country" (Blasim, *The Corpse Exhibition* 6). By extension, the war is also an opportunity for writers and meaning makers to frame and shape what is going on according to their agenda. Taking advantage of a dire, horrible situation

by writers is not new. However, the graphic approach that Saadawi and Blasim use furthers the rhetoric of war and violence into a likable thriller. Horror and shocking violence create empathy and identification with the victims, but they do that by turning people's suffering into a mode of entertainment. The tendency to exhibit and expose violence, to "open the wound" and leave it open, so to speak, is a two-edged tool common among post-2003 Iraq War narratives. Rather than creating new imaginaries to overcome the status quo, overemphasizing victimhood narratives in post-conflict societies naturalizes violence and feeds into a culture of masochistic pornography of violence and trauma. Moreover, refraining from a political discussion of the role of the American occupation in starting the civil war reproduces a culture of self-blame and desperation.

In these two narratives of the war, horrific, grotesque and gothic representations of the war scene make a paradigm that leaves behind configurations of national identity and collectivist politics. While this paradigm risks leading to another mythology of war based on fetishizing the grotesque or fantasizing the problem of political violence, it liberates the reader from the burden of the national allegory –of having a responsibility to a collective cause, imagining alternative configurations of the nation. Important as it is in depicting other aspects of the war experience, politically, the texts stop short at undermining the dominant ideologies they work within, namely, neoliberal, post-nationalist (American) globalization. Instead of resisting or exposing current power structures, and to avoid falling into cliché politicization of war experiences, they choose to play safe by abstracting the horrific experiences of everyday Iraqis. By exposing the horror of the war through graphic representations, they become masochistic investments in war pornography, providing a misleading epistemology of war and violence as an abstract, collective Iraqi problem.

Frankenstein in Baghdad and *The Corpse Exhibition* present Iraq and the Iraqi space as a post-national war zone debris. Iraqis are phantoms of human beings, corpses. Gender, agency, and individualism are erased as most characters become bare lives under dire exceptional conditions of horror and violence. The sovereign other who controls their lives is abstracted and removed from the picture. The texts may have succeeded in universalizing the trauma of Iraqis, but they flatten their pains and suffering. Life in the country has turned into a spectacle of violence and trauma. The country is a "golden opportunity" for terrorists to excel in their violent practices and horrible crimes as much as it is an opportunity for writers to use its traumas to pen down thrilling and alluring war-pornographic fiction, using the ghastly reality of the war to create entertainment. However, the only remedy one can think of is that this is almost always the case with war literature. American novelist and WWII veteran Kurt Vonnegut once stated that he was the only beneficiary of the bombing of Dresden in WWII. "I got three dollars for each person killed. Imagine that" (177).

4. 2. Trauma Villains and Others' Trauma in *the American Granddaughter* and *War Porn*

Paris-based Iraqi novelist Ina'am Kachachi uses the experience of exile to build a narrative of the Iraq War from the perspective of an Iraqi-American woman. Exile presents a hybrid "third-space" experience (Bhabha 37) that allows a revision of fixed identities in the postcolonial world, training subjects to reexamine their sense of belonging. The ambivalent third space, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha asserts, "carries the burden of the meaning of culture." By exploring it, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (*Location*, 38-39). Bhabha's third-space provides a spatial metaphor that speaks of the politics of agency in this experience of exile. While it could solve problems of assimilation and belonging

for the exile outsiders in the metropolitan spaces of the empire, the implications it entails include the inevitability of the all-encompassing empire and the negation/ erasure of the (former) self. Edward Said, another prominent postcolonial thinker, speaks of the hybrid postcolonial experience of exile as "a discontinuous state of being" (*Reflections*, 177). Because exiles are "cut off from their roots, their land, their past," they feel "an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (Said, 177). The union of the self and the other happens at the expense of the former self, as the other exercises a dominant, triumphant ideology. This can be best seen in *al-Hafida al-Amreekeya* (*The American Granddaughter*).

In Kachachi's novel, the negation of the Iraqi side of the protagonist's hybrid identity extends to justifying torture and crimes against humanity committed by her American comrades against Iraqis (139). The novel tells the story of an Iraqi American woman returning to Iraq as an interpreter with the U.S. Army. The return of the Westernized native to the homeland, in the circumstance of a neocolonial war is not a welcoming homecoming (68). She is not returning to reconnect with her cultural roots or to restore a lost utopia but to make money and exercise the agency bestowed by her new identity. The experience of exile westernizes Zeina, transcends traditional binary oppositions of the self/other and makes her the other of her Iraqi self. It liquefies identity, hybridizes her notions of the self and complicates her sense of belonging. It negates nationalism, falling into the trap of assimilation by the multicultural global system which is framed and led by the American empire. While it also changes the empire itself by stretching what it means to be American; it exerts imperial hegemony and makes the colonial encounter inevitable. The result is the transformation of the third space from a potential space to open and

transform empire and resist colonialism, into a frontier for enlarging the empire's borders culturally and justifying its continuing (neo)colonial project.

The American Granddaughter challenges the binary of Iraqi and American others of the war story by portraying the war trauma from an Iraqi-American female point of view. The very choice of a female perspective is a shift of the sole masculinity of war. If not entirely liberating, this shift challenges the traditional roles of female characters in Iraqi war literature. It allows the voice of traumatized women in the war to speak and be heard, undermining the masculinity of war and war literature. The novel politically challenges the discursive powers beyond war culture bridging the self-other rift by commingling the two identities and discourses of the Iraq War in the character of the protagonist Zeina Behnam. Undermining the self-other binary by hybridizing/liquefying identity means that the American is not an Other in this Iraqi war novel. On the contrary, it is the self, the affirmed identity that the protagonist constantly performs. On the other hand, Zeina, the partly Iraqi subject of the war discourse, is not constructed as a bare life or a subaltern, but only thanks to her adopted identity. However, Zeina's perspective is by no means entirely feminist. On the contrary, she subscribes to the masculine discourse of the war, the military and uses the power they entail on her. Throughout the novel, she exercises different levels of agency, choosing to go to Iraq for pragmatic reasons and choosing to leave when this agency is threatened by a romantic patriarchal relationship.

Clearly, Zeina's traumatic experience is not representative of Iraqi traumas due to the privilege and agency she enjoys. I argue that this Iraqi novel represents an American perspective of the Iraq War. Reproaching the protagonist for her betrayal of Iraq is beside the point because Iraq is nothing to her except a memory, a component of her past. Critics (such as Ḥassan, "I Wonder How Traitors Betray") who do that fall into the narrative game of picking sides, a

rhetorical game meant to complicate and problematize the question of identity in the charged world of the novel. The novel's occasional portrayal of Zeina, through her grandmother's eyes, as a corrupted girl betraying her origins is rhetorical. It allows the repressed Iraqi side of her identity to speak. But the novel also silences this side by depicting Zeina to be more intriguing and likable than other characters who oppose her views. The complex topography of the world of Zeina, the Iraqi-American leading female character, is the war context to which she is both an agent and a victim at the same time—having to navigate is both challenging and traumatic. As an American war narrative, Zeina's story presents the narrative of the trauma hero to be female and non-white, moving the discourse slightly from the mainstream but maintaining the ideology. Combining many elements of this narrative, Zeina's trauma is not simply individual as most American war narratives would depict it. It is her failure to combine both constituting cultural narratives of her identity that causes her trauma-that is equally cultural and individualistic. Zeina is not simply a victim of war and trauma. Throughout the text, she exercises different levels of agency, choices, and challenges that make the simple reading of her victimhood naïve and misleading.

Zeina's hybrid identity, her ambivalence to both home and host culture serves as a step to assimilate, accept and exert the discourse of the dominant imperial ideology. *The American Granddaughter* negotiates the "third" space solution to the question of identity at war, navigating "imaginative geographies" (Said, *Orientalism* 50; O'Gorman 79) and reconciling contradictory affiliations. Despite her light nostalgic connection to Iraq, she embraces her American side wholeheartedly, a choice that corresponds to the distribution of power and agency between the former self and the other. Zeina ends up being appropriated and trained subject of the empire. The latter enlarges its frontier by encompassing new subjects and celebrating their narratives of

their transformations. The novel presents Zeina's story as one such narrative. Representing this nuanced experience by Kachachi, an exiled Iraqi writer located in France in such a powerful narrative illustrates the power of fiction to reach beyond the boundaries of experience (that shapes and determines much of American war writing) and nationalism that dominates war literature in Iraq.

Following suit the model of the returning trauma hero in American war narratives, the novel starts at the end of Zeina's story. She has just returned from Iraq, traumatized, "bearing a cemetery in her chest" (1), "defeated, laden with the gravel of sorrow" (2) but having an incredible story to tell. Similar to narratives that make the soldier of occupation the victim of trauma they perpetrate on others, Zeina returns from Iraq "feeling like a squeezed rag, one that we use to mop the floor. A floor cloth. That's how [she] returned" (2). Exhaustion, sorrow, disillusionment, defeat and a sense of loss and irreversible change that she has undergone are the results of her experience. Nevertheless, accompanying these feelings was her intriguing story that she starts the book feeling privileged with and empowered to tell (3). Claiming the narrative of the trauma by telling its story is another component of the trauma model in American war narratives that the novel follows. It is an attempt to negotiate her situation and cope with the irreversible impact that the war experience, complicated by her divided identity inflict on her. Trauma for Zeina is empowering, another source of agency. She embraces her trauma as it distinguishes her from other Americans. "My beautiful sorrow, which makes me feel that I am no longer an ordinary American but a woman from a faraway and ancient place, her hand clutching the burning coal of a story like no other" (3).

In the introductory chapters (II-V) the text establishes the background story. Zeina is the daughter of a Christian Iraqi family who has fled Iraq fifteen years previously because her father

was detained and tortured by the regime of Saddam Husein. Arriving in Detroit, Michigan, where thousands of Iraqis have settled, Zeina and her family become United States citizens. She remembers the day the family swore allegiance to their new homeland. Unlike the rest of the family, Zeina's mother

> walked apart from [them] and looked like she was in a funeral procession... she glanced sideways at her neighbours in the surrounding seats who couldn't contain their excitement. It was their collective wedding. The moment that would banish their fears and drive away for ever the spectre of homelessness. The day they swore allegiance to their new bounteous homeland. After the oath, they would be entitled to push out their chests and boast: "I am an American Citizen'… The masses put their hands on their hearts and sang out the national anthem as the jazz band started playing 'God Bless America'. The voice of my mother, the Iraqi woman Batoul Fatouhy Saour, was the only one out of tune, as she wailed in Arabic, 'Forgive me, Father. Yaabaa, forgive me' (Kachachi 20-21).

This portrayal of the mother having nostalgic and patriotic feelings for Iraq is in contrast to Zeina's apathetic attitude. Batoul's remembering her father and asking for his forgiveness demonstrates the patriarchal nature of the national discourse. She interprets her acceptance of American citizenship as a betrayal to Iraq. Ashamed of this, she apologizes to the memory of her father that best symbolizes the betrayed homeland. Zeina was a child at the time. Unlike her parents who have mixed feelings, she celebrates her new identity and enjoys her American experience. Zeina's assimilation to American life is introduced from the very beginning.

The epigraph that opens the novel introduces the stigma of Zeina's being corrupted by the American experience. In the epigraph, an unauthenticated *hadith* (saying) of the prophet Muhammed reads: "Beware of the beautiful woman of dubious descent," warning the reader of Zeina's corrupt character. The Arabic word *manbat* (translated in the text as "descent") refers also to the surrounding milieu in which one dwells. Zeina's American life is considered the source of her corruption by her grandmother. This continues to haunt her, especially via her grandmother who keeps using the derogatory colloquial term "*adab siz*" (a hybrid Turco-Arabic

term which literally means “bad manners due to bad upbringing”). Rahma’s character functions as the authentic Iraqi mother figure, the model woman that Zeina would not live up to. The narrative establishes the divide between the two women and the values they stand for. The novel frames Zeina’s liberal values and behaviors as a lack of good-rootedness, contrasting her with the other women in her family as well as the way women are traditionally portrayed in Iraqi culture. Most importantly, this epigraph starts the metafictional narrative game between the protagonist and the author. The latter starts the game by warning readers against her protagonist. Zeina revolts on this authorial voice of the writer many times. She deletes sentences the latter types on her keyboard, accusing her of exploiting Zeina’s story to create a patriotic novel in which the American granddaughter is the villain. The importance of this narrative game between the author and the protagonist is to give another dimension to Zeina’s story, to show the nuance and complications of the experience of war and trauma from different perspectives. Technically, the leading narrative voice of the novel is Zeina’s voice with intrusions by a metanarrative omniscient narrator that fills gaps in the narrative and provides counterviewpoints to hers. The transitions between the two voices are stated by Zeina’s voice as she argues, defies or gives the stage to the “writer” to tell the story.

> She's been irritating me since I realised how she had circled and manoevred in order to force out a patriotic novel at my expense. The imposter wants to kill me off so she can win for herself the admiration of idiotic critics, TV politicians and dinosaur nationalists. She wants to paint me as the villain and my grandmother as the brave and kind heroine…
>
> The writer sees me as a stepdaughter of the occupation and my grandmother as a jewel of the resistance. I am the sinning Magdalene who deserves to be stoned, and my grandmother an immaculate virgin in her eighties. [the writer] gives me the features of the prodigal daughter who returns like a female Rambo on a US Army tank. She traps me twice--inside the Green Zone and inside a hateful character--and imposes her unstructured nationalist imagination on me, an imagination inherited in black and white and sepia, no longer suitable for the age of Photoshop. But her traps neither impress nor interest me. Her weak narrative plot tries to silence me and rob me off my right to have a say in the affairs of this land that witnessed my birth and the births of my parents. Why does she want to

> prevent me from participating in the story in my own way, with full commitment and without a prompter feeding me the lines, hidden off-stage? (Kachachi 26-27).

The writer here is not Kachachi but the fictional persona that Zeina talks to and argues with in the make-believe world of the narrative. This fictional divide in viewpoint indicates the futility of one-sided representation of war experiences in today's world. When identity is fluid, the difference between self and other is vague. It is not enough to approach the experience from one side—whether individualistic or patriotic. The self is divided; and so is the discourse. The game continues with Zeina's answer to her rhetorical question, metafictionally analyzing the writer's reasons for blindly subscribing to the discourse of Iraqi nationalism and deconstructing the latter as an imposed ideology of a dated patriarchal culture, boasting of what she thinks that she, unlike the "writer", has—the agency to write her own story:

> "[The writer has] never written one sentence of her own making, never tasted the joy of expressing what's really on her mind, out loud and without fear of a raised rough hand that could descend on her soft cheek with a slap to reprimand the digression. She's conditioned to reject her own reason, to believe blindly in the intimations of the heart and to accept rhetoric and poetry as keys to the undisputed truth (27).

This passage powerfully subverts the discourse of Iraqi war culture that negates the individual and subscribes to collective, abstract causes. However, ideologically, this subversion of the dated Iraqi national culture is but a celebration of Zeina's liberal Americanism. After all, thinking that you are free from ideology is the very form that the dominant ideology takes (Žižek *The Plague* 27). This technical shift in the viewpoint adds to the intrigue of the narrative, providing a multiplicity of viewpoints to the story of the war. The make-believe divide between the two reflects the ideological rift that underlies Zeina's post-national identity, her claim to be a "citizen of the world"(130).

Zeina's sense of loss and defeat is not quite productive. Instead of questioning the moral ground of her deeds, she celebrates her Americanness by apologetically sanitizing the war on her

country of origin. The 9/11 attacks trigger Zeina's patriotic sense of belonging to the United States. Setting the sequence of events from the terrorist attacks to recruiting Arabic interpreters and then the war on Iraq as a reasonable response to the attacks to which Iraq and Iraqis have no connection is an epistemic failure in the framing of the war that follows American representations of the Iraq war. Like these narratives, the novel fails to make any connection between the country and these attacks. The attacks function as a trigger of the protagonist's sense of patriotism, a collective trauma through which American ideology interpellates Zeina to do something for her country. Contemplating the meaning of patriotism that was a "load of nonsense" (11) to her as she justifies her financial drive to work for the U.S. Army, she contradictorily claims the national trauma of September 11 as the reason behind her decision. Similar to the way formal and patriotic American narratives of the Iraq War relate the protagonist's decision to enlist to these attacks, the latter turn Zeina and her friends and neighbors into a traumatized collectivity: "We turned into creatures that shook and trembled, emitting sounds of panic and indignation, clasping hands above heads or using them to cover mouths. 'Oh my God…Oh my God,' ceaselessly repeated, as if the rest of the language had been forgotten and these three words were all that remained" (11). The writer successfully presents an account so close to the experience expressed by many American war narratives that, for a while, one forgets that the story is an Iraqi account of the Iraq War and that the rhetorical structure of the book undermines this very narrative of superficial patriotism. However, ideology precedes as the text continues: "A week [after the attacks], the FBI was recruiting Arabic translators and advertising a web address for applications. I read the advert and felt a mixture of vulnerability and enthusiasm. What could I do to help my country in its adversity? How could a powerless immigrant like me help the great United States of America? (12). Zeina's patriotic rhetorical

questions can hardly cover her reasons: NINETY-SEVE THOUSAND DOLLARS A year. All expenses paid.' That was the mantra that started it all" (8, capitalization in the original).

While the following Iraq war complicates her parents' feelings and attitudes, she never questions her Americanness. Pragmatic and patriotic as she is, Zeina uses her "cultural capital," her ability to speak Arabic (inherited from her eloquent father) to work with the American forces in Iraq as a field translator. In addition to the financial drive, Zeina claims to be motivated by her willingness to participate in liberating and rebuilding the country. After openly discussing her pragmatic decision to join the American army for financial reasons, she decorates her attitude with a piece of patriotic rhetoric: "I repeated after Fox News that I was going on a patriotic mission. I was a soldier stepping forward to help *my* government, *my* people and *my* army, *our* American army that would bring down Saddam and liberate *a* nation from its suffering [emphases added]" (10). The repetition of the possessive pronouns in relation to America stresses Zeina's anxiety over her Americanness, the conscious attempt to cling to and perform this fictional identity. She seems to be trying to convince herself, to impose this new identity, ironically exposing this as mere propaganda. The use of the indefinite article "*a"* in the sentence quoted above to refer to the nation of Iraq stresses her choice of the American side of her mixed identity and negating Iraq as an "other." "The poor people of Iraq. They won't believe their eyes when they finally open into freedom," she states (10). However, these were Zeina's initial feelings of excitement before experiencing the actual war.

The novel's short chapters take us back and forth between Iraq and the United States. In Iraq, the narrative revolves around Zeina and her connection to her grandmother Rahma. The relationship between the two defines the protagonist. She is the *American granddaughter* of Rahma, who symbolizes the negated nation-state of Iraq. Rahma, the wife of a distinguished

Iraqi colonel is the opposite of Zeina. Refusing to leave the country no matter what circumstances she faces, Rahma accuses her granddaughter of being corrupted by her American life. Similar to Elishiva's attitude in Sadaawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Rahma refuses to leave Iraq, signifying old-fashioned patriotism and nostalgia to which Zeina and her generation cannot connect. Zeina is nostalgic for Rahma's home that stands for her Iraqiness. Trying to visit her grandmother while working with the army, Zeina accepts her captain's offer to stage a fake raid to the neighborhood so that she can visit the old woman without implicating her or risking Zeina's life. Pragmatic as she is, the American granddaughter does not object to the idea despite the fear and the discomfort that the raid causes for the neighbors who have to undergo this raid for the sake of Zeina's personal desire. Rahma is infuriated by knowing that Zeina works with the American forces. (98-104). Zeina tries to calm her down: "We're doing a good job in this country. Believe me" (102). Rahma does not buy Zeina's words. She thinks she has lost her for good. She tells her granddaughter, crying, that she has changed: "You belong to the Green Zone now" (102).

Speaking of her other grandchildren who are scattered in different exiles all over the world (62), Rahma tells Zeina that she has a milk brother.[3] A neighbor woman, Taows, had nursed Zeina when she was a child along with the woman's son. Muhaymen, the mysterious "brother" turns to be an intriguing challenge for the defiant American girl. A strange, unacknowledged love relationship develops between the two. Muhaymen respects Zeina and considers her to be his sister. Empowered by her "liberal" American values, Zeina does not believe in this foster kinship of milk siblings. An intersection of gender and national politics takes place in their relationship. She fears Muhaymen because he is a sort of political enemy. He is a member of *al-Mahdi Army*, a resistance group that fights the American presence in Iraq. The

relationship of the Christian Rahma, the Muslim Taows and the resulting kinship of Zeina and Muhaymen stand for the lost unity of the Iraqi identity before the American invasion.

In narrative passages where the setting is Iraq, Zeina is portrayed as empowered by her Americanness. In her encounters with Iraqi people, she is an outsider who understands them but is not subjected to their values and power relations. With her American friends, she is culturally empowered because of her knowledge of the local language and culture. Because of her assumed power as an American, Zeina acts beyond the limits and imperatives of local gender expectations. The foster kinship of milk siblings fetishizes Zeina's body in relation to the local value system of Iraqi culture. Her imagined romance with Muhaymen cannot be realized because of this imposed value of kinship, which complicates the power/love relationship between the two. The romance gives chance to middle ground compromises and reconciliations; however, the novel portrays it as quite impossible that the two can have a chance to develop their feelings beyond the limits of their situation. The political overshadows the personal. War romance is not realistic in this novel. It is simply a poetic rapture of imagination, especially when one side of the romance represents the defeated other in a (neo)colonial encounter. Rational and pragmatic as she is, Zeina does not give up her Americanness to choose Muhaymen. She chooses America because it is where she thinks agency is. "It wasn't easy to give up power. I understood this now" (155). The intersection of politics and gender favors Zeina, the liberated American woman over Muhaymen. However, Zeina's position in the middle of the conflicting overarching national narratives is only ornamental (one reading of her name indicates an ornamental accessory), Muhaymen, on the other hand, is a romantic figure of traditional patriotism. Despite her crush on him, Zeina refuses to be subjected to his strong personality and his ideological cause. Indeed, Muhaymen's name (literally meaning the dominant) indicates the hegemony of the grand

narrative of the resisting Iraqi nationalism over their personal relationship. Rejecting his rhetoric, Zeina exerts the other favorable rhetoric of her American identity.

This divide between Zeina on one side and Rahma, Muhaimen and the writer who stand for the Iraqi side reflects the gulf in the story between the two conflicting identities. According to Zeina, the either-or rhetoric of conventional war literature (that portrays characters as either patriotic heroes or villains betraying their homelands) is an intimation of the heart, not reason or truth (27). Zeina refuses to give up her Americanness to prove her love for Iraq. She chooses both America and Iraq instead of the limiting either-or option. Objecting to Muhaimen's categorizing her with those who change their skin regularly, she tells him: "I only have one skin. It just has multiple colours" (130). Multiplicity, fluidity, and inclusivity are Zeina's American values that contrast Rahma's and Muhaimen's firmness, determination and steadfastness.

Zeina claims a deeper level of truth-representation by attesting to wider perspectives than the limitations of conventional patriotism or nationalistic discourse. While part of her sees this both-and choice as liberating and empowering, she finds it alienating and tiring at the end. "I couldn't get my old life back, and I couldn't adapt to my life in the [Green] Zone. I was a dog with two homes" (147). This both-and choice proves futile at the end of the novel when she asserts that she can only be an American: "I couldn't be anything but American. My Iraqiness had abandoned me long ago. It fell through a hole in my pocket and rolled away like an old coin" (163). Interestingly, the coin-pocket metaphor is relevant as it attests to one basic reason behind her decision to come back to Iraq—money, something that she admits from the very beginning as "the mantra that started it all" (8). Depressed by the prospects of Iraq's future after the war and the death of her grandmother, Zeina asks Muhaymen, her last connection to her Iraqiness, to

accompany her to the States. He refuses and the two leave each other after the death of Rahma, the symbol of the old Iraq that unites its people and bring them together.

Navigating the third space in this novel is a liminal experience training the empire's subject to obey and belong to the post-national world that the American Empire shapes and leads. On a superficial level, it gives the illusion of liberty and agency to individuals; on a deeper ideological level, it negates otherness and erases cultural differences. Zeina's assimilation via the third space she occupies in the novel creates the illusion of having the right to choose and reconcile between the empire and its other (Iraq in this case) while reproducing and internalizing the discourse of the empire within the hybrid, ambivalent self. It allows individuals to negotiate their relations to the empire and celebrate their attachment and belonging to it as a rational pragmatic choice. This illusion is the reason behind Zeina's return. Unlike root-seeking narratives of the return of the native, Zeina chooses to return to Iraq as an American, part of a "triumphant ideology" (Said, *Reflections,* 177) that she wholeheartedly embraces. In addition to the narrative game of the protagonist versus the author Zeina creates movie titles for situations that require an outsider (authorial) commentary that interrupts the flow of her narrative. The title she chooses for her return to Iraq is *the Delayed Return* in which the "protagonist returns to the country she left fifteen years before, not as a visitor to her birthplace, but as a soldier in the battlefield" (32).

Zeina's trauma narrative amalgamates the personal agony of a divided self that pretend to manage the conflicting drives of her identity with the cultural trauma of the destruction of her home country and her conforming role in it. The narrative reflects intersected axes of oppression/domination on the protagonist who emerges as a traumatized subject with a handful of money and a wound to be healed. It moves the discourse over postcolonial identity

into post-nationalist discourse, leaving the national trauma behind and choosing the individual, neoliberal solution.

The ambivalent, hybrid third space that the writer (and her protagonists) occupy in relation to the colonizer/colonized binary is a liminal space in the process of westernizing Zeina commingling the self and the other. However, Zeina's navigating and enunciating the third space does not "elude" the polar politics of the self and other (Bhabha, 39), it simply reiterates the discourse of the more powerful of the two, overshadowing the discursive erasure of otherness for the sake of winning the empire. The problem is, however, not in the third space or exile itself, but the real reason for Zeina's agony, her tragic fall is her pragmatic opportunistic decision to go to war against her country of origin. Wanting to have everything she wants, Zeina goes to Iraq to make money, to restore a nostalgic connection with part of herself. Arriving there, she wants to visit her grandmother and be safe, so she does not mind making fake raids on people's houses to get what she wants. Meeting Muhaimen and falling in love with his strong masculinity and faithfulness to his cause, she both wants to have him as a lover and to not give up her liberal life and agency.

Neoliberalism can be seen in Zeina's pragmatic and opportunistic approach to her identity, to the country of her birth and the way she navigates her path as an *American* "citizen of the world" as she tells her conservative lover/brother. "The world is her homeland," she stresses, emigration is the new way of settling. She is not someone who changes their skin but someone with a skin that has more than one color. From a neoliberal economic viewpoint, Iraq is an opportunity for Zeina as it is for many Americans who chose to go there. It is her difficult life in Detroit (which was undergoing a dire economic recession around the time of the novel) that drives her decision to use the opportunity, to use her cultural capital to change her (and her

family's) difficult life by enlisting as an interpreter. In today's globalized world, Zeina's attitude shows that nation and nationalism are old-fashioned means of constructing one's identity. Her father's eloquent Arabic, his love of classical Arabic poetry, her grandfather's heroic past (fighting the Arab-Israeli Wars) and taking pride in his military uniform are things of the past. They mean nothing for Zeina other than factors among others that shape the narrative of her identity. She cherishes them as long as they do not decide or limit her course of action and her agency.

The reference to Salma Hayek (157), the hybrid Mexican American star of Arab origin is relevant to Zeina's vision of her American utopia. Hayek is the erotic idol for a local Iraqi interpreter Younis, a teammate of Zeina who is killed in combat wearing the American uniform and keeping a topless picture of the actress in his helmet. [5] Zeina sadly speaks of Younis's fetishization of Hayek's breasts, and the joke of the American soldiers about his death in al-Sadr city (which literally means the breast). The pun and the joke derealizes Younis' loss and the loss of other Iraqis. However, unlike other interpreters in other texts that this dissertation has covered, Younis is not completely erased. Mentioning one intimate detail like his daydreaming about the American star and the proximity of his sub-story makes him a little bit livelier. The figure of the in-between interpreter that recur in Iraq War narratives appears most strongly in the character of Zeina. Unlike other interpreters, Zeina claims her own narrative and navigates her space successfully, mainly because she is American.

Other than Zeina's memories, the actual Iraq is negated and "derealized" throughout the novel. The actual war only happens on the margins of *the American Granddaughter*. Throughout the book, Zeina relates a few stories of the actual fighting that she has never seen in person. Instead, she reflects on her personal story of navigating the politics of her identity. There hardly

is any killing or blood in the narrative, as if to relate a clean war of her own, indirectly apologizing for what happens in the real war. Except for the few scenes of reflecting on the death of her American soldiers and the Iraqi interpreters in her team, the apologetic blast of anger against the Abu Ghraib scandal, her attitude to what is going on in the real war is indifferent. The exposure of the torture scenes and photographs infuriates her as it reminds her of the torture of her father by the Ba'athists and refutes American pretensions of carrying out good intentions and achieving something good for the country. Despite her pretend "anger," she tries to justify the crimes of torturing prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison and recording that on tape: "The brutality of *our* soldiers increased in direct proportion to *our* losses" (139 emphases added). She understands her moral entanglement, pragmatically negotiating it and relating to her (and her country's) good intentions (102). However, Zeina does not claim to be innocent. She relates an incident when she personally was behind one act of torture that she does not regret or feel ashamed of:

> The only time I felt threatened was when I passed a cell occupied by one of the dangerous detainees on my way to the bathroom and he looked out through the bars of the tiny window, gesturing with his thumb across his neck, threatening me with slaughter. I didn't respond, but continued my way, peed, washed and then called two particularly tough soldiers and asked them to teach him a lesson. I didn't bat an eyelid (138-139).

The power exchange in this scene is quite reflective of Zeina's exercise of her agency. According to Elaine Scarry, in torture "what assists the conversion of absolute pain into the fiction of absolute power is an obsessive, self-conscious display of agency" (Scarry 27). Zeina understands her position of power over the prisoner and acts accordingly. In Zeina's logic, if necessary, torture by itself is okay –as long as it is not staged and communicated to the outside world. Her anger is not about the victims but about the military honor that was implicated by the offenders' scandalous act. Right on the same page after this incident that Zeina is personally responsible

for, she expresses shame over acts of torture and humiliation in Abu Ghraib: "military honor was no longer just a male issue. There were women offenders too, and that made my anger more bitter. How did that bitch, who was dragging a prisoner behind her like a dog on a leash, get into our army?"(139). One would imagine Rahma or “the writer” answering this question by telling her something like: “the same way you did.”

Like American narratives of the Iraq War, the Iraqi space in the novel is flat and one dimensional. The imagined geography of Iraq in the novel corresponds to its portrayal in American media, having little to do with the real one. The “Triangle of Death,” for instance, is the U.S. media name for a district south-west of Baghdad where extreme battles and insurgency took place (158). In contrast to this, the American space is portrayed more intimately. Speaking of the destroyed twin towers in the 2001 attacks, Zeina expresses deep connection and emotional engagement: “I knew these two buildings. I knew New York. Every American did. Whether or not she'd ever been there. I had visited New York, stood in front of her twin towers and had a bite to eat on the plaza that led to one of them” (11). America was on fire before my eyes,” she exclaims, “and I could smell the ash. The name of this movie would have to be *The Towering Inferno*” (11). Compared to this intimate portrayal of New York in her framing of her decision to work as a translator, the Iraqi space she represents is negated and othered. Like what the media does, the novel erases the real geography of the place, the complexity of what happens there (the resistance, the terrorist attacks...etc) and utilizes the media name to give a sense of realness. This demonstrates the reiteration of the (global) mainstream representation of the invasion that the writer has fallen to. Opposite to Zeina’s investment in her personal past, in an attempt to make sense and cope with her present choices, the Iraqi place in the novel is de-historicized. History is always a burden that Zeina tries to avoid. Indeed, the complexity and nuances of the country’s

past and present are not priorities for Zeina. Instead, what really matters is her own liminal position and strong sense of connection to the other space, her America.

Despite her apologetic attitude to the blunders of the American war in Iraq, Zeina's grief over the losses of Iraqis and American victims is remarkable in war narratives that usually choose sides and other the enemy. In an iconic scene in the Arlington national cemetery in Washington D. C. The novel relates an exchange between a reporter and a mother of an American soldier who has died in Iraq:

> "It was Memorial Day... Gina[a mother of a soldier killed in Iraq] had nothing to say to the newspaper reporter who intruded on her quiet grief. Her tears were just drops in the sea of cemetery. Maybe the other visitors would be more eloquent, she thought, but he insisted on hearing her. So she told him she empathised with the grief of Iraqi mothers that she saw on the news wearing black abayas and weeping over the children they lost in the streets of Baghdad (127-128).

The motherly attitude of this woman expresses a universal grievability of all war victims, Gina's framing of the traumas of Iraqi mothers as equal to the story of the American soldiers to be remembered here and now does not suit the agenda of the reporter who interrupts her saying: 'That was another story" (128). Before he leaves Gina and moves to talk to other women.

The same dismissive attitude of the reporter could be expected from other characters who approach the war by picking sides. Like the reporter, those who choose either Iraq or America cannot share or connect to the grief and empathy Gina feels for the traumatized Iraqi mothers. Evening the pain and losses of the others with our own losses are against deeply-rooted ideological scapegoating mechanisms of othering that maintain and strengthens collectivities by defining them against an inimical, scapegoated other. Dismantling this narrative alienates Zeina in Iraq, just like it resulted in the reporter leaving Gina's unfinished point to move on looking for a more patriotic story in a national day of remembering the heroes of the nation.

In *the American Granddaughter*, the war turns the protagonist into a cog in the giant machine of the American empire. While this might seem to work for her personally, liberating her financially and transforming her into a stronger person; it alienates her culturally and erases her roots to her past. Just like the discourse of "liberating the poor Iraqis," this sense of personal liberation is equally false and misleading. Without her negated past, without her lost Iraqiness, Zeina is far from "reconstituting [her] broken life," no matter what triumphant and righteous ideology she connects herself to. Transformed and sophisticated as the narrative tries to depict Zeina after her experience, she ends up being depicted as a victim of the war. A reviewer of recent American literature of the Iraq War rightly criticizes the way contemporary Iraq war fiction depicts how "Iraqis die but the real victims are always the American soldiers forced to pull the trigger in a confusing, needless war. Aside from military translators, Iraqis… seem to exist in these fictional worlds largely as people to be killed so American soldiers can learn about war, life and death" (Peter). However, Zeina is not completely a victim in the novel. the rhetorical distribution of the narrative voice between her and the other characters stresses the complexity and multiplicity of the experience. She is both a trauma heroine and a fallen perpetrator, a beautiful character in dubious dwelling and dreadful circumstances.

Other possible ways to imagine and engage the perspective of the other in war writing include employing multifocal/polyphonic narrative techniques that the modern novel has presented. Using these techniques, breaking the causality and rationality of sequential narration to reach beyond the limits of one's experience, Roy Scranton's *War Porn* constructs a multi-layered narrative of the Iraq War that incorporates the perspectives of Iraqi victims, American perpetrators, and the bystander American population. The novel is exceptional in American Iraq

war literature in its empathetically and intimately representing the other and its undermining of American war mythology that transforms American perpetrators of war into victims of trauma.

The novel consists of three sections or narrative lines that move together, interrupted by short prose-poetry sections titled as Babylons. The first narrative line is about a returning Iraq War veteran Aaron attending a small party in a small town in Utah using his trauma story and war pornographic pictures that he has taken in Iraq to impress his friends and to flirt with a girl who turns him down. The second line of the narrative is about Wilson, an American soldier in the Iraq war, navigating his path in a war that he was driven to by economic reasons and providing an account of the war that is neither (psychologically) traumatic nor openly political. The third and arguably the most important narrative line is about Qasim, an Iraqi mathematician living a bare life under the dictatorship of the Ba'athist regime, waiting like other Iraqis for the false utopia of the democracy that the American invasion of the country promises to establish.

Like exposing and exhibiting the horror of war in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *the Corpse Exhibition*, the graphic portrayal of combat in popular American culture is the theme of the novel's title and central metaphor. But unlike these texts that narrativize that pornographic thrill, Scranton's novel depicts it as a misinforming, misleading epistemology of war writing. The thrill of war's spectacle in American literature is as old as the trauma hero myth that the novel undermines. American writer and veteran of the Vietnam War Tim O'Brien writes of this thrill that war creates as "astonishing. It fills the eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not" ("How to Tell a War Story" 80–81). Another Vietnam War writer stresses the intensification of human experience in war, the "terrible ecstasy" it creates. War is "an experience of great intensity; its lure is the fundamental human passion to witness, to see things, what the Bible calls the lust of the eye and the Marines in Vietnam called eye-fucking"

(Broyles). This spectacle turned from photographic and narrative representations in Vietnam into live streaming of violence and combat in Iraq thanks to the real-time communicability of contemporary technology. The Internet has become a great medium to communicate intense experiences of war to online audiences all over the world. In his *Light It Up: The Marine Eye for Battle in the War for Iraq*, John Pettegrew speaks of the short history of war porn that accompanied the popularity of the internet in the 1990s and after: "By the early twenty-first century, Islamist extremist groups routinely filmed bombings and other violent acts and then posted the videos on the internet for purposes of propaganda and recruitment. With the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the U.S. Department of Defense slowly tried to match radical Islamic presence on the web" (49).

Pettegrew argues that the American empire, to some extent, depends on the "vernacular pleasure principle of combat" (49), even if this graphic "presence" contradicts the rhetoric of the good and just war that usually describes American military engagements all over the world. Ideologically, the vernacular pleasure these thrilling episodes create is useful for recruiting future enthusiasts for violence as we see in texts from the above discussed *Operation Homecoming* and similar war narratives. Just like pornography with regard to real sexual relations, pornographic war narratives misinform the reader/voyeur and create false expectations about real war experiences, in addition to objectifying and erasing the other.

Scranton's *War Porn* undermines this intersection of thrilling narrative representations and the ideological purposes they perform by exposing American War literature as a form of pornography of violence. Metaphorically, the title dubs all American war literature as pornographic war narratives that invite readers to the thrill and mystique of war. In the novel, this can be seen in the role of literature in shaping people's expectations upon going to war: "He

thought the war would be over quick and he'd be sitting in the desert twiddling his thumbs the whole time like in that book *Jarhead*" (*War Porn* 308). The novel shows how *Jarhead*, Anthony Swofford's novel of the 1991 Gulf War shapes the expectations of what war is like for a generation of young people who enlist with images from such books and novels about war. This is why war literature matters, why it is not simply a form of entertainment but also a responsible medium shaping people's attitudes and decisions regarding, among other things, future wars. The cover of Scranton's book defines war porn as "[v]ideos, images, and narratives featuring graphic violence, often brought back from combat zones, viewed voyeuristically or for emotional gratification." Such media are often presented and circulated without context, though they may be used as evidence of war crimes". Exposing the economy of thrilling spectacles of war or war pornography and bridging the cultural gap by a fair representation of the other are necessary endeavors to develop a multicultural understanding of war and the human experience. They allow readers and consumers of war literature (and other cultural representations) to reach beyond the mystique and thrill of violence, to ask engaged responsible questions of the sociopolitical ramifications of war instead of the nature of the thrilling experience that exceeds words or representation.

Undermining the trauma hero myth that transforms American soldiers from perpetrators of violence into victims of trauma, Scranton defragments the traditional narrative of war, highlighting the more destructive trauma of Iraqis. He goes beyond patronizing characterization of Iraqis as victims into an informed representation of life in Iraq before and during the American invasion of the country in 2003. Although it is unfair to the novel to read it solely through the theoretical framework of Scranton's non-fictional writing (mainly his thesis of the trauma hero myth), *War Porn* can be best read as a creative application of Scranton's

criticism to this myth creating a controversial narrative that features Iraqi and American characters in a babel of voices discussing the Iraq war from different experiences and points of view.

The structure of the novel comprises three layers of narrative with poetic fragmentary short chapters subtitled as "Babylon" intervening the main sections of the narrative. The Babylon sections serve as creative linguistic intervals between the main sections. As a current of free association/ stream-of-consciousness, these episodes provide a space for the author to freely comment on the war from different perspectives with no confines of a narrative line or structure that he has to follow. Scranton's *babylon* intervals communicate a cacophony of voices inside the narrator's head. They combine "literal 'scraps' or 'distortions' (Clark 85) of free verse, unfinished prose poems, quotations from the Bible, the Quran, the *Illiad*, and other cultural commentaries on war, American and Iraqi culture. [6]

The first main narrative line in the novel starts with a group of middle-class liberal American friends at a barbecue in a small town in Utah discussing a range of issues. An example of Scranton's critique of Americans' involvement with the Iraq war and its victims, the barbeque conversation reflects how war literature betrays the real victims privileging those who survive and tell the story intoxicated by the thrill of the experience. Wendy, a poet, and a liberal character reflects on killing a coyote while driving her way to a poetry reading in a nearby town. It was a winter storm; she can hardly see her way when it happens. She stops, looks for the animal, looks for signs of the accident, but couldn't see anything. The poor thing has disappeared. Driving home, she faces a bigger one at the scene of the accident, standing idle and staring at her (23-24). Metaphorically this could be read as a reference to killing people in war and telling stories about them. The image of the coyote (or its ghost) that haunts Wendy upon her

return is a powerful representation of the Other in war literature. The other as a silenced victim, a nonhuman prey that needs no care or consideration, a constant and necessary reminder of the guilt war leaves within its subjects and perpetrators.

This scene introduces the main story of the section, the post-war experience of Wendy's boyfriend Aaron, the "traumatized" soldier from the Iraq War. The conversation shows very polarized positions that reflect American cultural divide about the war. Before the intellectual debate and the engaged political criticism, the first expectations of the group upon knowing of Aaron's service is that he may have some war porn:

> He just got home from Iraq."/"No way. Was he in the shit?"/ ... "Don't be all ... She said he's a little sensitive."/"Maybe he's got pictures," Matt said, snapping his fingers and pointing them, thumbs up, across his hips. /"That's what I'm talking about. Seriously. And if you're done moping, help me bring out food" (11).

Videos and pictures of torture and war crimes are primarily a form of entertainment that Americans are thrilled to enjoy. Using the traditional model of a returning veteran struggling to fit in society after what he has been through, Scranton portrays the "trauma hero" as a villain, a manipulator of people's (patriotic) feelings, their lack of knowledge of (and interest in) war and its politics to get what he wants. The barbeque scene shows Americans' disinterest in the war because of their lack of information and experience and their distrust and apathy to politics in general. This disinterest in politics and the gulf between civilians and the military is the fertile ground for ideological myths (such as the trauma hero narrative) to flourish as people trust soldiers' experiences of what war is like over political articulations of its meaning(s).

Guilt for not going through the hardships soldiers (willingly) undergo prevents a thoughtful ethical attitude to their crimes and misdeeds, driven by bigger war enterprises but executed by soldiers themselves. This attitude of the "bystander population" that Nancy

Hollander warns against in her “Trauma, Ideology and the future of Democracy” is antidemocratic (157) and therefore, antipatriotic. Ideology functions in this very gap as soldiers do not create meanings of their experiences themselves but use available ideological constructions. Patriotism, in its traditional meaning, is only a cliché in the novel. Matt, one of the group at the barbeque party stands for the ignorance of the people when he says: "I mean, all we know is what they show us on TV, right? …We're totally ignorant of this situation, and I'm just wondering, is it really like how they say? Is it bad? Is it getting worse? Is it getting better?" The question here is more politically engaged than the standard what-is-it-like question people usually ask veterans. The presence of Aaron, the trauma figure (the perpetrator) destabilizes the calm, middle-class life of the group and challenges their liberal values.

Melanie, an outspoken, free-thinking poet attacks Aaron’s role in the war accusing him of killing and torturing people for money. Questioning Aaron’s politics and his thoughts of what he has done is Scranton’s way of bridging the fictional gap between veterans and their society. He is articulating the right questions instead of the “what-is-it-like” invitation to mythologize war. Aaron answers create more doubts and uncertainties than Matt has. "I don't know what to tell you, chief. It's bad enough." "But they can vote, right? They have democracy. That's better, isn't it?" Melanie pushes for more answers, for deeper insights into the experience, but Aaron has nothing to tell her except that

> It's a fucking shithole. And it doesn't matter what the fuck we think about it, because the guys who run shit don't give a rat's ass what people like you and me think. Or do. Or say. Unless we're blowing shit up or donating money, they could give a flying fuck. So I don't know what to tell you… Yeah, well, I'm all traumatized and shit. You know what it's like. You saw the movie (29).

Faced with the right questions about the meaning of his war experience and what he has been part of, Aaron and the discourse of the war that he represents falls apart. He quickly jumps to the safe zone of the trauma umbrella. This illustrates how the traumatized hero myth solves Aaron's dilemma. It gives him an excuse, a way out of the mess that his role in the war puts him through. The movie (or any war narrative for this matter) represents an alternative to reality. But a more engaged, morally responsible (and idealistic) citizen refuses to accept the trauma excuse at face value. "So why'd you go, then, man," Mel asked, "if none of it matters?" (29). Aron responds "college money, patriotism. Service, challenge, honor. Nine-eleven. Same things as anybody else." Mell is not satisfied with Aaron's justifications that she pushes the conversation into the edge: "No, he made a choice. He wasn't drafted. All he had to do was kill people." They continue. "It's like the Nazis," Mel says. "Like some people do it just because other people tell them to." Mel stared hard at Aaron: "Did you kill anybody?" Aaron, shockingly disturbed, answers in the negative: "Not that it's any of your goddamn business, but no, I didn't kill anybody. It wasn't my job." "But it was someone's," Mel said. "I just held the camera" (30). This last claim of only holding the camera is proven false at the end of the book when they browse the war-pornographic pictures that he has, some of which show him participating in the aggressive acts of torture (321).

The writer returns to this line of the narrative at the very end of the novel when the group reconciles the two. Mell is still outraged and angered but calms down to save the night. Aaron shows them pictures of tortured and sexually violated Iraqis. In one of the pictures, he appears participating in the practice, not only holding the camera as he previously has claimed. Aaron's unreliability is stablished as he uses his experience, his trauma to manipulate others (Clark 106). He presents himself as a tough masculine war hero ecstatic about the thrill of

controlling others among guys; but fabricates a sensitive tender image of himself helping kids at dire situations when he speaks to girls of his war experiences. We later understand his reasons for this manipulation as he keeps flirting with Dahlia who wants him to stop. Enraged by her rejection and desperate for the failure of his flirtations and manipulations, Aaron forces himself on Dhalia when the others go to watch the sunrise. He rapes her and the novel ends. The rape scene, like Qasim's nightmare in the "Fall' narrative line of the novel that is discussed below, is symbolic not only of the rape of Iraq and Iraqis as Olivia Clark reads it in her thoughtful analysis of the novel (108) but also of the epistemological and ethical violation of the American people by war pornographic literature and the myth of the trauma hero whose beastly desire is unleashed by his exercise of power over the voiceless enemy.

This narrative line is a direct critique of the "liberal" American audience of war culture who claims to oppose the war but still supports the troops. The real victims of trauma are not the perpetrators but the people who undergo their aggression and those who believe their narratives at face value. The ideologically conforming thank-you-for-your-service attitude to soldiers (and the wars they fight), the novel seems to argue, should be replaced by the moral imperative that they should have not been there in the first place. If that is not realistic, at least the discourse of war that they perpetuate should be critically opposed and questioned.

The second narrative line is the story of Specialist Wilson, a well-intentioned, educated and sensitive man who is deployed to Iraq. He has goodwill to help Iraqis but also grave fears and suspicions, watching "them with distrust and curiosity" (61). In this semi-autobiographic section (echoing Scranton's time in Iraq) Wilson navigates his way through the hardening instructions of the military, his willingness to be good to people and his yearning for a better life than that of a soldier, coveting the refined lifestyle of the ruling administrative class

that he sees in the international Green Zone. This yearning comments on the class structure in the American military. Reminiscent of Shakir Nūrī's distinction of Americans into soldiers or have-nots; and leaders, commanders and members of the ruling bourgeoisie in his novel *the Green Zone*, Wilson's dilemma is not psychological because of war and trauma but sociological because of class and power distribution in his world. The war problem, Wilson's yearning for a refined life indicates, is more structural than individual war wounds or psychological traumas. He entertains ideas of deserting and settling in Iraq just to get rid of his miserable life in the military "I could go right over—escape into the night and find some nice Kurdish family to take me in who wouldn't cut my throat in my sleep" (99). This embrace of the Other is understandably marred with stereotypes, fears, and suspicions. Although Wilson expresses empathy, the section reveals the racism that dominates military culture. A joking conversation between soldiers about having sex with Iraqis exposes the racist stereotypes about "stinking Iraqis". One of the soldiers accuses the other of being "a secret hadji lover." The other soldier answers: "Fuck that. Hadjis stink." /"Shit, they wash up like normal people. Besides, you stink too…Just let yourself go for a few weeks till you're really filthy. Then you won't even notice." Iraqis do not only stink according to this, "[t]hey got diseases here you ain't even heard of" (86-87). This rhetorical use of racist language continues as Wilson describes the Iraqis they pass as "a raggedy bunch, mustached and bony, wearing the same dirty clothes every day." Despite his refined, educated character, Wilson falls into this racist language because of the situation he is in: "They're shooting at us every day and I'm supposed to give a flying fuck about human rights? Fuck that. Once *they* quit chopping people's heads off and lighting dudes on fire, then maybe we'll talk" (280 emphasis added). The generalizing "they" in the sentence shows how war categorizes people into camps of opposite identities—us vs. them. The text implies that no matter

how educated or well-informed you are, war conditions force you into these categories and you act accordingly. Wilson's perspective is important as it is the middle ground between the trauma narrative that the first narrative line of the novel examines and the perspective of the Iraqi Other that the "Fall" sections present. Rather than stressing one of these perspectives as the most accurate approach to reality, the novel maintains a multi-perspectival (Clark 97) approach that holds all these experiences as valuable ways to approach a multifaceted experience.

Opposite to Aaron in the first narrative line, Wilson is not traumatized or showing any signs of PTSD. The setting of the narrative is in Iraq at the time of the war, not in a retrospective way that trauma narratives usually represent, leading to the same end of not suggesting any indication of trauma. Showing a close depiction of the intensity and complexity of being in a war system structured by social, racial and economic classification is one way to depart the two extreme narratives of, psychologizing war experience as inductive of PTSD; and the other over politicizing the war narrative as a national trauma.

The third and most important section of this novel for the purpose of this dissertation is "the Fall" chapters that portray the war from an Iraqi perspective. The 'fall" that the sub-title chooses is the word most Iraqis use to describe the invasion in its earlier stages. Temporally, this chapter portrays life in Baghdad just before the occupation, focusing on the life of Qasim a1-Zabadi. A1-Zabadi is an Iraqi mathematician, a university professor who is interrogated by Iraqi authorities accusing him of using mathematical codes to spy and infiltrate information to the invaders. Living the chronic trauma of life under dictatorship, Qasim, like many Iraqis naïvely dreams of the utopia of future Iraq after the fall of the Ba'athist government. This tragic naivety drives Qasim into much trouble before, during and after the fall. It is in Qasim's story that the three narrative lines of the novel intersect. After the war, Qasim works as an interpreter with the

American forces (in Specialist Wilson's unit) and later we learn that he is accused of conspiring against the Americans and is interrogated, tortured by, among others, Aaron from the first narrative line of the book.

Before the war, Qasim's trauma is his life under dictatorship. This political trauma is reflected in his personal life, his fears and agonies of having no control over his (or his family's) destiny. This fear is symbolized, among other things by black dogs chasing him (159). Being bitten by a black dog, incidentally, is a recurring motif in Iraqi war fiction. A black dog violates the corpse of Salaam, the friend of the protagonist in Ḥusayn Sarmak Hassan's *Beyond Hell* for instance (53). While it symbolizes war in that novel, inflicting the protagonist's trauma and indirectly referring to the dogs of the post-war political regime tearing apart the country; dogs here stand for the Ba'thists chasing Qasim and other Iraqis. He has a hard time sleeping for fear of their intrusion on his life, only to dream of being chased by dogs (202). A more horrible nightmare follows in which his wife is being sexually violated by Qusay Husein, son of the dictator and symbol of the despotic power (203-204). The rape scene/nightmare is symbolic of the domination of the state on Qasim's life— power at its severest manifestation in the state's penetration of intimate private life.

Having in mind previous wars that he and the country have seen, Qasim's trauma is both cultural, political and personal. Discussing plans for after the invasion with his students in the class just before the war starts, Qasim tells them that he is not going to fail anyone for not convening after the forced break, that they are not going to be punished for being crippled or dead (149-150). Previous Iraqi wars and experiences mar his and other Iraqis' expectations of their future. Being afraid of the Ba'athists among the students, Qasim did not express high hopes about the future. But within his close social circle and with the war closing up more seriously

than previous American interventions, hopes of the utopia of life after the fall of the regime have become high. His uncle Luqman tells him:

> "Nephew! Look at MTV. Look at CNN. We'll vote, we'll have a constitution, we'll elect our president. Think of it! No more Hizbis! No more secret police! No more Abu Ghraib! It'll be like it was in the seventies, before the Mother of All Morons attacked Iran. I'm telling you, everybody had a new car and nice clothes. Not this shit I wear now" (154).

But these hopes are false and futile as the novel follows the horrible life of Qasim and other Iraqis after the war. Qasim's life is a whole narrative of bare, unaccounted for living, starting with his fear of the government violating his personal life, to being an interpreter, subject to the hatred and distrust of both his people and the American forces he works for, through his torture for false accusations by Aaron and his team, to finally been objectified in pictures of war pornography the "trauma hero" browses to impress his American friends in Utah (321). In the photographs of his torture, Qasim's (and other Iraqis') pain is objectified, it "is denied as pain and read as power, a translation made possible by the obsessive mediation of agency (Scarry 28).

Indeed, Scranton's articulation of the Iraqis' experience of war "evokes empathy without paternalism and promotes pathos without pity… [He] re-write[s] the Other, offering a corrective of characterization and point of view that enables a more inclusive construction of cultural memory. (Clark 104). However, this characterization does not move beyond empathy with the other as a victim. Most Iraqi characters are presented with no strong personality or real agency. In the novel, Qasim and most Iraqis lead a bare life before the invasion because of the dictatorship. After the war, their lives become yet more dire, precarious and unlivable. Empathy and pathos are important in representing the other, but agency and power over one's own future are equally necessary to fairly represent a contested cultural territory of the Iraqi life before,

during, and after the war. We do not see strong characters, such as Muhaimen in In'aam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*. In addition, the insistence on picking interpreters to represent the Other is quite telling of the strategic function of this use. I would argue that it is their roles in correlation with the American forces that make them matter. Technically, it is easier for an outsider to a culture to use his key holders to its understanding—interpreters that (s)he has worked with, introduced their culture to him/her. However, the very position interpreters occupy in-between two warring cultures deprives them of agency or power over their own lives. Choosing someone who is self-selected to perform cultural bridging to represent a culture is not the best way to reach into the other. It is, at best, a safe way to leave one's epistemological comfort zone. Choosing a victimized interpreter, I argue, is a weak point in this rather strong and nuanced portrayal of the Iraq war.

In addition to dismantling the trauma hero myth, the relatively positive characterization of Iraqis and the informed, attentive representation of Iraqi space, gender roles are other markers of the novel's excellence in comparison to other Iraq War narratives. Gender, as performed by the characters in the novel, is fluid and progressively depicted. It takes a strong lesbian woman, Melanie, to aggressively question the authority of the masculine narrative of the war. She is the only one who poses the right questions of America's war and accuses Aaron of killing people for money and the thrill of doing that. Aaron, the rapist, the trauma hero-villain, represents masculinity as fragile, manipulative role rather than an empowering or essential characteristic of males. He describes the thrill of war and violence to men differently than he explains it to females. Enforcing his masculine agency of having been into the toughening experience of war he tells Matt "It's a weird thrill, having that much physical control over somebody, knowing what you're doing" (322). Echoing rape culture in which the coercive

sexual act is a performance of power, Aaron excitedly tells Matt that at the essence of war experience there is a masculine thrill like no other. With females, this affirmative masculine persona disappears as he tells Dahlia, trying to impress her by portraying himself doing a fake heroic act of saving children trapped by the fighting "'It's always the children that suffer the most. I mean we did what we could, but… It's just-these kids, their lives are basically fucked'" (323). Aaron here is not only performing his (traditional) gender role/expectation differently but manipulating others by doing so. Beyond his manipulative rhetoric, his act of raping Dhalia at the end of the novel illustrates a toxic masculine expectation. Because of his "heroism" portrayed by a culture that fetishizes war experience and traumatized heroes, Aaron expects Dhalia and other girls that he may want to have sex with to conform to his will and power. The powers that Aaron and other people in the military exercise on Iraqis intoxicate them. The danger, the novel indicates, is their will to extend this power over to American civilians. Scranton's portrayal of Aaron's toxic masculine character, his aggression on Dhalia and Iraqi victims offers a feminist critique to the institution of war highlighting the latent danger in a culture that fetishizes trauma and worships trauma heroes.

In addition to Aaron's gender performance, the "Fall" narrative illustrates how gender and power intersect in the paranoid mind of the traumatized Qasim who sees power, symbolized by the son of the president, violating his wife sexually. As an Iraqi citizen, Qasim is metaphorically castrated by power. In a nightmare he sees Qusay Husein, son of the dictator sexually violating his wife Lateefah:

> "What are you looking at?" Qusay shouted… Stop," Qasim said. "God is great!" Qusay shouted, and shuddered. Lateefah's belly swelled with his seed… sweetheart, it's our baby. Look," she said, and showed him the swaddled newborn… Lateefah smiled warmly at them, but when she turned away, he laid the baby on the table and smothered it with a pillow. The baby barked and yipped and Qasim forced the pillow down. "What are

> you doing?" Lateefah screamed. But he didn't stop. He felt the wriggling thing under his hands and pushed down, down (203-204).

The rape nightmare is an indication of Qasim's castration anxiety to use the language of psychoanalysis (Evans. *An Introductory* 23, Migliozzi 23). [7] Unlike Dhalia in the first narrative line of the book, Lateefah is not actually raped. It is Qasim who dreams of this imagined act of aggression. The government in dictatorial regimes acts as the symbolic phallus, the father figure that holds power and might over the powerless individual. Anxiety over one's life under such power is a form of symbolic castration anxiety.[8] In the nightmare, Qasim avenges his honor by killing the baby, the result of this aggressive power relationship of the dictatorial regime and the individual. As seen in the examples of gender performance discussed here, *War Porn* reimagines gender roles in the Iraq War in a way that undermines the aggressive masculine ideologies of American militarism and Iraqi dictatorship.

In addition to subverting gender hierarchies, the empathic characterization of Iraqis and creatively imagining their viewpoints, space is another dimension of the progressive way the novel approaches the Iraq War story. Scranton pictures the real Iraqi geography as might be thought of from an Iraqi's perspective, imagining the way Iraqis watched the piece-by-piece fall of their country to the occupying forces with mixed feelings of relief and rage:

> They watched TV reporters in Kuwait, Qatar, and Israel put on gas masks. They watched American tanks push across their desert. They watched Iraqi soldiers surrender… ON CNN they saw generals pointing at big maps full of arrows . . . And they saw their city burning…They watched Umm Qasr fall. They watched Basra fall. They watched an-Nasiriyah fall. They watched Karbala fall. They huddled around a map, listening to the rumors on the news, trying to see how far the Americans had come (217-219).

As Baudrillard argues in his *The Gulf War did not Take Place*, Iraqis here are objects of killing but also spectators to their trauma. This portrayal of Iraqi space as it is being taken piece by piece and what that signifies for Iraqis, whom the author imagines returning the gaze from below is empowering to a certain extent. In addition to portraying the Iraqi other in a positive, empathic way, Scranton portrays the way an Iraqi imagines his American Others: Watching aI-Jazeera reporting of nine B-52 airplanes that have left their airfield in Britain flying their first missions to attack Iraq, Othman, Qasim's cousin, imagines the pilots of the Bombers,

> flying those enormous silver machines: they'd wear shiny helmets and black masks, like insec- toid machine-men, but inside they'd be pale and blonde and say things like "Roger" and "I need a vector on that approach." Othman lit a Miami and pictured their green flight suits with all those pockets, and how they'd call their wives and girlfriends before the mission. Some of them must have English girlfriends, he supposed, and others would have American wives who would hate the English girls…Then they'd put on their helmets and masks and fly over the English Channel and Paris and the Alps and Bosnia and Turkey and push buttons on their control panels and hundreds of bombs would fall from their machines onto his city. The earth would shake, buildings crumble, men die engulfed in storms of white-hot metal, children and women screaming, blood bubbling on blistering lips, and the pilots would high-five, saying, "How you like them apples?" (205-206).

The American others, removed by technology and the fear of their might are intimately imagined as people having wives, girlfriends and leading complex social and emotional lives. But they are still perpetrators sending hellfires to those on the ground. Unlike other narratives that objectify the other who is distanced by the advanced war technology (Pettegrew 49), this novel emphatically states that there are people with lives, emotions, dreams, and stories at the other end of the war divide, that the other is not abstract. It is a form of reversing the vertical colonial gaze of the perpetrating pilot in narratives that erase the Iraqi Other (an example of which can be seen in formal portrayals of war from an American bombardier's viewpoint discussed in my reading of *Operation Homecoming* above). This reversal of what Mbembe calls "vertical sovereignty"

(28) gives agency to the victims, the objects of that violence. To the more critical question of whether this is a real agency, one can only speculate that it is the best that literature can provide.

Kachach's *The American Granddaughter* and Scranton's *War Porn* represent the Other of the Iraq War story intimately beyond the restrictions of nationalism or cultural differences that build on a culture of othering. Similar to Kachachi's Arlington Cemetery scene that imagines the American traumatized mothers as empathetic to the traumas and losses of Iraqi mothers, Scranton portrays these Iraqis gazing at their American counterparts with intimate understanding. Subverting the conception of trauma heroism that dominates much of American Iraq War literature, the two novels present multi-perspectival trauma narratives that undertake the meaning-making of the war trauma, reversing the fetishizing rhetoric of the trauma hero myth. In Kachachi's novel the self-other binary is a construction of dated ideologies. Zeina's assimilated identity combines both Iraqi and American affiliations. In Scranton's *War Porn*, the other is not identical with the self, but imagining their trauma is not only possible but a matter of necessity. Qasim's narrative provides a counternarrative to the mainstream American story of the war—a reversal of the colonial gaze. Imagining the trauma of the other bridges the cultural gap that war and war culture perpetuate. The two novels succeed in moving the discourse of the Iraq War fiction a step forward by incorporating the perspective of the other. They start the necessary cultural conversation among equals, among the mothers of the killed soldiers in the Arlington National Cemetery, the bystander citizens in Utah and the prisons of Baghdad and other cities of Iraq.

Notes

1. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* won the International Prize of Arabic Novel or the "Arabic Booker Prize" in 2014 and was shortlisted to the International Man Booker Prize for 2018. The book was translated for more than twenty-five languages and was among the bestsellers in English for the year 2018. Hasan Blasim (1973) is an Iraqi writer, poet and filmmaker who has left Iraq in the 1990s, illegally crossing the borders to Iran, Turkey and several other countries until he reaches his current home country of Finland.
2. A stampede incident that took place on August 31, 2005 on al-A'immah bridge, which crosses the Tigris river in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad connecting al-A'adhamiya (a mostly Sunni-populated neighborhood to the mostly-Shiite al-Kadhimiyah. 953 people died in the incident. See: Robert Worth et. al.'s coverage of the incident for the New York Times.
3. The term al-Attagha was popularized in public culture, among other things, in comic TV shows such as Muhanad Abu Khamra's *Juma'a al-Attagh*, Etana Productions Al-Sharqiyah TV, 2011 for instance.
4. The story appears in the Arabic version of the book, *Ma'radh Al Juthath*. (Milano: Almutawassit, 2015). Pp. 21-27. It is not translated in the Penguin edition of the *Corpse Exhibition*; however, it appears in English in Blasim's other book *The Madman of Freedom Square*. (Manchester: Comma Press, 2009). Pp. 69-75.
5. For more discussion of the Interpreter in post-2003 Iraqi war writing. See: Abdul Karim Al-Sadi's important comparison of the role of interpreters in *the American Granddaughter* and *the Green Zone.*

6. For a detailed, engaged reading of the “Babylon” sections” in the novel, I refer readers to an informed reading of the texts in comparison to Walt Whitman’s free verse and more importantly to Dos Passos’ *Camera Eye* sections of his U.S.A. Trilogy. See Olivia R. Clark. *Novel Perspectives of the Iraq War*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019. p. 86.

7. According to Jacque Lacan, castration is a “symbolic lack of an imaginary object; castration does not bear on the penis as a real organ, but on the imaginary PHALLUS.” See: Dylan Evans. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). P. 23. See also: Anna Migliozzi. "Castration and Conformity," where she defines castration anxiety as “a state of mind in which individuals, women as well as men, must battle throughout the course of their lives against limitations and, hence, so-called safe pleasures (security, reproduction, family, etc.) brought about through the constraints imposed on them by civilization” (23).

Conclusion

To conclude this study is also to write a conclusion to a chapter of my life, a five-year journey that taught me a lot about myself, my country, and the country where I conducted this research project. However, the American chapter in my life did not start in 2014 when I first arrived in the United States to earn a Ph.D. Twenty-eight years ago, the United States waged war on my country to liberate Kuwait, a country that I had never heard of at the time—nor had I heard of the United States, for that matter. I was six years old then, but I knew war. Iraqis had been at war from before I was born. I can barely remember the 1991 war. However, I do remember the popular revolt that erupted after the defeat of Saddam's forces in Kuwait. I remember the excitement on people's faces, and then their fear and disappointment. Later I learned that this disappointment was because the United States had approved Saddam's use of helicopters in the no-fly zones to crush the grassroots revolt. I remember my uncle who was taken by the Ba'athists after the failure of that uprising, who never came back. I remember the economic sanctions of the 1990s that maimed my childhood. More vividly, I recall the 2003 war. I was nineteen when I saw an American soldier near my home for the first time—I had seen their military helicopters and airplanes before, but not an actual American. I had the mixed feelings that I believe most Iraqis had at the time—hope about toppling a dictatorial regime, but trepidation that it was being done by a foreign army. At the time, we did not think ending despotism would also mean destroying the entire country and its institutions. If I would add one more personal thing to this personal narrative, it would be the disappearance of my other uncle in 2014—a few months after I arrived to the United States—in a continuous phase of the war that U.S. president George W. Bush started sixteen years ago.

Sixteen years is the distance I measure between my naïve youth years when I had high hopes and expectations about the future that the 2003 war had promised to deliver, but failed—and what I now consider my experienced, critical views that I try to communicate in this dissertation. Here, again, the political is entwined with the personal. This personal narrative of loss is nothing compared to the losses of millions of Iraqis and other victims of the constant state of war that Iraq and the region has been in for the last three decades. On the contrary, I feel privileged and responsible to enter into an intellectual conversation about the meaning of the war on my country that many of my generation have not survived. The personal narrative here is, I feel, a component of the views and the claims I articulate in this dissertation. It is a reflection on what a state of constant war on the home ground of a country can deliver to its citizens, politicizing their lives by necessity.

In my short time in the United States, I find the opposite. It is very rare that people here combine political conversations with personal affairs. Studying the history of the trauma narrative myth and other ideological constructs in this country, I can relate what I study in this dissertation to what I find in real life. Individualism as ideologically constructed encourages a disinterest in politics and public affairs. This is a grave limitation of life in an actively democratic and free country. The opportunity to engage political awareness in everyday life is a privilege that many countries aspire to have but is quite under-used in this country. In Iraq, the difficulty of disentangling the personal from the political is a structural characteristic of war—a public, collective enterprise that uses individuals to achieve political goals. It is not necessarily a marker of more engaged citizenry than that of the United State but a natural reaction to the omnipresence of political impact on everyday life. Incorporating political awareness of structural matters such as wars that are being fought in the name of Iraqi and American people is a first step if we want to overcome the dominant discourses of these wars or to aspire for peace.

Although it has become a cliché to say that winning war is easier than winning peace, I believe that war cannot deliver its promises, that it does not and cannot create or maintain peace. Hence the need to continuously deconstruct its constituent ideologies and narrative myths.

Today, in 2019, Iraq is still a crumbling state struggling to meet basic human needs for its citizens. Sixteen years and the world is not safer as the war rhetoric promised Americans that it would be. In a stroke of irony where the political and the individual converge again, it took sixteen years for the country that the 2003 war destroyed to start showing signs of healing from collective traumas as I conclude this study. The peaceful demonstrations going on in Iraq right now, what the youth in my country prefer to call "the October revolution," oppose the corrupt ethno-sectarian political regime that the American occupation established after 2003. If this peaceful uprising succeeds, a new chapter in the history of Iraq will be written. With a little wishful thinking framing my view, I would like to consider October 2019 as the date the 2003 Iraq War finally ended for Iraqis. The peaceful path that people are choosing now is a sign that the country is learning the lessons of war, healing the traumas, and moving forward. The literary narratives that I study here play a role in raising this awareness. Some Iraqi writers whose texts I study here have become public intellectuals articulating the people's aspirations for peace and prosperity. Their books are distributed in the public squares of Iraqi cities. Their contribution to the process of meaning-making is essential in understanding the past and moving forward.

By understanding war's rhetoric, myths, and stereotypes, human beings can grow intercultural understanding that can create and maintain peace. My dissertation examines one specific aspect of this recent past: Arabic and English literary narrative representations of the Iraq War in Iraq and the United States. This dissertation is my personal intervention into the intellectual conversation about war literature in general and the literature of the Iraq War in

particular. I started the study with a premise that American and Iraqi war writing of the 2003 Iraq War build narrative patterns either so individualistic that they forego the structural ramifications of war experiences or, oppositely, so collective in emphasis that they privilege collective wounds over individual pain.

In the first chapter, I introduce my review of the critical and academic literature of war in general and the Iraq War in particular. When I first started the project, the subject of the Iraq War had just started to gain serious academic and critical attention. At the time, in part due to cultural and linguistic limitations, there had been little cross-cultural examination of the literature of the Iraq War that examine both Iraqi and American writing. Since then, more studies have emerged analyzing literary representations of the Iraq War in one aspect or another. To this rising academic subfield, I hope that this dissertation can make some useful contribution.

In my second chapter, I provide historical and genre contextualization to the patterns of narrating the nation at war in Iraq and narrating the traumatized self in the United States. I maintain a balance between being comprehensive and being attentive to narrative detail in readings texts that create the traditions with which Iraq War writing converse. I admit a structural imbalance in that chapter comparing two centuries of American war writing to the eighty-year counterpart of the comparatively smaller modern Iraqi state, an imbalance that I compensate by comparatively tracking common narrative patterns and discursive/ideological constructions.

My third chapter starts the real conversation between American and Iraqi texts about the war of 2003. I follow the trauma narrative patterns in texts that approach war as a cultural trauma or a response to one collectively traumatic event. In this chapter, I study narratives that best exemplify mainstream literary representations of the war narrative. These narratives invest

in a process of cultural trauma creation, trying to construct meanings for the two catastrophic events, the attacks of September 11 in the United States and the Iraq War of 2003.

Chapter four provides closure to the narratives of national allegory and mythologies of the traumatized hero. I study texts that redefine the Iraqi nation beyond hegemonic ideological constructions of etatist nationalism of the past, texts that redefine identity and the relation to the other. I study texts that deconstruct the American trauma hero narrative or reclaim the narrative of who that hero is.

Throughout these chapters, I raise questions about the traumatized hero narrative, the national-allegorical significations of the texts, the representations of the other in the war story, and the role of the individual in relation to the collective structures of war. I examine the role of interpreters as cultural ambassadors that the war turns into bare lives, as well as the narrative function and significance of space and the way it is transformed or abstracted by war. I analyze gender constructions in war experiences, and the technical aspects of writing in communicating the meaning(s) and/or the ideological constructions.

Writing about war writing is troubling as you find yourself picking sides and defending tropes and ideological attitudes. It is an intellectual battle over the process of meaning-making that war writing undertakes, a battle over framing and deciding which intellectual frame better suits this or that narrative. This study, which frames the war story undertaken by several distinguished and less known writers, is an attempt to move the conversation forward. The comprehensive scope of the study has its limitations. The selection of texts generally depends on the existence of the examined patterns and narrative tropes. The analysis I undertake here cannot redeem the losses of war but perhaps it can show us how to help those who have survived.

Understanding this literature, its driving discourses and the complex human experiences it communicates widens our perspectives of the word.

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