CULTURAL TRAUMA AND THE QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY: A STUDY OF OSAMA ALOMAR'S *THE TEETH OF THE COMB AND OTHER STORIES*

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Cultural Trauma and the Question of Sovereignty: A Study of Osama Alomar's** ***The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Cultural Trauma and the Question of Sovereignty: A Study of Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*

This research attempts to study the representation of necropolitics and cultural trauma experienced by Syrian civilian characters in the flash fiction collections written by Osama Alomar, a Syrian refugee author. The selected collections of flash fiction include *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2017). The satirical, metaphorical, and allegorical narratives presented in both collections have been interpreted to analyze the implications of wide-scale violence, unrest, and instability in Syria in the wake of the Syrian civil war. This research is guided by two theoretical perspectives, including Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma. Both theories are triangulated to show the working of Syrian necropowers in the selected collections; how they exert their sovereignty over Syrian civilians to strengthen their rule over Syria and subdue opposition, which, in turn, leads to cultural trauma at a collective level. The analysis of cultural trauma experienced by Syrian civilian characters is carried out through the exploration of their disrupted collective identity, the breakdown of collective consciousness, the collapse of the broader social fabric of Syria, and the extensive displacement of civilian characters. This research is qualitative in nature and Catherine Belsey's textual analysis method seems to be the most suitable method to unpack the allegorical narratives full of satire and metaphors. This method is helpful for examining the ramifications of necropolitics and cultural trauma caused by the Syrian civil war on the cultural, social, and political fabric of Syrian society. This research also contributes to the ongoing discussions on necropolitics as a theoretical perspective by making an intervention in Achille Mbembe's exploration of necropolitics. By drawing attention to the importance of resistance strategies that are adopted by any oppressed factions of society, which I term as 'the pursuit of a 'justified resistive autonomy' that is exhibited by the Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections, my research adds to the discussions of necropolitics.

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DEDICATION

To my supportive husband, Zeeshan

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research studies the flash fiction collections of the Syrian refugee author, Osama Alomar. This research selected two collections of flash fiction including *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories (2017)* serving as a primary text and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) as a supplementary text. To carry out the analysis of the selected collections, two theories have been adopted, including the theory of cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander and the concept of necropolitics put forth by Achille Mbembe. Each of these theories have been employed in a separate chapter of analysis to analyze how the selected collections of flash fiction represent the situation and implications of the Syrian civil war. Using Catherine Belsey's textual analysis method, this research attempts to study Osama Alomar's fictional representation of how Syrian civil war affects the Syrian civilian characters. Moreover, this research draws multiple textual examples from the selected collections, focusing particularly on the allegorical aspects, metaphors, satirical remarks, and verbal exchanges taking place among personified objects.

To begin with, the present research explores how the selected collections identify the perpetrators and victims of cultural trauma in the context of Syrian civil war. It further seeks to analyze the way Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections navigate their cultural trauma resulting from the civil war. Employing the theory of cultural trauma, this study seeks to analyze how Syrian civilian characters process their cultural trauma and deal with its aftermaths. To carry this out, the present research begins with analyzing how the selected collections of flash fiction portray the condition and response of the Syrian civilian characters towards the aggravating situation of their country in the wake of Syrian civil war. Constantly facing chaos, instability and violence, these characters seem to have been caught with a predicament of identity crisis. Therefore, this research attempts to identify and analyze the factors that lead to the identity crisis that Syrian characters seem to experience on a collective level. Focusing on singular events taking place in the Syrian civil war as portrayed in the selected collections of flash fiction, this research aims to unravel what leads to the disruption of a collective Syrian identity for civilian characters, starting with the loss

of trust in social institutions and the disruption of shared meanings. This will help to examine the long-term damage caused to the collective Syrian identity in the aftermath of the cultural trauma brought about by the Syrian civil war.

Furthermore, this research studies the selected collections to examine the rise of necropolitics in Syria in the wake of Syrian civil war. In multiple flash fiction stories in the selected collections, the ruling regime of Syria is portrayed as a necropower that seems to exercise unchecked sovereignty over the mortality of Syrian civilian characters. In simpler terms, the Syrian regime seems to enjoy the power of governing the civilians' fate, deciding who lives and who dies. The present research analyzes a number of flash fiction stories from the selected collections that portray scenes of state-sanctioned executions and deliberate on the ethics of deploying chemical and mechanical weapons against civilians. Besides exploring the role of the Syrian regime in regulating death, this study examines necropolitical practices of the Syrian regime in the selected collections that subject civilian characters to violence, prolonged starvation, homelessness and human rights abuses. It will help to lay bare the harsh conditions of living that seem to gradually push the civilian characters to death, albeit a slow death. Moreover, an analytical approach towards the study of these collections will help this research to explore how the necropolitical Syrian regime in the selected collections justifies the killing of the target civilian population. In this way, this research will examine the episodes of the wide-scale violence and executions that civilian characters are subjected to in the selected collection.

Overall, this research aims to analyze *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* to analyze how these collections of flash fiction produced by a Syrian refugee author, Osama Alomar, engage with the impacts of the Syrian civil war. Beginning with the premises that flash fiction, as a popular Arabic literary genre, represents the suffering of the Syrian civilians in a brief yet thought-provoking manner, this research makes use of the theory of cultural trauma and the concept of necropolitics to examine the civilian characters' vulnerability to the state-sanctioned abuse and aggression against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war.

1.1 The Socio-Political Background of Syria

The Syrian land has become a battlefield for all the global powers. Syria, which once was a hub of trade, agriculture, and commerce is now in ruins. Syria's condition

has deteriorated because of civil war that took place following the Arab Spring of 2011. Syria became a hub of terrorism, a land that previously was a nurturer of civilization. Robbin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami have described the past glory of Syria in their book *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* by calling Syria a land of "the first agricultural revolution" and the place of excavation of "the world's first alphabet" (1). Syria, being "a land of invasions" (Kassab and Al-Shami2) was very diverse and open to immigrants but in 2011 tables were turned in the Arab world due to (supposedly a pro-democratic) Arab Spring and the scenario got changedin Syria too.

Due to Syrian civil war, Syrian land and people saw the worst happening in front of them. "Entire cities were flattened. Hospitals were bombed and ancient sites were blown up. Thirteen million people were forced to leave their homes" (Sandra Gathmann 0:15-0:28). This war made it impossible to count the casualties which is suggestive of the fact that the level of humanitarian suffering in Syria is beyond imagination. Even ten years after the conflict had started, Syrians find themselves in the midst of chaos. It seems like a war without an end. Nowadays, people might think the war is over, or that now the sitting government has won but, it is the other way round. In recent times, cities and railways are being rebuilt. However,the reality is that most of Syria is still in ruins even after the violence has diminished.

In March 2011, pro-democracy protests started in Syria after being inspired from Arab spring in neighboring countries like Tunisia and Egypt. Arab spring was a series of protests against repressive rulers in these Arab countries which paved way for the Syrian spring. Arab spring was successful as leaders were overthrown, but in Syria, the government responded with force, as a consequence of which a countrywide uprising started. The ruling government's forty years rule was threatened by protests that spread from the southern city of Dera to Damascus, Hama, Homs, Latakia, and other cities. The protest movement was seismic. It shook the regime to its foundation. The regime had been in power for more than forty years, but pro-democratic people wanted to get rid of corrupt and repressive regime. Initially, the war started as a civil war in which government forces fought with Syrian opposition "that included people who were defected from the military and opponents" who stood against tyranny of government (Sandra Gathmann 03:20). However, it was not all.

As the civil war gained momentum, other external powers jumped in this war for their vested interests. These powers included the US, Turkey, UK, Qatar, Saudi

Arabia and others that sided with the Syrian rebellious (revolutionary) groups from the beginning. On one hand, "an inconsistent and uncoordinated supply of mainly light weaponry" was provided by "Saudi Arabia and Qatar," on the other hand, the government was "generously armed and funded by Russia and Iran" (Kassab and Al-Shami 86,106). There were other enemies common to them all like ISIS, Al Nusra front and other groups who took advantage of the chaos in order to be in control. Then Syrian Kurdish fighters got involved who joined up with the Arab militias to push ISIS out and make their own territorial claim. Another group the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] considered "the Turkish state [as] its primary enemy" (Kassab and Al-Shami 232), as Turkey did not want them to be in control of southern borders, which led to a war between Turkey and Syrian Kurds. Syrian land, therefore, has been a battlefield cluttered with internal and external powers.

Common population of Syria has suffered the most as common masses who were not directly involved in this war faced indescribable war crimes. In this heinous war, innocent civilians, especially children and women were attacked with the chemical weapons which is one of the worst war crimes. They were blockaded, starved, and detained, mainly by government forces. During the peak of wartime, situation was worst in every aspect but the major setback that the whole Syrian nation faced even after the war was worst economic crisis. Global powers wanted their monopoly over Syria because of which innocent people died of hunger, chemical weapons, and bombing. According to a report by Al Jazeera news channel, as of 2021 "nearly 90 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line" (Sandra Gathmann 4:56). Syrian currency is devalued which has worsened the crisis. There are shortages of fuel, food, and electricity. Nowadays, the government controls about two-thirds of the country, but they are still fighting for the parts of the north where all sorts of groups are ravaging.

Some Syrian Kurdish dissidents in the south of Turkish borders in Idlib want the Turkish Kurds in southern Turkey to join their war to make their own realm of Kurdistan. Turkey naturally wants to safeguard its borders and maintain its control. Therefore, Idlib, the last opposition stronghold is a very complicated place, as Syrian rebels are mixed in with many groups that are considered terrorists. Millions of refugees are living there in camps. The level of humanitarian suffering is just beyond imagination in Syria. American forces are in some areas mainly protecting oil fields. There are other groups including militias backed by Iran like Hizbullah. As Kassab and Al-Shami write:

"The entry of Lebanon's Hizbullah and other Iranian-backed militias gave the conflict a Sunni–Shia flavour and fitted it into a regional struggle which had flared since the American occupation of Iraq" (112). The rise of Islamists deepened the sectarian rift, which, in turn, intensified the situation of hostilities.

Syrian war has become a living nightmare for the people of Syria. Half of Syrian population is living in refugee camps fighting the war for their survival. More than six million people are internally displaced and 5.5 million are living outside Syria (Sandra Gathmann 7:39-7:42). Over the course of war, there have been a number of peace initiatives which have failed as "[i]n June 2012, an 'Action Group' conference in Geneva brought… both regime and opposition figures and prepared for a conference in which the two sides would talk directly… [which] was of course no more than a symbolic step" (Kassab and Al-Shami 189). Meanwhile all those external powers are still using Syria to settle their scores with one another. Until global powers outside Syria do not stop confronting each other directly using Syrian ground, there can be no actual end to the Syrian conflict. The war is apparently over, but it has come at an enormous cost. Syria is still a place of continual attacks and skirmishes.

In the backdrop of the Syrian civil war, the selected collections of flash fiction by Osama Alomar stand as a typical example of flash fiction coming from a war-torn place like Syria. The following section explains some of the salient features of this genre before moving on to further discussion about the text.

1.2 Flash Fiction as a Literary Genre

To examine flash fiction as a narrative style, a research paper "Towards A Poetics of Narrative Brevity: Short Story, Microfiction, Flash Fiction" (2021) explores the origin of brief storytelling. Analyzing different genres of brief stories, this paper consults Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1841). It takes Poe's arguments about the appropriate length of a story as the basis for arguments that privilege flash fiction stories over lengthy stories as told in novels, plays, and epics. Reiterating Poe's viewpoints presented in his essay, this research paper views stories with a short length as a literary genre to have the potential of leaving a stronger impression on readers in comparison to longer stories that are read in multiple sittings with the usual interruption of routine matters (Kiosses 10). Kiosses believes that distractions, "weariness or interruption" encountered while reading a literary text can

disrupt the reading experience for literature enthusiasts (10). Hence, shorter narratives facilitate the reading experience without diminishing the impact that literature leaves on readers' minds.

Moreover, this research paper identifies flash fiction as a "literary subgenre" and argues that writing and consuming brief stories such as flash fiction narratives help to promote "narrative minimalism" in the field of literature (Kiosses 11). Narrative minimalism is a complex subject and a thorough explanation is required to make sense of it. The paper describes narrative minimalism as a literary approach that is characterized by the absence of "specifics of the setting", character development, and "structured narrative progression" (13). It is also noted that a flash fiction story depicts a "single action" or incident with an "abrupt beginning and ending" (13). Also, a flash fiction story can appear as a "fragment" that is "sometimes incomplete yet illuminating" (13-14). This indicates that a flash fiction story can provide readers with a profound literary experience without making use of traditional story-building devices.

An equally thorough investigation of the flash fiction genre is carried out by another research paper entitled "Flash Fiction: A Unique Writer-Reader Partnership" (2015). In this paper, it is proposed that stories limited to one or more sentences or a word count of 50-1000 words are classified as flash fiction (Al-Sharqi and Abbasi 53-54). Moreover, it is noted that flash fiction authors tend to withhold details about "characters, events, scenes" (53). Since the flash fiction literary genre breaks free from these literary formalities, it is important to explore what defines the style of flash fiction stories. According to this research paper, the indispensable feature of flash fiction narratives is "an element of surprise" by the end of a story or, in simpler words, an unpredictable ending (54). This intensifies the reading experience as well as the impression that flash fiction stories leave on readers. Moreover, this paper also notes that flash fiction stories are often found to be "satirical", "ironic", "philosophical", "thought-provoking," and "clever" with regard to the content and literary style (53). Moreover, themes staple to flash fiction stories are "global problems", "interpersonal disputes", "death", "dystopia" and "racism" (53). However, there can be found variations in the style, themes, and content of flash fiction stories.

"The Remarkable Reinvention of Very Short Fiction" (2012) is another research article that explores the origin and development of flash fiction as a popular narrative form. This paper accredits the rapid technological advancement with the popularity of

flash fiction stories. It argues that the habitual activity of "surfing the internet" has reduced the attention span of people (Shapard 46). Observing this change, "television and internet" sought to adapt to reduced attention spans, however, literary authors and publishers put little effort to keep up with the fleeting concentration of readers (46). Therefore, the origin of the flash fiction genre can be traced back to the gradual experimentation of authors to catch up with the fast-paced world. This is the reason behind the popularity of the flash fiction genre. Hence, the 20th century witnessed the "renaissance of very short fiction" (47). This indicates that flash fiction is a reader-friendly genre that aligns with modern reading stamina.

However, it is also argued that flash fiction has its origin in the Arab world as an allegorical literary form that dates back more than a millennium. It can be defined as "any literary text, including an act that is described or introduced in a very ironic, striking and brief narrative style" (Al-Mutairi 33). Arabic flash fiction is also defined as "a special narrative genre that is remarkably labelled by boldness, unity, intensification, irony, surprise, use of verb sentence(s), use of personification, symbolism, gesture, allusion and delusion" (Al-Nakhlani 4). These aspects characterize the selected collections of flash fiction by Osama Alomar.

In accessible prose, Alomar's very short stories depict the bitter pain of exile that the writer felt and decided to speak his heart out. In these slim but dense collections of short stories, everything communicates whether it is animate or inanimate, which is a satire on humanity that is proud of being at the peak of civilization. Animals, natural things, and man-made things have been personified in the text to discuss political and philosophical issues because it is often observed that "literature under restrictive regimes tends to develop a flair for allegory, confessing in code" (Lababidi 95-96). As the text is richly loaded with symbolism and satire, verging onto even absurdity, Alomar's wisdom tales describe the plight of oppressed masses who are being crushed under oppressive regimes.

1.2.1 *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) as a Primary Text

The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories is a collection of flash fiction selected as a primary text for this research. It is a Middle Eastern genre that includes very short stories and is commonly known as "qissa qasira" in the Middle Eastern world; however, the similar style followed in the Western world by the Middle Eastern refugee and

migrant authors is called flash fiction (Rao n.p.). There are more than a hundred and a half pieces of flash fiction stories in this collection, and the narrative design of each story is different from another, with some being very brief stories comprised of a few clauses to longer stories covering the space of a few pages.

Metaphor is a widely used literary device in this collection. Multiple objects are represented to convey deeply philosophical meanings embedded in nature and man-made items. For example, the cage in the story "When the Sparrow Was Imprisoned" represents the loss of freedom, the elevator in "Descender!" symbolizes social mobility and pride, the feather in "The Feather and the Wind" personifies vulnerability, and in "Purity," the lake symbolizes purity, peace, and nourishment.

Moreover, the use of personification is also observed in this collection of flash fiction. In multiple stories, animals and birds are personified. These creatures lament over the condition of mankind, reflecting on why human beings are caught in violent conflicts. For example, in the story "Nests", a personified bird happens to see a homeless man sleeping by the roadside. This leads the bird to think about what is wrong with humans and that they are the only species that can be homeless, while other species have the ability to build or find shelter. This is one of the many examples of the use of personification in this collection. Besides personification, the extensive use of metaphor and satire helps this collection of flash fiction to include a wide range of philosophical and sociopolitical reflections regarding peace, war, resilience, and conflict. Interestingly, these constructs seem to be particularly related to the context of the Syrian civil war.

It is important to note that the selected primary collection does not make any direct references to Syria. However, besides the Syrian origin of the refugee author Osama Alomar, there are multiple references to civil war, refugees, destructions, and human rights abuses committed against civilians that solidify the assumption that the selected primary collection of flash fiction is an attempt to represent the destruction, chaos and suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. To support this argument, the critic Robyn Creswell remarks, "Alomar's stories can't be anything else but Syrian" (qtd. in Beis 33). Therefore, grasping a myriad of meanings embedded in this collection of flash fiction necessitates readers to be cognizant with the historical and sociopolitical context of Syria.

In short, entailing the themes of "war," "oppression" and "violence", this collection is a part of a growing body of non-western literature widely popular in the Western world (Lababidi n.p.). The flash fiction stories in the selected primary collection are thought-provoking fictional narratives that aim to foster new understandings about the prevalent issues in present-day Syria.

1.2.2 *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) as a Supplementary Text

Osama Alomar's first collection of flash fiction entitled *Fullblood Arabian* is selected as a supplementary text for this research. Examples from this collection will be used to substantiate the arguments proposed in this research. This collection is also replete with the use of literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, allegory, and satire. Placed in the flash fiction genre, this collection is comprised of very brief narratives about life, conflict, peace, and war. The reason why this collection is being used as a secondary text in this research is that it is not much different from Alomar's latest collection of flash fiction *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* so it will only be used to show that Alomar's literary works consistently engage with the themes of trauma, identity, violence, death, and necropolitics.

1.3 Theoretical Foundation

In order to analyze the selected collections of flash fiction, the concept of necropolitics (2003, 2019) is triangulated with the theory of cultural trauma by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) to identify the ways in which the Syrian civil war and political unrest have led to traumatizing events.

Making use of Alexander's cultural trauma theory, this research endeavors to depict the trauma of Syrians as a "meaning making" process through the narrations of the text. These narrations help navigate through a "meaning making" (Alexander 11) process that helps in formulating the collective identity of societal groups (Collins 105-109). Through the selected collections of flash fiction, Alomar seems to form the collective identity of Syrians by reenacting trauma through the act of narration. While the phrase, 'the act of narration' signifies the process of creating new trauma narratives on social suffering that may trigger the fabric of social repairs (Alexander 14). Alexander believes that it is not the historical event, for instance, the Holocaust that creates trauma; rather, it is the meaning making of that event that shapes the reality of trauma (Hanif and Ullah 3). Therefore, appropriating this theory in the context of Syria,

this research evaluates the meaning making process of cultural trauma caused due to the Syrian civil war.

Along with cultural trauma theory, the concept of necropolitics may be seen as dominantly seen in the warp and weft of the selected micro-fictional text. The necropolitical lens helps to identify the cause of trauma. This lens shows the working of perpetrators of violence, who, to gain power and dominion, take control of other people's lives to the extent of killing them, and forcing them to live in extreme conditions of poverty.

The aforementioned theories have been triangulated to understand the working of necropowers that have traumatized Syrians for more than eleven years. The combination of both theories reveals how Syrians are living in a continuous state of trauma that is the consequence of the working of necropowers.

1.4 Thesis Statement

Osama Alomar's selected collections of flash fiction show that necropowers exercise unrestrained sovereignty over Syria, thereby causing civilians' cultural trauma and prompting a reconfiguration of identity in the wake of growing political unrest and social chaos within the country.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do Osama Alomar's selected collections of flash fiction represent the cultural trauma of his home country?

2. How does Alomar use satire as a tool in the selected collections of flash fiction to highlight the absurdity of war as a working of necropolitics?

3. How do the selected narratives depict cultural trauma as a meaning making process in constructing new identities in war-torn Syria?

1.6 Research Objectives

1. To understand how trauma affects the human psyche at a collective level

2. To analyze the psychological impact of the Syrian civil war

3. To highlight the role of necropowers as represented in the selected collections of flash fiction

1.7 Significance and Rationale of the Research

The present research has selected primary literary texts from the flash fiction genre because of the growing popularity of this "new" genre in the English literature canon (Shapard 47-48). Since the burgeoning use of electronic gadgets has reduced attention span, readers find the 'very short stories' in flash fiction more adaptable to the contemporary reading trends. Despite being conveniently brief, flash fiction does not compromise the gravity and depth of the stories being narrated. Therefore, the present research has made use of the reading convenience and growing popularity of the flash fiction genre by selecting Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction.

The current research aims to trace cultural trauma and necropolitics in the selected collections of Syrian flash fiction. Cultural trauma theory is helpful in highlighting trauma perpetrated by necropowers in Syrian flash fiction. The selected collections of flash fiction portray the suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Since there is no other significant flash fiction text on the Syrian civil war describing the trauma of a nation, this research is a pioneering effort in this genre of 'Syrian Flash Fiction'. Being a Syrian refugee, Osama Alomar is better able to present the grave situation of political and social unrest in Syria through his sly moral fables. His miniature parables are full of wisdom as he has presented the terrifying and absurdly frustrating experiences of life under the tyrannical regime through the witty use of satire, irony, metaphors, and wild personification.

Moreover, analyzing this flash fiction in the light of cultural trauma theory along with the theory of necropolitics by Achille Mbembe makes this research unique as it has not been attempted so far. This study of necropolitical and traumatic reading gives voice to the freedom fighters and helpless civilians of Syria whose trauma is neglected for more than a decade. It unearths the role of necropowers whose unsolicited sovereignty over their victims has led to the tragic turn in history in the form of civil war.

1.8 Delimitation

The present research is delimited to the study of *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* by Osama Alomar for tracing the concepts of cultural trauma by Jeffrey C. Alexander, and the concept of necropolitics by Achille Mbembe. There can be other theories to analyze this flash fiction, but the selected texts call for the application of cultural trauma theory triangulated with the concept of

necropolitics.

There are several other works of Alomar in the genre of flash fiction in Arabic and English which include *O Man* and *Tongue Tie* etc. which are not taken for this research because the selected texts are Alomar's only flash fiction on Syrian civil war. Therefore, the study is limited to the investigation of Alomar's only flash fiction collections related to Syrian civil war, including *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian.*

1.9 Chapter Breakdown

The organization of the present research is given below.

1.9.1 Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter introduces what the present research is about. It begins with introducing the selected collections of flash fiction and adopted theories. It lays the foundation for the composition of a focused thesis statement that clearly describes the argument of the research. Besides, this chapter includes research questions, objectives, significance and delimitation of the present research.

1.9.2 Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter reviews multiple research papers, articles and theses that are relevant to the topic of the present research. For this purpose, previously published research works in the domain of cultural trauma, necropolitics and the relevant Syrian literature, especially the selected collected collections of flash fiction are reviewed. This chapter also attempts to identify a gap in the relevant existing studies to highlightthe significance of the present research.

1.9.3 Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter introduces the research method that is to be used for the analysis of the selected collections. It also explains the adopted theories, including the theory of cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander and the concept of necropolitics put forth by Achille Mbembe. These theories are elucidated to facilitate the composition of a comprehensive theoretical framework. Moreover, this chapter also provides a rationale for the application of these two theories to the selected collections of flash fiction.

1.9.4 Chapter IV: Necropolitics and the Syrian Struggle in Osama Alomar's Selected Collections

This chapter studies the selected collections of flash fiction from the perspective of Achille Mbembe's theorization of necropolitics. This chapter is also broken down into different sub-sections, to make the analysis clear and comprehensive.

1.9.5 Chapter V: Representation of Cultural Trauma and Shattered Identities in the Selected Flash Fiction Collections

This chapter analyzes Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* from the perspective of Jeffrey C. Alexander's cultural trauma theory. The chapter is divided into multiple sub-sections, each of them specifically focusing on a particular aspect of the theory.

1.9.6 Chapter VI: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings of the present research and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the selected collections. It addresses each research question in the light of these findings. Moreover, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to propose a theoretical intervention in Achille Mbembe's necropolitics.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature related to the current research is reviewed from three dimensions. The first and second dimensions are related to the critique of works pertinent to the theoretical perspectives that have been employed for the present study. Those perspectives are cultural trauma theory (2004) by Jeffrey C. Alexander and necropolitics (2003, 2019) by Achille Mbembe. War narratives including those representing the Syrian crisis which depict the trauma and exploitation of common masses at the hands of necropowers are explored in this part of the review of literature. The third dimension of research is related to the structural form of the selected text, which is flash fiction. The works related to the structural form of the selected text are also explored in the second dimension of the literature review. Additionally, an attempt has been made to review flash fiction works that include the theme of war.

2.1 Literature Review on Cultural Trauma

This section of the literature review is related to the research works done in the field of cultural trauma studies. It elaborates on the concept of cultural trauma and its development from Erikson in the 1970s to Alexander et al. in the 2000s for developing and understanding the concept. Also, several works of fiction like novels and anthologies that depict the trauma associated with wars in general and the Syrian war specifically have been reviewed.

Critics have analyzed the intervention of regional and global powers in the deterioration of the Syrian civil war in multiple ways. A relevant research article entitled "Beyond Sectarianism: Geopolitics, Fragmentation, and the Syrian Civil War" (2014) has been consulted to highlight this aspect. In this article, it has been argued that the Syrian civil war has evolved into a "regional proxy war" where some big powers are attempting to assert their supremacy in the Middle Eastern region (Berti and Paris 28). These powers include Russia, the USA, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, and they are doing a grave disservice to the well-being of Syrian civilians by cashing in on the Syrian civil war.

In this regional proxy war, Iran and Russia have become the main supporters of the Assad regime, while Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey have been providing support for

the Syrian groups that oppose the Assad regime (Berti and Paris 27). Both blocs have one geopolitical interest in focus i.e., to defeat their opponents at the expense of "Syrian blood" (28-29). Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Iran are also manipulating the Syrian battleground into an opportunity to defeat each other in the broader Shia Sunni conflict in the Middle East (26). Therefore, the onus of the plight of Syrian civilians can be placed on regional and global powers pursuing their rivalry on the Syrian battleground.

2.1.1 Understanding the Cultural Trauma Concept

Jeffrey C. Alexander defines trauma as a socially disruptive event affecting the members of a society under the influence of continuous tragic events which results in the dismemberment of their identities by affecting their consciousness gravely. Trauma definitions and experiences vary greatly across the developed (The Western World) and the non-developed (primarily non-Western countries), with the latter's experiences of trauma being under-represented in global media coverage. Considering, for instance, Syria which presents a glimpse of sheer destruction and plight of inhabitants of the country, yet it has gained a limited recognition in terms of acknowledgment from a wide global audience. Alexander sees trauma as a collective process which propagates itself through the collective human sufferings across various social groups, countries, and even civilizations. As this propagation of human plight and suffering gets global attention and a sense of feeling of pain, such nations put together their combined efforts to thwart the causes of trauma, so that they might not happen again across the globe. However, such is not the case in Syria, where it is in dire need of time of sensing the misery and agony of Syrian people through socially constructing the traumatic experiences of Syrian inhabitants so that the globalized world must pay heed to the suffering of people through addressing theircollective traumatic responses and work together to end the plight of Syrian people.

2.1.2 Individual Trauma vs. Collective Trauma

According to an American legal scholar, Angela Onwuachi-Willig, a layman's interpretation of trauma is confined only to merely individual psychological phenomena like, post-traumatic stress disorder. Similarly, the evolution of trauma as described by Woods dates back to the Seventeenth century when the word trauma was associated with physical injury which is mentioned in the article "Cultural Trauma: Ron Eyerman and the Founding of a New Research Paradigm" (2019). However, in the nineteenth century, the concept of trauma was expanded, and its narrative encompassed a broader spectrum

of injury within the psychological confines of human beings. Likewise, the roots of trauma further expanded to other domains of social sciences, such as the sociological perspective of trauma indicating distress or injury at the heart of a social community (Woods, 261). The views of Woods were expounded by various other sociologists such as Ron Eyerman and Professor Kai T Erikson who extended the concept of trauma to the social sphere of the human mind, asserting that trauma is not only confined to the physical injury (Onwuachi-Wiilig "The Trauma of Awakening" 8).

Kai Theodor Erikson was the first sociologist to analyze the disastrous effects of trauma collectively on the inhabitants of society. Through his scholarly writings in "*Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (1978) book*, he conceptualized contrasts between individual and collective trauma. In his view, individual trauma is a blow to one's psychological defenses in such an impulsive and atrocious manner, that one feels defenseless against its brutality. Similarly, collective trauma is a blow to the collective societal norms and patterns in such a way that the social connection and bonding among individuals of a society is shattered and communal bonds are broken (Erikson *Everything* 153-154). In his book, Erikson analyzed the grave effects of Buffalo Creek Flood on the inhabitants of West Virginia and explained about the severe effects of the tragic incident on the lives of people. Furthermore, the same concept of collective trauma is explained in the "Notes on Trauma and Community" by Erikson, who argues that the nature of a community is similar to that of a human body and sometimes the organs of a community can be devastated in the same way as the destruction of tissues and the organs of a human body due to trauma (Erikson "Notes" 185).

2.1.3 The Emergence of Cultural Trauma

The domain of trauma in individual or communal contexts has been expanded in cultural terms by cultural theorists. Cultural trauma is a collective phenomenon manifested across a majority of people in a particular culture. However, there is a difference between individual trauma and cultural trauma. Individual trauma is expressed in terms of a person's psychological disorder due to stressors, but cultural trauma is a collective process of disorder and distress often seen as a collective process occurring at a societal level (*Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* 2004). This book is a fundamental source of explaining cultural trauma as a collective disrupting process rather than individual psychological stress due to the brutality of grave incidents.

Cultural trauma is a collective suffering prevailing among the people of a culture through the collective sharing of agony and misery. Alexander, in his writings, suggests that trauma is a phenomenon constructed socially by the people of society rather than seeing it as a naturally existing phenomenon (Alexander "Toward" 2). He argues that the trauma process starts with a "claim" experienced and manifested by a particular group and is carried out to the audience through the jointly shared experiences of the aggrieved group. This particular "carrier group" collectively demonstrates the sufferings and social disintegration of the people and initiates a "claim" and demands compensation for their "emotional and institutional" losses (11). These sufferings of the people are expressed through "master narratives" to a wider audience, who, then, realizes the intent and sheer magnitude of the sufferings by understanding and feeling the relevance of the traumatic events (11). This general acceptance of the traumatic events by general masses results in a public sympathy for the aggrieved group of individuals and helps to form a collective consensus for thwarting the causes and happenings of traumatizing events to occur again in the global society as a whole.

The components of forming a culture are explained by Neil Smelser in his article "Psychological and Cultural Trauma" (2004). He is of the view that culture is an assimilation of "values, norms, outlooks, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and empirical assertion," associated with each other in the form of "a meaning system" (37). Smelser expounds that any harmful tendency undermining these key "ingredients of culture" or "culture as a whole" can be referred to as Cultural Trauma (38). He differentiates social trauma and cultural trauma, with the former resulting in disassociation and disintegration of social life and institutions, while the latter dismembering and threatening the collective identities of the people of a society. Similarly, Eric Taylor Woods compares and contrasts social trauma with cultural trauma and reflects social trauma as resembling "an injury to the body" and cultural trauma as an "'injury' to a social structure." (Woods 2) The disintegration or the loss of social integration due to the loss of social institutions is a direct consequence of cultural trauma related closely to psychological trauma.

The views of Alexander and Smelser differentiate in how they interpret the concepts of cultural trauma. Alexander regards cultural trauma as an attribution mediated through society, however, Smelser asserts that cultural trauma is a historically "contested process" (38), as the presence of various social groups in a society interprets

different meanings of trauma that exists within the society. These meanings of trauma draw a line between cultural trauma and psychological trauma, where cultural trauma is reflected through the representations of "social agents and contending groups", however, psychological trauma lays its manifestations in disintegrations on the lines of internal psychological defenses and other adaptability measures like "coping", and "adaptation" (Smelser 39). Hence, psychological trauma can be regarded as an individual process, however, cultural trauma is a collective chaotic process experienced by individuals of a social community and is perpetuated through social processes.

From the lens of cultural sociologists, cultural trauma occurs when chaotic and disruptive courses of events upset the basis of cultural affiliations and bonds. However, an American Legal scholar Onwuachi-Willig, proclaims that cultural trauma can also be experienced when routine harm or oppression is imposed and dispersed in individuals through public or governmental dealings. In the writings of Onwuachi-Willig, especially in "The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett till Verdict" (2016), the writer explores how the cultural trauma is experienced and perpetuated among African Americans through the biased verdict in the case of murder of a young African American boy Emmett Till. Furthermore, she expounds the narrative of cultural trauma by resting it on three distinctive features: "It should have a long history of causing continuous impairment, secondly it should grab an extensive media awareness, and thirdly, it should have a general public narrative and communication basis" Onwuachi-Willig ("The Trauma of Routing" 336). The biased and unjust decision not to punish the two White men who murdered the African American boy reaffirms the events of oppression throughout the long- withstanding history against African Americans in the first stage. Secondly, it grabbed wider media attention and was discussed by massive public audiences globally in the final stage. This caused massive unrest and socially distressing situation for African Americans resulting in constructing cultural trauma for them. Similarly, these distinctive features as explicated by Onwuachi-Willig, fulfill the narrative expounded by Jeffrey C. Alexander.

These reflections from the research studies help to understand the concept of cultural trauma as disrupting the social identities of social groups by distorting their collective identities and cultural norms. In this regard, the cultural traumas having global acceptance like Western cultural traumas such as the Holocaust and the 9/11

tragedy, and those of the non-Western world such as the Syrian crisis and Kashmir crisis for instance, represent a clear discrepancy in their projection to the outer world. The Western dilemmas are represented as terrifying and disruptive throughout the world, however, the plight of Syrian people and the trauma they face does not get much attention from the media as well as global population. The harsher repercussions of the civil war in Syria, the oppressive roles of global and regional powers, the silence of the global humanitarian regimes, and the chaos in the lives of Syrians asks for a global acceptance of the Syrian crisis as a manifestation of cultural trauma so that the disastrous impact of war creating trauma can be averted.

Syria has faced civil war and political turmoil for more than ten long years, which greatly changed the geography and economic condition of Syria. People lost control of their lives and the freedom they had before the Assad regime. In their book, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* (2017) Kassab and Al- Shami expose the complicated situation of life that people living in refugee camps. The writers have drawn testimonies from the opposition fighters and refugees who have faced the worst conditions during their exile. They have recorded statements of the human rights activists who have courageously unveiled the detesting living condition of refugees. They have exposed the regime's dictatorial rule as the writers describe the situation that "by February 2015 more than 220,000 had lost their lives, … at least 6 percent of the Syrian population had been killed or injured since 2011" (Kassab and Al-Shami 147). The massive destruction that the dictatorial regime caused is horrific.

In this book, stories of struggle have been intertwined with the with an insightful analysis of the militarization of the uprising, the rise of the Islamists and sectarian warfare, and the role of Syria's government in aggravating the brutalization of the conflict. Through these accounts and a broad range of secondary source material, the authors persuasively argue that the international community has failed in its stated commitments to support the Syrian opposition movements.

Abdul Samad Kadavan's research article entitled "Journey to Death: Fictionalizing the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*" (2021) discusses the novel *Sea Prayer* (2018) by Khaled Hosseini as a refugee narrative. The theoretical framework of this article is guided by multiple theoretical perspectives, including Maria Stehle and Beverly Weber's concept of "non-arrivals" proposed in "Touching Journeys: Precarious Intimacies and Narratives of Non-Arrival" (2020), J.D.

Kinzie's concept of refugee trauma discussed in "The Traumatic Lives of Refugees and Asylum Seekers" (2013), Claire Gallien's writings on postcolonial refugee literature published in "Refugee Literature: What Postcolonial Theory Has to Say" (2018) (Kadavan 4-6). It is important to note that Gallien's arguments about postcolonial refugee literature are inspired by David Farrier's categorization of refugees as "the new subaltern" (5). These theoretical ideas inform the arguments proposed in Kadavan's research article.

According to Kadavan, the foundation for the Syrian refugee crisis has been laid down by the wide-scale instability caused by the "9/11" tragedy, the "War on Terror" and the "Arab Spring" (2). This indicates that one needs a holistic picture of the political context of the Middle East and Europe to understand the Syrian refugee crisis. This is the reason that Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* represents the plight of "Afghanis, Iraqis, Somalis, Eritreans… Syrians" in a single narrative (9). The article discusses that these refugees, tormented by trauma and the memory of home, appear to be in pursuit of a destination they never meet. The narrative focuses on how a Syrian family is washed up dead on a shore in search for asylum. The memory of home is interpreted as a form of "protest" and support system for many refugees (8). A refugee father is seen as lamenting that his little child will eventually lose his memory of home (8). This symbolizes the importance of memory in staying resilient in the midst of overwhelming challenges faced by refugees. These challenges are predominantly political in nature, and they are manifest in the form of "politics of border control" represented in Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* (6). The very border politics is responsible for the ruthless "detention and deportation" policies of host countries in the novel (6). Sometimes, refugees are neither accepted nor expelled. This indicates the non-arrival of refugees in host countries since they are subject to similar deprivations that they faced in their conflict-ridden homes. They appear to be condemned to homelessness and starvation even after finding asylum. The present research also engages with the representation of the Syrian refugee crisis in Osama Alomar's selected collections of flash fiction, but it will focus on the process of disruption and reconfiguration of national, social, and cultural identity that Syrian refugees undergo in host countries.

Mohrem and Zuraikat's research article entitled "Baba's Death: Nour's Nostalgic Voice in Zyen Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*" (2023) examines nostalgia of an uprooted character, Nour, as a resistance tool. The article defines

nostalgia as a memory of an individual past (1207). The theoretical framework of the article is informed by Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Clay Routledge's ideas on nostalgia (Mohrem and Zuraikat 1204). This framework is further supplemented by Willis H. McCann, Xinyue Zhou, and Svetlana Boym's writings on nostalgia and its major implications (1205). The article draws on the experiences of a Syrian refugee, Nour, as portrayed in *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018). It is argued that changing weather and places spark her nostalgia. She is overwhelmed with nostalgia as the weather changes and as she visits different countries. Storms invoke Nour's nostalgia by reminding her of the violence and chaos her family witnessed while they lived in Syria (1205). In stormy weather, she terribly misses her late father and her home in Syria. Her memory of home dominates her thoughts. As she drifts through Jordan, New York, Ceuta, and Egypt, she undergoes imaginary journeys backto Syria (1206-1207). The article argues that Nour's memory of Syria enables her to sustain her "self-identity" in foreign lands (1206). This justifies nostalgia as a resistance tool in the selected novel. Overall, this research is limited to the representation of nostalgia in the lives of Syrian refugees. However, the present research takes a step ahead of nostalgia to examine how violence, death, and destruction in the wake of the Syrian civil war cause cultural trauma to Syrian civilians.

Mohammad Ihssan Zabadi's research article "Framing Post-2011 Syria in the Translation of Samar Yazbek's Bawa:ba:t ardʿadam: The Crossing My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria" (2022) examines the biased and distorted translation of Yazbek's memoir *Bawābāt arḍ alʿadam* (2014) as *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* (2015) (Zabadi 272). Mona Baker's theory of narratives is applied to the original Arabic text and its English translation to expose the intentions and motives of the translator. According to this article, the English translation of the memoir carried out by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp and Nashwa Gowanlock has been enforced by prejudiced and oriental ideology prevalent in Western countries (265). The English translation strengthens the Western perception of the Middle Eastern and Islamic world by tainting the narrative with the color of extremism (271-273). The article argues that translators have made textual additions to Yazbek's memoir to advance Western agenda of antagonizing the role of Islam in the Syrian context.

Zabadi offers multiple textual examples from the original Arabic text and its English translation to support his claim. He notes that on page no. 161 in the original

text, a member of the Sharia court tells a character that he intends to expel secular Syrians from Syria (Zabadi 273). However, the translated text on page no. 173 also adds the threat of decapitation for seculars to his words (273). This serves to portray the image of Muslims as violent and ruthless. Moreover, on page no. 16 in the Arabic text, a female character shares that she received stares from men for being the only female activist in a political rally (274). However, on page no. 19 in the translated text, the translators exaggerate the woman's words by adding that she was the only "uncovered female" found in the rally after the Syrian revolution took an Islamic turn, therefore, she received men's stares (274). Similarly, on page no. 98 in the original Arabic text, Yazbek expresses her desire to "empower women" but the English translation adds another phrase i.e., "to help resist the radicalization of society" to Yazbek's vision of empowering women (276). According to Zabadi, the translators have taken away the element of social, humanitarian, and volunteer work from Yazbek's vision by ascribing it to the Western motivation of shaping the Islamic world in their ideological paradigm (276). These examples indicate how translations can be motivated by the goal to further one's own political and national agenda and ideologies.

Overall, this research shows how original texts set against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war can be distorted by west-sponsored English translations that attempt to malign the role of Islam in the Middle East. On the other hand, the present research examines Alomar's collections of flash fiction that have been originally published in the English language so there is no issue regarding the distorted translations of the selected collections.

The Syrian civil war has a different background from wars in other realms like Kashmir and Palestine. Palestine is under Israeli occupation whereas Kashmir also known as "South Asia's Palestine" (qtd. in Aamir 3), is facing a similar problem of chaos and turmoil that has left both these countries in sheer destruction. Kashmir and Palestine are places of massive human rights abuse because of the perpetrators of violence have forced them to live in traumatic situations. Palestine being under "settler colonialism" (Pappe *Biggest Prison* 37) is a place of massive aggression where citizens are surviving under constant fear due to their rights being usurped every day. Every sort of injustice prevails there, which is the reason their rights need to be preserved not only for the sake of residents of those places but for the peace of the world at large. Similarly, Kashmiri residents, being under "de facto curfews" (Peer 128) face injustice

at many levels be it psychological, physical or social. Rabia Aamir in her article "Impasse of Kashmir and Recurring Pretexts: A Historiographical Analysis" (2020), raises concerns about environmental ethics which proposes that, "It is time for a clear declaration of the environmental ethic of this postcolonial region for a sustainable and peaceful future of not only this region but the world at large" (22). Kashmir and Palestine have a different scenario of conflict from Syria as in Syria perpetrators and victims of violence are from inside which is why this is known as civil war of Syria. However, not only the ruling (dictator) government, but foreign involvement also aggravated the civil war that took a deadly turn and became one of the most traumatic events in history.

Rabia Aamir's doctoral dissertation, titled, *Questioning Idées Reçues: A Study of Interpellative Strategies and Environmental Ethics in Basharat Peer and Ghada Karmi's Memoirs* is a postcolonial mode of inquiry revisiting the official narratives built around the realms of Kashmir and Palestine. In her postcolonial appraisal, Aamir provides an analysis of Kashmiri and Palestinian memoirs, namely, Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir* (2010) and Ghada Karmi's *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) with an attention to social justice in debates of environmental ethics. The conflicting political positions and strategic locations of both countries have inspired these writers to address the conflicts in their memoirs. The researcher has taken into consideration overview of other works from these regions along with the application of multiple lenses to situate the logic of neocolonialism. The implications of imperialistic and colonizing idées reçues strategies, like, neocolonialism and settler colonialism have been shown in the selected memoirs. It is explored whether these strategies are fueling environmentalismas put forward by Robert Nixon in Nigerian context (iv). The researcher has argued how their memoirs present the issue of marginalization and expurgation. The researcher has depicted how the two writers from Kashmir and Palestine subvert the idées reçues or the official accounts built around both regions. Aamir is of the view that the manifestation of neo/settler colonialism in cultural, social, and political spaces of both lands by their respective writers is suggestive of disruption created against the ethnic other (iv).

A book named *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine* has, also, been written by Rabia Aamir who did her PhD Research Fellowship

from Columbia University. She presents a close reading of Kashmiri and Palestinian memoirs by "deconstruct[ing] the political, economic, and environmental myths" (5) to raise awareness about the environmental ethics of two war zones i.e., Kashmir and Palestine. She employs a multipronged approach by interweaving Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation (Althusser 187) with Edward Said's Idea of idees rescues (94) to question the hegemonic governing bodies i.e., neo- colonial strategies of India and "settler colonialism (Pappe 37) of Israel. Along with these approaches, the author draws on several other approaches like Curtin's view of "postcolonial environmental ethic" (2005) that proposes a dialectical relationship between environmentalism and post-colonialism, and Huggan and Tiffin's view of "Green Postcolonialism" (2008) and several other theories to highlight despotic rule of socio-political powers through the analysis of memoirs and visual narratives. The author has neologized the concept of "implonialism" (396) by extending the implications of colonial imperialism in Kashmir and settler colonialism in Palestine to highlight the height of oppression that Kashmiris and Palestinians have been facing for many decades. The term 'implonialism' aids us in seeing the marginalized communities of the world that have been subject to erasure through Neronian strategies.

The research that I am undertaking is very much pertinent to the book reviewed above as Syrians are subjected to the same turmoil of despotic rule and civil war that erupts continually. Syrians face awful living conditions and brutalities by the necropolitical regime which leaves them devastated and marginalized. They are neither heard nor allowed to live. J. C. Alexander's Cultural trauma theory is blended with the Necropolitics theory to highlight the result of fascist rule in Syria i.e., trauma of all Syrians that is well expressed by Alomar in his works of flash fiction that speak out loud the suffering caused by oppressive regime.

Gaza Writes Back (2014), edited by Refaat Alareer, is a compelling anthology of short stories from fifteen young writers in Gaza, members of a generation that has suffered immensely under Israel's siege and blockade. These stories present the unmediated voices of young people who are fed up with the occupation, the international community, and the aging Palestinian leadership. Their experiences, especially during and following Israel's 2008-2009 offensive known as Operation Cast Lead, have fundamentally impacted their lives and their writing. Their words give an insight into the homes and hearts of mothers, fathers, students, children, and elders

striving to live lives of dignity, compassion, and meaning in one of the world's most embattled communities.

Their stories portray that a sense of rootedness develops in Palestinians when Israel attempts to snatch their own lands from them. The stories are endowed with the passion with which Palestinians relate themselves to the land. Land, place, and trees are central motifs in the stories of *Gaza Writes Back*. Their deep attachment to land is expressed vividly in a story "The Story of The Land" by Sara Ali in which she describes the love and pain that her father felt for his land that was destroyed illegally by Israeli forces. He came back to Palestine to revive the memory of his land and olive trees but to his dismay Israeli forces didn't consider them or their trees worthy of living. For them Palestinians are only numbers who could be killed, and their trees could be bulldozed whenever and however they want. As the writer illustrates a scene of her bereaved family who lost their trees and got their land runover by Israeli Bulldozers:

> They saw more toppled trees, feeble and defeated. They went on…. The scene of our Land was not shocking. Simply put, our trees were no exception. Our trees were gone. A miscellany of affliction and denial took over the place. My father's faith, I could tell, was smashed into little pieces. (Alareer 55)

From stories of this book, it becomes quite evident that this attachment to the land and soil continues to grow in spite of all the practices and measures Israel takes to detach Palestinians from their land. The harder Israel tries, the more attached to the land these people grow.

Qissat (2007) edited by Jo Glanville is an interesting collection of short stories by Palestinian women authors. It depicts different experiences of the difficult situations and some heart wrenching stories of families separated by the reality under which Palestinians live under Israel occupation or displaced because of it.

These twelve stories are diverse in every way but one: they are all by women whose lives have been distorted by the loss of a homeland they can call their own, whether their own remembered loss or that of their elders. Many of them are not political in any overt way – they deal with childhood memories of being mischievous, of buying shoes and not buying into society's ideas of what feminine is, of being a child in a beautiful country. Some of the authors are expatriates too young to have known Palestine and who write in English, for others expulsion is a compulsive, constant

memory, while some endure and write from within the occupied territories and in its language.

These stories give an understanding of the costs of exile and occupation in Palestine and in other parts of the world. The stories show how the political situation defines and determines so many actions and activities for Palestinians that are normal for the citizens of freer countries like crossing a road to go to a nearby area that could be full of tribulations. Their experiences present people with cruel choices of collaboration, resignation, resistance, saving one's livelihood and family or one's dignity. It is never clear which is the right choice or the more honorable one.

2.2 Review of Literature on Necropolitics

Now I move to the second part of the literature review which pertains to a review of the literature around the theory of necropolitics. Due to limited research in this field, this part of the review is not very extensive. As the research pertaining to the necropolitical understanding of Syrian fiction and non-fiction has been scarce, this section tends to explore the concept of necropolitics through the review of books written by Achille Mbembe.

Necropolitics, a concept implying the use of controlling practices to order how some people may have the right to live their life and how some must die or at least live in precarious conditions, was first proposed by Mbembe in article "Necropolitics" (2003) and later in Necropolitics (2019) in the form of a book. Mbembe puts forth similar ideas concerning sovereignty and subjectivity in his book *On the Postcolony* (2005) consisting of six essays reconnoitering the question of power in post-colonial Africa. This book is mainly written in the wake of the colonization of Africa by European powers, most specifically Britain and France who exploited Africa in a way that is manifested even today in different forms of subjugation like capitalism etc. According to Mbembe, his collection of essays is a way to expose those colonial practices that rendered a monstrous image of Africa and how they are prevalent today. Mbembe in the preface of *On the Postcolony* (2015) posits that his essays are:

An attempt to uncover what lies underneath the mask of the Father. What form does the Father take in the aftermath of colonialism "stricto sensu"? What does his face look like? What are his shapes? What is produced by means of the Father and what surfaces does he engender?... [The book] looks at the ways in

which [the West] stages itself and how it is refracted in the consciousness of those who are under its spell – in short, what life, lived under its sign and as a result of its (de)generative power, is about. (n.p.)

In this book, Mbembe covers aspects from history, politics, and economics, to psychoanalysis, theology, and philosophy. Mbembe has tried to analyze these aspects to provide awareness to Africans about their "time and subjectivity" by "model[ing] the complexities of African life for the Africans" (143-178). He is of the opinion that the reduction of Africa to mere objects by Europeans in the colonial era has taken a new form and continues to nullify their presence in new controlling ways.

The West considers Africa as an animal that possesses drives, but it doesn't have capacity which makes it not an owner. It is only considered as an object of power. Africa is considered an animal that needs to be tamed because of its lack of ability to take care of itself. Relating it to economics in chapter 1 "Of Commandment" (24-65), he says that Africa has no capacity for self-care, and economic affairs require colonial powers to authorize them. Analyzing the history of colonial and post-colonial economic practices, Mbembe holds that economic control is being exercised by transforming public gain into private gain. Income is associated with faithfulness to a government which makes people do whatever higher authorities want them to do. New forms of violence have been legalized in such a way that if anyone resists them, it results in further deterioration of social order. Drawing on the case study of Cameroon, Mbembe postulates about the concept of "banality of power" in which arbitrary and bureaucratic rules are routinized in a way that they become intrinsic in controlling systems exploring "the complex interplay of consent and coercion in the post colony and the carnivalesque disposition of both rulers and ruled in the production and maintenance of hegemonic relations of power and subversion" (1-30). Violence is ingrained in the system in a way that it becomes legitimized through consent, and no one is able to question the authoritarian system that leaves people with no choice but to conform to the rules that are proposed by power structures.

Mbembe returns to the original question of contemporary African identity-whether modern Africans are slaves or not. Violence permeates the system of domination in a way that does not necessarily affect modern-day slaves directly, rather this kind of slave can be anyone whose life can be degraded in whatever way the authoritarian system wants. The system is so deeply rooted in everyday life that

Mbembe retorts to this by saying that we must adapt ourselves to survive in "uncertainty, chance, irreality, even absurdity" (243-44). In summary, Mbembe's book offers insights into the contradictions in political and socio-economic formations that led to the exploitation of Africa not only in the colonial era but also in the postcolonial era.

This book poses the question of sovereignty with respect to African identity whereas the present research employs a necropolitical perspective to show the way power structures rule Syria by dismantling their sense of self through civil war. Necropowers in Syria, render a similar approach of violence to crush any sign of resistance for the sake of their pharaonic rule.

A similar approach has been employed by Mbembe in another book written in 2013 under the title *Critique of the Black Reason* which encompasses the discourses and practices that shape the culture and experiences of Blacks in different parts of Africa (28). In his point of view, black reason accommodates all those forms of knowledge, pronouncement, and voices that are directly linked to the people or even things of "African Origin" (27). Mbembe says that the Western idea of reason is different from the Eastern concept of reason because of their different geographies and different experiences and the interaction between two ideologies has resulted in two types of consciousness – Black perception of Blackness and Western impression of Blackness. Mbembe takes us on a historical journey of colonialism, slavery, and Apartheid to dive deep into the White consciousness of Blacks. He recounts how Blacks were suppressed, subjugated, and persecuted in the name of civilizing them.

The White perception of Black is like a prison with many cells where Black is let in on his own will and then molded according to White's idea of Black. So, a Black individual doesn't have access to real knowledge of things; he/she only gets to know what Whites show them. It is evident from Mbembe's quote that "Reason, in particular, confers on the human a generic identity, a universal essence, from which flows a collection of rights and values. It unites all humans…. The question …was whether blacks were human beings like all others" (85). The clear answer to this is obvious that Blacks were not even considered human beings which is why their exploitation was justified by Whites. Regarding Black perception of Blackness, Mbembe points out that, "Black – we must not forget – aspires also to be a color. The color of obscurity. In this view, Black is what lives in the night. The night is its original envelope, the tissue out

of which its flesh is made. It is a coat of arms, its uniform" (152). In such an obscure environment, Black is left with two options - either to comply and die or strive to survive. This other mode of Black consciousness had an ambiguous basis because "Although its authors wrote in the first person and in a mode of self-possession, they, as subjects, were haunted by the idea that they had become strangers to themselves." (29) This is why they had to develop a basis for themselves. They strained to preserve and galvanize the original experience of Blacks and find their identity having a firm ground of its own, so that, they don't have to look beyond their very own self in search of truth.

But the association of Blackness with animalistic tendencies prevails in the twenty-first century too which shows how powerful the Western narrative of Blacks has been in disfiguring their identity structure. If Blacks have to get recognition from the Whites, they have to act upon the orders of their masters and comply with their narrative. Therefore, Blackness has to whitewash itself with a White ideology which is "a process of conversion to Christianity, the introduction of market economy…and the adoption of rational, enlightened forms of government" (87-88). Blackness is always tainted with a low position rather than no position at all that renders an inhuman image of Blacks and if that image has to be clear, in Hegelian terms, Blacks as slaves have to conform to their masters as both need one another to run the vicious cycle of hegemony in every sphere of life.

 In conclusion, Mbembe's notion of black reason is the collection of all sorts of experiences encountered by Blacks that shaped their identity in various forms. Black reason is essentially the conglomeration of experiences of Blacks that develops a feeling of association and belonging among Blacks living in all parts of the world.

This book, fundamentally, emphasizes the worst experiences of Blacks throughout the colonial rule while the current research is about the functioning of necropolitics in Syria. This research tends to expose the dark face of necropowers by illustrating the plight and trauma of Syrians as they go on to live in extreme poverty, violence, and other worst life conditions under the despotic regime.

2.3 Review of Works on the Genre of Flash Fiction

Now I move to the third part of the literature review which is related to the structural form of the selected texts in which flash fiction works, mainly on the theme

of war, would be reviewed.

Κώστας Μπέης's dissertation entitled *Osama Alomar's Arabic short stories: A critical analysis for multicultural classes* (2021) analyzes Alomar's collections of flash fiction, including *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) and *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017), with respect to their narrative form and genre. The researcher makes use of genre theory and cultural poetics to design the theoretical framework of the research project. This research engages with the examination of the social, political, and cultural context of Syria portrayed in the selected collections. Moreover,the selected collections are categorized as "microfiction" (9-11). According to the researcher, this approach enables the understanding of Syrian literature in multicultural settings and societies (13). Multiple stories from the selected collections are analyzed with respect to their themes and form. Afterward, the researcher moves on to show how these flash fiction narratives can be taught at Greek schools as well as to bilingual adults to facilitate diversity, inclusivity, and empathy (38). Though this dissertation discusses how Alomar's collections of flash fiction can be taught at Greekschools to promote diversity and acceptance, the present research examines the same collections of flash fiction to analyze the implications of necropolitics and cultural trauma for Syrian civilians in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war.

The current research has a different approach from the above-reviewed article as the existing research is carried out with respect to the illustration of trauma and working of necropolitics in Osama Alomar's flash fiction narratives with *Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) as the primary text and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) as its secondary text.

Amal Saad Almenee has written an article "Flash Fiction in Saudi Arabian Literature: An Overview of Structure, Characteristics and Implications" (2020) which discusses the craft of flash fiction in Saudi Arabia. The researcher has analyzed typical flash fictions by five Saudi flash fiction writers to study form, content, structure, and technical characteristics of Saudi flash fiction. The researcher concluded by explicating the most prominent connotations and implications of the Saudi flash fiction. The Scholarly Personal Narrative method was used, under the semiotic methodology as a scientific procedure for research and analysis. The study revealed that the most prominent types of discourse used in the flash fiction in Saudi Arabia are the narrative (dialogue-based) discourse, the expressive, and the expository discourse. It also

showed that there are five basic structural elements of the flash fiction in Saudi Arabia: (character, action (narrative perspective), setting (time and place), style and brevity. The characteristics of the Saudi flash fiction were also listed as intensification, symbolism, suggestion, and paradox. The study also revealed that the Saudi flash fiction revolves around three principal implications and themes: the social, religious, and symbolic connotation.

The article reviewed above is related to the form and structure of flash fiction whereas current research focuses on the themes of war, trauma and power-politics in Alomar's flash fiction through the lens of necropolitics and cultural trauma.

J. Cynthia is another author of short stories and novels who has written about war trauma and unsung heroes by exposing the reality of so-called glorified war. Her collection of short stories *Tales of War - Flash Fiction Stories* (2021) is demonstrative of such harsh veracities of war in which soldiers have to live a life full of perils of war where they see their family members dying. The trauma of war is illustrated very well in her stories, as there is a story "The Lavender Garden" (Cynthia n.p.) in which she illustrates the pain and trauma of war through the contrast of a beautiful garden of flowers on which a son's lifeless body laid to be witnessed and mourned by his mother and brother. Her stories have a setting of war which makes them true representative of various facets of struggles, challenges, hardships and heroism of war that her characters portray. This collection of short stories presents a gloomy picture of war through powerful imagery.

The present research incorporates necropolitical understanding and cultural trauma perspective to navigate through the working of the necropolitical regime that traumatizes common Syrian people by waging war against them as it is illustrated through the very short fictional narratives of Alomar.

There are seven more micro-stories, a subset of flash fiction, on war by Alex Epstein, translated from the Hebrew by Yardenne Greenspan and published in Guernica- a magazine of global arts and politics. Entitled "Seven Micro-Storieson War (and Only One on Love)" (2014), these stories mainly describe the gruesomeness of war. In a micro-story "How We Won the War" the writer mocks humanity that is so keen about destroying the whole world. The idea of ending war in the future is an ideal condition which won't happen in the future. Another story "How to Dance" is an ironic account of war in which a girl wants to teach dance to Death but, at the very moment,

a missile hits her and, without wasting time, the girl holds the hand of Death as she is afraid to dance alone.

Another very moving micro- story is "The Interpretation of Reality as Explained to Me by a Five-Year-Old", in which a young boy innocently asks whether there are bomb shelters in dreams too as he doesn't know where to run when sirens blow in his dreams. This story paints a grotesque and macabre imagery where siren is blowing, and a small child doesn't know where to run to find a safe haven to avoid war. A very short story "Outside of Time" illustrates trauma of a mother who is suffering in the memory of her dead son. The story goes: "In the room with the grief-drawn shutters, outside of the rain, she makes her son's bed. Time stands still. She'll dream him back from the dead." Such stories as these show the pointlessness of war. These micro-stories comprised of fewer words, with the touch of satire, convey the idea that wars can never be just because those who have lost their loved ones can never live peacefully, and no reparation can compensate the loss of human life in real sense.

The collection of micro-stories mentioned earlier is representative of themes of alienation, frustration and suffering that leaves the mankind scarred and devastated. The existing research sheds light on trauma of people of war-ravaged Syria through the combination of necropolitics and, cultural trauma perspective.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this thesis covers the areas of cultural trauma, necropolitics as well as form and themes of flash fiction genre. The present research focuses on cultural trauma caused by the Syrian civil war through the application of cultural trauma theory (2004) by Jeffrey C. Alexander, and necropolitics (2003, 2019), on selected Syrian flash fiction collections. It would be a distinctive research work on the Syrian civil war. There have been limited studies related to flash fiction on the theme of war in English Literature. Moreover, the selected flash fiction collections have not been explored through the selected theoretical lenses yet, which would be the contribution from the present research. The necropolitical exploration of Syrian flash fiction is a unique feature of this research which brings to light the absurdity and trauma of war caused by necropowers, that, for their vested interests, leave innocent civilians at the edge of life.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to explore the role of necropowers and trauma in the selected flash fiction, I employ Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and cultural trauma theory by Jeffrey C. Alexander as the main theoretical lenses for this study. Along with theoretical framework, I have employed relevant research methods for a clear understanding of the present research.

3.1.1 Theory of Necropolitics

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is relevant to the selected text in relation to the contemporary era of political and economic turmoil in Syria. The economic and political management of Syrian people through their exposure to civil war has been weakening Syria for more than a decade. Achille Mbembe gave the concept of necropolitics in 2003 with an essay "Necropolitics", and then in 2016, with the book *Politiques de l'inimitié*, translated and published in English in 2019, as *Necropolitics*. This article along with the book is appropriate for the analysis of the selected collections. The other main theoretical lens used for this investigation is Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory about cultural trauma in his book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* which is relevant to the current study as it endeavors to bring trauma of Syrian masses to the fore which is caused by the working of necropolitics in the wake of the Syrian civil war.

Achille Mbembe, in his article, "Necropolitics", postulates that the fundamental attribute of being sovereign is to be able to kill or allow to live. According to him, "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 11). Thus, deconstructing the meaning of sovereignty from any divine powers, Mbembe contextualizes sovereignty in the context of the sovereignty of necropowers who deploy power over life in order to be in control. For example, Syrian war is a means of exercising the power to decide the life and death of other individuals. This leads to "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 14). Necropowers enact their authority over other

populations through instrumentalization that violates the dignity of other individuals.

However, it is important to note that destruction of human life is not considered as an expression of necropowers' "insanity", rather such practices are regarded as "nomos of political sphere" (Mbembe 14). This means that necropowers' violation of target population's right to live is not considered a manifestation of psychopathic tendency of the sovereign. On the contrary, violence, death and destruction caused to target population are justified by the laws and policies that govern the political ideology of necropowers. Therefore, instead of pathologizing the necropowers, violence and use of force against target population is justified by the necropolitical sovereign as a method of protect and assert its sovereignty.

Mbembe relates the concept of necropolitics to Foucault's notion of biopower. Foucault first discusses the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in his 1976 work, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*. Foucault presents biopower as a mechanism for protecting but acknowledges that this protection often manifests itself as subjugation of non-normative populations. The creation and maintenance of institutions that prioritize certain populations over others is, according to Foucault, how population control has been normalized. In this way biopower works through "dividing people into those who must live and those who must die" (Mbembe 16-17). He is of the view that the division of human beings into groups and subgroups leads to the othering of those who do not conform to the rules proposed by necropowers. In this way, non-normative populations are labelled as outcasts; their non-conformity becomes the justification for their extermination at the hands of necropowers. The ideology behind the concept of sovereignty is, therefore, "the perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on [one's] life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen [one's] potential to life and security (Mbembe 18).

Mbembe holds the view that imprisonment and displacement have become a prevailing way of governing unwanted populations. The most inhumane conditions prevail in those concentration camps. Mbembe has given the example of Nazi extermination of Jews to show how necropower operates by exercising the right to kill. Moreover, different and effective ways of killing have been introduced, like, Nazi forces used "gas chambers" (18) to eliminate Jews, communists and other communities that were considered a threat to Nazi state. This reinforces the idea that necropolitics is "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is

not" (Mbembe 27). Necropowers work in a way to kill the masses by considering it their right to kill those who are considered as dangerous or nonessential. In contemporary times, different modes of killing are deployed to bring about maximum destruction of people.

Furthermore, Mbembe also discusses the display of violence against vulnerable communities as a spectacle (19). He notes that history is a witness to many incidents of execution and punishment in which the suffering of the convict was prolonged to entertain a crowd in the form of a "play" (19). These incidents constituted a "ritual" or a ceremony of state-administered punishment which was supposed to serve two purposes i.e., invoking fear among spectators and displaying power of the ruler/s (19). However, the changing dynamics of the modern world put an end to the display of violence as a form of entertainment for spectators. The advancement of human society accompanied the pursuit of "civilizing" the execution of the condemned (19). This is the reason that contemporary times offer states a number of methods to carry out punishment against the condemned in a closed space, hidden from citizens.

Moreover, the methods of execution have been made less gruesome and more humane. Mbembe finds these innovations deeply ironical. He believes that, instead of developing socially acceptable methods of killing, the world has seen an increase in the attempts to make killing more precise and effective which helps to save time and resources (19). This shows how necropowers have adapted to the ethical considerations of the modern world without forsaking their lethal and deceptive intentions. This has enabled necropowers to continue their practices of killing the target population that may pose a threat to the sovereignty of necropowers without much opposition and criticism.

In addition to civilizing the manner of killing, necropowers also seek to rationalize the killing of the target population (Mbembe 23). The process of rationalizing violence and killing is carried out by legislations that grant a state, ruler or sovereign the right to take life (23). This right falls under the category of the right of a state "to kill" in order to "conclude peace" (23). Therefore, the mass killing of the target population is rationalized and justified by a necropolitical state as a rightful approach to implement peace in the society.

Moreover, Achille Mbembe finds it important to re-address the history of slavery. According to him, the life of slaves in the past bears significant resemblance to the persisting plight of target population in a necropolitical state. Therefore, a slave and

a necropolitical subject are subject to similar brutality. Their lives are marked with "a triple loss" which refers to the simultaneous loss of "home", bodily rights and "political status" (Mbembe 21). The triple loss denies the humanity of the target population. As a result of the triple loss caused to them, they lose all means of protection, shelter and rescue. This marks the beginning of their subjugation which is no less than "a state of injury" (21). Moreover, persecution and exploitation of the target population is intensified by the growing power imbalance between the necropolitical sovereign and target population (22). In the light of these viewpoints, it can be argued that a necropolitical subject is a contemporary substitute for a slave.

In the light of necropolitics, the colonial rule has been predominantly necropolitical in nature. Under the rule of a necropolitical colonizer, the native population is considered to be debased, "hungry" and "starved" (Mbembe 27). These deprivations undermine their human value in the sight of the colonial necropower which ultimately allows the colonizer to decide whether they should continue to live or die at once. Moreover, Mbembe observes that Palestine is one of the most accomplished forms of the subjugation of target population at the hands of necropolitical colonizers (27). Palestinians' lack of access to resources intensifies their exploitation at the hands of Israeli settlers who engage in the necropolitical practices of declaring death for natives. Moreover, natives' right to live is violated by restricting their movement across the city spaces. As a result, Israeli settlers are able to manipulate the Palestinian landscape to their own advantage (27). As a result, Palestinian population is deprived of both i.e., the territory as well as the access to resources.

Using the example of Palestinian occupation, Achille Mbembe explores the concept of "infrastructural warfare" (29). This form of warfare refers to the acts of sabotage carried out by necropowers that seek to damage the resources owned by the target population. This includes dismantling of electronic gadgets, buildings, forests, water containers etc. The intention behind these actions is to force natives to accept their defeat and surrender to the sovereignty of the necropower.

Overall, it can be observed that necropolitical sovereigns seek to subject target population to a life of "humiliation", "interrogations", "beatings" and "curfews" (Mbembe 39). Everyday life in a subjugated town offers glimpses of "children blinded", "parents shamed" and "soldiers patrolling" (39). These conditions of living assign living subjects the status of "living dead" (40). Even if the necropowers allow target

population to continue to live, their lives are no better than the dead. They always find themselves on the verge of life and death. Therefore, it can be argued that necropolitical subjects are either killed at once or put to slow death.

3.1.2 Theory of Cultural Trauma

Mbembe's theory, when used with Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of Cultural trauma theory, provides us with some answers when the textual references from the selected work are studied in their light. In Alexander's book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, his essay "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" serves as the other main theoretical lens to read our text. Alexander posits that, "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander et al. 1). The construction of cultural traumas helps social groups identify the source of human suffering. Trauma exists not only in our daily lives, but nations as collective groups also face traumas that are basically ' societal formations' as they are embedded in everyday lives of people. As Alexander puts it in his essay, "Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (Alexander et al. 8). Individual and collective trauma, both are constructed by individuals in a society.

i. Individual vs Collective Trauma

Jeffrey C. Alexander believes that traumas occurring at individual psychological level are dealt differently than group level where traumatic incidents affect the combined consciousness of a group of people. Individual victims deal with any traumatic event with "denial, repression and working through", whereas groups of people deal with it through "symbolic construction and framing" (Alexander 3). Alexander postulates that cultural trauma is not formed at an individual level because individuals might suffer psychologically owing to any traumatic injury that affects the psyche of an individual person. However, cultural trauma is formed when a group of people is affected by a traumatizing happening. Alexander is a founding figure in the field of cultural sociology, and he has won many awards for his best articles and books in cultural sociology.

In his book, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, Alexander provides us with a theory for traumas happening at the level of collectivity. In his view, there is a symbolic

construction of a collective identity "we" through narratives and coding, and any harm to this socially constructed identity results in trauma that affects all the members of a social group. Alexander mentions that collective identity is not "given" naturally to members of a collectivity; rather it is something "culturally" conceived (Alexander 1). In the same way, any harm to this collective identity is not conceived naturally; rather it is culturally conceived through the processing of trauma which comprises the symbolic construction of cultural trauma through meaning making and understanding through interpretations. Moreover, it must be stated that traumatic injuries and loss are experienced individually, but the construction of shared trauma depends on the collective process of "cultural interpretation" (3). Therefore, it can be stated that individual traumas can be transformed into collective trauma culturally through speeches, rituals, storytelling, narratives, movies, etc. As Alexander says,

> Cultural traumas are reflections of neither individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them. Rather than descriptions of what is, they are arguments about what must have been and what should be…It is people who make traumatic meanings, in circumstances they have not themselves created and which they do not fully comprehend. (Alexander 4)

ii. Towards the Theory of Cultural Trauma

In a collaboratively authored work by various sociologists, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, J. C. Alexander reviews the commonplace understandings of trauma which collectively constitutes "Lay Trauma Theory". The researcher has taken Lay trauma theory – a version of cultural trauma theory (Alexander et al. 2) as the second main lens of investigation for current research. Lay trauma theory proposes that traumas are events occurring in nature. The reaction to such traumatic events as such is reflexive. When basic needs of human beings like love, security etc. are undermined, they would naturally be traumatized. Lay trauma theory is further divided into enlightenment and psychoanalytical understanding of trauma. According to the enlightenment version of lay trauma theory, trauma is a lucid reaction to sudden change; it may happen at an individual or social level. The trauma-triggering objects are perceived vividly by the actors which is why the impact of these responses is progressive, which leads to the solution of problem. For example, economic depression, lost wars, and assaults on people cause anxiety and depression at individual

and social level. These traumas would require their resolution that would ultimately prevent them from happening again. Alexander quotes Neal's work "*National Trauma and Collective Memory*" to show the effect of trauma on collective level. Quoting Neal, Alexander writes that traumas are actually "individual and collective reactions to a volcano-like event that shook the foundations of the social world" (Alexander 3). Alexander has quoted another theorist Kai T. Erikson – a sociologist who views collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality (Alexander 4). Trauma breaches the sense of collectiveness when it shatters a community as a whole. Therefore, social groups witness a lack of active support in a community that has faced trauma.

The psychoanalytical version of Lay trauma theory discusses "unconscious emotional fears and cognitively distorting mechanisms of psychological defense" between the traumatic event and the person who faced the tragic event (Alexander 5). This version of trauma breaks a person emotionally to the extent that the actor represses the traumatic experience. Traumatic feelings are an outcome of anxiety of pushing unwanted feelings to the unconscious. According to this approach, trauma can be resolved provided memory comes to the surface from unconscious mind. Alexander quotes Cathy Caruth to support his argument on psychological version of Lay trauma theory as Caruth, in her anthology of essays *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and in her edited collection, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, stresses the role of "objectivity" and "reenactment" of the tragic event that one cannot leave (Alexander 6). The resolution of trauma requires consideration of trauma in the real sense which is why objectivity is required. The objectivity leads to the truth of the traumatic experience.

Moreover, memory brings the nature of trauma to the fore and leads to the way of resolving trauma which, in turn, leads to the reconstruction of collective identity. The reconstruction of identity is done through the "re-remembrance of the collective past" (Alexander et al. 22). This memory of the past helps to form collective identity as it resolves trauma by bringing repressed memory to the surface. This re-remembrance assists in processing trauma that eventually plays a role in collective identity formation.

It is relevant to discuss here that collective trauma is also concerned with the emotional state of the trauma victims, whereas cultural trauma entails traumatic events

that disrupt the social fabric and identity of a collectivity. Neil J. Smelser in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* compares the victims of collective trauma to a "rape victim" as their psychological balance is permanently disrupted (42). Collective trauma, as defined by the trauma theorist Arthur Neal, induces "feelings of anxiety and despair" in a collectivity (Smelser 42). Besides encapsulating psychological distress and emotional breakdown as its usual manifestations, collective trauma is also "a trauma in the social realm" and it can take the forms of "a national shame, a permanent scar, etc." (42) Shared traumatic events intertwine the individual emotional and psychological states of the victims with the collective trauma. It becomes hard to distinguish personal emotional and psychological states from the broader collective trauma. As a result, the line between individual and group's emotions is blurred.

On the contrary, cultural trauma primarily focusses on how a traumatic event shatters the collective identity and group consciousness of an ethnic, national or social group. Cultural trauma leads to 'meaning making' which can be made possible through certain acts like memorials, performances, drama, film, theatre, novels, poetry, etc. that arise the feeling of shared pain among masses who then realize the nature of trauma and its horrendous implications. Cultural trauma focuses on conflicting narratives to highlight the trauma, the perpetrators, and the victims that make victims and other people realize the nature and implications of a dreadful happening. This realization of the essence of a traumatic event leads to the resolution of trauma by making reparations to avoid it from happening again. This is how meanings are made out of a traumatic condition that members of a group not only feel the trauma i.e., collective trauma but, also realize the nature of trauma and take steps to avoid any similar sort of traumatic event in the future i.e., cultural trauma. Trauma being a social construction may involve the use of imagination because "imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation" (Alexander 9). This is how identities are reconstructed in a society struck with any tragic event.

In order to trace the social construction of cultural trauma in the context of Syria, the researcher uses the theory of Cultural Trauma put forth by Jeffrey C. Alexander as the second main theoretical lens of inquiry. Alexander theorizes about cultural trauma in his essay, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity", a concept through which he later illustrates the social construction of the Holocaust and other mass murders in his article, "Cultural trauma, Morality, and

Solidarity: The social construction of 'Holocaust' and other mass murders" (2016). This study applies his theoretical framework to investigate the construction of the Cultural Trauma for Syria's traumatizing realities as portrayed in the selected flash fiction collections.

The construction of cultural traumas assists social groups and communities in not only identifying the source of trauma but, they are also able to share the pain of trauma. This sharing of pain helps navigate through the processing of trauma by making repairs to avoid it from happening again. Those who fail to recognize the sufferings of others fail to achieve a moral stance (Alexander 1). It is pertinent to note that cultural trauma is applicable not only to western societies but to all the societies of the world at large as Alexander argues: "Cultural traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations" (27). Therefore, the application of cultural trauma theory is quite relatable in Syrian context. Alexander defines cultural trauma as,

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (1)

This definition presents cultural trauma as being comprised of five interwoven and significant elements. Firstly, it starts with a group of people who are subjected to what they consider "a horrendous event". Secondly, this event must be experienced by the "members of a collectivity." Thirdly, for the event to be considered a cultural trauma, it must be so deeply felt that it leaves an unforgettable or lasting impression on their "group Consciousness." Fourthly, this unforgettable mark on the group consciousness will forever influence the "memories" of the collectivity. Fifth, because of its effect on the collective memory of the group or collectivity, the existing cultural trauma will also change the "future identity" of the group, who are suffering because of the horrific event.

The construction of cultural traumas by social groups, national identities and entire civilizations not only recognize the nature of tragic event but they also expand the circle of "we" by taking moral responsibility of sharing the pain of trauma and making repairs in the society to prevent such traumatizing events from happening again. As "Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is socially mediated attribution"

(Alexander 8), the construction of trauma is also a social process. This means trauma is constructed socially which implicates intervention through representation that may involve the use of imagination. Society builds layers of meaning around the tragic event to provide a sense of fear and shock. Thus, the trauma construction can be considered as a continuous struggle of analyzing the tragic events again and again. For instance, the fictional accounts of Syrian civil war can be scrutinized for the sake of meaning making and trauma processing.

iii. The Social Process of Cultural Trauma

A society may face disruption in social roles and social institutions, but it might not be traumatizing for all members of society as is stated by Alexander. He is of the opinion that "for traumas to emerge at the level of collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises" (10). It means trauma affects essential ingredients of any group's culture e.g., values, beliefs, norms, knowledge and identity that are connected with one another forming a meaning system.

Moreover, the emergence of cultural trauma happens through a gradual process of mediating or articulating interpretations in the form of narratives. If, through the representation of the original collective traumatic happenings, the suffering group of people comes to believe that their meaning system (values, norms, beliefs, knowledge, etc.) and collective identity is being affected badly, only then is the traumatic status attributed to those events. When the collective identity including the beliefs of all individuals of a society are threatened through a course of tragic events, it leads to the creation of cultural trauma. Hence, trauma is not a direct result of members of a collectivity experiencing trauma, rather it is the discomfort that affects the collective sense of social integrity and social identity which, in turn, causes trauma. In such a situation, the social actors experiencing such a traumatic situation depict their social pain as a threat to their collective "sense of who they are, where they came from, [and] where they want to go" (Alexander 10).

The time interval/gap between the occurrence of a tragic event and its representation signifies "trauma process." Quoting Kenneth Thompson who terms this trauma process as "spiral of signification," Alexander avers that potential threat of a problem is escalated through the signification of the problem (16). The representation of a traumatic state is made by the collective actors of a society who experience the unrest or tragic set of events, choose words to describe their pain and agony (basically

give meanings to the original suffering) and convey it to the public masses. In other words, these meanings are the "claims" that are made about any shared reality. They are termed as "carrier groups" (Alexander 11), a term coined by a sociologist Max Weber. With the claim of members of a collectivity the trauma process is started. The carrier groups may comprise any entities ranging from elites belonging to downgraded stratum of society to religious personalities relating tales of brutalities, to audience, inflicted upon them or social media individuals, whose primary purpose is to convey their sufferings symbolically in the form of words to general public or masses. They also include writers, celebrities, political authorities, poets, or even general public using social networking sites in today's world.

The goal of the carrier group is like a speaker whose aim is to project the trauma claims to an audience while taking into consideration the symbolic resources, historical situations and various opportunities or constraints given by institutional structures. These carrier groups tend to persuade other members of society that they are being traumatized through their actions or literary works. Once they persuade the social members collectively that they are traumatized, the carrier groups try to build a master narrative, to convince the larger faction of the collectivity that they have also been traumatized. This master narrative covers a wide array of audiences and has a sound narrative to convince the larger masses of society that they have been traumatized. For a master narrative to build a profound cultural trauma, Alexander considers four basic questions which need to be addressed:

1. The nature of pain: What has a particular group, or collectivity of which the group is a part, actually suffered?
2. The nature of the victim: Who are the ultimate victims of the traumatizing pain? Is it a particular group or general people of the community or collectivity?
3. Relation of trauma victims to the wider audience: How are the victims related to the greater collectivity? How can the audience identify with the representation of the experiences of the traumatized victim?
4. Attribution of the responsibility: Who are the perpetrators or antagonists? Who has victimized this particular group in reality? (Alexander 13-15)

iv. Mediating Trauma Process in Different Institutional Arenas

After the creation of a master narrative, its efficacy needs to be authenticated by the social institutions like religion, mass media, aesthetics, law, science, or state

bureaucracy which, in turn, are influenced by "stratificational hierarchies" within which any social action occurs (Alexander 21). These institutions validate or project the trauma by depicting a disorder among them through a system of hierarchical domains of control. For instance, if a trauma occurs within religious arena, it would be an indication of God's injustice or discrepancy in dealings with respect to different human beings residing in various parts of the globe. Similarly, if the bureaucratic setup is faced with a trauma, it might involve governmental entities to authenticate its magnitude or significance. In a similar fashion, in the aesthetic domain, trauma is reflected and transferred to the general masses by means of strong narratives or pieces of art or writings. For example, the "Diary of Anne Frank" was, a prototypical literary work to represent the Holocaust as a globally traumatizing event.

The institution of mass media is quite significant and if the representation of events is mediated through mass media, it gains opportunities but also becomes subject to certain restrictions as well. It not only enables traumas to be expressively dramatized but also allows some competing interpretations to gain prominence. There are certain restrictions as well, as the reporting demands concision, neutrality, and balance. When an event is reported as trauma, a particular group is considered traumatized, and another group as perpetrators, politicians, the supporters of the perpetrators may attack the media and journalists (Alexander 18).

v. Stratificational Hierarchies Influencing Trauma Process

Portraying trauma through social media means is quite an effective technique, but it requires a balancing mechanism or element of neutrality, where the suffering of a collective society is dramatized, thus, allowing competing interpretations to gain prominence. The representation of trauma through social institutions is influenced by 'stratificational hierarchies' that refer to the "uneven distribution of material resources and the social networks that provide differential access to them" (Alexander 21). The following questions probe into the constructive or destructive intervention of stratificational hierarchies in the trauma process which significantly influences the ultimate construction of Cultural Trauma.

- Who owns the media houses?
- Are journalists really independent of political and financial control?
- Who controls the religious institutions and judiciary?

- Who influences the policies made by the government? (Alexander 21)?

In this process the suffering entity is the traumatized entity, whereas the opposite entity is the oppressor or the perpetrator, and the supporters of perpetrators may attack media persons. This troika of traumatized entity, oppressor or the perpetrator, and the supporters of perpetrators might result in agony and dismay among these entities and may result in harsher repercussions for the media outlets (Alexander 18).

The representation of trauma is based on the conditions of fair play with respect to unbiased ownership of media houses, their independence and indiscriminate provision of resources to various social networks, which represent the trauma to the general public. These significant aspects of the social institutions under consideration determine their constructive or destructive interventions (Alexander 21) with regard to trauma and eventually cultural trauma.

During the situation of a traumatic event, the identity of the victim and perpetrator is established, whereas the victims represent the collectivity of individuals, and their identities are constructed by looking deep into their pasts (Alexander 22). Once the collective identities are formulated, the lessons learned from the traumas are commemorated in the forms of monuments or statues and kept in museums or historical buildings, etc. This restructured collective identity is the epitome of the past and is highly beneficial in solving prospective problems that intend to arise in the future (Alexander 23).

Alexander in his famous essay "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," states that traumatic situations in both Western and non-Western societies need to be addressed, since the traumas are applicable to all societies. In fact, the "non-Western" societies have faced more traumatic conditions as compared to Western ones (Alexander 24-25). The failure in recognition of trauma in non-Western world is largely attributed to the lack of ability of carrier groups such as cultural entities to effectively disseminate the trauma situation to the audience at large. The trauma process needs to be tackled with responsibility in order to broadcast the collective suffering of non-western societies to a wider audience so that their sufferings should be recognized by a larger audience and moral lessons be drawn from it as this research puts forth the understanding that the Syrian trauma needs to be processed effectively so as to be recognized by a larger audience.

3.2 Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature as it entails interpretation and exploration, and therefore, one of the most appropriate methodologies for the current research seems to be Belsey's textual analysis method. Jonathan Grix in his book, *The Foundations of Research,* is of the view that qualitative research "usually involves in- depth investigation of knowledge" (119). Unlike positivist research where numerical values are considered, "qualitative researchers tend to be working in an 'interpretivist' philosophical position, using methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which the data are produced" (120). In this type of research, the data is interpreted in the light of "social and cultural context over a specific period of time" (120). Furthermore, Grix has raised a very important point regarding qualitative research. He notes that qualitative research has investigated "the nature of dictatorships" by interviewing individuals who lived in such a system of government. Statistical data alone would not have led to such 'rich' findings (120). The nature of the text that is selected for this research requires the utilization of qualitative mode of research.

3.2.1 Research Method

The current research would be carried out with the aid of textual analysis method. Gabriele Griffin in her book *Research Methods for English Studies* views textual analysis as the "staple of English studies research" (12). In the chapter 9 of this book, titled "Textual Analysis as a Research Method", Belsey writes that "textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism, where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural studies" (Griffin 160). A society can never exist without any sort of culture and history which is why textual analysis can be a credible way of studying history and culture.

Moreover, textual analysis method is of massive importance because it "involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help" (160). According to Belsey, this close examination of the text helps the researcher to consult "original sources" and so the researcher is saved from the personal biases of "second-hand accounts" (Griffin 12). Furthermore, textual analysis is "the process of interpretation as the effect of a relation between a reader and a text" but text alone doesn't determine its meaning

nor does it support "vague subjectivism, in which the text means whatever it means to me, and there is nothing to discuss" (166). Belsey wants researchers to "adopt a critical vocabulary which allows the text to 'invite' certain readings and 'offer' specific positions to its addressee" (167). She stresses that textual analysis incorporates "extra-textual knowledge" as "there is no such thing as 'pure' reading" (Griffin 163). For instance, one has to have a knowledge of culture and history, personal knowledge if it is biography, and secondary sources to support the main idea that they tend to put forward.

The data source includes *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* by OsamaAlomar which are collections of short stories which come under the genre of flash fiction.These books were originally written in Arabic and translated into English by C.J. Collins with the help of the author. The study employs the theory of necropolitics by Achille Mbembe and the theory of cultural trauma by Jeffrey C. Alexander. These lens help unearth the working of necropolitical powers who have traumatized the Syrians.

CHAPTER 4

NECROPOLITICS AND THE SYRIAN STRUGGLE IN OSAMA ALOMAR'S SELECTED COLLECTIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) from the perspective of necropolitics. Proposed by Achille Mbembe, necropolitics is a concept that refers to a system in which the ruling group of society enjoys power over the "life and death" of a vulnerable group (12). This chapter in the present research studies the selected collections to explore how the ruling Syrian regime uses this power against Syrian civilian characters, resulting in massive casualties and brutal atrocities.

To represent these conflicting groups in the analysis of flash fiction stories from the selected collections, relevant terms have been borrowed from Mbembe's work on necropolitics. Since Alomar portrays the Syrian ruling regime as the perpetrator of violence in the Syrian civil war context, the regime and the regime officials are referred to as necropower or the sovereign. The selected collections show that the Syrian regime upholds necropolitics "having as their main targets civilian populations that are unarmed" (Mbembe 35). On the other hand, suffering Syrian civilian characters are referred to as the necropolitical subjects, target population, or "disposable" subjects (Mbembe 27). These terms will be used in the following sections of the chapter to distinguish the Syrian regime from civilian characters in the selected collections.

Furthermore, this chapter analyzes multiple flash fiction stories from the selected collections to study the theme of necropolitics. The researcher makes a conscious effort to analyze those flash fiction stories that are particularly relevant to the theme of necropolitics, portraying the ruling Syrian regime as the necropower, while the Syrian civilian characters as necropolitical subjects.

4.2 Representation of Necropolitics in the Selected Collections

According to Achille Mbembe, the term necropolitics refers to the way a powerful group in society exercises absolute control over the "mortality" of another group (12). This power emanates from a huge power imbalance in a society where the

life and death of the weaker group or community becomes a matter of choice for the powerful group (12). Asserting such a form of control over the lives of other individuals is one of the most effective ways through which the powerful group exhibits its power (12). As a result of the proliferation of necropolitics, two groups emerge i.e., the "sovereign" and the "disposable" (25, 27). The sovereign gets to decide who lives and who dies, while the lives of the disposable individuals are dictated by the whims of the sovereign (11). In such societies, large-scale dehumanization and devaluation of the disposable is a common occurrence. The disposable is subject to perpetual violence and human rights abuses, while the actions of the sovereign go unchecked (12). In the absence of any form of accountability, the sovereign acts as a necropower, thereby constantly violating the right to life of the disposable individuals. Formulated by Mbembe, these arguments about necropolitics are helpful in studying the plight of Syrian civilians in Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014).

There are multiple characters in the selected collections that are subjected to a "death-in-life" state (Mbembe 21). This state is characterized by the "pure slaughter" of the vulnerable group, and it seems to highlight the suffering of Syrian civilians in the wake of civil war (25). In the selected primary collection, one flash fiction story relevant to this theme is "Homeless Buildings". This story paints the picture of an annihilated "city" in the aftermath of a "civil war" (Alomar *Teeth* 165). The buildings are "destroyed", and the houses are ruined (165). The residential area of the city is engulfed in ashes; therefore, the residents abandon the place and flee elsewhere (165). However, following the destruction and abandonment, the damaged buildings draw near to each other seeking a sense of companionship and proximity in the absence of human residents. Eventually, the civil war comes to an end and residents return.

This story represents the suffering of Syrian civilians who are rendered homeless in the wake of the Syrian civil war. The image of residents fleeing elsewhere in the story represents the Syrian refugees who successfully managed to escape the violence and suffering at the hands of the military and advanced weaponry deployed by the Syrian government. Since the Syrian civil war resulted in the displacement of "millions of refugees", therefore, it serves to shed light on the control of the autocratic Syrian regime on the lives of the Syrian civilians (Alomar *Teeth* 42). The power to force an unlawful eviction of civilians from their homes characterizes the Syrian government

as the necropolitical sovereign in this flash fiction story. Acting as the necropolitical sovereign, the Syrian regime destroys residential areas and uproots civilians from their homes. Moreover, the images of destroyed buildings and devastated city spaces in the story serve to highlight the devaluation of the material property owned by Syrian civilians.

Another flash fiction story entitled "Love Letter" is set in the backdrop of the Syrian civil war. The story is comprised of the narrative of a love letter addressed by an unnamed man to his beloved, Minerva. In this letter, the man recounts the story of his romantic entanglement with Minerva, reminiscing the time they first met and how their relationship gradually bloomed. According to the content of the letter, the lovers initially faced obstacles such as the family's disapproval of the relationship, financial challenges, and the man's decision to migrate from his homeland in the wake of the civil war. These obstacles led to an estrangement between the lovers. However, the man concludes the love letter by conveying his desire to reunite with Minerva.

Since this story is set against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war, there are various references to the deteriorating sociopolitical conditions of the country and its direct impacts on the personal lives and relationships of Syrian civilians. The images of "gloomy insects and poisonous creeping reptiles" are significant in this narrative since these bugs find their way into homes. Therefore, the imagery of insects symbolizes the perpetrators of violence who, in the wake of civil war, infiltrate the private dwellings and public spaces of the country, even affecting the romantic relationships of civilians (Alomar *Teeth* 21). Therefore, it no longer remains possible for civilians to go about their everyday lives. Their lives are pushed into a state of impasse. Moreover, the image of "severed limbs and heads" represents the violence and atrocities committed against civilians by the state-sponsored militia (23). These images seem to symbolize the suffering of the vulnerable Syrian population at the hands of the necropolitical government which condemns a large number of civilians to physical torture and violent deaths.

Moreover, in this story, the man writing the letter emphasizes the trace of savagery inherent in war. The Syrian civil war leads to a "bitter struggle" between the man's desire to stay in Syria or move to "a faraway place" (Alomar *Teeth* 22). However, his survival instinct takes over and he finds himself in "exile" as a refugee (23). However, he does not regret his decision. Despite agonizing over his separation from

his beloved, the man regards his exile as "a revolution against oppression" (23). He expresses his disdain for a life condemned to "tyranny", "slavery" and "oppression" (23). These three constructs turn an individual into a victim of necropolitics who is left at the mercy of the necropolitical ruling regime in Syria. By expressing his disapproval of the necropolitical powers governing Syria, the man seems to justify his decision to flee his home country. Moreover, the man looks forward to reuniting with his beloved. His optimism symbolizes his hope for the restoration of peace, stability, and value of human life in his home country which will result in the normalcy of everyday life for Syrian civilians. He hopefully believes that the post-civil war rebuilding of Syria will be an opportunity for him to return to his homeland, love interest, and family.

In *Fullblood Arabian*, a story entitled "Historic Missile" also deals with the theme of necropolitics. This story centers on a mysterious occurrence of a nuclear attack. Although the origin of the "enormous explosion" remains unknown, it nevertheless brings about a "terrible loss of life and property" (Alomar *Fullblood* 13). The narrative refers to this nuclear attack as a "tornado of terror" (13). This tragedy drains the "reserves of food and water" of the world and forces people to hide in "shelters and basements" (13). However, the "investigations" and "research" to identify the origin of this attack remain unsuccessful. As a result, people are unable to turn life back to normal. They remain in hiding ever since.

This story is Alomar's satire on the violence of mankind against mankind. Through this allegorical representation, the author attempts to show that it is difficult for us to determine how humans turned into cruel creatures, bent on violent nuclear ambitions. The way the origin of the nuclear attack remains identified in the story shows that it is a big challenge for us to learn how humans were stripped out of their humanity when they decided to engage in violent wars and nuclear attacks. The story shows that people remain hidden in basements for the rest of their lives awaiting the results of investigations. This indicates the fear of nuclear violence that contemporary generations of Syrian civilians face. This also reveals the dangers of nuclear power that have given rise to necropolitics and indiscriminate violence throughout the world.

4.3 Legitimization of the Civilians' Executions

According to Achille Mbembe, necropolitical regimes instrumentalize human life (14). This indicates that the necropolitical sovereign uses human life as a tool to

seek their invested interests. Since the sovereign has the power to decide who lives and who dies, human life becomes a tool, instrument, or resource at their disposal which they can use, abuse, and discard as they deem fit (14). According to Mbembe's historical analysis of necropolitics, the groups and individuals acting as the sovereign keep shifting but their methods of manipulating and controlling human life do not significantly change.

However, the methods of killing the vulnerable seem to evolve, with the most significant change witnessed in the 20th century (19). In the 20th century, the legacy of "imperialism", "World War I" and "Racism" significantly influenced the necropolitical approach to the elimination of human life (19). As a result, necropolitical powers sought to "civilize" the manner of carrying out executions (19). The act of civilizing the manner of executions helps necropolitical regimes to legitimize the mass killing of civilians. These so-called "civilized" executions aimed at "disposing" of maximum numbers of human lives in limited time and resources (19). These arguments proposed by Mbembe are very helpful in analyzing the mass executions of vulnerable Syrian civilians carried out in Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian*. These collections of flash fiction widely use satire as a narrative strategy to shed light on how strategic necropowers subject civilians to death. While satire as a literary technique refers to the use of criticism, mockery, and irony to prompt a change in society (Elliott n.p.). Some of the relevant flash fiction stories from these collections are analyzed in the following section.

In the selected primary collection, *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*, the flash fiction story "The Head of Hair and the Guillotine", also discussed in the other chapter of analysis in relation to cultural trauma, portrays the execution scene of a man in a satirical fashion. Before leading the condemned man to the guillotine, the executioners cut the man's hair so that it does not get tangled in the blade of the guillotine, rendering it dull and ineffective. The image of the guillotine in the story shows the evolved methods of killing. An in-depth analysis of this flash fiction story shows that the picture of a guillotine is painted in the narrative to collectively refer to the evolving mechanical and chemical methods of killing. Since the guillotine machine has historically been associated with the idea of making execution more humane and less brutal, the narrative of the story reflects on the absurdity of using complex machines to dispose of the life of "weak creatures" (Alomar *Teeth* 161). It reflects on

the reasons behind inventing different tools to kill people. This story can be interpreted as a satire on modern warfare and advanced weaponry.

The hair strands of the condemned man are personified in this story, and they get into a verbal exchange and pass satirical remarks. They deliberate on why the necropolitical sovereign can "bend us and wrap us and move us and tie us up however they like" (Alomar *Teeth* 161). These phrases highlight the way a condemned person's body is tied and bent before the execution through mechanical devices such as the guillotine. This is the reason the condemned man in the story is shown as a passive individual who is unable to perform any action. Phrases like "they led him to the guillotine", and "they cut [his] hair" not only show his physical inactivity but also shed light on the state-employed executioners who rob condemned individuals of their agency (161). The condemned man does not perform any physical action or engage in a thought process throughout the narrative. He is pushed and dragged by his executioners, while his hair strands reflect on the brutal nature of execution. This serves to highlight "the murderous state" of Syria in the wake of civil war since the executioners are hired by the Syrian regime (Mbembe 17). On the other hand, the condemned individual can be seen as a Syrian civilian deemed as one of "the enemies of the state" whose life is worth disposing of (19). This shows the necropolitical power of the Syrian state over civilians in the wake of civil war.

"The Big Truck" is another flash fiction story exploring the theme of necropolitics in the selected primary collection. It portrays the shock and fear experienced by Syrian civilian characters as they see a "big tanker truck" parked on the road (Alomar *Teeth* 67). It creates so much panic and chaos that an unnamed male character mistakes the scene for the "Judgement Day" (67). When he looks out the window, he learns that the threat is posed by a massive truck parked on the road with the warning "Nation under pressure. Flammable!" (67) The reason why it creates so much "terror" among pedestrians is that they identify with the Syrian nation that is undergoing a serious conflict and crisis in the wake of civil war (67). The entire area is engulfed in "shouts", "creams" and pleas for "help" (67). The warning "flammable" can be interpreted as the Syrian regime's forewarning of further deterioration of the circumstances which may lead to more violence and destruction (67). The image of a big flammable tanker parked in a civilian area can be interpreted as a symbol of the Syrian government's necropolitical procedure to kill a large number of Syrian civilians

in a moment without going through the trouble of arranging one-by-one executions for individuals. This story is a satire on how necropowers introduce innovative ways to subjugate target populations with death threats. While some are threatened with death as shown in this flash fiction story, others are killed without any alerts, forewarnings, or threats.

Regarding how necropowers civilize the methods of executing necropolitical subjects, the flash fiction story entitled "Free Elections" offers relevant insights. It portrays the scene of people electing their political leader. Civilian characters seen as casting votes are referred to as "slaves" of the state (Alomar *Teeth* 31). The choice of words in the narrative of this story conveys satirical reflections. The voters are identified as slaves, while their political representative or leader running the election is called "their executioner" (31). The leader being referred to as an executioner exposes the workings of necropolitics. The use of the term slaves for Syrian civilians highlights their status as vulnerable and disposable individuals whose "dignity" is trampled on by the Syrian regime acting as the necropolitical sovereign (31). The narrative of the story also comments on the flawed and deceptive nature of "democracy" prevalent in Syria (31). Although the leader is shown as being elected through democratic means, the powerlessness of civilians and the hint of their executions in the future at the hands of their elected representative carries deep meanings. It symbolizes the touch of civilization and "democratization" given to the extermination of Syrian civilians who are viewed as a threat or "enemies" to the ruling regime (Mbembe 19). The scene of the election appears to be an ironical and satirical remark on the necropolitical nature of the Syrian regime.

Furthermore, another flash fiction story entitled "Psychological Barrier", also discussed in the previous chapter, highlights a massive power imbalance between the officials working for a necropolitical state and vulnerable civilians. An unnamed civilian is portrayed as climbing over a barrier that separates him from the "palace" of a senior official (Alomar *Teeth* 12). As soon as the official notices him, he first attacks the civilian with "insults" and "kick[s]" and then throws him into a "prison" (12). Later on, he installs "electric fences" around his palace to keep off civilians from approaching (12). This story shows the sovereignty of the official over the life of a civilian. The official is shown as "a high functionary" working for the necropolitical Syrian regime that has the power to brutally attack civilians with impunity (12). The image of the

official's palace shows his high status and the abundance of the state resources at his disposal. Besides this, he has the power of the life and death of vulnerable civilians which he makes use of to discard unwanted people into a "prison"(12). As the civilian is brutally assaulted before being imprisoned, the prison appears to be a garbage bag to dispose of the weak and oppressed individuals by the necropolitical sovereign.

4.4 Deployment of Military Against Civilians

According to Achille Mbembe, one of the tools used by necropowers to suppress the target populations is the "military" (25). The state-controlled military becomes an effective tool to subjugate civilians and suppress their opposition to the sovereignty of necropowers. This contributes to the imposition of strict restrictions in everyday life. The sense of freedom of the civilians is lost under the constant coercion and aggression of the military. In Mbembe's terms, "Daily life is militarized" (30). This serves to indicate how state-controlled military overpowers civilians, instilling in them constant fear of violent punishments in case of resistance. This enforces civilians to exhibit obedience to necropowers.

In a vast number of studies conducted on conflict and chaos, the danger of using the military against civilians is an important subject of discussion. A dissertation entitled *Questioning Idées Reçues: A Study of Interpellative Strategies and Environmental Ethics in Basharat Peer and Ghada Karmi's Memoirs* (2020) refers to conflict zones of Kashmir and Palestine as "marginalized space of pervasive military presence" (113). This dissertation argues that the deployment of the military in conflict zones worsens the condition of already suppressed communities. This work also guides the exploration of militarized life of Syrian civilians in the selected collections.

In Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*, a flash fiction story entitled "Convoy", also discussed in relation to cultural trauma in the other chapter, deals with the theme of military aggression against civilians going about their everyday life. The story begins with the scene of a peaceful city where everything appears "orderly" and people "serene" (Alomar *Teeth* 103). Suddenly, a royal convoy happens to pass by the city. To ensure a smooth passage to the convoy, "security forces" manhandle pedestrians to push them out of the way (103). The formerly peaceful city is overtaken by "terror", "screams" and "shrieks" (103). This chaotic state of urban space adversely impacts the citizens and pedestrians. This indicates the transformation

of Syrian space into a "militarily brutalized place" (Aamir 135). Therefore, using military against civilians serves to subject civilians to severe aggression, manhandling and brutality. It can be seen in the flash fiction story "Convoy" that, in the invasive presence of security personnel in a public space, some of the civilians look panic-stricken, others terrified. Not sustaining the pressure, one of the pedestrians dies of a heart attack.

In this story, the royal convoy represents the necropolitical Syrian regime, while the aggressive security officials symbolize the state-controlled militarization of private and public spaces inhabited and visited by Syrian civilians. The portrayal of a pedestrian succumbing to a heart attack shows the long-term impacts of devaluing human life using force, aggression, and violence against the target population of necropowers. Moreover, the chaos brought about by the arrival of the royal convoy in the story shows the way the routine life of the Syrian civilians is subjected to hardships and entrapment. The story attempts to show how the necropolitical Syrian regime carries out such actions to not only distract Syrian civilians from the ideas of resistance and freedom but also to condemn them to a slow death. If their everyday life comes to a pause, their survival will be difficult. These subjects will not be able to find work, food, and shelter, and as a result, their lives will be endangered. Ultimately, the militarization of civilians' routine life helps the necropolitical regime to control and violate their right to live.

Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection, also portrays a highly militarized civilian life. In this collection of flash fiction, a story entitled "The Smiling People" portrays a world controlled by a tyrant leader who has set up a "secret police" force that performs the duty of punishing people for exhibiting a sense of displeasure with the ruling autocrat. In this story, a man named Wadi is physically assaulted by secret police officials for looking at the leader's photo with an "unsmiling face" (Alomar *Fullblood* 37). Wadi is continuously subjected to "punches and kicks" in prolonged imprisonment, and he is eventually sentenced to "smile at the leader's image for a life" (37). This story shows the overwhelming and invasive involvement of state-controlled security forces in the lives of civilians. It is a satire on the overly militarized life of Syrian civilians as civilian characters can be seen being subjected to torture and confinement for trivial things. This theme is a staple of Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction.

4.5 Justification for the Killing of Civilians

According to Achille Mbembe, the emergence of modernity across the globe is accompanied by multiple "imaginaries of sovereignty" (18). This phrase refers to the way people and societies constitute a collective understanding of the notion of sovereignty. Mbembe notes that one of the most common imaginaries of sovereignty prevalent in the Modern era (covering the time period of the late 18th century and onwards) sees the existence of the subjects of necropolitics as a "mortal threat" against the perpetuation of the rule and power of the necropolitical sovereign (18). Based on this imaginary of sovereignty, one of the possible reasons behind the violence perpetrated by the necropower against the target population is the survival instinct of the necropower. Mbembe observes that the necropower may feel a need "to kill in order to live" because the existence of the subjects of necropolitics poses a threat of opposing, challenging, or subverting the authority of the sovereign (18). Therefore, to perpetuate their dominance and sovereignty, necropowers engage in the "destruction of human bodies and populations" (14). Therefore, the extermination of the target population can be seen by necropowers as a justified course of action. A number of flash fiction stories in Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction deal with this theme by portraying the necropolitical Syrian regime's use of violence to maintain its power and subdue civilians' opposition.

The story "Human Malice" shows a verbal exchange between Grenade and Nuclear Bomb. Using the literary device of personification, Alomar's grenade and bomb are represented as two competing characters who try to outwit each other regarding their ability to cause destruction. However, another character, Human Malice, enters the scene and outstrips both of the previously arguing characters, Grenade and Bomb, in his ability to cause large-scale destruction. After listening to Human Malice, Bomb and Grenade accept their defeat. This flash fiction story serves to highlight the destructive nature of nuclear weapons. These weapons are used for the mass destruction of human lives and properties. However, these weapons are manufactured by governments and states under the garb of defense and deterrence. Promoting an imaginary of sovereignty which allows the necropower to kill the disposable subjects for its survival and continuation of power justifies a large-scale production of nuclear weapons.

In this story, it is interesting to note that Human Malice is respected by Grenades

and Bombs as the biggest destructive force. Although these weapons are created by humans on the pretext of defense, the author foregrounds "malice" and malevolence as the underlying causes of the wide-scale production of these weapons (Alomar *Teeth* 138). This argument can be supported by the discussions carried out in a research paper entitled "Monseigneur's Despotism and Hashmat's Benevolent Despotism" (2011) which studies the fictional portrayal of despotism in Amjad Islam Amjad's famous 1980s drama *Waris* and Charles Dickens's classic novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). It argues how despotic rulers maintain their tyrannical autocratic rule over their subjects by posing a constant "threat of punishment and violence" to state subjects (Aamir 2). Such threats help subdue state subjects.

In the same way, in Alomar's story "Human Malice", the production and deployment of weapons pose the threat of punishment and violence to Syrian civilian characters. This relates perfectly with Mbembe's conception of a type of sovereignty imaginary that necessitates the killing of the subjects of a necropolitical state who pose a threat of resistance to the authority of the sovereign over their mortality. Since the Syrian civil war witnessed an unchecked and vicious usage of such weapons against protesting civilians, the Syrian refugee author, Osama Alomar, writes multiple flash fiction stories revolving around this theme.

There is another story entitled "Ants" in the selected primary collection of flash fiction that is relevant to this discussion. The narrator in this story happens to "crush" a large number of ants (Alomar *Teeth* 47). Although it is an inadvertent act on the part of the narrator, it serves to teach him a great life lesson. He learns that unwarranted suffering is the fate of the weak. This story is an allegorical representation of the suffering of Syrian civilians who are subjected to unfair and unjust violence in the wake of civil war. The character of the narrator represents the ruling regime of Syria, while a large number of ants represent millions of Syrian civilians who are uprooted, displaced, and killed mercilessly to subdue opposition to the regime. After crushing thousands of ants, the narrator realizes that unprovoked torture and killing symbolize the vulnerability and weakness of the necropolitical subjects. In the context of the Syrian civil war, ants can be interpreted as Syrian civilians constituting necropolitical subjects. These necropolitical subjects, upon opposing and protesting against the autocratic regime, are subject to unprecedented violence and human rights abuses. However, the killing of these subjects is justified by the necropolitical Syrian regime as a way to

warrant the sustenance of the power of the sovereign regime.

Another flash fiction story "Kicks" in *Teeth of the Comb,* also discussed in the other chapter, is equally relevant to the analysis of the workings of necropolitics in the selected collections. This story shows the devaluation of human life at the hands of necropowers. This story portrays the scene of a prison camp where a prisoner is brutally assaulted by two state-employed investigators. This assault is a manifestation of the power of the necropolitical Syrian state on the life and death of Syrian civilians. The way these investigators assault him shows the way the life of the vulnerable necropolitical subjects is easy to dispose of. As the story proceeds, the investigators leave but suddenly the walls of the prison camp begin to hurl kicks at the prisoner resulting in the collapse of the roof on the prisoner's head.

This story is an allegorical representation of the recurring violence carried out by the Syrian necropower. The aggression of walls against the prisoner shows that everything associated with or owned by the necropower serves to violate and devalue the life of the necropolitical subjects. Interpreting this story in the context of the Syrian civil war highlights the plight of hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians that are detained and tortured by the state, with many having lost their lives in prisons. However, the autocratic Syrian state enjoying sovereignty over the mortality of civilians is not shown as being held accountable for its brutal treatment of the subjects in the selected collections. This is also relevant to Achille Mbembe's argument that necropowers can engage in the "invisible killing" of the necropolitical subjects (30). In this story, the murder of the prisoner is carried out by the walls of the prison. This highlights the mysterious deaths of many civilians during the Syrian civil war. The reasons behind their deaths and the identity of their executioners remain largely unidentified. The portrayal of the walls of the prison camp acting as the executor of the prisoner can also be interpreted as the slow death of Syrian civilian prisoners who faced perpetual neglect and abject deprivation in prison camps.

Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection, also portrays necropowers executing civilian populations to maintain their power. In the flash fiction story "When Tongues Were Cut Off", a "dictator" is infuriated by his subjects' outright opposition to dictatorship (Alomar *Fullblood* 24). To put an end to increasing protests against the regime, the dictator decides to implement "democracy" (24). He orders a carpet made up of his subjects' "tongues"

and announces that democracy is an act of walking on that carpet (24). As the subjects' tongues are severed, their ensuing silence is mistaken as their ultimate satisfaction with the regime. This story is a satire on the Syrian struggle for democracy that resulted in civil war, with the ruling regime causing widespread death and destruction to subdue the civilian opposition. The order to sever the tongues of civilians shows the necropolitical tendency of the regime that renders the target population powerless and voiceless. The powerlessness of the target population ensures the continuance of the necropolitical sovereign's rule. This story shows that necropolitical regimes subject the target population to violence, dismemberment, and death to suppress resistance, opposition, and protests.

4.6 Triple Loss Experienced by Necropolitical Subjects

Achille Mbembe argues that the sovereignty of necropowers marks the lives of necropolitical subjects with a "triple loss" (21). The quoted phrase refers to the deprivation and violation of three fundamental human rights i.e., the collective loss of "home", "political status" and "loss of rights over his or her body" (21). The loss of these three rights at once leaves a lasting impression on the lives and identity of the necropolitical subjects. The following section is an attempt to understand how Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections navigate these losses or deprivations.

4.6.1 Loss of Home

In Osama Alomar's flash fiction, the loss of a home is a major loss experienced by the Syrian necropolitical subjects at the hands of the Syrian regime. It is important to note that, in his discussion on necropolitics, Mbembe encloses the term 'home' in inverted commas to exhibit the multiple dimensions of meaning that this term covers in the context of necropolitics. Therefore, in the light of multiple flash fiction stories in the selected collections, it can be argued that loss of home does not only refer to the destruction of residential areas and buildings owned and inhabited by the Syrian necropolitical subjects, but it also symbolizes how these subjects' sense of belonging with Syrian homeland, nation, and historical legacy is shaken under the sovereignty of Syrian autocratic regime acting as a necropower. The civilian characters can be seen as uprooted, displaced, and homeless. If we stretch this argument further, the loss of home experienced by Syrian civilians in the selected collections also highlights the families separated and torn apart in the wake of wide- scale violence and human rights

abuses committed in civil war.

In the selected primary collection, a flash fiction story entitled "Nest" is an allegorical narrative focusing on the theme of homelessness. The story personifies a bird that happens to see "homeless people" sleeping by the side of a road (Alomar *Teeth* 27). The bird wonders why these people do not attempt to look for a cozy space to ward off "bitter cold" like the way birds do (27). It reaches the conclusion that the human species has some "great flaw" (27). This story reflects on the reasons behind abject deprivations experienced by humans. In this flash fiction story, the comparison of humans with birds is a literary strategy that helps the author to draw readers' attention toward the failure of the human race in protecting its basic rights. The bird's understanding of survival involves protection from "dangers" and "cold" (27). However, Syrian civilian characters, represented as homeless people in this story, are seen as sleeping by the roadsides. They are exposed and vulnerable to "the dangers of the outside world" (27). Though claiming to be the most evolved species, many humans are deprived of a home.

This story represents the plight of Syrian refugees who flee to the "outside world" to evade violence in the wake of civil war (Alomar *Teeth* 27). However, as Achille Mbembe argues, the presence of necropolitical subjects is "undesired" in host countries where they are further marginalized (Mbembe 103). The term homeless refers to their status as a refugee, while the image of the roadside represents the marginalization of Syrian refugees in foreign countries.

The loss of a home is also a staple theme of Osama Alomar's other works. In *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection, "Whales' Suicide" is a flash fiction story that portrays "a group of whales" about to commit suicide by moving towards the coastline (Alomar *Fullblood* 42). While doing that, they engage in a conversation and deliberate on why humans on the shore return whales to the ocean, thwarting their suicide plans. One of the whales blames humans for their suicide plan, criticizing the way they pollute their "clean and pure" ocean water, turning it into a "poisoned home" (42). Upon closer reading, this story shows the deeper meaning conveyed through the metaphor of suicidal whales. It reveals the reason why people choose to desert their homeland. It appears that civilians leave their homes and face degradation as refugees because necropowers render their homes uninhabitable. This story uses an allegory of whales' suicide to highlight that, to escape violence and human

rights abuses in a country engulfed in unending "armed conflicts" and "destructive wars," many Syrian civilians are left with no choice but to leave their homes in search of peace and protection (42). The constant unrest, destruction, and conflict prompt civilians to seek refuge in foreign countries as "an act of protest" against the necropolitical Syrian regime (42). Leaving home and accepting the state of homelessness is a necessary evil for vulnerable Syrian civilians caught in the violent conflict. Therefore, moving away from Syria can be construed as an expression of civilians' resistance to state-administered violence and oppression.

4.6.2 Loss of Political Status

The second major loss experienced by Syrian civilians is the loss of political status. In the selected primary collection, the loss of political status of Syrian civilians is a major theme of multiple flash fiction stories. The story "War", also discussed in the other chapter in relation to cultural trauma, makes a passing reference to the plight of "millions of refugees" who are persecuted both at home and abroad (Alomar *Teeth* 42; Mbembe 103). Viewing their condition helps a team of extraterrestrial aliens in studying violent tendencies inherent in human nature.

Such persecution of refugees is also the subject of various other scholarly discussions. One of the works that is important to cite here is a journal article "Violent Inaction: The Necropolitical Experience of Refugees in Europe" (1969). This article discusses Johan Galtung's distinction between physical and physiological violence that refugees are subject to. It is argued that refugees, particularly the ones seeking asylum in European countries, flee physical violence in their home countries but, in host countries, they are subjected to physiological violence which encompasses the deprivation of basic needs and provisions along with "constrained movement" (Davies et al. 8). The restrictions imposed on refugees and negligence exhibited towards their well-being in host countries trap them in a cycle of violence. This is the reason behind their loss of political status in both home and host countries.

Another flash fiction story in the selected primary collection entitled "Bag of the Nation" has been discussed in the other chapter in relation to Alomar's representation of Syrian cultural trauma. It also relates to the representation of necropolitics in Alomar's works. The story deals with the challenges that Syrian refugees face in host countries. The story portrays a supposedly Syrian man recounting

his experiences as a refugee. He tells that, in the beginning, he enthusiastically walked around in a foreign country proudly carrying a bag containing items and memories from his home country. However, one day, he gathered people to show them the marvels of his nation. As soon as he opened the bag, it exploded. The crowd ridiculed him for his "bag of the nation" (Alomar *Teeth* 16). He narrates, "I took the heavy bag off my back" (16). This shows his embarrassment and disappointment at his national legacy.

The reason behind the narrator's disappointment is that he is subjected to "degradations" and "disgust" because of the violence, destruction, and human rights abuses committed in Syria (Alomar *Teeth* 17). As a refugee, he is continuously denied social approval and respect in a foreign country. He says that as his home "country's reputation" keeps deteriorating with the passage of time, he continues to be a target of derision (17). At last, he decides to give up on his Syrian identity and "wandered off not knowing where" (17). His decision to flee both home and host countries shows the adversities posed by a life marked with the denial of political status as an equal citizen. Achille Mbembe talks about the same situation when he mentions the persecution of necropolitical subjects both at home and abroad (103). In Syria, he faces violence, while in a foreign country as a refugee, he faces insults and embarrassment. In short, his status as a necropolitical subject takes over his political status.

4.6.3 Loss of Bodily Rights

The third serious loss experienced by Syrian civilians is the loss of their right over their bodies. The flash fiction story "Leaning on a Bone" deals with the violation of bodily rights of Syrian civilian characters in the civil war. The right to health facilities and nutritious food is particularly highlighted here. The story portrays a child who waits at the doorstep for his father's return. It is revealed that the father left home in search of food for his family in the wake of civil war and drought when the entire country was overtaken by famine. The child dances with excitement initially but as the father draws nearer, the child shockingly announces to the family that the father is empty- handed, appearing extremely weak and skeletal.

According to Mbembe, necropolitical subjects constitute "a hungry town" as the necropowers consider them as disposable populations, unworthy of state-owned resources (27). It symbolizes the way necropolitical subjects are subject to prolonged deprivation. The flash fiction story "Leaning on a Bone" shows how the lack of access

of necropolitical Syrian subjects to food and health facilities reduces them to mere shadows. In this story, the father who travels for a month looking for food for his family is no longer able to walk properly as he seems to be "leaning on one of his bones" (Alomar *Teeth* 63). This shows the Syrian necropolitical regime's violation of civilians' bodily rights. In this story, the Syrian civil war poses a major threat to the civilians' food security. Starved for several months, the father's weak body shows the symptoms of malnutrition. On the other hand, the child's disappointment at viewing his father returning empty-handed symbolizes the civilian families in Syria that succumbed to prolonged starvation during the civil war period.

To extend the discussion on the colossal loss experienced by the Syrian civilian characters as a result of the Syrian civil war, it is argued that the necropolitical regime in Syria affected almost all segments of society. The term triple loss referring to the loss of home, political status, and loss of one's bodily rights turns into a "deadly triangle" that dominates the everyday life of Syrian civilians in the selected collections (Alomar *Teeth* 53). Deprived of their fundamental human rights, these civilians acquire the status of "living-dead" (Mbembe 40). Albeit left to live, these characters' basic needs are trampled upon by the ruling regime. The authorities' neglect of their needs is a necropolitical practice that symbolizes the devaluation of human life.

Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection, also shows how fundamental human rights are violated under necropolitical regimes. In this collection, the title story "Fullblood Arabian" shows a man admonishing another for envying a fullblood Arabian horse. He advises him to be "proud" and grateful for being a human, instead of a horse (Alomar *Fullblood* 31). However, the envying man insists on it by emphasizing that a fullblood Arabian horse has a "far greater… value" than a human (31). This story is a satire on the rise of necropolitics in Syria which violates human rights to an extent where human life becomes a devalued object. While human lives continue to lose worth in the eyes of authority figures, the value of animals and material properties skyrockets. This is the reason that the character, in this narrative, envies horses for their growing value in a society that depreciates human dignity. It also helps to show that devaluation of human life in a conflict-ridden world is an important theme of Osama Alomar's works.

4.7 Disproportionate Impact of Necropolitics on Vulnerable Groups

It can be observed in multiple flash fiction stories of the selected collections that all necropolitical subjects in a state do not experience violence in the same way. Some of the characters appear more vulnerable to violence and chaos than others. It shows how necropolitics affects each group in society differently. Some characters in the selected collections, bearing the brunt of their individual identity, end up getting more hurt and experiencing bigger losses. In the light of these flash fiction stories, characters who experienced colossal damage and loss include women, youngsters, children, refugees, and the poor. The following section entails an analysis of how the condition of necropolitical subjects deteriorates with their vulnerable personal positions.

4.7.1 Impact on Youth

The flash fiction story "The Earthquake" shows how necropolitics intersects with other identity markers, particularly highlighting the challenges that youth face in Syria. As a country engulfed by conflict and violence, Syria offers no promise of success, opportunities, a secure future, and social mobility. In this narrative, youngsters are subjected to "a psychological earthquake" prompted by countrywide "unemployment" (Alomar *Teeth* 40). These young men see their future as "destroyed", similar to the way a catastrophic earthquake causes destruction (40). This sense of "loss" overwhelms them (40). This narrative shows that, in troubled times, youngsters, who are supposed to be the asset of their state, end up in depression and disillusionment. The loss of opportunities is akin to "the loss of human life" (40). If there are no promises for a better and stable future, the young lot of the country is doomed. The theme of this story resonates well with the Syrian youngsters who are forced to flee Syria to escape constant violence at the hands of the necropolitical regime.

4.7.2 Impact on Women and Children

Osama Alomar's selected primary collection of flash fiction entitled *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* carefully deals with sensitive issues such as the way necropolitics extends to family life, affecting women and children. This sub-section of the analysis is relevant to Achille Mbembe's observation that, under a necropolitical regime, "parents [are] shamed and beaten in front of their families" (39). The plight of parents in turbulent territories is also an important theme of the book *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine* (2023). Analyzing a number of

Palestinian and Kashmiri memoirs, this book examines at length the helplessness of parents in protecting their children in the face of tumultuous times. It analyzes Basharat Peer's portrayal of the troubles of a Kashmiri couple who witness their son's unjust killing at the hands of the Indian state which also orchestrates character assassination for their son on television (Aamir 232). This indicates how necropolitical violence encroaches on the private spheres of civilians, violating and dishonoring family life. Parents who are supposed to protect their children are condemned to humiliation and violence before their children.

The flash fiction story entitled "The Strongest" shows how children become terrified seeing their mother's defeat at the hands of a bigger power, unable to accept that their mother is weak. This story shows a personified hungry lioness with her starving cubs looking for prey. She eventually finds a gazelle, tears it apart, and begins to enjoy the fresh meat with her cubs. Suddenly, a huge lion arrived at the site and claimed the prey of the gazelle. Initially, the lioness resisted but to protect the cubs, she decided to retreat. This story shows the power dynamics that permeate the natural world.

As an allegorical representation of the chaotic state of Syria, this narrative is set in a jungle. It helps to foreground the themes of lawlessness, chaos, exploitation, and ruthlessness. These aspects characterize and govern the workings of Syrian society in the wake of the Syrian civil war. The rule of law is absent from the everyday life of the Syrian population. They are subject to the whims of the powerful. In this story, the gazelle represents the most vulnerable segment of society. Having no one to back it up, this animal becomes easy prey for a powerful lioness. However, since the lioness is not the most powerful animal, it is also subject to the exploitation of a more powerful beast, a lion. Having witnessed their mother's surrender to a bigger lion, the cubs are overtaken by the sense of shock and fear, so the lioness tries to console her cubs by saying, "I'm very strong… but there is someone stronger than me" (Alomar *Teeth* 46). However, the cubs remain terrified at the spectacle of their mother's cowardly surrender to the lion. Through the allegory of the jungle and animals, this story helps to show that in chaotic and unstable societies, such as Syria, everyday life is like that of wild beasts, with the powerful preying over the weak, while the weak is unable to protect their family.

Moreover, the image of the lioness retreating with her cubs and leaving her prey

to a stronger lion shows the maternal instinct to protect offspring from potential danger. The theme of parents' struggle to protect their children in turbulent scenariosis also explored in the aforementioned book *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine* (2023) through the analysis of Kashmiri and Palestinian narratives. This book analyzes Basharat Peer's memoir entitled *Curfewed Night* which narrates the experiences of people from a conflict-ravaged area, Kashmir, where a mother, Shameema, desperately tries to save her son from the clutches of Indian soldiers by "shouting at the soldiers" before she "lies down on top of [her son]", thereby acting as a shield to protect him (Aamir 233). The desperation and helplessness of Shameema in protecting her child is similar to the depiction of the lioness in the story being discussed i.e., "The Strongest". The lioness can also be seen renouncing her prey to the lion and retreating from the scene to make sure that her cubs are not hurt. Moreover, the lion's claim over the prey is symbolic of the way necropowers feast over the fruits of the efforts of generations of Syrian civilians. The resources of the country and the hard-earned achievements of the nation are subject to the exploitation of the necropolitical sovereign which, in this context, is the Syrian regime.

Similarly, in another flash fiction story "The Star Messenger" which is also discussed in the other chapter with regards to its portrayal of Syrian cultural trauma, a child is subjected to a life of deprivation in the wake of the chaotic state of the country. Having lost his "family" to the violent conflict prevailing over the country, the child is condemned to "fear", "hunger", and "cold" (Alomar *Teeth* 53). Experiencing such intensity of pain and suffering, the child exclaims, "How many wretched people in this world!" (53). The next morning, the child is found dead by a street sweeper. This narrative indicates that children are highly vulnerable to turbulent times. Moreover, the death of the child in this story foregrounds the ruthlessness of the necropolitical Syrian regime that shows no regard for the lives of innocent children caught in the conflict.

4.7.3 Impact on the Poor

In his elucidation of the concept of necropolitics, Achille Mbembe observes, "The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread" (27). This means that under the subjugation of necropolitical regimes, the target population is condemned to unprecedented levels of deprivation and poverty. Not being able to afford a meal means a slow death for necropolitical subjects. It is also one of the ways through which a necropolitical regime manifests its sovereignty over target populations. Though such

practices undertaken by a necropolitical state may sometimes be simplified as mere neglect of the needs of vulnerable civilians that does not seem to be the case in the selected collections of flash fiction. A number of flash fiction stories in Osama Alomar's flash fiction show the plight of the impoverished at the hands of the necropolitical regime.

In the story "Do Not Forget the Poor", the narrator happens to smell a strong odor from his surroundings. He tries to find the source of "the sad smell" and finds out that a female beggar across the street was emanating the smell (Alomar *Teeth* 148). This story hints at the Syrian civilians who are displaced, uprooted, and unemployed in the wake of the Syrian civil war. While the fabric of Syrian society collapses, the economically struggling segment of the society takes a major hit. Many are forced to beg on streets with torn clothes as shown in this story.

Nevertheless, the narrator tries to help the woman by giving her a small donation but the woman suddenly falls dead. This story indicates that since the Syrian civil war pushed civilians to unprecedented poverty and deprivation, the state institution would need to take serious measures to control the growing poverty in Syrian society. The narrator realizes that a little donation to a beggar cannot control the "sad smell" of poverty (Alomar *Teeth* 148). Therefore, it can be argued that the story serves to highlight the importance of sustainable economic support and donations for Syrian civilians to help them get back to their normal lives.

Similarly, in the flash fiction story "The Shining Idea", a father is shown as having a conversation with his unborn child. He keeps telling him the reasons why the world is not worth being born into. One of the reasons he puts emphasis on is "poverty" (Alomar *Teeth* 98). He tells the unborn child that the world is so ruthless for the poor that financial woes force barely 10-year-old girls into "prostitution" due to a lack of resources and family support (98). This story indicates that life for common people in Syria has been marked with so many woes and adversities that it has become challenging for adults to choose to become parents since bringing more children into the world will mean condemning more lives to necropolitical violence. This is one of the subtle ways through which necropolitical regimes manifest their control over the mortality of the target population. The civilians, as shown in this story, may choose of their own volition to not have children as it is clear in this narrative that the father is trying his best to make his unborn baby understand why it is important for him to

prevent its birth. As a result of perpetual unrest in the country, the right to live is once more infringed upon in the selected collections.

Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection, also shows the devastating impacts of rising necropolitics on the lives of common civilians. In this collection, a flash fiction story entitled "The Seashell" makes explicit references to "wailings of the tortured", "cries of mothers", "tears of orphans" and "rivers of blood" (Alomar *Fullblood* 38). Interpreted in the context of the Syrian civil war, these phrases serve to highlight the tragedies, destruction, and devastation faced by civilians. Millions of civilian characters seem to have lost their lives to the necropolitical practices of the ruling regime. Moreover, this collection of flash fiction shows that, to suppress resistance, the ruling Syrian regime does not hesitate from killing civilians who can pose a threat to the sovereignty of the ruling regime.

4.8 Challenging Necropolitics: The Response of the Target Population

So far, this chapter has discussed the impacts of the necropolitical Syrian regime on Syrian civilian characters as shown in the selected collections. It is now time to study how Syrian civilian characters respond to state-sponsored violence.

Before examining it, it is important to revise how Achille Mbembe represents the condition of target populations in his theorization on necropolitics. According to him, necropowers use violence against target populations to reduce them to "the status of living dead" (Mbembe 40). He further adds that "invisible killing is added to outright executions" to subject targeted civilians to a life of subjugation (30). This approach helps the necropolitical regime ensure the continuance of its rule without any threat of resistance or opposition from civilians (18). However, it is observed in multiple flash fiction stories in the selected collections that a number of civilian characters are more than living dead. Despite being condemned to "death-in-life", they manage to exhibit a spirit to fight, challenge and subvert the sovereignty of the ruling regime over their freedom and mortality. The following section analyzes those flash fiction stories.

The selected primary collection, "The Light of Hope" is a story that portrays a man who finds himself trapped in a tunnel. Unable to deal with amnesia, isolation, fear, and hunger, he tries to find his way out. Fortunately, he notices a ray of light coming from the end of the tunnel. Chasing it lands him out of the tunnel. As he comes out, he realizes that he was stuck inside a cannon barrel. This story is an allegorical

representation of Syrian civilians trying to escape state-sponsored violence.

As the narrative opens, the man opens his eyes in a dark tunnel, feeling "fear", "hunger" and "cold" (Alomar *Teeth* 36). The combination of these three feelings is a condition common to multiple characters caught in the civil war in a number of flash fiction stories throughout the selected collections. Moreover, the man compares the tunnel to an "iron coffin" which highlights the theme of death, condemnation, and necropolitical violence (36). The man's increasing sense of loneliness ensuing from the absence of his "family… wife and children" also foreground the theme of wide- scale killings (36). These conditions are an allegorical representation of a civilian caught in a civil war with a necropolitical regime. However, the man's resilience and determination prompt him to look for an escape from this confinement.

Having found an opening at one end of the tunnel, the man begins to "crawl with eager determination toward the light" (Alomar *Teeth* 37). The image of the ray of light symbolizes hope and freedom, while the use of the word "crawl" implies struggle and fighting. After struggling his way out, the man realizes that he was stuck inside a cannon barrel that was about to be fired. His timely escape is the reward for his struggle to fight his way out of the misery that befell him. This story emphasizesthe significance of resisting and fighting the lethal dangers that necropolitical subjects face.

Another flash fiction story "Mutiny" highlights the importance of collective efforts to challenge and subvert subjugation and oppression. Using the literary device of personification, the narrative shows that all clocks in the world decide to defeat "the tyranny and absolute hegemony of time" (Alomar *Teeth* 59). They begin to move their hands according to their will, breaking free from the dominion of time. Witnessing this transgression, people dispose of these clocks resulting in a huge "clock graveyard" (59). This story is a satirical representation of how necropolitics emerged in the wake of the Syrian civil war. As discussed in 1.1 section of the first chapter of this research, Syrian civilians protested against the ruling Syrian regime, inviting the wrath of the regime that subjected a large number of protestors to indiscriminate killing. However, the consequences of the rash response of the ruling regime extend far beyond these killings. This incident only served to deepen the conflict between the civilians and the ruling regime, turning Syria into a necropoliticalspace. This aggravated conflict is represented in this story as people disposing of their protesting clocks.

Moreover, the term "graveyard" symbolizes the Syrian civilians who are killed in the civil war (Alomar *Teeth* 59). The necropolitical Syrian state continues to rule Syria, exterminating individuals who pose a threat to its power. However, the story shows that the reclamation of freedom requires struggle, sacrifice, and collective resistance against tyranny.

Another flash fiction story in the selected primary collection that shows the fighting spirit of the target population is "Who Leads Whom". This story shows a donkey defying the orders and authority of its master. It complains of "insult", "degradation, and shame" that its human master has been subjecting it to. Now, it asks to be carried on the back of his master the way it carried him in the past (Alomar *Teeth* 129). This story is a portrayal of the Syrian struggle to remove the ruling regime from power since the regime devalues civilians' lives. In this story, the donkey is a metaphor for a subjugated civilian population that has awakened to "revolt" against the ruling regime's tyranny (129). In short, this story shows the resistance of necropolitical subjects to the sovereignty of a regime that violates their fundamental rights and devalues their lives.

This narrative is similar to another story entitled "Donkey Demonstration" in Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) serving as a supplementary collection of flash fiction in this research. It portrays three friends who enjoy a film about a hero who stands up against subjugation and attains freedom. However, as they leave the cinema hall, they are flabbergasted to learn that the roads are blocked across the city because of donkey protests. This story highlights the irony of freedom fighting which people admire on film screens but fear in real life. The group of friends applauds the movie hero's display of "bravery and courage" in fighting his "oppressors" but experience "electric shock" upon learning of donkey protests (Alomar *Fullblood* 28). This story highlights that despite being glorified as an adventure, freedom fighting in itself is a strenuous struggle against oppression which may result in a violent conflict. The group of friends ends up running away "shaking" because they are afraid of getting embroiled in donkeys' fierce demonstrations for freedom (29). This story shows that contrary to a romanticized adventure, fighting for one's rights is an honorable struggle that deserves respect and requires courage.

Overall, this analysis shows the spirit of resistance that numerous characters in the selected collections embody. Portraying clocks, donkeys, and humans as freedom

fighters, Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* highlight the Syrian civilians who stand for their rights in the face of an autocratic regime that tends to exterminate opposing parties and protesting civilians to strengthen its power.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed Osama Alomar's flash fiction through the lens of necropolitics. Multiple flash fiction stories from these collections have been discussed to highlight the devastating impacts of necropolitical practices of the ruling Syrian regime. Analyses of stories such as "The Head of Hair and the Guillotine", "Convoy", and "The Big Truck" along with others has shown how the ruling regime in Syria had been portrayed as excessively necropolitical, subjecting Syrian civilian characters to unjust violence, torture, and killing.

Moreover, it has also been discussed how civilian characters justified their choices of fleeing their homeland to seek asylum in foreign countries. The unique aspect of this research is that it has also studied the response of Syrian civilian characters to the necropolitical violence and human rights abuses. Although the resistance of necropolitical subjects has not been an important subject of Achille Mbembe's discussion on necropolitics as discussed in the 5.8 section, multiple stories in the selected collections have helped the researcher to highlight the way civilian characters challenged the sovereignty of the necropolitical Syrian regime. For instance, in his collection *Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*, "The Light of Hope", a Syrian civilian successfully escaped state-sponsored violence through his resilience and fighting spirit, while in "Mutiny", the rebellion of clocks showed that struggle, sacrifice, and collective resistance against tyranny can lead to ultimate freedom. Both of the stories, along with others, have been discussed in detail in this chapter. Moreover, in the next chapter, these findings will be further discussed to make a theoretical intervention in Mbembe's necropolitics.

CHAPTER 5

REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL TRAUMA AND SHATTERED IDENTITIES IN THE SELECTED FLASH FICTION COLLECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) in light of the theory of cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander. To carry out a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis, this chapter is broken down into various subsections. Every section of the analysis chapter includes textual examples from the selected collections of flash fiction. These examples help with carrying out a comprehensive and in-depth study of how the process of cultural trauma unfolds within the Syrian context as portrayed in the selected collections. The main argument prevailing over the entire chapter is how the state of unrest, instability, and chaos in Syria disrupts the cultural meanings and collective identity of the Syrian characters in the selected collections who, as a result, find themselves collecting the shards of their shattered collective identity. This identity crisis marks the beginning of their attempts to redefine who they are, process their psychological and emotional challenges, and share their stories to seek catharsis and support from the international audience.

It is crucial to clarify why this chapter argues that cultural trauma in Osama Alomar's selected collections reconfigures the identity of Syrian civilian characters. Although the characters' experiences of displacement, homelessness and refuge seem to be the concerns of diasporic fiction, the primary cause of Syrian civilians' plight seem to be the cultural trauma caused by the Syrian civil war. It is conceivable that the breakdown of the Syrian society and the group consciousness of Syrian civilian characters following the brutalities of the civil war are the primary agents of the identity crisis faced by them. Therefore, it can be argued that, in the selected collections, diasporic experiences and the identity crisis prevalent in Syria seem to be the collateral damage of the Syrian civil war. Accordingly, the present chapter analyzes diasporic experiences as byproducts of the broader social and political upheaval in the wake of the civil war which prompts cultural trauma in the Syrian society.

5.1.1 Osama Alomar

Osama Alomar is a Syrian refugee author. His collection of flash fiction entitled *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* is selected as a primary text for the present research, along with *Fullblood Arabian* serving as the supplementary text. In an interview with Sam Jaffe Goldstein, Osama Alomar talks at length about the purpose of his writing. He sees himself as a writer whose primary goal is to highlight the plight of Syrian people for a global audience (Goldstein n.p.). Through his collections of flash fiction, he seeks to give the international audience an insight into the brutalities of the tyrannical Syrian regime (Goldstein n.p.). Therefore, it is important to take into account the historical and sociopolitical context of Syria to gain an in-depth understanding of the selected collections.

The selected collections make extensive use of metaphor and allegory. This literary style is commonly observed in Syrian literature. There are justifiable reasons behind this trend in Syrian literature. Writing about the literary trends in Syrian literature, Hanadi Al-Samman, a professor of Arab literature, writes that Syrian literature has always been deeply rooted in political themes. However, with the rule of the Ba'ath Party, Syrian writers were caught in a dilemma of choosing between "artistic freedom in exile" or writing in a "subversive" and "subtle" style (qtd. in Rao n.p.). This indicates how the ruling regime deals with writers who choose to give an expression to the atrocities, violence, and oppression that the Syrian civil war breeds. It justifies the wide usage of metaphorical and allegorical style that widely characterizes contemporary Syrian literature.

This argument is important to understand in the context of this research since subtle literary style serves as a garb for the "dissident views" of the contemporary Syrian refugee author Osama Alomar (Rhee n.p.). In an interview with Nissa Rhee, Alomar expresses his concerns regarding his legacy as a writer in the times when a large part of the Syrian literature is lost under the rigorous monitoring of state-sponsored "censorship" (Rhee n.p.). He claims to have experienced immense fear regarding his safety and well-being as a writer. According to Alomar, many Syrian authors have been subjected to torment, imprisonment, and "disappearances" for their "daring" approach toward political themes and overt modes of expression (Rhee n.p.). Since Alomar's collections of flash fiction are replete with "metaphors", therefore, he regards his metaphorical literary style as a shield against the strict surveillance of the

ruling regime of the Ba'ath party.

The following sections of this chapter introduce the selected collections of flash fiction.

5.1.2 *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017)

The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories is a collection of flash fiction, a popular Arabic genre. The term "flash fiction" is a Western construct referring to Arabic (very) short stories known as "qissa qasira" in Middle East (Rao n.p.). Written by a Syrian refugee writer, the stories in this collection can be regarded as little chunks of thoughtful reflection on chaos, instability, suppression, and displacement. The selected collection entails very short stories that grapple with the themes of "war", "oppression" and "violence" prevailing in a "Third World" country (Lababidi n.p.). Some scholars refer to these stories as "modern fables" which narrate brief stories about modern issues such as refuge, political asylum, censorship, and nuclear warfare (Schnelbach n.p.). However, unlike traditional fables, these stories are "never didactic" (Schnelbach n.p.). This indicates that the flash fiction stories in the selected collection are thought-provoking narratives that aim to foster new understandings of the prevalent issues in Syria.

According to Robyn Creswell, the specific sociopolitical conditions, cultural references and individuals' names used in the flash fiction stories in *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* hint towards one fact i.e., "Alomar's stories can't be anything else but Syrian" (qtd. in Μπέης 33). Despite these observations, Alomar's flash fiction stories in the selected collection make no direct references to Syria. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the selected collection of flash fiction stories, it is important to recognize their allegorical nature. Thus, before analyzing a story, this chapter provides a descriptive overview of its narrative or scenario.

The distinguishing aspect of this collection of flash fiction is its excessive use of personification. Using this literary device, Osama Alomar has given eloquence and intellect to different inanimate entities such as currency notes, handkerchiefs, pens, and animals to name a few. There are one hundred and sixty-three pieces of flash fiction in this collection, and the structural composition changes from one flash fiction story to another, ranging from brief stories spanning a few sentences to more extensive narratives occupying a few pages (Μπέης 19). Although concise, the flash fiction

stories within this collection encompass a wide range of philosophical and sociopolitical reflections on the Syrian civil war.

5.1.3 *Fullblood Arabian* (2014)

Osama Alomar's first collection of flash fiction entitled *Fullblood Arabian* is selected as a supplementary text for this research. Examples from this collection will be used to substantiate the arguments proposed in this research. This collection is also replete with the use of literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, allegory, and satire. Placed in the flash fiction genre, this collection is comprised of very brief narratives about life, conflict, peace, and war. The reason why this collection is being used as a secondary text in this research is that it is not much different from Alomar's latest collection of flash fiction entitled *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* so it will only be used to show that Alomar's literary works consistently engage with the themes of trauma, identity, violence, death, and necropolitics.

5.2 Disruption of Collective Identity in the Wake of Cultural Trauma

One of the most important things to be explored in this research is the nature of the damage that leads the Syrian population to reconfigure their identity at a collective level in the selected collections of flash fiction. According to the theory of cultural trauma, what is at stake in the aftermath of a traumatic event is the "patterned meanings" of a collectivity (Alexander 10). These meanings refer to the interpretations, beliefs, traditions, and practices that are exclusive to that group. These aspects constitute the "group consciousness" of collectivity (265). Though these meanings may gradually alter with the passage of time, any event that suddenly disrupts these patterns of meaning is regarded as traumatic. Consequently, the "structures of meaning" prevalent in that group are unsettled and "destabilized" (10). The following sub-sections explore the implications and impacts of the dislodged meanings leading to a destabilized identity of the Syrian populace represented in the selected collections. These discussions also explore the way in which the experience of processing cultural trauma becomes a catalyst for redefining and reconstructing identity. The revised identity emerging from this experience carries visible signs of strength, resilience, and perseverance.

5.2.1 Psychological Reactions

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, the destabilization of group consciousness

and the collective identity of a collectivity elicits a strong psychological response from its members. Once the shared meanings of a collectivity (such as culture, beliefs, history, traditions, art, etc.) are put into question in the aftermath of a traumatic event, the members of the collectivity face overwhelming emotional and psychological breakdown. It is argued that if the identity markers i.e., shared meanings governing the identity of a collectivity are "abruptly dislodged", the collectivity is faced with cultural trauma, pushing the individuals to the deepest pits of shared pain and suffering (Alexander 10). As a result, a strong "sense of fear and shock" prevails over the entire community, subjecting its members to self-doubt which leads them to reconfigure their identity (10). The responses exhibited by the members of the collectivity are predominantly motivated by a state of fear and shock.

Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction, *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* portray these psychological reactions of the Syrian population faced with a major humanitarian crisis in the form of civil war. The distinguishing feature of the short stories in this collection is their use of allegory to depict the pain and suffering experienced by the Syrian population as the situation in their country deteriorates. These stories delve into the portrayal of a formerly peaceful society that is gradually engulfed into a conflict between the government and civilians, ultimately leading to a devastating civil war.

One of the stories in this collection, entitled "Convoy" engages with how unrest and chaos emerged in Syria in an otherwise peaceful country. The story begins with the beautiful depiction of regular activities taking place in everyday life in a stable, albeit bustling metropolis. The words such as "orderly", and "calmly and quietly" characterize how pedestrians and vehicles move about in a busy urban setting (Alomar *Teeth* 103). At the same time, individuals inhabiting the city appear complacent, grateful, and content. Their well-being and emotional stability are visible in their "smiles" and "serene" composure (103). This shows the condition of the peaceful Syrian society prior to the civil war. However, the privileged groups of society eventually come out to disrupt the peace of the city.

The disruption in Syrian society begins with the passage of a "royal convoy" which refers to a group of vehicles traveling together in defense and protocol of the members of a ruling royal family (Alomar *Teeth* 103). To ensure the implementation of a protocol for the convoy, security forces forcefully evacuate pedestrians from the road.

The entire city space is engulfed by "the screams and the shrieks", "shrieking horn" and "rush" that disturbs the formerly prevailing sense of serenity (103). People going about their normal lives suddenly begin to "run" and "shout" (103). On top of their apparent distress, they are further terrorized by the "security forces" and "policemen" who order them to "Get out of the road!" (103). Affected by the unprecedented chaos and tension, one of the pedestrians experiences a panic attack and sits by the side of the road, opening the buttons of his shirt to regulate his heavy breathing. However, this is only the beginning of the disruption of everyday life in the city. As the same situation repeatedly occurs on different days with the royal convoy passing by frequently. The pedestrian finds himself admitted to the ICU. When this occurrence becomes commonplace, he succumbs to a heart attack.

The royal convoy in this story seems to refer to the Syrian Ba'ath Party, a totalitarian political party currently ruling Syria, the dissatisfaction with which sparked country-wide conflicts taking place in Syria under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad. Therefore, alluding to the emergence of a new ruling regime, the story depicts the shift from a once peaceful Syria to a society plagued by turmoil and turbulence. Nevertheless, it is important to note that it is common people who are the primary victims of this turmoil. Under the pervasive presence and control of security forces, the masses are being unnecessarily pushed around. The story shows the brutality and aggression of security forces against people of all ages, including the ones with poor physical and mental health. It also highlights that the perpetual state of unrest and instability in public places proves to be fatal for common people. The ruling elites' sense of entitlement over the roads of the city and thorough security ends up reducing the value of human life. The portrayal of the suffering of a pedestrian evolving from a panic attack to a fatal heart attack highlights the severe psychological impacts of turbulence in Syrian society. It also symbolizes the millions of Syrian civilians who lost their lives in the conflict with the totalitarian government.

Moreover, the police crackdown on pedestrians, shouting at them phrases like "Get out of the road!" symbolizes the uprootedness and displacement of Syrians in the aftermath of the civil war (Alomar *Teeth* 103). The scene of pedestrians being forcefully removed from the roads to provide a smooth passage to the convoy is emblematic of the way the Syrian populace was uprooted from their homes following the tyrannies of the ruling regime in Syria. In short, the pedestrian's state of intense

physical and emotional distress, overwhelming fear, and panic leading to a fatal heart attack represents the state of shock and fear in the wake of cultural trauma.

Similarly, in *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), Alomar's first collection of flash fiction serving as a supplementary text in this research, a story entitled "The Lake and the Fire" also discusses the impacts of prolonged suffering and trauma. In this story, Lake and Fire are two personified characters. Fire is shown as trying to burn a rock for a very long time to no avail. Lake, who has been watching this scene all along, announces Fire's defeat. However, Fire argues that even if he remained unable to burn the rock, he has "at least… blackened it" (Alomar *Fullblood* 17). This story shows that even if a traumatic event does not result in complete death and destruction, it creates serious devastation. It tampers with the identity of the affected people, leading them to reconfigure who they are. The blackening/darkness that consumes the original color of the rock symbolizes disfigurement and destabilization, representing the long-term impacts of traumatic events on the collective consciousness of a community. It indicates that coming to terms with one's trauma requires the recognition that the identity of the target group or community has been disrupted, calling for a cathartic process.

Another story in *Fullblood Arabian* which portrays the psychological reactions of the Syrian civilians to the Syrian civil war is "Lost". This story personifies a star in the sky as a mother who gives birth to a child. The child expresses his apprehensions with his mother saying, "I'm afraid I will get lost" (Alomar *Fullblood* 34). On his mother's consolation, the child insists, "Then why do so many humans get lost" (34). This story shows the anxiety, concerns, and worries of Syrian civilians who face disillusionment in the wake of the Syrian civil war. It also unveils the threats conflict-ridden societies pose to people at an individual level. The rise of violence, chaos, and unrest in Syria is accompanied by civilians' growing fear and hopelessness for a stable life. The child questions his mother, "Don't you see the terrifying void around us that respects no limits?" (34) This shows that violence affects the entire society, not discriminating between old and young, men and women, rich and poor. This is the reason behind the child's fears and the mother's inability to address his queries in this story.

5.2.2 Polarization and Tensions within Syrian Society

When we recognize that the disruption of identity markers and shared meanings

of a collectivity is the root cause of cultural trauma, it becomes evident that the group consciousness that binds members of a collectivity is profoundly destabilized (Alexander 1). This endangers the collective identity of a group that connects individuals with the collectivity as well as with each other. However, as soon as a traumatic event befalls a collectivity, the very thread of the shared collective identity is damaged. Therefore, the experience of cultural trauma is followed by a process of reconfiguration of collective identity (1). A number of flash fiction stories in the selected primary collection of flash fiction seem to embody themes such as the repercussions of internal polarization, conflict, and tensions in the Syrian society undergoing cultural trauma. Moreover, these stories seem to reflect unity and solidarity as basic constituents of the shared collective identity.

The flash fiction story "The Teeth of the Comb" portrays that "class differences" are the main reason why societies end up developing internal conflicts (Alomar *Teeth* 183). In the context of the Syrian conflict, the story seems to convey the idea that social hierarchy, competition, envy, and "disdain" for one another are the causes of internal conflicts (183). As a result, a well-functioning society turns into a "garbage" bag (183). This story shows the detrimental impacts of social inequality and class struggle. This theme is also present in the supplementary text i.e., Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014). In this collection, "The Volcano" is an interesting story that portrays "sectarianism" as a volcano that wreaks havoc in a heaven-like world (Alomar *Fullblood* 16). As it erupts, it turns "villages and cities" into "coffins", causing widespread death and destruction (16). This shows that internal conflicts in a society on the basis of race, sect, caste, and language are lethal. A society that practices unjust discrimination cannot hold up for long. These barriers annihilate the very fabric that weaves societies and communities.

Similarly, another flash fiction story in the selected primary collection entitled "A Dream" portrays a man having a dream of discarding "religion, sect, and race" in a "bottomless pit" (41). The state of dreaming in this story shows the dream and vision for a world that is tolerant and peaceful for all despite differences. The social constructs such as sects, race, color, and language can be interpreted as the basis for the discrimination and rejection that Syrian characters in the selected primary collection face as refugees in foreign countries.

To have a holistic approach to the issue of social fragmentation in Syrian

society, it is helpful to consult a book entitled *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders* (2017). It analyzes the fragmentation of Syrian society based on sectarian and religious identity. The book argues that the Syrian regime manipulated the identity politics of Syria to enjoy leverage over the opposing groups. To put emphasis, the book categorically refers to this approach as "the regime's sectarianization strategy" (Baczko et al. 258). This approach remained successful as the divides between Christians and Sunnis deepened, with these religious groups "forming their own militias" (258). This is how the regime's involvement in the identity politics of Syrian served to "militarize the minorities" (257). Henceforth, the militarization of religious and sectarian groups further intensified the clashes in Syrian society. Moreover, it can be said that the arguments presented in this book are crucial to understanding how Syrian society developed internal conflicts in the wake of the Syrian civil war.

In the selected primary collection, the story "The Head of Hair and the Guillotine" shows how disharmony and internal discord affect a group. The story begins with the portrayal of a man who is about to be executed. Before carrying out the execution, the executioners begin to cut the man's long hair. In the meantime, the man's hair strands engage in a verbal exchange. One strand of the hair asks the other why they have to be cut before the execution, arguing that they are a weak part of the body that cannot help a person escape execution. Another strand satisfies its query by enlightening him with the importance of strength inherent in unity that characterizes the millions of individual hair strands.

This story emphasizes the importance of unity and solidarity. The symbol of hair is used to emphasize the position of personal identity in the broader social fabric. It brings to light the vulnerability inherent in disharmony and fragmentation. In the context of the Syrian civil war, this story seems to convey a deep moral lesson for the affected people. The Syrian population is faced with a tyrannical regime, and the fragmentation of the local populace into conflicting groups in civil war may heighten their fragility. The tyranny of the oppressive Syrian regime is also one of the major themes of the story which is highlighted by the image of the guillotine that is specifically highlighted in the title of this story. One of the hair strands argues that it is convenient to "bend us and wrap us and move us and tie us" like the inmates on death row (Alomar *Teeth* 161). This professed vulnerability of the hair strand shows the

power that authority figures assert on weak individuals. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that people who are divided across social, political, and economic lines cannot escape weaknesses and vulnerability. Therefore, the narrative emphasizes the importance of collective action and combined efforts by making it explicit that "in union there is strength" (161). If the Syrian population joins hands in opposition to the oppressive regime, it can resolve the conflict.

5.2.3 Reconfiguration of Homeland

The Syrian civil war caused a significant number of Syrian civilians to flee their homes, resulting in a massive displacement of the population. As a result, the concept of 'homeland' has been profoundly affected for the millions of uprooted Syrians. The ones who found refuge in other countries keep on grappling with the meaning of their homeland and their national identity. Since nationality is an important identity marker, therefore, the destabilization of national identity and loss of homeland drive multiple Syrian characters in the selected collections toward cultural trauma. A short story, "Bag of the Nation", explores the theme of national trauma and displacement. The story portrays a man walking through a foreign land and carrying a bag full of wonders from his home country. He gathers people to show them the heritage of his homeland but as soon as he opens the bag, an explosion takes place inside the bag which disfigures his face. As a result, he becomes a subject of ridicule from the crowd. In a fit of embarrassment, he gets rid of the bag and wanders off, not knowing where to go.

In this story, the bag carries the marvels of the man's homeland that he has inherited from his family. In this context, these marvels appear to be the riches, heritage, legacy, and contributions of Syria in the service of mankind. The man "proudly" carries his "nation's genius" wherever he goes (Alomar *Teeth* 16). He enthusiastically gathers people to show them the glory of his nation's past and aspirations for the future. He wants to present the "glorious" and "lofty" image of his nation to the world to celebrate. However, things do not turn out as expected (16). The bag of national riches that he received as a gift from his family no longer contains those treasures. Contrary to expectations, its contents have been consumed by an "atomic irony" which explodes as soon as the man opens the bag (16). The use of the word irony in the narrative serves to underscore the contrast between the man's expectation of receiving admiration from the crowd and the actual outcome which is public ridicule. This symbolizes the unsettling picture of Syria in the eyes of the world which views it

as a battleground for a number of conflicting interest groups including the US, Turkey, the UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. To many Syrian refugees, Syria was once a land full of worldly riches and promises of a glorious future. This is why the man portrayed in the story wants to build a positive image for Syria in a foreign country. However, it cannot be denied that the current state of Syria does not warrant applause and admiration. As a result, the man becomes an object of ridicule and derision. He becomes overwhelmed with "degradations" (17). His pride vanishes.

In response, the man exclaims "Oh my country… what did you do to me… what did I do to you?" (Alomar *Teeth* 17). Here, as a native Syrian, the man exhibits a sense of responsibility for the unrest that ruined the image of his country and turned him into a laughingstock in the eyes of the world. He becomes disillusioned with his country's situation. His "terrifyingly disfigured" face epitomizes the disruption of his identity (17). Therefore, consumed by the sense of loss, he decides to relinquish his sense of belonging to the Syrian land and walks away.

Moreover, to unveil the struggle of the man portrayed in this story, it is important to recognize that migrating to a foreign country in itself is a challenging course of action. There are books like *Trauma and Resilience Among Displaced Populations: A Sociocultural Exploration* (2021) that discuss that refugees are potentially at risk to face PTSD. This risk is posed by factors such as "separations from the family" and covert rejection from the host country (Theisen- Womersley 33). This rejection manifests in the way refugees are perceived as "economic and social threat" and "diseased intruders" in host countries (39). These arguments help to acknowledge the struggle of Syrian refugees presented in the selected collections.

The short story "The Sold Nation" portrays a conversation taking place between several currency notes in the pocket of a merchant. Several personified currency notes lament over their fate of being passed from one hand to another. They express "annoyance" over their constant circulation and longing for a sense of "stability" (Alomar *Teeth* 10). While this verbal exchange takes place among a few, some other currency notes express resignation to fate by coming to terms with the fact that they "were born for this" (10). They surrender to their fate of being trapped in a continuous cycle of transaction, exchange, and movement. One currency note says, "We are like nations that have been sold" (10). At this point, the narrative draws a parallel between currency notes and nations. The parallel between the images of nation and currency

notes symbolizes different responses to the uncertain time period in the trajectory of nations. Some individuals protest and exhibit fortitude in the face of a national crisis, while others let the whims of their fate dictate their destinies. The phrase "imprinted with thousands of fingerprints" indicates that the fate of nations rests in the hands of several generations of people who leave the marks of their experiences and endeavors on their national identity (10). This identity passes from one generation to another and is subject to further changes. Furthermore, the image of notes "crammed into thousands of pockets" highlights the long-term implications of the collective experiences of a nation (10). These experiences can be political, economic, social, or cultural in nature.

Nevertheless, the crucial point in this story is the dilemma of choosing between submission or confrontation in the face of traumatic circumstances. Besides, the sources of trauma underscored here are instability and uncertainty in the course of the history of nations. However, the fortitude and the spirit of resilience exhibited by the currency notes in the face of constant circulation help them stand their ground. As the plot progresses, the note that had passively surrendered to its fate ends up getting "settled into a cold wallet" of the merchant (Alomar *Teeth* 10). The image of the "coldwallet" enforces the idea of death (10). Together, these phrases symbolize the absolute disintegration and ultimate downfall of a nation. On the other hand, the unsettled and protesting notes that are still circulating may live longer.

This story uses the metaphor of the currency notes to reflect the suffering of the Syrian population. Like these constantly circulating currency notes, the Syrian population is also undergoing displacement, uprootedness, and instability in the face of civil war. The constant cycle of transactions that these notes are subject to seems to symbolize the vast majority of Syrian individuals who have become either homeless or refugees. Their lives have become as uncertain as the fate of these currency notes. The image of "moving from hand to hand" symbolizes the ordeal of Syrian refugees who are denied refuge in host countries. Some of them may seek refuge in other countries; however, many of these refugees are either detained in prisons or live as illegal immigrants hiding from authorities.

This theme is also recurrent in other works of Osama Alomar. In *Fullblood Arabian* (2014), the selected supplementary collection of flash fiction, the story entitled "The Union of Our Home" also discusses the challenges that refugees face. In this story, the narrator, who is supposedly a Syrian national, envies "European" citizens who only

"flash their identity card[s]" to comfortably enter foreign countries (Alomar *Fullblood* 15). Their so-called superior nationality prevents them from unnecessary "searches", and "surveillance and questioning" which the narrator has to go through (15). This story highlights the discrimination that people from conflict-ridden countries face when they seek refuge in foreign countries. They face invasive searches, detentions, and humiliations before being granted asylum.

Moreover, the use of the adjective "sold" with the word nation in the story "The Sold Nation" suggests the international powers are playing with the Syrian territory to satisfy their vested interests and geopolitical agendas (Alomar *Teeth* 10). It also foregrounds the absence of agency of the Syrian population whose destiny is controlled by resourceful global powers. These national and international groups vying for control in Syria are symbolized by the image of "thousands of pockets" (10). However, the concluding note of the story conveys the message of endurance and resilience which can help the Syrian population to persist in the midst of the adversities, ensuing from the civil war.

5.3 Syrian Crisis Unfolding in Institutional Arenas

Since the theory of cultural trauma argues that trauma is an intricate sociocultural process, it is important to understand how this process takes place. To begin with, the trauma process is carried out by the efforts of "collective actors" who attribute traumatic status to an event (Alexander 10). This process is called "meaning making" since it involves the efforts of the collective actors to interpret the implications of a traumatic event for the collectivity as a whole (11). These collective actors can be citizens, political parties, organizations, or religious figures who engage in the process of making sense of an event and interpreting its implications for collectivity. Meaning making plays an important role in the trauma process since it contributes to the development of a new trauma narrative that claims and assigns a traumatic status to a devastating event on behalf of the collectivity (12). However, this is not a new argument. It has been proposed by some other critics as well.

This argument is reinforced by Ron Eyerman, a contemporary trauma theorist, who extends the theory of cultural trauma. In his book entitled *Memory, Trauma, and Identity* (2019), he argues that an event cannot be given the status of trauma "until it is accepted as such by an audience" (Eyerman 43). In light of this idea, it becomes clear

that trauma is a complex "sociocultural" process that is related to collective identity, instead of individual (10). Therefore, only those events can be regarded as "traumatic" that inflict damage on a collectivity i.e., a tribe, community, or a nation (9-10). Any injury to a group on a collective level results in severe damage to the well-being of the group. Therefore, it can be said that trauma is a human experience at a collective level that affects a group as a whole.

In addition to establishing the claim that a particular event is traumatic, the process of developing a new trauma narrative requires a "symbolic representation" of the collective suffering (11). Symbolic representation refers to the act of using symbols, language, or other forms of cultural expressions to communicate the traumatic nature of an event to collectivity and extend its dissemination to broader audiences. Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction selected for this research contain multiple short stories that involve collective actors from different arenas. Hence, the stories examined in the subsequent sub-sections explore the unfolding of the trauma process and the attempts of meaning making being carried out in various spheres, encompassing religious, artistic, and legal contexts.

5.3.1 Religious Realm

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, trauma processes often take place in the domain of religion (15). Since social actors from each major social institution attempt to compose a trauma narrative and interpret its implications for the affected community, the representatives of the religious groups in the Syrian society help believers in the Syrian community navigate cultural trauma in line with their religious views. Therefore, it is important for the present research to identify and explore how Osama Alomar portrays the attempts of the Syrian religious groups to help Syrian civilians process their trauma and suffering.

Since religions invite people to resign to the will of all- powerful Being/s, hence, the process of meaning making taking place in the religious domain engages with the assumptions such as why God allowed massive atrocities committed against the weak (Alexander 15). These discussions can either bring one closer totheir religion or make one relinquish their faith. The reason for the former is that people may come to believe that there is a possibility to assume that suffering is God's way to punish or test the weak. However, the latter assumption can make people believe that there is no Being powerful or benevolent enough to put an end to the sufferings that humans are

unfairly subjected to. To explicate it further, Alexander uses the example of Job in the Torah, the account of whose suffering has multiple layers of meaning for people to grasp (15). If a righteous person like Job can face massive trials, then it means that suffering can be regarded as a source of resilience.

Therefore, it is observed that studying the responses of the religious class of a society can help one with identifying how trauma processes unravel in different arenas. In the selected collections of flash fiction, multiple short stories engage with how trauma impacts people's responses to their belief systems. In the context of the Syrian civil war, the following discussion contributes to the understanding of how the suffering of the Syrian population transforms their religious perspectives.

In the story "The Shadow", a massive shadow surrounds the earth. As a result, the sun and moon slip out of sight which causes a constant sense of fear among people. They speculate on the reasons for the looming shadow but are too afraid to look up at the sky to see what really happened. Different explanations are offered regarding the origin of this shadow. There are people who call it a "punishment from God" for people who indulge in sins (Alomar *Teeth* 82). Others call it a divine retribution for the "moral decline" that characterizes modern civilization (82). If this story is analyzed in the context of unrest and upheaval prevailing in Syrian society, it becomes clear that the unnamed characters in this narrative interpret the suffering emanating from the Syrian civil war as a ramification of human actions. It is assumed that the source of suffering is "heedlessness of principles and values" (82). These principles and values refer to the guiding ethics of human societies. The characters believe that violating these ethics brings about divine wrath. The narrative of the story suggests the characters' strong belief in the existence of an all-powerful Being that holds people accountable for their deviant actions and malpractices.

Another story "Barbed Wire" portrays an author's young son who has a habit of reading the pages thrown in the wastebasket by his father. One day, the boy happens to read a narrative full of violent and disturbing imagery from the wastebasket. As a result, he is overtaken by fear. The boy's experience leads him to decide that he will use words responsibly in his life. This story seems to be an allegorical representation of the relationship between humans and God through the metaphors of the boy and the father. The "marks of annoyance" on the father's forehead signify the divine wrath, while the images of "blood", "massacred words" and "nightmarish cries of anguish" suggest the

punishment of God directed to humans for their negligence towards divine teachings (Alomar *Teeth* 93). Humanity's rejection of divine teachings is symbolized by the discarded pages in the wastebasket. On the other hand, the boy represents mankind that is pushed into a state of shock and fear upon witnessing the suffering resulting from human actions. His horrified response indicates the recognition of how humans, engaging in conflicts and wars, cause pain and suffering to themselves and others, and provoke divine wrath.

Both stories discussed above suggest one of the two possible responses to traumatic events. They deal with how human suffering can be considered a divine retribution for human moral decadence. However, another possibility that the theory of cultural trauma discusses is how people can relinquish their faith in the existence of a benign God after witnessing massive suffering.

One of the short stories "The Temple" engages with this theme. It depicts a man who borrows money from his family and friends to work on a personal "project" (Alomar *Teeth* 51). However, when he shares his idea of founding a "new religion" with them, they are "shocked and angered" (51). After some time, he successfully builds a temple to worship money. Upon seeing it, people who initially "throw garbage bags and stones and excrement at him" also join him in his "rituals" and "reverence" (51-52). Gradually, the religion of money gains popularity and happens to "unite all of humanity under its banner" (52). This story indicates how changing social and political conditions impact people's perception of religion. In the wake of the Syrian civil war, the global elites invest their money to capitalize on the unrest and chaos caused in the country. They do so by gambling their material resources on one or more interest groups comprised of the US, Turkey, the UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran that are competing against each other in the civil war. As a result, Syrian civilians' suffering is escalated with advanced weaponry provided by big powers and global elites. This story seems to suggest that the increasing power of money has replaced other powers (such as divine Being/s) that are credited with directing human societies.

5.3.2 Aesthetic Realm

When the trauma process unfolds in the aesthetic arena, new artistic genres emerge. The narratives in these genres engage with trauma through different art forms to promote the "imaginative identification" of other communities with trauma victims

and prompt "emotional catharsis" among traumatized individuals. Artistic forms such as theater, literature, and film raise awareness and evoke emotions in individuals, thereby helping them confront their trauma. This does not only help individuals and communities to process their trauma but also leads to catharsis and gradual healing.

The story "The Name" in *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* also engages with a similar subject. Using anthropomorphism (i.e., attributing the attribute of living beings to inanimate objects) as a literary device, the name of the book's author is given animal attributes. It is shown as trying its best to stick to the cover of the book by clinging and clawing its nails into the cover of the book. However, it eventually falls into a pit. As a result, the name of the book's author is lost. Years later, the book receives immense critical and commercial acclaim, despite being anonymous. This story can be interpreted as an allegory for composing trauma narratives. The theory of cultural trauma proposes that cultural trauma dismantles cultural meanings of a collectivity, resulting in fractured identities (Alexander 10). Trauma makes victims question their sense of self and grapple with their identities, leading to the reconfiguration of who they are and what place they occupy in the broader social fabric.

In this story, the struggle of the author's name to stick to the cover of the book represents a similar scenario. The loss of the author's name and the subsequent anonymity shrouding the identity of the book's author symbolizes the dismantled identity of collectivity. Moreover, the phrases used to describe the pain of the author's name trying to stick to the cover are also highly significant in portraying the challenges that traumatized individuals face when they confront and process their memories and trauma. Phrases like "terrifying creatures", "tears mixed with its sweat", "nails broke off" and "crushed by thousands of feet" embody the suffering emanating from the act of re-engaging with a traumatizing experience (Alomar *Teeth* 113). However, despite being a devastating experience, it is considered an important part of the trauma process which fosters emotional catharsis for trauma victims and helps them write trauma narratives to raise awareness.

Furthermore, the book's eventual success as an anonymous masterpiece symbolizes a positive reception to trauma narratives. This story is emblematic of Osama Alomar's collections of flash fiction that serve as Syrian trauma narratives in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war. Making the most of his position as a Syrian refugee author, Alomar writes flash fiction narratives to represent the suffering of Syrian

civilians to the global audience. Since the representation of trauma through artistic means can resonate deeply with readers, it can be one of the most effective ways to seek global attention. It also indicates that sharing trauma narratives with a wider public can serve as a means of fostering intercommunal empathy. Therefore, it can be said that the selected primary collection of flash fiction, *The Teeth of the Comband Other Stories*, raises awareness and calls for the attention of the international audience towards the traumatic condition of the Syrian population in the wake of the civil war.

5.3.3 Legal Realm

When the trauma process plays out within the legal framework, it calls for a legal judgment to attribute responsibility for the traumatic event to the perpetrators, sentence "punishments" and issue "reparations" for the affected individuals and communities (Alexander 17). However, there is a limitation inherent in legal judgments. These verdicts cannot ensure the acceptance of guilt by the responsible individuals and groups. Moreover, these legal rulings may not foster the identification of the wider audience with the traumatized victims (17). Even though legal rulings cannot guarantee the recognition of criminal acts by the responsible party, it is still important for trauma processes to extend to the legal realm.

In the story "Peace Agreement", Strong and Weak are represented as two characters. Both of them signed a peace agreement to resolve a prolonged conflict. Weak shows immense respect for the agreement by framing and displaying peace agreement in his house. Considering it as "a rebirth for himself", he even invites journalists to host a media announcement and have the agreement photographed and publicized (Alomar *Teeth* 133). On the contrary, Strong uses that document as a diaper for his son. This story shows the different attitudes of people towards legal agreements. It does so by depicting the refusal to acknowledge the guilt of the powerful individual. Strong's lack of respect for the legal agreement exhibits the megalomaniac tendencies of the individuals who enjoy immense unchecked power. Despite this, the story seems to suggest that such a response should not hold victims back from approaching the legal realm to seek verdicts, since it is the weak who needs legal protection the most.

Secondly, this story also seems to highlight the importance of the issuance of punishment and reparations for the perpetrators and victims respectively, as peace agreements alone cannot settle conflicts permanently. Furthermore, the story alludes

to the huge power imbalance among different conflicting groups in the Syrian civil war which serves to hinder the resolution of the conflict.

5.4 Key Representations in the Syrian Trauma Narrative

In the development of a new master narrative of trauma, a traumatic event has to undergo the process of cultural classification. The process of cultural classification enables groups/collectivities that are faced with a traumatic event to identify, classify, and interpret that event to analyze the nature, immediate impact, and long-term implications of a traumatic event on the collective consciousness and identity of a group. Since cultural trauma is known to fracture the identity of a group, it leads to the re-writing of its history. This addition to the history of a particular collectivity can be understood as "telling a new story" (Alexander 12). The term story refers to the trauma narrative that later serves as the driving force of a revised identity. A traumatic event not only destabilizes the identity of a group but also makes room for the revision and reconsideration of the collective identity of that group.

Cultural classification, in simplest terms, involves the process of placing a particular event into the category of traumatic events. However, this classification is just the beginning of a "new story" associated with collectivity, such as the holocaust has become an important story to the Jewish community (Alexander 12-13). Cultural classification not only recognizes and categorizes an event as traumatic but also traces its significance to the culture, history, collective consciousness, and identity of the traumatized group. After the completion of the cultural classification of a traumatic event, a need for the creation of a "new master narrative" of trauma emerges (12). The creation of a new trauma narrative takes the form of a "symbolic process" (12). This involves the efforts to engage with different cultural symbols, literary traditions, and rituals to tell a new story of the traumatized group. This new story is the addition of a fresh narrative in the collective consciousness, cultural story, and history of the traumatized group.

In relation to cultural trauma theory, it is crucial to recognize that cultural trauma does not literally refer to a form of trauma that only affects the culture of a traumatized group. In order to grasp the symbolic meaning that the phrase cultural trauma conveys, it is important to consult works that discuss the origins of studies on trauma in the field of humanities. A research paper entitled "Cultural Trauma: The

Other Face of Social Change" (2000) traces and discusses how the term trauma has been adopted by sociological theorists from the medical and psychiatric field. It observes that, in the beginning, the term trauma referred to an acute injury on one's body; now it is extended to include the meaning of an abrupt change inflicted on a group or community that damages its sense of identity. In simpler terms, the phrase cultural trauma refers to a sudden change in "social life", "social structures", "thinking" and "acting" of a community which is primarily brought about by a traumatic event (Sztompka 456). It indicates that the term cultural trauma refers to a damaged social fabric of a community. This research paper will lead the researcher to focus on those aspects of the selected flash fiction collections that explore how Syrian civil war damages the broader social fabric of Syria, thereby adversely affecting the members of the Syrian society.

The theory of cultural trauma acknowledges that the creation of a new trauma narrative is highly critical for a group. Therefore, the theory proposes a general framework to guide the creation of a "compelling" master narrative of trauma (Alexander 12). According to this, there are four "critical representations" that play a crucial role in the "collective" expression of a trauma narrative (Alexander 12). The following section contains a detailed discussion of the four representations in the selected collections of flash fiction that are essential to the symbolic representation of the Syrian trauma narrative.

5.4.1 Examination of the Nature of the Pain

The first and most important stage in the creation of a trauma narrative is to identify the nature of the pain experienced by a group following the occurrence of a traumatic event (Alexander 13). It involves the identification of the type of pain experienced on a collective level and shared among a group as a whole. Osama Alomar's selected collections of flash fiction including *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* and *Fullblood Arabian* specifically engage with the nature of the pain experienced by Syrian civilians in the wake of the Syrian civil war.

The story "War" narrates the scenario of a team of scientifically advanced and pacifist aliens landing on Earth to study the "planet" and "human nature" (Alomar *Teeth* 42). However, as soon as they land, they are confronted with the stark realities of "nuclear explosions", "severed human limbs piled up", "millions of refugees", "killing" and "destruction" (42). They are horrified to witness such a large-scale annihilation,

devastation, and death. They immediately withdraw and disseminate the news to the other extraterrestrial beings of a brutal internal conflict that is about to tear up the planet Earth. The story helps to highlight the absurdity of self-destructive and a "crushing civil war" in Syria which, despite being an internal conflict, hinders stability, progress, and peace, thereby turning the country into an inhospitable place (42). Moreover, it highlights the pain that Syrian civilians are subjected to.

In another story "Psychological Barrier", a common man tries to trespass the barrier set by a high-ranking official with the intent to explore the other side of the barrier. However, he ends up being beaten up by the official for this transgression. This story portrays the Syrian civil war in the simplest possible manner, whereby the man stands for the civilians, while the official represents the members of the autocratic regime. The conflict between these two is characterized by a huge power imbalance. The aspect of the power imbalance is the reason why the man is shown as a defenseless victim of cruel circumstances, a merciless fate, and a perpetrator. When the man tries to overcome the barrier between him and the official for the first time, he falls down and realizes that he "broke [his] leg" (Alomar *Teeth* 12). The second time he finds himself being mercilessly kicked on his "dignity with feet of insults" (12). After a severe beating, he is thrown into a "prison" (12). On the other hand, the official is seen building a "psychological electric" barrier, thereby enjoying impunity and unchecked power (12). These phrases serve to highlight the agony and humiliation that Syrian civilians suffer at the hands of the autocratic regime.

It is important to note that this story not only acknowledges the physical but also the psychological pain experienced by millions of Syrian civilians. The broken legs, electric shocks, and severe beatings are the images that represent the physical pain experienced by common men and women in the wake of the Syrian civil war. Moreover, the representation of the psychological barrier, "insults" and loss of human dignity at the hands of the high-ranking official symbolizes the long-term impacts of the violence and atrocities inflicted on Syrian civilians by the tyrannical regime to subdue their resistance to the regime (Alomar 12). Furthermore, the way the man in the story ends up being imprisoned indicates the massive number of imprisonments and state-sanctioned executions carried out by the Syrian government against individuals who are seen as a threat to the sovereignty of the autocratic regime. In this story, imprisonment is associated with painful experiences such as feelings of isolation, loss

of freedom, and confinement.

The selected supplementary text i.e., Osama Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) also presents the pain of Syrian civilians in an allegorical fashion. In this collection, "Human Rights" is a story that presents human rights as a personified woman. Human Rights, as a compassionate and spirited woman, decides to travel the world and distribute gifts among humans. However, throughout the world, she is "robbed", "stoned", "crushed", "raped" and eventually "killed" by mankind (Alomar *Fullblood* 49). This story is a satire on the violation of human rights across the globe. Particularly, this narrative shows how the violation of fundamental human rights metastasizes into the merciless killing of vulnerable civilians. This flash fiction story projects the pain of the trauma victims which is essential to represent in trauma narratives.

5.4.2 Identification of the Victim

In a master narrative of trauma, it is necessary to identify the victims that are affected by a traumatic event (Alexander 13). The identification of victims is essential to a trauma narrative because it helps with recognizing how widespread was the destruction caused by a traumatic event and who suffered the most. This stage may also involve the act of distinguishing between the direct and indirect victims of a traumatic occurrence. Nevertheless, at its core, it clarifies whether it is only the members of a particular group, race, or ethnicity that fell victim to a traumatic event or all the individuals in the society as a whole were affected by it (13). In Osama Alomar's *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*, the victims of the violence in the wake of the Syrian civil war are categorized into different groups such as refugees, prisoners, writers, and children.

One of the stories entitled "Kicks" is a prototypical example of police brutality against prisoners. It portrays two investigators who subject a prisoner to physical torture. As soon as they leave, the walls of the prison begin to torture him which ends in the collapse of the roof on the prisoner's head. This story speaks volumes about the condition of prisons and civilian prisoners following the Syrian civil war. The prisoner is outnumbered and outpowered, while the investigators appear inhuman and brutal. The images of "bleeding profusely", "tumbling", curled up, and "shaking in terror" show how the prisoner is subjected to physical violence and brutal treatment (Alomar

Teeth 168). Moreover, the image of personified walls of the prison assaulting the prisoner serves to give an expression to the abuse which is faced by the Syrian people in the wake of civil war.

Children seem to be another group of victims highlighted in Alomar's flash fiction. Multiple stories engage with the theme of loss of innocence. The story "The Star Messenger" portrays a child with "no family" and "torn clothes" (Alomar *Teeth* 53). He is tormented by a "deadly triangle" which refers to the condition of experiencing "hunger", "fear" and "cold" simultaneously (53). Despite such a painful condition, the child looks up at the sky and exhibits empathy for stars that also appear to have no food, family, or warm clothes. This is a common literary depiction of children who grow up in tumultuous times. In the context of the Syrian Civil War, millions of children met the same fate.

However, the child's pain in this story conveys the universal theme of loneliness, poverty, and abandonment. The child's expectation of being rescued from the continuous suffering by a star messenger serves to throw light on the indifference of the people who are in the position of helping others but are overtaken by insensitivity and indifference. As the story ends up on a pessimistic note with the child meeting death in the face of constant deprivation. It can be argued that this story is a call to action and social injustice. Through such short and tragic narratives, the refugee writer Osama Alomar attempts to evoke compassion in his audience for the vulnerable individuals who are consumed by the harsh realities of a war-struck country.

Similarly, another story "The Forbidden Doll" portrays a little girl, Samar, living with her stepmom, deprived of parental love and attention. The narrative revolves around her desire to play with her doll; however, the overwhelming "fear" of being punished by her stepmom stops her from doing so (Alomar *Teeth* 171). Soon she hears the footsteps of her stepmom and forces herself to fall asleep. In her dream, she plays with her doll. This story shows the psychological impacts of living in oppressive environments. It helps to foreground the impact of the Syrian civil war and sociopolitical disruption on the innocent minds of Syrian children. The absence of Samar's biological parents highlights the impacts of the massive loss of human lives in the wake of the Syrian civil war. The image of "the forbidden doll" symbolizes the joys of childhood denied to Syrian children following the civil war (170). Through the example of Samar, this story illustrates how the Syrian civil war disrupts the lives of

children, causing them a profound loss of innocence.

One more class of victims of the Syrian civil war in the selected collections of flash fiction seems to be the Syrian refugees. The story "Insults" in *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* reflects on the struggles of navigating unfamiliar places, thereby highlighting the everyday problems of refugees. The story starts with the narrator "walking out of [his] house" (Alomar *Teeth* 15). This phrase enforces the theme of displacement, uprootedness, and homelessness. However, as the narrator begins to walk, he is struck with terror upon hearing his shoes "insulting" and "expressing their disdain" for each step that he takes (15). It shows the internal conflict of refugees who are forced to flee the brutalities and atrocities being committed in their home country.

Even though the narrator is familiar with the dire situation in his homeland, his decision to leave his home and the attempt to seek refuge in another country lies heavy on his conscience. The Syrian civilians' decision to flee Syria in search of refuge in other countries is an important subject of discussion in multiple research projects. A research paper entitled "Fight or Flight in Civil War? Evidence from Rebel-Controlled Syria" (2014) is particularly relevant to this discussion. This research paper particularly uses quantitative empirical method to find out the motivations behind Syrian civilians' migration. After analyzing a number of hypotheses, it is inferred that "there are clear benefits to leaving Syria" for Syrian civilians as they are "much better provided for" in refugee camps (Mironova et al. 12). These benefits include a "better access" to "basic necessities" as well as "security" (11). This enables us to understand the motivations of Syrian refugees.

Regarding the benefit of security for Syrian refugees, it is important to understand the concept of "localized despotism" as used in the 2023 book *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine* (Aamir 234). As this book argues, oppression against victimized populations in conflict-ridden regions such as Kashmir and Palestine is carried out by the colonial forces within the confines of their geographical regions. Extending this argument to the study of Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections helps us to argue that the Syrian autocratic regime also exhibits similarity with the workings of localized despotism. Syrian civilians are persecuted within the boundaries of state-administered Syria, and therefore, fleeing Syria warrants Syrian civilians' protection from violence and persecution.

Nevertheless, the narrator continues his journey which shows the determination of refugees and immigrants to rebuild their lives and find peace and stability in unfamiliar environments. Also, the sequence of shoes insulting each step of the narrator symbolizes a myriad of obstacles that refugees face in a foreign land including cultural, social, and linguistic barriers. The term "insults" also shows the lack of acceptance in the host country for refugees (15). In short, the story presents an everyday activity or situation to portray the everyday struggles of refugees.

5.4.3 Relation of Trauma Victims to Wider Audience

The third stage of creating a new trauma narrative is to establish a relationship between the trauma victims and the wider audience. This stage is a crucial step for the members of the traumatized group to get a larger identity group to engage and empathize with their trauma (Alexander 14). Jeffrey C. Alexander gives the example of police brutality against African Americans and the response of white Americans to it as a relation between a traumatized group and the wider collective identity (14-15). Moreover, the theory of cultural trauma proposes that as the trauma process begins to unfold following a traumatic event befallen a particular group, there is a huge reluctance on the part of the wider collectivity to participate in it (14). The wider collectivity's reluctance or refusal to recognize the trauma of a particular group as a serious contemporary issue serves as a huge obstacle in the large-scale dissemination of the trauma narrative, evocation of sympathy, and a call for justice and reparations. A relation between the traumatized group and the broader collectivity is only possible through representing "valued qualities shared" by both groups. These valued qualities can be the historical relevance and cultural significance of the concepts such as humanity, justice, and equality. The importance of these values in societies can motivate them to participate in the trauma process of a traumatized group.

One of the stories "The Dog and the Nation" in the selected primary collection engages with a similar theme. The story presents a scenario of a crowd gathering in the center of the city where two flyers are displayed. The notice for a "lost" dog receives tremendous "attention" and concern from the public, while the other notice for a "lost nation" is widely ignored (Alomar *Teeth* 173). This scenario contrasts people's reactions to two different situations, the first announcing an immediate concern, while the other notifies about a bigger and long-lasting social issue. The notice of the "lost nation" in this scenario symbolizes the Syrian crisis which is metastasizing and poses

the threat of absolute annihilation of Syrian identity (173). The crowd represents the wider collective identity which seems to be the countries neighboring Syria, influential powers, and the global audience. The lack of concern for the lost nation shows the failure of the international world in addressing and resolving the Syrian conflict.

In this story, one possible reason behind the indifference of the crowd towards the flyer for a lost nation is that wider collectivities and global audiences are not familiar with the specific sociopolitical context of the Syrian conflict. On the other hand, the flyer for the lost dog receives "words of regret and distress" since it is a problem that people can easily resonate with (173). Therefore, as suggested by the theory of cultural trauma, a need for creating and disseminating a master trauma narrative of the Syrian conflict emerges.

In the context of this story, a master narrative of the Syrian cultural trauma may help with familiarizing the global audience with the Syrian conflict and the persistent violation of the basic human rights of Syrian civilians. Since love for domestic animals and pets is universal, the notice of the lost dog can be regarded as a shared value among multiple groups and collectivities. Moreover, it also highlights the importance of sharing trauma narratives through storytelling since the stories about individual pain and adversity such as losing a pet receive more sympathy than collective issues like loss of nations. Therefore, this story seems to convey the message that stories about the suffering of individual Syrian civilians may serve as a powerful tool to garner the attention of human rights activists and global organizations dedicated to safeguarding human rights and promoting peace.

Osama Alomar's works often discuss the ways in which groups and communities can participate in each other's trauma and provide support in times of need. In Alomar's *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) serving as a supplementary collection of flash fiction in this research, there is a story "Booby-Trapped State" which shows the hazards of global communities maintaining indifference to the cultural trauma of another community. In this story, a massive explosion takes place in a country, leaving "surrounding nations… wounded" (Alomar *Fullblood* 23). As a result, "severed limbs" and "bloody fragments" are seen all over the world (23). This story indicates that if states do not stand in solidarity with each other in times of crisis, they may also face repercussions. The chaos in a country can also destabilize the neighboring countries. Therefore, it can be argued that Osama Alomar's works invite his readers and audience

to show support and solidarity with traumatized communities.

5.4.4 Attribution of Responsibility

The final stage in the process of creating a master trauma narrative is to attribute responsibility for the trauma caused to a certain group. It involves the identification of the "antagonist" and the "perpetrator" (Alexander 15). It is important for a trauma narrative to distinguish between two groups, the traumatized group and the party responsible for the trauma. The responsible party can either be comprised of a few individuals or a larger network. Determining who is accountable for the occurrence of cultural trauma leads the wider audience toward a holistic viewpoint on the traumatic situation. It is a matter of singling out "who", which paves the way for the identification of individuals, or a group involved in causing a traumatic event (15). Jeffrey C. Alexander presents the example of the holocaust to explain this stage. In the context of the holocaust, the stage of attributing responsibility for the trauma caused to Jews involves asking and probing whether it is the Nazi regime or the entire Germany that was involved in the mass killings of Jews.

In Osama Alomar's collection of flash fiction entitled *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories*, the responsibility of the Syrian conflict and the suffering of Syrian civilians is attributed to political figures. Multiple stories in this collection portray authority figures as the main antagonist of the Syrian unrest and instability. One story "The Shadow" shows the downfall of an unnamed country as a result of a natural disaster in the form of an overwhelming shadow that shrouds everything. A youngster trying to uncover the reason behind it finds out that the shadow and never-ending darkness was an act of sabotage by an "ugly gang leader" (Alomar *Teeth* 83). The young man further finds out that the leader is orchestrating "a strategic plan for destroying and pillaging the country for hundreds of years to come" (83). This seems to refer to the attempts to maintain the power carried out by the Syrian autocratic regime led by Ba'ath political party. The word "gang" refers to the accomplices of the leader, hinting towards the individuals who occupy important political positions in the Syrian autocratic regime (83). The term "gang" may also collectively refer to the multiple interest groups involved in the Syrian civil war; therefore, it can be interpreted as a symbol for the US, Turkey, the UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran that are exploiting Syrian civil war to pursue their own geopolitical interests in the Middle East (83). Besides geopolitical motivations, these interests also have materialistic motives as the Middle Eastern region

is has rich reservoirs of oil. These regional and global powers seem to be the groups to whom the responsibility of Syrian unrest is attributed in this story.

In short, the argument presented in the above passage suggests that Alomar's flash fiction represents the political leader of Syria as the main perpetrator of the Syrian conflict, unrest, and violence. This argument can be supported by the observations presented in the book *Syrian Requiem: The Civil War and Its Aftermath* (2021). The authors of this book assign the blame for the instability, violence and destruction of Syria to the "ruthlessness" of the autocratic ruler of Syria, Bashar Al- Asad (Rabinovich et al. 230). The book also explores the strategies which helped Bashar Al-Asad to maintain his autocratic rule over Syria despite strong opposition from civilians, political parties and rebel groups. The book clearly argues that it is Asad's ruthless strategy to "galvanize sectarian tensions" and "willingness to use barrel bombs and chemical weapons against his own population" that deteriorated the prevalent clashes and tensions in Syria (231). It also indicates that, in Syria, the state-orchestrated religious and sectarian conflicts (as discussed in 4.3.2 section) and the state-sponsored use of nuclear weapons are the reasons behind the Syrian crisis.

Similarly, in the story "The Fingers of Dynamite", world leaders convene for a conference. Prima facie, they pass friendly gestures. Suddenly, a person in the audience notices that the fingers of these leaders are interlaced. Such body language seems to convey the idea of deception. The portrayal of world leaders in this story can be interpreted as external interest groups involved in the Syrian civil war which include US, Turkey, UK, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The metaphor of fingers of dynamite in the title of this story can be interpreted as a reference to the actions of Western superpowers providing nuclear weapons and arms to conflicting groups in Syria (Alomar *Teeth* 89). This story seems to blame the external interest groups for deteriorating the condition of the Syrian conflict.

Motivated by geopolitical interests, these groups contribute to the wide-scale destruction and violence in Syria. To support the argument regarding the involvement of regional and global powers in the Syrian civil war, we need to revisit a research article entitled "Beyond Sectarianism: Geopolitics, Fragmentation, and the Syrian Civil War" (2014) that has already been reviewed in the literature review section. Now it is time to relate and integrate the arguments presented in that article in the analysis of Alomar's stories.

In this article, it has been argued that the Syrian civil war has evolved into a "regional proxy war" where a number of big powers including Russia, the USA, Turkey, the UK, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are attempting to assert their supremacy in the Middle Eastern region (Berti and Paris 28). Keeping in mind these views, it can be observed in "The Fingers of Dynamite" that Alomar's portrayal of world leaders' body language shows them as deceptive. Their interlaced fingers and constant smirks expose their hidden agendas, with each intending to throw the other off-balance on a foreign battleground. In this story, the image of multiple world leaders sharing a stage symbolizes their collective intervention in a foreign conflict i.e., the Syrian civil war. The article suggests that Iran and Russia have reportedly been responsible for the oppression being carried out against Syrian civilians by providing the Assad regime with weapons. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey supply funds to Syrian groups that attempt to overthrow the Assad regime.

In the same way, the story "Bowed Heads" attributes the responsibility of the Syrian unrest to a "tyrant leader" (Alomar *Teeth* 19). The story "A Handkerchief of Freedom" attributes this responsibility to a "dictator" who exhibits utter disregard for fundamental rights and the "freedom" of civilians (73). Both of these stories seem to single out the ruling political party in Syria, led by Bashar al-Assad. Under this regime, there have been significant instances of human rights violations.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of the representation of Syrian cultural trauma in the selected collections of flash fiction. A number of flash fiction stories from the collections have been analyzed above to show how Syrian characters in the selected collections engage with the process of meaning making of the Syrian civil war and its aftermath. This process begins with their attempts to attribute the status of cultural trauma to the Syrian civil war as portrayed in the stories "War" and "Insults". Next, the destabilization of the collective Syrian identity has also been studied. Stories such as "The Bag of Nation" and "The Sold Nations" have been analyzed to see how Syrian nationals turn homeless, seeking refuge in faraway countries. Their psychological reactions to massive displacement and violence have also been analyzed. Moreover, the attempts of different Syrian characters to give expression to their trauma have been studied to understand how the traumatized Syrian civilians, in the wake of civil war, engage in the process of meaning making of trauma, thereby processing their

cultural trauma in the religious, legal, and aesthetic arena.

CONCLUSION

SYRIAN CIVILIANS STANDING AMIDST UNCERTAINTY IN OSAMA ALOMAR'S FLASH FICTION COLLECTIONS

Encapsulating the findings of the research, this chapter discusses the inferences drawn from the textual analysis of the selected collections of flash fiction including *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) penned by Syrian refugee author, Osama Alomar. The present research has focused on examining and decoding a number of textual elements present in both of the collections including metaphors, imagery, allegory, and satirical remarks. This research has analyzed the flash fiction stories that are relevant to J. C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics. The findings of the research are restated in a detailed and comprehensive manner to ensure clarity of proposed arguments and inferences. This will help to show the implications and contribution of the present research.

The three research questions posed at the beginning of this research have been specifically addressed in light of the findings. Moreover, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that the present research is significant in the selected field of study. The significance is established through the suggestion of a theoretical intervention in Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics. However, it is important to note that the suggested theoretical intervention is based on the conclusions drawn from the examination of the selected collections. Nevertheless, it contributes to the ongoing discussions on necropolitics and the selected collections of Syrian flash fiction. This chapter ends with recommendations for further research on the selected collection of flash fiction.

It is now time to address each research question thoroughly so that the analysis of both collections can be synthesized.

The first question posed in this research asks how Osama Alomar, a Syrian refugee author, represents the trauma of his home country, Syria, in his collections of flash fiction. To address this question, this research studied Alomar's *The Teeth of the*

Comb and Other Stories (2017) as a primary text, along with his collection *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) serving as a secondary text to substantiate arguments. To examine how Syrian society and civilians underwent and processed their trauma following the unrest and violence that erupted in the wake of the Syrian civil war, the present research employed the theory of cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander. The findings of the research show that Alomar's representation of trauma faced by Syrian civilians qualifies as cultural trauma which is exhibited through the portrayal of psychological breakdown, disruption of collective consciousness, and identity crisis faced by Syrian civilians.

The analysis of the selected collections of flash fiction has shown how cultural trauma emerged in Syria as a direct impact of the breakdown of the social fabric and collective identity. The wide-scale violence, destruction, and death caused to Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections not only condemns civilian characters to overwhelming psychological turmoil but also compells them to leave their home country in search of asylum. The analysis of stories such as "Convoy" and "The Lake and the Fire" has shown how police aggression, state-perpetrated brutality, and prolonged suffering pushed the civilian characters to the verge of physical, mental, and emotional collapse. The civilian characters shown as experiencing panic attacks, heart attacks, and disfigurement in the aforementioned stories symbolize the beginning of the disintegration of the collective consciousness of Syrian civilian characters. This is the reason why multiple characters seek refuge in foreign countries.

Moreover, the analysis has shown how the Syrian civil war disrupted the collective meanings of Syrian society, leading civilian characters to a serious identity crisis. Particularly, the understanding of 'homeland' has taken a major hit with the displacement of Syrian civilian characters. The civilian characters' flight from their turbulent homeland in search of refuge in faraway countries marks the beginning of their attempt to reconfigure their identity. The narrators of stories such as "Bag of the Nation", "Love Letter" and "The Union of Our Home" can be seen dealing with degradations in foreign countries as refugees.

Syrian refugee characters are seen facing insults and rejection for their Syrian identity since people in host countries see Syria as no more than a battleground for conflicting groups. For instance, the unnamed refugee character portrayed in the story

"Bag of the Nation" becomes an object of ridicule and derision before a crowd in a foreign land for taking pride in the legacy of Syria. In another story "Insults", the narrator's decision to leave his home and seek refuge in another country lies heavy on his conscience. All these instances indicate how challenging it is for Syrian refugee characters to accept their decision to leave their homeland and be granted acceptance in foreign countries. Their identities undergo the process of reconfiguration as they navigate their refugee status.

The second research question asked how Osama Alomar uses satire as a tool to highlight the absurdity of war as a working of necropolitics. A number of stories in the selected primary and supplementary collections of flash fiction engage with multiple literary devices such as satire, allegory, and metaphor to show how the Syrian civil war denies any gains to the Syrian state and rebellious groups. Failing to obtain any goals, the selected collections show that the Syrian civil war has only resulted in wide-scale violence, death, and destruction. The portrayal of multiple civilian characters facing unjust and unprovoked violence characterizes Syria as a necropolitical state.

Moreover, this research has interpreted stories such as "The Head of Hair and the Guillotine" and "The Big Truck" as a satire on modern warfare and advanced weaponry. This research has argued that these satirical narratives criticize the Syrian government's necropolitical procedures to kill a large number of Syrian civilians without going through the trouble of arranging one-by-one executions for individuals. Moreover, stories such as "Psychological Barrier" and "Free Elections" are replete with satirical remarks that expose the touch of civilization and democratization given to the extermination of Syrian civilians who are viewed as enemies of the ruling regime. This research also revealed how the necropolitical Syrian state in the selected collections promotes an imaginary sovereignty that allows the state to kill Syrian civilians for its survival and continuation of power.

The analysis of selected collections has also studied how the necropolitical Syrian state considers prisons as garbage bags to dispose of Syrian civilians. Stories such as "The Smiling People", "When Tongues were Cut Off" and "Kicks" has shown the plight of Syrian civilian characters that have been detained and tortured by the state, with many having lost their lives in prisons. These stories paint the picture of a world controlled by a tyrant autocratic leader who has set up a secret police force that performs the duty of punishing people for exhibiting a sense of displeasure with the ruling

autocrat. The tongues of civilian characters are severed which shows the necropolitical Syrian regime's ambition to render the target population absolutely powerless and voiceless. The powerlessness of the target population ensures the continuance of the necropolitical regime's continuance of rule. This is how the research has analyzed the way the necropolitical regime subjected the target population to violence, dismemberment, and death to suppress resistance, opposition, and protests.

Besides this, the interpretation of allegories of jungle and animals shows that in chaotic and unstable societies, such as Syria, the rise of necropolitics in the wake of the Syrian civil war has turned the everyday life of civilian characters into that of wild beasts, with the powerful preying over the weak.

The third question in this research asks how the selected collections depict cultural trauma as a meaning making process in constructing new identities in war- torn Syria. In the analysis section of the present research, meaning making is defined as the process through which collective actors of a collectivity identify the implications of a traumatic event on the collective level, recognize it as cultural trauma, and develop a trauma narrative on behalf of the entire community. This process involves an in-depth study of how cultural trauma fractures and reconfigures the identity of a group.

Since the present research recognizes the Syrian civil war as the cultural trauma of Syrian civilian characters portrayed in the selected collections, various examples of identity transformation in the wake of the Syrian civil war have been presented. The fourth chapter of this research has studied a number of Syrian civilian characters in the selected collections who can be seen moving past the assigned religious, social, and national identities as they witness wide-scale destruction and violence amidst the Syrian civil war. The story entitled "The Name" uses the metaphor of the loss of the author's name from an acclaimed literary work to symbolize how the identity of a collectivity is destabilized following a cultural trauma. The following passage recapitulates these discussions carried out in the analysis of the selected collections to precisely address the third research question.

One of the dimensions of identity that is affected during Syrian civil war is the religious identity of the civilian characters. The stories such as "The Shadow", "The Temple" and "Barbed Wire" have shown the characters' disillusionment with the traditional God figure as they recognize their suffering as a manifestation of divine

wrath. In "The Shadow", when dark times shroud a country, people make sense of it as God's way to punish them for their moral degeneracy. In "The Temple", a civilian character can be seen as discarding his previously held religious beliefs to establish a new religion. In "Barbed Wire", a child is shocked and devastated to read his writer father's violent narratives. This symbolizes the pain that Syrian civilian characters go through as they witness the way the necropolitical Syrian state seals the fate of Syrian civilians in blood and misery. This is further emphasized through the portrayal of the Syrian regime subjecting civilians to unrelenting suffering, confinements, torture, and executions throughout the selected collections. This is how Syrian civilian characters engage in meaning making process in response to their suffering and cultural trauma.

Moreover, a number of Syrian civilian characters' national identity undergoes a transformation as they grapple with cultural trauma during the Syrian civil war in the selected collection. These civilians seek refuge in foreign countries to evade state-administered violence in Syria. Multiple stories in the selected collections including "Bag of the Nation", "The Sold Nation" and "The Union of Our Home" show the plight of Syrian refugees who are displaced and uprooted from their homeland. Attempting to leave home and struggling with the dissatisfactions of homelessness is seen as a necessary evil for these Syrian civilian characters caught in the violent civil war. Therefore, moving away from Syria can be construed as an act of resistance against state-administered violence and oppression.

Having addressed each research question, it is now time to see how the findings of this research contribute to extending the discussion on necropolitics.

Pursuit of a Justified Resistive Autonomy

Examining the selected collections of flash fiction from the lens of necropolitics and cultural trauma, this research has analyzed multiple overt and covert forms of persecution faced by Syrian civilian characters at the hands of the Syrian regime. The study has yielded results that can be considered a significant but modest addition to Achille Mbembe's theorization on necropolitics. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics frames the traumatized subject under necropolitical domination as passive, but current yields slightly different results. In the present research, it has been noted that Syrian necropolitical subjects in the selected collections engage in actions that exhibit a resistive autonomy. Therefore, drawing attention to Syrian civilian characters' efforts to pursue a 'justified resistive autonomy' is the theoretical intervention of the present

research.

At this stage, it is crucial to justify the use of the phrase 'justified resistive autonomy' for Syrians' resistance against the oppressive regime. The phrase justified resistive autonomy helps to illustrate that Syrian civilian characters' efforts to pursue independence and self-control is only possible through their defiance to the sovereignty of the Syrian regime over their life and death. Since Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics defines necropower as a type of sovereignty that controls the life and death of the target population, the Syrian civilian characters' expression of a defiant and justified resistive autonomy in the selected collections is their approach to reclaiming agency over their life and death. It is now time to justify how these characters' expression of justified resistive autonomy adds to Mbembe's discussion on necropolitics.

In 4.8 section of the analysis, it has been analyzed how Mbembe's concept of necropolitics reduces target populations and victimized communities to lifeless and passive victims. Within the context of Mbembe's exploration of necropolitics, the status of victims is emphasized through phrases such as "living dead", "death-in-life", "social death", "bare life", "absolute domination", "becoming- object" (Mbembe 12, 14, 18, 21). These phrases, though used for highlighting the excessive victimization of target populations, neither wholly constitute the condition specific to the Syrian civilian characters nor represent their response to the state-sponsored violence and subjugation in the selected collections. On the other hand, ascribing such a passive status to necropolitical subjects, as symbolized by the quoted phrases, strips them of their agency which is not what we find in the selected texts. These texts exhibit a nuanced resistance to the subjugation they are subjected to which can be referred to as 'justified resistive autonomy'.

It is important to note that Mbembe's perception and projection of necropolitical subjects neglect their efforts to overturn the sovereignty of necropolitical regimes over their mortality. The concept of necropolitics is based on the argument that necropowers exercise absolute control over the "life and death" of the target population (Mbembe 12). Control over life suggests that necropowers have the ability to influence and manipulate the actions of necropolitical subjects. Contrary to this, the present research has analyzed multiple stories in the selected collections of flash fiction that Syrian civilian characters make efforts to regain control of their lives. For instance, there are

stories such as "The Shining Idea", "Love Letter" and "Who Leads Whom" in the selected primary collection and "Whales' Suicide" and "Donkey Demonstration" in the selected supplementary collection that demonstrate the justified resistive autonomy of the Syrian civilian characters. The civilian characters portrayed in these stories manage to show resistance even in the face of overwhelming violence and brutality.

These stories show Syrian civilian characters' attempt to escape persecution and systemic oppression in Syria by the necropolitical regime. Civilian characters evade state-administered violence by either resorting to suicide or fleeing Syria and finding asylum. This shows their attempts to assert their right to life and safety. Fleeing life-threatening conditions in Syria created by the oppressive necropolitical regime help civilian characters to challenge the sovereignty of the ruling regime over their life and death. The acts of seeking refuge and committing suicides show the civilian characters attempts to regain control of and assert autonomy over their lives. Although these stories have been analyzed in the analysis chapters, they have not been discussed regarding their portrayal of Syrian civilians' pursuit of justified resistive autonomy. It can be an important dimension that may be an extension of this research project.

In the story "The Shining Idea", an unborn child is seen as trying to convince his father to let him be born to the world. However, the father "refused to have him" to save him from the "hell of war" that the world has turned into (Alomar *Teeth* 98-99). Over the unborn baby's constant pleas, the father finally advises him, "You should be happy that you haven't… been born" (97). This shows that the man has decided to not become a father to save his offspring from the violence and unrest that the world has to offer. This story also indicates the efforts of Syrian necropolitical subjects to reclaim their right over their mortality. The father displays his autonomy by refusing to have a child since it prevents the Syrian necropolitical regime from controlling the "life and death" of his child (Mbembe 12). The man's denial to have a child symbolizes the denial to allow a necropolitical regime to violate the life of one more human. This determination enables the man to give an expression to his resistive autonomy.

In "Whales' Suicide", a group of whales decides to commit suicide by landing on the shore as "an act of protest" against humans who have polluted their natural habitat through "armed conflicts" and "destructive wars" (Alomar *Fullblood* 42). The metaphor of whales' suicide helps the author to show the attempts of Syrian civilians to regain control of their life and death. The whales portrayed in this story perceive their

suicide attempt as their personal choice which helps them assert autonomy over their "life and death" which, as Mbembe notes, are controlled by the necropolitical regime (12). They also complain about human intervention in thwarting their suicide attempts since people on the shore, as whales complain, "always try to return us to the sea" (42). The allegory of whales refusing to inhabit a polluted ocean and claiming absolute control over their mortality demonstrates the justified resistive autonomy of Syrian civilians. This symbolizes an end to civilians' passive acceptance of death imposed by the necropolitical state. By engaging in collective suicide as a protest against necropolitics, they regain and assert control over their mortality.

In the story "Love Letter", a Syrian refugee writes a love letter to his beloved, Minerva, in which he writes about the Syrian civil war and his motivation behind fleeing from Syria. The man writing the letter regards his decision to flee Syria as a form of "revolution against oppression and slavery" (Alomar *Teeth* 23). This indicates that his escape from Syria is in itself a form of justified resistive autonomy since he attempts to regain control of his life and break free from the clutches of the Syrian necropolitical regime. He further justifies his pursuit of refuge by saying that "the flowers of freedom had finally blossomed" in his mind and he resolved to save himself from the "claws of insane war" (23). It is important to note that the man accredits his escape from Syria to his pursuit of "freedom" (23). Therefore, it can be argued that his pursuit of refuge is the expression of his justified resistive autonomy. He defies the overarching control of the Syrian regime over his life by fleeing from Syria and, by doing so, he displays his autonomy over his thoughts, actions, and future.

In another story "Who Leads Whom", a domestic donkey can be seen nagging his human master to carry him on his back to return the life-long favors of being carried by him. The donkey asks, "Don't we… deserve to revolt even once against the degradation and shame that we are exposed to throughout our lives?" (Alomar *Teeth* 121) Through the metaphor of a stubborn donkey, Alomar demonstrates the resistive autonomy of the Syrian civilians. It indicates that defying the oppressive authority of the master/ruler is the first step toward the acquisition of autonomy. Here, Alomar views the civil war as a response of Syrian civilians to the tyrannies of the necropolitical regime. Similarly, the theme of fighting against constant oppression is also represented in the story "Donkey Demonstration" which highlights labor abuse.

The above discussion sheds light on Osama Alomar's portrayal of Syrian

civilians' pursuit of justified resistive autonomy. Multiple stories from the selected collections of flash fiction have been analyzed to explain how the present research contributes to extending discussions on necropolitics. Focusing on the element of justified resistive autonomy as the pursuit of Syrian necropolitical subjects draws attention toward the resistance and fighting spirit of victimized target populations.

Many civilian characters seem to overtly resist the ruling regime and its brutality as portrayed in the story "Who Leads Whom", but it is not the case for all of them. Some civilian characters seem to resist the oppressive Syrian regime by reasserting personal choices such as refusing to start a family, committing collective acts of suicides or seeking asylum. This enables these characters to assert autonomy over their lives and reject the fate imposed on them by the oppressive necropolitical regime. This is how they refuse to passively accept violence and death at the hands of the necropolitical regime.

Therefore, it is crucial to clarify that, although seeking asylum and committing suicide are debatable forms of protest against the necropolitical regime, the possible means of resistance for many Syrian civilian characters is to flee Syrian homeland, collective acts of suicide or not to have children in the first place. These actions help them attain autonomy over their lives and break free from the necropolitical state which usually decides who lives and who dies. Since these two ways help them reclaim a right to life and safety, it means they have successfully defeated the necropolitical agenda of the state and taken control of their lives. As a result, the necropolitical state is no longer able to control the conditions of life and death of Syrian civilians.

To sum up, the present research has attempted to make a theoretical intervention in Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics to further the debate on oppressive power structures, tyrannical regimes, and victimized populace. Moreover, the lack of existing qualitative research on the flash fiction genre as a primary literary text has also motivated the selection of Alomar's collections of flash fiction for the present research. This study helps to foreground the impacts of cultural trauma and challenges faced by Syrian refugees and their response to this traumatic period in Syrian history. Alomar's stories show that, despite being physically distant, the lives of Syrian refugees are going through massive upheavals due to the deteriorating condition of their homeland, and their families are caught in the Syrian civil war. Being one of these refugees, Alomar can write freely and evade the strict censorship that he could have otherwise faced in

his homeland. So, his portrayal of the Syrian civil war can be assumed as a highly in-depth, close, and credible representation of the Syrian plight.

Recommendations for Further Research

Besides the aforesaid research dimension of reading these texts with an angle of the pursuit of a justified resistive autonomy, the selected collections of flash fiction, *The Teeth of the Comb and Other Stories* (2017) and *Fullblood Arabian* (2014) can be analyzed through Jan Alber's theory of unnatural narratology to engage with the unique narrative style of these collections that create an unnatural world inhabited by philosophizing birds, protesting animals, and antagonistic objects. Moreover, Maria Tumarkin's concept of traumascapes, proposed in her book *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (2005), can be used to analyze how Osama Alomar represents Syria as a traumascape through the imagery of ruined cities, graveyards, and militarized spaces.

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