RE-IMAGINING HOLOCAUST: THE POLITICS OF TERROR AND TRAUMA IN THE MIDDLE EAST FICTION

BY

KHADEEJA MUSHTAQ

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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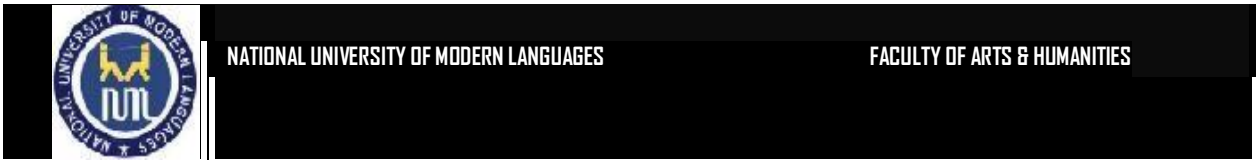

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Thesis Title: Re-Imagining Holocaust: The Politics of Terror and Trauma in the Middle East Fiction

Submitted By: Khadeeja Mushtaq **Registration #:** 627/PhD/Eng/F16-Lit

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan
Name of Research Supervisor

_____
Signature of Research Supervisor

Dr. Inayat Ullah
Name of HoD

_____
Signature of HoD

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan
Name of Dean (FAH)

_____
Signature of Dean (FAH)

Maj. Gen. Shahid Mahmood Kayani HI(M) Retd)
Name of Rector

_____
Signature of Rector

_____
Date

CANDIDATE DECLARATION FORM

I Khadeeja Mushtaq

Daughter of Mushtaq Ali Qureshi

Registration # 627/PhD/Eng/F16-Lit

Discipline English Literature

Candidate of **Doctor of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Re-imagining Holocaust: The Politics of Terror and Trauma in the Middle East Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of PhD 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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Khadeeja Mushtaq
Name of Candidate

ABSTRACT

Title: Re-Imagining Holocaust: The Politics of Terror and Trauma in the Middle East Fiction

Wars and military conflicts have besieged the Middle East for years resulting in colossal human tragedy especially in countries like Syria and Iraq. This extended exposure to extremely traumatic events, which include encounter with grotesque deaths and total destruction, has serious consequences for the mental health of the survivor-victims. Through the textual analysis of the selected fiction from wartime Syria and Iraq, this study engages with the grim on-ground traumatic reality and its detrimental effects on the psyche and emotional lives of the characters. As the imagined worlds of the texts are imbricated in the sociological reality of the two countries, a comprehensive account of the true events is considered a necessary prelude to the understanding of the characters' responses to war, destruction and global politics. The analyses of the texts rely on two assumptions: that the prolonged encounter with the grotesque has serious, devastating effects on the mental health of the characters (the survivor-victims of the wars), and that trauma is not only personal but also political – terror is used as a ploy by those who control these wars to bring the characters, as victims of these wars, into a state of total abjection and submission. As the selected texts reveal, this psychological terror can manifest in multiple ways, for instance, military prowess, media censorship, and/or narrative framing etc. The literary analyses invoke Robert J. Lifton, Judith Butler, and Giorgio Agamben to support these objectives. The study concludes that future studies on Middle East war-trauma must take into account the total devastation of survivors' physical and mental landscapes in order to fully understand the complex nature of traumatic injury inflicted on the trauma victims.

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DEDICATION

For the Survivor-Vistims of Syria, Iraq and now Palestine.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in the Middle East cannot be understood in the simple context of the "good" and the "evil" (researcher's emphasis). Wars in Syria and Iraq have caused colossal damage to the countries at large. The Syrians and the Iraqis have had to witness large scale deaths and total destruction of normal life as wars ravaged their countries. They have lived under very harsh conditions for an extended period of time without hope of change. There is a need to examine and understand the psychic damage they have had to endure along with the special circumstances which produced them. The selected fiction from Syria and Iraq can be read as documentaries of abuse, violence and suffering inflicted on the survivor-victims of wars.

This study attempts to situate the suffering of the Syrian and Iraqi civilians in the specific context of war. Academic researches on war trauma have largely focused on the experiences of refugees, prisoners, or war veterans and very rarely taken into consideration the fate of civilians. Through the selected texts, the study makes an attempt to close this gap and highlight the civilians' traumatic experiences as the result of prolonged exposure to destructive modern warfare machinery. The civilians experience trauma due to a number of factors including but not limited to bombings, restricted movement and denial of basic resources required for a decent living. In the introduction to "The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians: An International Perspective," (2003) the editors Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. Mclntyre define war trauma in these words: "The designation war trauma is meant to refer to the effects of war as an extreme stressor that threatens human existence, acting upon a human being or a group of people" (7).

Through the selected texts, the study hopes to make a powerful statement on the devastating nature of modern wars and trace the influence of war trauma on the survivors' psyche and their emotional well-being. The selected literary texts reveal a world devoid of humanity and compassion; a world where the living are no better than the dead; and, a world where dignity comes at a price. The study dares to make a bold statement in view of the survivors' traumatic mental state after witnessing/experiencing the total destruction of both their inner world and the world outside, and calls this catastrophic devastation a holocaust – *a holocaust* not *the Holocaust*. The title proposes a 're-imagining' of the holocaust trauma viz a viz the Syrians and Iraqis, and invites a direct engagement with the literary texts, unencumbered/uninterrupted by the hegemonic discourse surrounding the term 'holocaust'. This 're-imagining' or the symbolic rendering of the term Holocaust offers a disconnect with the discourse on Jewish massacre during the WW2 and braves a fresh rendering of the term 'holocaust' which, in turn, assumes uniqueness due to its non-specificity. This interventionist approach envisions to unsettle the trauma discourse in the Western academy which is predominantly Eurocentric.

The holocausts in Syria and Iraq are defined by the extreme nature of terror and trauma inflicted upon the survivors. The present study attempts to tell the story of their holocaust. As the literary texts reveal, the survivors are subjected to extreme abjection and psychological dehumanization by the aggressors to completely destroy them: body and soul. In order to take a holistic view of their situation, a three-pronged framework is envisaged involving Robert Jay Lifton (psychiatrist & author), Judith Butler (political philosopher & academic), and Giorgio Agamben (political philosopher). As a primary theorist, Lifton's concept of 'numbing' as a coping strategy against traumatic onslaught is elaborately discussed in relation to the texts in the analyses chapters. Through Judith Butler's notion of "differential allocation of grievability" and Giorgio Agamben's framing of the "muselmann" and the "homo sacer," the oppressor/aggressors' strategy of the victims' psychic maiming and dehumanization are discussed. The survivor-victims, who are already burdened with many losses and grotesque deaths, are also victims of unjust and indifferent world that watches their destruction in silence. This lack of empathy is politically motivated, as the texts reveal, and is aimed at total destruction of the people in those countries. Hence, the imbrication of trauma and politics. Butler's suggestion of binarism is crucial to the understanding of the politics

of trauma. The divisive ideology that some lives more sacred and grieveable than others is part of the ordeal of the peoples in Syria and Iraq, hence very useful in understanding the nature of the traumatic onslaught brought on them. Similarly, the *muselmann* and the *homo sacer*, as the limit-figures, defiled, loathed, and isolated, reveal an unimpassioned world structured around binaries. This political rendering of victims by both Butler and Agamben is used to strengthen the researcher's claim of the victims experiencing a psychic onslaught on a catastrophic scale – a holocaust.

As the above discussion shows, it is not the aim of this study to find links between the story of the Jewish holocaust and the holocaust in Middle East especially in Syria and Iraq. However, it might be more appropriate to claim that the two (holocausts) intersect at trauma studies, hence, the necessity of one for the other. A re-imagining of the holocaust is required especially with reference to the powerful fictional narratives emerging from Syria and Iraq. Since WW 2, trauma studies has mainly remained focused on the Jewish Holocaust and the use of the word 'holocaust' is fundamentally linked, in the Western discourse on trauma, to the Jewish Question. However, without ignoring the historical import of the word, the present study invokes the literal meaning of the word as understood before the Jewish Holocaust. "Holocaust" is related to the word "caustic" and implies a purging: the burning. "Holocaust" more specifically is burning in entirety. The etymology reveals the association of the word with the notion of genocide:

> mid-13c., "sacrifice by fire, burnt offering," from Old French holocauste (12c.), or directly from Late Latin holocaustum, from Greek holokauston "a thing wholly burnt," neuter of holokaustos "burned whole," from holos "whole" (from PIE root ***sol-** "whole, well-kept") + kaustos, verbal adjective of kaiein "to burn."

Originally, a Bible word for "burnt offerings," given wider figurative sense of "massacre, destruction of a large number of persons" from 1670s, the Holocaust as "Nazi genocide of European Jews in World War II," was first recorded 1957, earlier known in Hebrew as Shoah "catastrophe." The word itself was used in English in reference to Hitler's Jewish policies from 1942, but not as a proper name for them.

In its original sense, it is possible to divorce the word from its specific historicity, or Jewish massacre, during the World War II. Hence, the mass murder of

Muslims in the Middle East may be witnessed on its own without drawing up parallels with the Jewish holocaust. The aim of the study is to call for an understanding and a recognition of trauma beyond its understood spatio-temporal and historico-cultural boundaries and to develop an empathetic understanding for human suffering instead of localizing it and studying it from a single reference point alone. Trauma critics, Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg have argued for a more comprehensive understanding of human suffering insisting that "claims for uniqueness of the suffering of the particular victim group to which one belongs tend to deny the capacity for, or the effectiveness of, transcultural empathy" (518). It is best to see trauma as a continuum rather than a break. Thus, trauma is a recurring historical phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of Jewish culture alone.

In this sense, the Holocaust is seen as a metaphor for the grotesque - the grotesque in man which in different times, to different peoples finds manifestation quite incorrigibly. The Holocaust is interminably present informing the examination and discussion on Syrian and Iraqi holocausts, as a signifier and a reminder of what is extremely grotesque in man. The literature review section of this study connects the two tragedies on the human scale while also explaining the tangential nature of the study. Alford (2016) argues that the holocaust survivors and their children live a deeply impacted life in which the memory of Auschwitz is constantly at war with the ordinary memory. The testimonies of Auschwitz survivors revealed that they felt as if they had two lives, separated yet connected in strange ways, one in Auschwitz and the other in the present. They could not reconcile the two worlds. Charlotte Delbo describes her life after Auschwitz in these words:

> Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise, but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self. Unlike the snake's skin, the skin of memory does not renew itself. . . . Alas, I often fear lest it grow thin, crack, and the camp get hold of me again. . . . I live within a twofold being. The Auschwitz double doesn't bother me, doesn't interfere with my life. As though it weren't I at all. Without this split I would not have been able to revive. (Alford 55-56)

It is in this sense that Alford describes two states for Holocaust survivors: "the Auschwitz self" and "the post-Auschwitz self." However, his premise is that the post-Auschwitz self is so shattered that it no longer finds any "value" or "meaning" (58) in

life. This happens because traumatic memory has the quality of being profound, or what Delbo describes as *memoire prodonde* (Alford 57). The disbelief that this could happen to them coupled with the inability to communicate those horrors effectively in language, puts the survivors under immense psychological pressure. The burden of the memory that they must carry is not made easy for them even when they have the privilege to unburden it. Yet, this "doubling" has benefits: "for a vast majority, doubling allows life to go on. Doubling serves Eros in its largest sense, the drive for life after having lived through a world devoted to death" (Alford 62). Alford comes to the conclusion that doubling allows the survivors to live a full live despite their troubled traumatic past lives. This notion of doubling is transformed from passive to an active force in the novel *The Sirens of Baghdad* where the protagonist trains to become a suicide bomber yet retains his natural innocence. His double is the product of his past trauma; it is the 'other' – the self residing somewhere in the dark corners of his unconscious wanting to be unleashed. This form of doubling is self-destructive and is occasioned by extreme life-threatening conditions and serves as an immediate response to traumatic injury of a magnifying scale rather than occurring as a belated response felt under normal conditions. That said, the examination of the selected texts is carried out without drawing up parallels with the Jewish Holocaust. The idea is to situate and discuss the suffering of the Syrian and the Iraqi civilian population in their specific socio-political contexts to bring forth *their* (researcher's italics) traumatic injury as it is happening to them.

While the selected frames are instrumental in understanding the ways in which terror and trauma influence the characters' lives in the selected texts, they also pave way for new insights into the nature of psychological trauma. Lifton's book, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967), explores psychological deadness and traumatic impasse in relation to the survivors of Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima referred to as *hibakhusa* in Japanese. The *hibakhusha* translates literally as "bomb-affected-people," "exposed survivors," "atomic bomb survivors" (*Hibakhusha* Stories "Who are the *hibakhusa*?"; Naono 2019). The category was constructed immediately after the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to refer to someone who was directly affected from the deathly effects of the atomic bombing. As Lifton points out, the hibakhusha or survivor-victims shielded themselves from the atomic onslaught by shutting out the grotesque and the horror. In that moment, they simply stopped living.

Lifton describes this state as 'numbing' or impairment of psychological functions causing the hibakhusha or survivor-victims to limit their emotional and psychological investment when catastrophe struck. This is not, however, a temporary state of being but can become chronic as time passes. In Lifton's words, numbing represents the collapse of psychic processes; it is the "breakdown of inner imagery of connection, integrity, and motion, an absolute loss of the sense of human continuity" (*Death in Life* 502).

In her book, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler investigates the relation between 'injurability and aggression' to foreground the complexity of framing injury for ethical considerations. Butler's emphasis on "cultural politics" and "differential allocation of grievability" highlight the duplicitous standards of representation of trauma in Euro-American discourses. While traumatic experiences of the citizens of the U.S and European countries have been legitimized through media discourses and academic debates, the same value is not granted to the 'other.' She maintains that the notion of life is more unstable now than it ever was, hence, her idea of 'vulnerability' of human life. On the other hand, Giorgio Agamben is one of the leading figures in Italian philosophy and radical political theory. His political constructs like the *Muselmann* and the *Homo Sacer* are employed to underpin the politics of terror in the contexts of Syria and Iraq. Both the *Muselmann* and the *homo sacer* exist on the fringes. They are the 'other' - rejected and degraded by others.

These different theoretical approaches come together to explain the total destruction (body and soul) of the civilians in Syria and Iraq through the selected texts. With the help of these perspectives, I hope to make clear the imbrications of the psychological and the political, as well as the individual and the collective. The analysis of the texts is expected to address a broader discourse on the politics of trauma achieved through numbing and terror. In the context of the Middle East, especially Syria and Iraq, terror assumes significance because it is through the apparatus of terror that trauma is sustained and fortified. In other words, human shields are used for political advantage and victory. The study makes a significant contribution because the Syrian and Iraqi fictions have not been analyzed in this light before (researcher's note). By threading these perspectives together I wish to demonstrate that Iraq and Syria have become sites of a holocaust. Unfortunately, as the result of pervasive anti-Muslim narrative, the

perpetration of violence in these countries seems *normal* and the world watches in silence as human tragedy unfolds.

The Syrian novel, titled *Death is Hard Work*, outlines for us the harrowing experiences of the civilian population. The setting of the story is Damascus, a city once booming with life, famously called the Garden of Eden. However, the pre-war Syria is now only a memory. With more than half of Syria reduced to a rubble, nothing of old times remains. People can only reminiscence how it used to be like before war. At one point in the novel we get a glimpse of the old times when life was normal in Syria, when roads were surrounded with "groves of olives, peaches, and apricots and grapevines," and when the "houses were spacious and welcoming" and "the doors were always left open" (Khalifa 84). Everything is destroyed now; the indiscriminate and incessant bombing has leveled all standing structures in the city and lost under the debris is the "soul of Syria" with its culture, traditions and history. In the novel, the devastation is described in these words:

> The weak light revealed the extent of the devastation. It seemed as if souls were still moaning under the rubble, shreds of clothing and body parts strewn over the abandoned fields and mixing with the skeletons of their goats and mules. The dogs had scavenged what they could and left the rest for the flies. It was complete and utter ruin. (ibid 153)

The story opens in Damascus with the death of Abdel Latif al-Salim, whose final wish is to be buried in his ancestral village. A few hours trip during peacetime turns into a projected, life-threatening three-day journey for the three siblings: Hussain, Bolbol, and Fatima. The siblings soon realize that death like life has lost all sanctity. While they are captured, interrogated, and imprisoned, the corpse decays and becomes infested with worms. The novel invites us to think of Syria as the 'dead body' and the aggressors as the 'maggots': "The maggots were multiplying uncontrollably, it seemed, climbing the windows of the bus and covering the seats." (ibid 169).

The novel, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, is set in war-time Iraq, in the isolated town of Kafr Karam. The novel traces the transformation of the protagonist from a "docile, courteous boy" to someone whose "inextinguishable rage" can burn down cities: "I wanted to turn the country into an inferno from one end to the other. Everything I put in my mouth tasted like blood; every breath I took stank of cremation" (Khadra 134 &

159). Repeated encounters with traumatic events destroyed his mental peace and instead of forcing a retreat, the unfortunate events drive him to take destructive course. He moves to Baghdad, a city destroyed by war. But Baghdad is no longer the center of learning or business that it used to be. It's a destroyed city, at the mercy of militias who are wrecking life and every day bomb explosions take innocent lives. The novel reveals that these sudden, unannounced attacks have become a norm in Iraq. Not only do these events strike terror in the hearts of the local population, they take away their desire to live. A wedding feast is spoiled when a misguided missile lands in their midst. Reeling from the immediate shock from the blast, the mind fails to describe what it has witnessed. When a man is asked to describe what happened, his mental faculties fail him:

> I don't know anything. The guests were having a good time, and then the chairs and tables blew away, like in a windstorm. It was crazy…It was…I can't describe it. Bodies and screams, screams and bodies. If it wasn't' missile, then it must have been lightning from heaven (ibid 91).

Another character, Hussain, experiences cognitive dissonance after witnessing grotesque death of his cousin and friend during a suicide mission: "when the cops fired on him and he exploded, it was as if I disintegrated along with him. He was someone I really liked. He grew up on our patio" (ibid 210). Hussain is changed forever after this incident and even though he remains part of the militant group, he loses all desire to act. The violent death of his friend costs him his mental stability and sanity, as at times he behaves in a most bizarre manner: "I sincerely mourned him, but then the mourning was over, and now, whenever I picture him stabbing at his explosive belt and cursing, I burst out laughing" (ibid 210). The novel talks about grotesque deaths, death- guilt, fear and doubling among other issues.

The second Iraqi novel, *The Corpse Washer*, offers a gloomy picture of Baghdad, as a city of the dead. The narrator of the novel, Jawad, is forced to let go of his dream to be an artist, a sculptor following war and harsh economic realities that follow. Forced to take up his father's business as a 'corpse-washer,' his despondent self comes to the conclusion that there may not be any light at the end of the tunnel: "My heart, by contrast, is an abandoned house whose windows are shattered and doors unhinged. Ghosts play inside it, and the winds wail" (*The Corpse Washer* 3) The novella opens with Jawad's dream of his girlfriend, Reem, who was killed by the abductors

right before his eyes. The dream becomes a mirror of reality which keeps returning to haunt him and destroy his peace of mind: “Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep. Isn’t it enough that I toil all day tending to its eternal guests, preparing them to sleep in its lap” (ibid 2)? Against the gloomy backdrop of war, death, and destruction, Jawad’s loneliness and melancholy increases. His friend gone too as a result of American bombing: “I screamed his name as I ran, but he didn’t move….I called his name again and put my ear to his chest but could hear only my own breathing and the screams of others….I don’t remember how long I stayed there sobbing by his side” (ibid 48). All three texts focus on individuals and their mental, emotional landscape. They show us the importance of looking at human emotions and cognitive patterns for an understanding of their behavior.

In order for us to understand suffering, it is important to find out how humans consumed by destruction of body, spirit, and environment respond. It is important to study how tethered human souls cling to a memory lane marked by experiences of death, pain and loss. It is at these crossroads that reality and imagination meet. Trauma studies has moved away from psychiatric and biomedical approaches towards an examination of power relations. Until the late 19th century, trauma was seen as a ‘disease’ of the mind generated by some personal experience of distress or war-related conditions of shock and survival. Trauma was then a psychic condition and the subjects were traumatized individuals who were ‘psychically wounded and vulnerable, unwholed.’ The individual’s psyche was examined and explored for unacknowledged inner damage with lasting effects. The whole point was to find a cure to restore normalcy and balance in the otherwise unstable personality.

Through the groundbreaking studies carried out by Cathy Caruth and Dominique LaCapra (1995 & 2001) trauma studies has found a place in the humanities. Their works situated trauma within a socio-cultural framework and explored the role of memory in the trauma condition. Trauma was no longer just a psychic condition but seen as ‘a product of history and politics, subject to reinterpretation, contestation, and intervention’ (Wertheimer & Casper). In its present form, trauma studies is concerned not only with the discourse of trauma but how events are represented as ‘ruptures’ or ‘breaks’ from the normal.

Maurice Stevens notes that trauma is a "cultural object whose function produces particular types of subjects, and predisposes specific affect flows that it then manages and ultimately shunts into political projects of various types. Trauma does not describe, trauma makes" (Stevens 2016). In order to understand the imbrications of the individual and the collective, the study examines the selected texts in their specific cultural and political contexts. In doing so, I hope to address the broader discourse on cultural politics of trauma in the Middle East through fiction produced specifically in Syria and Iraq. By threading the different perspectives together, I wish to demonstrate that Middle East is witnessing a holocaust. As the result of pervasive anti-Muslim narrative, the perpetration of violence in the Middle East seems *normal* and the world watches in silence as violence against humanity continues.

1.1 Background of Study

Gabriele M. Schwab takes stock of trauma in these words: "There is no life without trauma. There is no history without trauma…Trauma as a mode of being violently halts the flow of time, fractures the self, and punctures memory and language." (42) It is true that we are living in the "age of trauma" (Miller and Tougow 2002) when the notion of trauma is employed in a variety of discourses to get better understanding of motives and emotions behind our actions. In more and more daily life occurrences that involve calamity or exploitation, the trauma register is employed to articulate its link with those events. The trauma question assumes greater significance because of the ethical lens it brings to examine the injury.

Since the outbreak of conflicts in the Middle East, the civilian injuries have soured and multiplied but have been ignored in the larger political and economic interests of the stakeholders in the region. What is really required is to foreground the condition of the people and their suffering as a holocaust. The selected texts take stock of the large-scale deaths, destruction and suffering in Syria and Iraq following protracted wars. These wars have ripped apart both the countries and forced millions to take shelter in other countries, and they are still not quite finished yet. Even though a great human tragedy has occurred, with a large number of civilian deaths, the world does not mourn for them.

Wars are never easy. They destroy both what is natural and man-made, and jeopardize freedom and comfort. They materialize man's worst nightmares. The

incessant exposure to bomb shelling, gun battles and bloodshed leave deep wounds which may take a life-time to heal. Be they combatants or civilians, each suffer from war trauma in ways which are complex and inexplicable. The symptoms grow and multiply after war when painful memories haunt the survivors and their dreams turn into nightmares. This passage from *The Good Soldiers* show what war can do to the nerves of soldiers despite training:

> Another, who at the end of all this would become the battalion's most decorated soldier, hadn't yet started dreaming about the people he had killed and wondering if God was going to ask him about the two who had been climbing a ladder. Another hadn't yet started seeing himself shooting a man in the head, and then seeing the little girl who had just watched him shoot the man in the head, every time he shut his eyes. (3)

Wars can be highly disruptive and destructive for a community. Nico Carpenter writes that "wars tend to cannibalize on the social and absorb it" while "truth" becomes a casualty of war where winning is all that matters (2). He further explains that in prolonged wars, margins between "us" and "them" become more pronounced, as reflected from the remarks of the US President, George Bush, after 9/11: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorist" (ibid 2). This kind of narrative is clearly dichotomous. As Carpenter states, it reveals how ideology is reflected in war discourses and plays an important role in developing narratives to further the cause of war. He further goes on to show how the dichotomized nature of these discourses help create multiple identities along the same pattern: "just/unjust, innocent/guilty, rational/irrational, civilized/barbaric, organized/chaotic, superior to technology/part of technology, human/animal-machine, united/fragmented, heroic/cowardly and determined/insecure" (3). These narratives are then played out by powerful media houses and are spread across the globe. For instance, during the War on Terror that followed the 9/11 attacks, the US and its allies used the same dichotomous strategy to weaken their enemies. While they were the "good" guys, their enemies were at the opposite end of the scale and were framed as "bad" guys. This sort of maneuvering created sympathies for the US forces and at the same time portrayed the other side as unjust and guilty. Discourses were constructed to show one side as innocent and the other as evil. The voice of the 'other' was repressed and silenced by the great noise generated by the powerful and mighty US which controlled much of the print and

electronic media. Hence, media war is ideological and plays a significant role in shaping opinions during or in the aftermath of a military conflict, and can also impact intellectual discourse.

The authors of *Culture, Trauma and Conflict: Cultural Studies Perspectives on War* (2007) conclude that meanings or constructions are not fixed in war discourses and instead "are (re)articulated before, during and after the conflict and inserted into different chains of equivalence" (3). LaCapra has defined the victim as "a social, political, and ethical category" (4). Victimhood is also ideologically constructed as after the 9/11 attacks he US citizens who were affected by the collapse of twin towers garnered more sympathy than the thousands of Afghan men, women and children whose lives have since then been crippled and scarred by the war imposed on them in retribution. As a result of the material, psychological and ideological effects of war, individual and cultural identities of the victims are mutilated beyond repair. The memories of war stay with the victims and leave them permanently scarred unless collective efforts are made to redress them.

We cannot even imagine what wars do to the civilians or the survivor-victims. Modern wars are devastating - individually, culturally and collectively. In *Refractions of Violence*, Martin Jay (2003) asserts that violence has become "a constitutive function of today's world, structuring and sustaining our way of existence and of socio-political and transnational intelligibility"(3). Michael Hardt and Antonio Nergi (2004) argue that contemporary warfare and violence have become "a permanent condition", "the primary organizing principle of society" and "the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination" (12-13). In *On Violence* (1970), political theorist Hannah Arendt states that war "with the weird suicidal development of modern weapons" is the most severe form of violence involving "the wholesale slaughter of civilians" (14). Scarry (1985) defines war as "a form of human brutality where the main activity is injuring and the ultimate goal is to out-injure the opponent" (12).

The trauma suffered during war is of specific nature hence specific categorization known as PTSD. The civilians, or the *survivor-victims*, as I would like to call them here, are the worst hit by war. Because they are at the receiving end of terror, their trauma is deep and lasting. In Iraq, the fatal wars have played havoc with the lives of the civilian population who have faced threats to their own lives and to the lives of their loved ones. Each war has left indelible imprints on their souls as the

civilians struggle to keep their sanity intact. For years, the Iraqi population has experienced continual instability and exposure to various forms of protracted violence under one pretext or the other. These include: campaigns organized by the Ba'athist regime, American intervention in the region, war with Iran and finally the ISIS. Throughout this time, destruction of cities, forced relocations, mass executions, disappearances and rapes became routine experiences for the people. For more than a decade now, Syrians are also experiencing the worst form of terror on their soil.

These wars have also been linked to Islamophobia which explains the general lack of empathy for the civilian population in these countries. Junaid Rana writes that "along with Middle East conflicts, tied to the legacy of Zionism and the occupation of Palestine, several Gulf Wars, the aftermath of 9/11, and the revitalization of American imperialism in Iraq and Afghanistan – events Tariq Ali refers to as Oil Wars – Islamophobia has risen throughout Euro-America and its connected satellites" (149). He describes Islamophobia as a kind of racism. Traumatic experiences may be internalized into perceptions about others that may have consequences for both communities. It is vital that these experiences are confronted and examined lest they end up producing hegemonic, divisive discourses which is exactly what these wars have done. Kinnvall narrates a story of a chance encounter at a memorial for soldiers killed in the Iraq war where the father of a soldier, who had died, was showing childhood pictures of his son to a psychology professor. Upon seeing the pictures, the professor began to cry:

> Father (surprised): What's the matter?
>
> Me: I was wondering if the war in Iraq is worth the death of your son.
>
> Father: (Again surprised). But we had to do something.
>
> Me: Why is that?
>
> Father: 9/11
>
> Me: But Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11.
>
> Father: Well, they're all Muslims. (Kinnvall 268)

The moral frame developed by the U.S. and its allies draws attention away from the suffering of the civilians in these countries. The recent labels like 'Muslim terrorist,' 'War on Terror,' turn the victims into a symbolic category, a homogenous mass, with

no individual identity. Due to the unequal power dynamics between the U.S. and the Middle Eastern Muslim countries, the U.S. led narrative against Muslims and Arabs has sustained and effectively blocked or erased other accounts. Differentiating between processes that determine signification, sociologist, Akiko Hashimoto insists that the reason some events become "more consequential than others" is because "we manage to make them more consequential" for the sake of self-definition and identification. After the WW2 and in the wake of mounting anti-German sentiments, the Germans, unwittingly, came to accept their role as perpetrators of war crimes and were reluctant to speak of themselves as victims (Sebald 11). Much in the same way the Arabs from the war-ravaged Middle Eastern countries are seen as a homogenous mass, as a result the price for one person's crime is to be paid by all.

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have a fairly long history of unrest and very few studies have focused on the psychic impact of violence on civilian population in Syria and Iraq. The cost of human life is cheap in the Middle East, and the narrative supported and circulated through Western media houses has shifted world opinion in favor of wars despite largescale human casualties in these countries. The new moral frame that has been developed by the U.S and its allies encourages stereotyping of Muslims, hence, 'Muslim terrorist' and 'War on Terror,' and draws world attention away from the trauma suffered by war civilians. The unequal power dynamics between the U.S. and the Middle Eastern Muslim countries has also helped solidify the U.S. led narrative against Muslims and Arabs and effectively blocked or erased others. The U.S. led soldier-centered narrative has intensified with war and is central to Western war discourse.

American philosopher and cultural critic, Judith Butler mourns the "rise of anti-intellectualism" in the US after 9/11 which dictated only two possibilities: "either you are with us or you're with the terrorists" (4). She insists that this mechanism reveals the "vulnerability" of the state and at the same time questions "the very value of dissent as part of contemporary US democratic culture." In her own words:

> The point I would like to underscore here is that a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. It seems crucial to attend to this frame, since it decides, in a forceful way, *what we can hear*, whether a view

> will be taken as explanation or as exoneration, whether we can hear the difference, and abide by it. (4-5)

Unfortunately, the powerful global narrative against Muslims has legitimized and authorized the use of violence against them as they are deemed as 'threatening Others.' This binary construction of "us" and "them" enables and maintains structural violence in the Middle East. In the contexts of Syria and Iraq, terror and trauma are consciously and malevolently inscribed on the psyche of the survivor-victims. Mass destruction, grotesque deaths and labelling are manifestations of power-politics that are used in recent wars in the Middle East to fetch a political victory for the aggressors.

In Iraq and Syria, many historical sites have been targeted and razed to the ground during wars in Middle East. These were direct attempts to erase the cultural memory of the community. As Robert Bevan in *The Destruction of Memory* (2006) points out the destruction of cultural artefacts is not collateral damage, it is intentional. The goal is "enforced forgetting" of the culture, history and identity. Bevan writes:

> The aim here is not the rout of an opposing army – it is a tactic often conducted well away from any front line – but the pursuit of ethnic cleansing or genocide by other means, or the rewriting of history in the interests of a victor reinforcing his conquests. Here architecture takes on a totemic quality: a mosque, for example, is not simply a mosque; it represents to its enemies the presence of a community marked for erasure. (8)

Bevan describes this as an act of appalling dehumanization and extreme barbarism. To lose the familiar can be disconcerting emotionally, especially for those who are already suffering under wars. The destruction of one's religious or cultural monuments can pose a serious threat to collective and personal identity. In Syria and Iraq, most places that have been destroyed were greatly revered by people from all sects. The destruction must have meant a great emotional blow for the peoples of these lands.

Iraq and Syria tell the story of failed attempts to winning peace and stability. The U.S and its allies decided that Iraqi and Syrian population is be punished again and again for the sins committed by its rulers. At around 5:30 am on 20th March 2003, the US forces invaded Iraq without authorization from the UN Security Council. Within hours of the invasion, the US president George W. Bush gave a nationally televised speech from the Oval office announcing that the war has begun: "American and

coalition forces are on the early stages of the military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." Fighting a country which was no match to its military prowess, the US army faced no greater military challenge in Iraq. Six weeks later, on 1st May 2003, President Bush landed on the deck on USS Abraham Lincoln off the coast of San Diego and declared the end of major battle: "My fellow Americans, major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our Allies have prevailed." As the US celebrated, hundreds of civilians continued to be killed and traumatized but that never made to the president's victory speech because politics takes precedence over human life. The British medical journal *Lancet* puts the civilian casualty during the first 14 months of the invasion to around six hundred thousand ("Democracy Now"). The Iraqi-American author, Zahra Ali, describes the US operations in Iraq and the consequent war as the "criminal war" because the US led surgical strikes since 2003 have indiscriminately targeted civilian sites and led to grave humanitarian crisis in Iraq (ibid 3:35-5:00). Sami Rasouli, an activist from Iraq, thinks the invasion meant the end of a future for Iraq: "Iraq entered a tunnel in 2003 with no light at the end. From the invasion to occupation to sectarianism then terrorism, ISIS, and we should not forget about the Iranian expansion in Iraq (ibid 8:46-9:10). Similarly, in Syria the war has affected millions of civilians and reduced a brimming populace to a state of extreme abjection. Hashemi and Postel (2013) report that between March 2011 and April 2013 nearly two million civilians fled the country and 4.2 million were internally displaced. By 2017, nearly 12 million were rendered homeless and half a million dead (Yassin xi). U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres said: "we have not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost 20 years ago" (Hashemi and Postel 3).

How have the civilians responded to this extreme form of terror? There is no doubt that the civilians or survivor-victims have had to suffer physical displacement, broken families, physical disability and long-term psychological illnesses. They have lost loved ones, seen children dying, survived in exploded neighbourhoods and looted houses and most significantly internalized terror. What they have had to and are still experiencing is the total destruction and uprooting of what is called respectable, human existence. Their trauma cannot be simply explained within the neat boundaries of PTSD. It requires foreshadowing of the complex political and moral trajectories and a

reassessment on humanitarian as well as political grounds. Afana points out the need to assess the political, cultural and economic factors in formulating and understanding the mental health of survivor-victims in the Middle East conflicts. He writes that "events that would be widely perceived as traumatic in countries where there is little violence or oppression may not be perceived as extremely distressing in societies living with daily conflict and political conflict" (30).

The civilian population in these countries has been forced to relocate, hide or face death. The war narrative has helped the cause of the neo-colonial forces rather than garnering support and sympathy for the survivor-victims. Any form of empathy for victims of brutal chemical and nuclear wars is neutralized by reports coming out from powerful media houses who project the victims as collateral damage. The images of scattered and burnt bodies of men, women, children no longer generate empathy. This is, in part, due to the inconsistent narrative and conflicting stories that come out in the wake of traumatic event. The countries involved in proxy wars in the Middle East are motivated by their political interests and human life is of little consequence in the greater game for power. The same countries distort civilian casualty and suffering.

Iraq has been the site of decades of war, international interventions, and displacements. Over the past forty years, Iraq has endured a bloody war with Iran (1980-1988), the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Second Gulf War of 1991, UN sanctions (1990-2013), a US-led military invasion and occupation in (2003-2011), and political, sectarian and militia armed conflicts (2003-present). According to Amnesty International (2010), there have been suicide bombings targeting civilians, kidnappings for ransom, killings and body mutilation, during and after the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011. The cost of these wars on Iraqi people is unimaginable, as the effects of violence extend beyond the counting of death tolls, injuries, and damages to state infrastructures. Iraq has witnessed one of the largest population displacements in the modern history. A close to four million people have been internally or externally displaced (Dewachi 66). Due to broken infrastructures, the Iraqis have been forced to seek critical medical and surgical care in regional states such as Jordan, Lebanon, India, Iran, and Turkey (Dewachi 67).

The Syrians too have experienced multiple risks and hazards that have impacted their mental health. The responses of survivor-victims to these threats are non-linear and unpredictable. Notwithstanding the grave tragedy, public health practitioners

acknowledge that the survivor-victims have shown great resilience. Despite losing everything to war, they are seen to push and strive for improvement of their condition instead of succumbing to the crises. A study conducted by CARE, a non-profit organization working for Syrians, shows that the Syrians, devastated by wars, are not giving up.: An interview of a male, aged 33, reveals how they are adapting to this new situation, "Our priorities have all changed and we have had to adapt. We never thought of food and water before the war; they were available always. We had services, colleges, schools, and hospitals. We used to have a good life, full of life and happiness. Now all we think of is how to provide the basics for our family. Of safety and security. Everything here is demolished and wrecked" (Heaner et al. 26); a female, aged 34, informs, "We went through many difficult and risky situations. For instance, we faced a severe shortage of food and medicine during a blockade in a conflict area. We could not feed our children; we fed ourselves with weed and some animals to survive. I felt desperate and miserable, especially for my kids. What did they do to be deprived of a basic need such as food?" (ibid 27); a female, 25, recounts, "When the Kurds began to move towards the village, we had to leave our homes and build tents to live in it. It was all very bad, but my family was together. The water was so dirty and I was worried about my child's milk. At first I gave him sheep's milk because he was starving, but he got sick from it. My brother's wife breastfed my son and her children at the same time so that would not starve" (ibid 36). The participants in the study mention different stressors like displacement (74%), exposure to conflict (69%), economic hardship (69%), loss or death of a family member (25%), and injury or other health issues (21%) which they are struggling against (ibid 28).

Such accounts raise several questions. Most significantly, they raise concerns regarding the mental states of the survivor-victims and their coping mechanism. We want to know what is it that keeps the survivor-victims going despite all the harrowing experiences they have been through? Also, how is their psychological trauma manifested? And, do the existing models of psychological trauma, like PTSD, adequately explain the Syrian and Iraqi holocaust? It is important that these questions are addressed for any assessment of the emotional and mental states of the survivor-victims. The role of religious thought and personal beliefs cannot be overlooked in all of this. Several recorded interviews with war-survivors show that faith can be a determining factor in managing and coping with stress, sometimes alleviating pain and

overcoming trauma of death encounter. But the consequences of the protracted war upon the emotional and psychological health of the survivor-victims are manifold and need to be interrogated seriously. Unable to reconcile with the grotesqueness of their situation, these survivor-victims have effectively shut down their emotional response and are protected, even if temporarily, from the curse of psychological suffering and emotional distress. By limiting their psychological investment in encounters with death and destruction, the survivor-victims manage to escape the immediate effects of trauma. Trauma is repressed - is not allowed full recognition in the moments of contact with terror.

LaCapra has defined the victim as "a social, political, and ethical category" (4). However, victimhood can also be ideologically constructed as the 9/11 catastrophe reveals. The US citizens have garnered more sympathy than the thousands of Afghan men, women and children whose lives have since been crippled and scarred by the war imposed on them in retribution. Another problem with ideological narrative constructions is that they forge selective forgetting. While some events are remembered and forged into collective consciousness, others are allowed to pass out from the memory. The post-9/11 trauma of the US citizens is memorialized, while trauma experienced by Afghan population is not legitimized or allowed to pass into the collective conscious of the West. There is no denying that media shapes our world and the way we live in it. Speaking about the indifference and complacency of the American public, anthropologist and cultural critic Thomas de Zengotita writes: "the vaunted wisdom of the American people – even more vaunted than Iraq's Republican Guard – is the more to be cherished for being theirs by definition, effortlessly acquired, no tedious study, no demanding ethical reflection required, yet another convenience in a convenient world" (170).

Richard McCutcheon wonders why the Iraq war got so little coverage in the Western and the US media following 1991. After the end of Gulf War in 1991, he witnessed not a return to normalcy but a furthering of "economic, social and physical devastation" (11) which was "rarely mentioned, let alone analysed" in detail (12). Aid workers have recounted stories of bombs dropping on civilian population, killing and wounding several between 1991 and 2003 in Iraq (12). There are reports of military engagements in this period of so-called normalcy which gives legitimacy to claims of

violence that McCutcheon and other scholars are making. John Pilger documents one such period of military activity in Iraq:

> During the eighteen months to January 14, 1999, American air force and navy aircraft flew 36 000 sorties over Iraq, including 24 000 combat missions. During 1999, American and British aircraft dropped more than 1800 bombs and hit 450 targets. The cost to British tax-payers is more than £800 million. There is bombing almost every day: it is the largest Anglo-American aerial campaign since the Second World War; yet it is mostly ignored by the American and the British media. (McCutcheon 17)

McCutcheon also mentions other forms of violence that were indirectly meted out to people of Iraq. He describes this as "structural/economic violence" which is targeted through "trade policies and sanctions, promoting forceful, often unwanted, change in human collectives" (18). The control of economic processes led to very tangible impacts on the civilian population in Iraq. Poor health conditions, malnutrition, scarcity of utility items, low wages etc. created a situation of uncertainty in the country. Daniel Kuehl, a military strategist, writes that "the first week's attacks cut Iraq's generating capacity by approximately 75 percent, and follow-on attacks extended that even further so that by war's end the system had been reduced to only about 15 percent of its prewar capacity" (18). The destruction of the power grid eventually led to the breakdown of the water and sewage treatment facilities in Iraq which as the US government reports revealed could lead to widespread disease in civilian population.

Another report by United Nation's Food and Agricultural (FAO) concluded that by December 1995, 567 000 Iraqi children had died in the first five years of sanctions (18). With the destruction of infrastructure, there was no way to keep track of the diseases that spread at an alarming speed among women and especially children. The Centre for Economic and Social Rights, UNICEF and the World Health Organization produced similar reports on the human condition in Iraq. In 1996, the WHO concluded its reports with this warning:

> This tragic situation has tremendous implications on the health status of the population and on their quality of life, not only for the present generation, but for the future generation as well....[T]he world community should seriously consider the implications of an entire generation of children growing up with

> such traumatized mental handicaps, if they survive at all. (World Health Organization 16-17)

Unfortunately, violence is also legitimized through "negative construction of the Other" (McCutcheon 20). During the Iraq war, Saddam Hussein was reduced to the figure of an evil man in prominent media sources. The world was easily led to believe the false claims about weapons of mass destruction and the plight of the Iraqi people was lost to them. The civilian population did not figure in the narrative that was constructed to dislodge the Iraqi leader. A similar pattern is repeated in Syria where the once beautiful country has now been reduced to a rubble and its people maimed, dead or forced into refugees.

This research is significant because Middle East fiction is a relatively unexplored area of research especially in the realm of critical trauma studies. The Euro-American models for psychological trauma are derived from 'the sudden and unassimilable experience' of suffering which remains hidden in psyche until, years later, it is revealed through a series of symptoms. However, in the Middle East, trauma is the prolonged, cumulative hurt of negligence and 'empty empathy' (Kaplan 2011). It deconstructs and at the same time, demystifies the Euro-American metanarrative sustained in Euro-American academic discourses. The implications of this research are, therefore, far-reaching. It calls for an understanding of a 'more differentiated and more culturally and more historically' (Visser 253) specific model for trauma that can decolonize Euro-American assumptions of trauma. This calls for the recognition of multiple framings as opposed to fixed, essentialist, Euro-centric orientation.

The need for research on the effects of violence on Arabs in the Middle East has never been greater. If the Holocaust and 9/11 can raise a whole new discourse on violence and trauma, the on-going tragedy in the Middle East calls for enhanced understanding and explication of their material and psychic conditions. The new methods of warfare have multiplied human tragedy and its effects are varied as well. Similarly, the political narrative generated and supported through powerful media houses often gets more attention and the actual scale of human tragedy is lost to larger public. Most significantly, there has been no noteworthy evaluation of trauma experienced by innocent civilians of Syria and Iraq.

Conclusively, the study deals with trauma as a psychological and political enquiry. This two-pronged nature of enquiry is useful in explicating the full horror of the traumatic injury caused by long-standing wars in Syria and Iraq. The parallel study of Syrian and Iraqi fictions reveals a connection and a pattern in the psychological and emotional responses of the civilians devastated by modern warfare machinery. More precisely, the study examines the psychological consequences of protracted wars on the mental health of the characters from the selected Syrian and Iraqi fiction, and at the same time explores the imbrication of terror and trauma in the trauma discourse. Terror becomes a psychological weapon in the hands of the aggressors, reducing the survivor-victims to a state of extreme abjection and submission.

1.2 Research Statement

Middle East literature, in particular, fiction from war-ravaged Syria and Iraq, is a testimony of the horror, humiliation, and wounding inflicted on the bodies and souls of the civilians - the survivor-victims of wars. The present study proposes a re-imagining of the holocaust trauma viz-a-viz Syria and Iraq which have become sites of present-day holocaust. The deployment of the Holocaust as a signifier for the grotesque unsettles the very notion of specificity or hierarchization of suffering implicit in the Western discourse on trauma.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aims to trace the vernacular modes of response on trauma among the civilian population of Syria and Iraq. More precisely, the goals of this study are as follows:

1. To attempt to dislodge the term ‘holocaust’ from the racial, hegemonic discourse surrounding it, in particular, in the Trauma Studies.
2. To seek an understanding of trauma in relation to the socio-cultural settings in which it is produced, namely Syria and Iraq, with reference to *The Sirens of Baghdad, Death is Hard Work* and *The Corpse Washer*.

1.4 Research Questions

The investigation is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the traumatic assault encountered by the Syrian and Iraqi civilians at individual and collective levels as manifested in the selected texts?

2. How do civilians from Syria and Iraq respond to this holocaust viz-a-viz the selected texts - assuming holocaust as a metaphor for catastrophic violence?
3. How is politics of terror and trauma played out in the cultural arena through labeling and shaming of the survivor-victims? How do the selected texts endorse and further this argument?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study aims to bring into focus the traumatic experiences of the survivors of war in both Iraq and Syria. The parallel study is aimed at revealing a connection and a pattern in the responses of the survivor-victims of war. The qualitative analysis of the selected texts is expected to show that the peoples of the two countries are devastated emotionally and psychologically as a result of the long-standing wars that are waged on their soils. The study, therefore, examines the psychological and emotional responses of the survivors to the brutalities of wars who are, more pertinently, also the victims, hence the term 'survivor-victim.' It is hoped that the insights from this project can inform the larger, disparate debates in the Trauma Studies regarding PTSD and its practice especially in relation to war-trauma.

The novels that have been selected for this study congeal and suggest a coherent perspective on trauma. They develop a refined understanding of the relationship between war-induced trauma and the political processes that frame them. These include:

1. *Death is Hard Work* by Khaled Khalifa
   (Translated from the Arabic by Leri Price)
2. *The Sirens of Baghdad* by Yasmina Khadra
   (Translated from the French by John Cullen)
3. *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon
   (Translated from the Arabic by Sinan Antoon)

1.6 Structure of the Study

This dissertation in divided into five chapters that are organized as under:

Chapter One brings into focus the physical, mental and emotional devastation that is lived and re-lived by the survivor-victims of wars in Syria and Iraq. It states and elaborates on the research statement, states research objectives, research questions and significance.

Chapter Two discusses theoretical framework and methodology that is the back-bone of this research. The discussion in this chapter is focused around the different frames that unlock the argument of the researcher. It also explains the method/s for the study.

Chapter Three contains a comprehensive review of related literature. This enables the researcher to identify gaps and construct research objectives. The chapter is divided into various sections each contributing to the main argument of the dissertation.

Chapter Four examines the selected texts for destructive, traumatic effects of modern wars on the civilian populations from Syria and Iraq. The psychological damage visited upon the survivor-victims of wars is seen through the theoretical lens of 'psychic numbing' introduced by Robert Jay Lifton. The chapter has multiple sections that explain the different aspects of 'numbing,' as they are manifested in the survivor-victims, vis-a-vis the selected texts: *Death is Hard Work, The Sirens of Baghdad and The Corpse Washer*.

Chapter Five examines the selected texts to emphasize the dehumanization process achieved through the politics of terror which increases the risk of psychological damage among the survivor-victims of Syria and Iraq. The analyses of selected works here reveal how through exercise of power and spread of terror the civilian population is maimed and forced into an abject existence. Theoretical concepts of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben are employed for analysis.

Chapter Six concludes the entire debate. It incorporates the findings of the research and also gives suggestions and recommendations for future researches in the area.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter looks at the theories that contribute to the theoretical framework developed to investigate the research statement and objectives of the present study. It also explains the method(s) of analysis of the selected works of fiction. The chapter also engages with ideas and concepts that are important and relevant for discussion on the nature of theory and theoretical framework.

2.1 Significance of Theory

According to Charles Kivunja, a theory as "a generalized statement of abstractions or ideas that assert, explains or predicts relationships or connections between or among phenomena, within the limits of critical bounding assumptions that the theory explicitly makes" (45). Most importantly a theory makes possible for researcher to name their findings and observations in the form of relationships, thus contributing to the understanding of the available wealth of knowledge. A theoretical framework, on the other hand, is "the synthesis of the thoughts of giants" in a field of study, as they relate to our proposed research, as we understand those theories, and how we use those theories to understand out data (Kivunja 46). About the conceptual framework, he writes that "a conceptual framework is the total, logical orientation and associations of anything and everything that forms the underlying thinking, structures, plans, and practices and implementation of your entire research project" (45). In other words, the conceptual framework summarizes our thoughts on the research project undertaken for examination. It is a lay-out or the master plan for the entire research project. While the conceptual framework is the product of researcher's thinking on the research topic, the theoretical framework consists of other people's theoretical perspectives that a researcher finds relevant to his research. A theoretical framework

provides a scholarly foundation for a researcher's goals and help in substantiating the research argument. Grant & Osanloo believe that a theoretical framework is not a set of arbitrary rules but is a reflection of personal beliefs and understandings. It provides the common world view or lens from which to support the research statement. The present study has developed a theoretical framework necessary for explication of the condition of the survivor-victims of wars in Syria and Iraq. It brings a psychological and political lens to the study and analyses of the selected texts.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for the present study is grounded in the theories developed by Robert Jay Lifton, Judith Butler, and Giorgio Agamben. The framework allows the researcher to study the subject of trauma from psychological and political lenses. These theories are used to gain a deeper and better understanding of the trauma visited upon the civilian population of Syria and Iraq through the selected works of fiction from these countries. The devised framework supports and underscores the psychological and political underpinnings of this study. The psychological examination deals with the psychological concept of 'numbing' as it is introduced by Robert Jay Lifton in his ground-breaking work *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967). The political lens is developed from the theorizing of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben. Judith Butler's monograph *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) examines the politics inherent in traumatic encounter and mourning, and Giorgio Agamben's work *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1999) discusses the unjust distribution of power and its consequences. The three approaches help sustain the idea that a holocaust is unfolding in Syria and Iraq, and that its devastating consequences can be far-reaching and nonreversible.

This framework is crucial to the explication of the civilians' inner psychological state against the outer world of violence, destruction, and apathy. All three theories discuss the effects of the sinister, violent environment on the human body especially on the minds of the individuals. Agamben and Butler draw attention towards the unfair distribution of balance of power and discriminatory practices against members of the weaker group. Lifton pays attention to the inner psychological life of the victim under attack from a hostile, unjust outer world. The Middle East crisis, especially the situation in Syria and Iraq, is a complex one requiring multiple approaches for a sound understanding. The framework makes room for an in-depth, comprehensive

investigation into the nature of civilians' mental, emotional and material conditions as well as the factors that bring these about. Most significantly, it confirms the researcher's premise that a holocaust is happening in Syria and Iraq.

This line of thought is employed to take into account the total psychic destruction of the civilians whereby they are reduced to the living-dead. As the analyses will reveal, this total destruction of mind and soul mirrors the devastation around them aggravated by the sense of being left alone by the world. This lack of humanity and compassion for the victims by the world at large especially the U.S., which has stakes in these wars, push them further down the alienating abyss of total darkness. The trauma experienced by the Syrian and Iraqi survivor-victims of wars is of complex nature due in part to the humiliation and dehumanization brought upon them by the aggressors as well as the rest of the world community who are watching their destruction but not raising an alarm – a holocaust. The civilian population feels betrayed and threatened from all sides. It has become very difficult for them to tell friends from enemies. Through the politics of terror, the project of victims' isolation and annihilation is sealed. Syria and Iraq are like the rotten body of a dead animal being pounded upon by a pack of hungry wolves; this is a sorry reminder of the politics of terror.

2.3 Psychological Trauma – The Phenomenon of Numbing

Technological advances in warfare and modern weaponry have turned deaths into a number game now. Cities have become battle-fields resulting in colossal deaths and a high order of destruction: "It is Death and Death's imagination with which nations wrestle, now using nuclear arms" (Perlman 14). The Middle East is witnessing a holocaust in the present times and the world watches in silence. Hundreds and thousands of Iraqis and Syrians have been dislocated. With their economies destroyed, the governments of these countries are in no position to provide relief to their citizens and look toward the rich nations for relief and aid. The civilian population in these countries is exposed to a multitude of psychological stresses. Their state is characteristic of severe trauma experienced both at individual and communal level. In his monumental work, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967), Robert Jay Lifton has explored the notion of death trauma and psychic numbing in relation to Hiroshima and concentration camp survivors. Lifton's concept of psychic numbing in relation to death-related trauma is applied to the selected fiction from Syria and Iraq.

Lifton states with respect to *hibakusha* that they sought to protect themselves from psychic and emotional harm by securing themselves against the onslaught of pain after their encounter with grotesque death. He argues that at the time of encounter the survivors were able to limit their "psychological investment" and shielded themselves from impending damage through a process called "psychic numbing." This is a mental state in which pain, injury, even death have no bearing on victims' psyche and are borne with indifference. The traumatized survivors of Hiroshima, or *hibakusha*, became desensitized immediately after their exposure to mass deaths and extreme horror. They were able to cope "completely and permanently" in the face of ultimate terror by experiencing not just diminution of emotions but no emotions at all. In his essay "The Concept of the Survivor" (1980), Lifton explains how survivors of Hiroshima bombing felt benumbed after the bomb fell and they found themselves surrounded with grotesque images of the dead and the dying. He likens their state to "a paralysis of the mind" which he explains as a "dysfunction between perception and emotional response" (120). However, this is a necessary psychological defence against the overwhelming external threat. The shutting-down response is a blessing in a way, as the survivor "undergoes a reversible form of symbolic death in order to avoid a permanent physical or psychic death" (Lifton, *Death in Life* 500). During these processes, the survivor copes by "creating emotional distance between himself and the intolerable world immediately around him" (34).

Numbing represents "a breakdown of inner imagery of connection, integrity, and motion, an absolute loss of the sense of human continuity" that can take a long time to heal (502). As in dissociation, the process of symbolization is impaired. Against the imagery of extraordinary horror and destruction, the survivor finds nothing to connect with. Because such images are unimaginable, they do not allow connection or symbolic union. Numbing is a destruction of the capacity "to grasp the deaths of others and the danger to himself" and in its extreme form resembles "death in life" (502-503). Although numbing occurs as a defence against the psychic trauma presented in the immediate environment but it can affect other areas of the survivor's life. It completely disrupts his life affecting all aspects of his social life so that he no longer feels "fully connected to the social world around him" (Henry 61). Numbing impairs survivor's emotional and social responses. It is reflected in their failure to maintain attachments and develop healthy relationships. Significantly, the cognitive processes remain intact

during numbing, what is lost is the ability for symbolic integration "which links cognition to feeling and action" (505). Hence, separation, disintegration, and stasis are central to the phenomenon of numbing. One can imagine how severing of thought process from feeling may produce impairment of mental faculties. Pomper notes that in numbing the "unitary dialectical self-process, which is the essential life of the mind, is suspended despite the continuation of the life of the organism – hence, death in life" (151).

Psychic numbing can become a prolonged mental condition, what Lifton terms as "sluggish despair." Among survivors of extreme death encounters, he finds such chronic symptoms as "diminished vitality, chronic depression, and constricted life space" (*Death in Life* 504). The condition is similar to Wallace's description of "disaster syndrome", a term he first coined in 1957 to describe a shocked state after an extreme event. Wallace proposed a set of responses to disasters which are now seen as disaster phases. These include: shock, stupor, being dazed, stunned, and numbed. However, emotions such as pain, grief, fear and anger are not felt and victims' generally respond with indifference (Valent 706).

Numbing can be a conscious response also as in case of concentration camp survivors who were forced into complete submission and were required to keep their emotions under check out of fear of death. In the long run, this may become exaggerated and become permanent aspect of survivor's psyche. Herman (1994) also argues that when faced with life-threatening situations, the survivor goes into a "state of surrender": "The system of self-defence shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness" (31). Unable to do anything about the threat and feeling completely powerless, the survivor quickly moves to numb their ability to think, feel or focus. Herman describes these alterations of consciousness to be at the heart of numbing experience. Variously described as the "state of detached calm," and "partial anesthesia or loss of particular sensations," numbing alters reality for survivor victim as a result the person may experience emotional detachment at the time of encounter. In this sense, it is a life-saving defence mechanism.

2.3.1 Doubling

Lifton states that doubling is "an active psychological process, a means of adaptation to extremity" (*The Nazi Doctors* 422). He comes to this conclusion after a

close examination of the Nazi doctors in the concentration camps. The Nazi doctors' failure to see deaths committed under their noses as murder and their total disregard for the horrible treatment meted out to the inmates is indicative of a severe disruption in the psychological order. This disruption which Lifton calls "adaptation to extremity" is the Nazi doctors' way of coping with their own death anxiety as well as overcoming their "fear of disintegration, separation and stasis" (422). More significantly, this double self remains connected to the prior self and does not sever from it completely. This remembrance keeps alive remnants of the original self. In this sense, Lifton differentiates between dissociation or splitting and doubling while discussing the psychic state of the Nazi doctors. In case of the former, the double self is at odds with the original self, closed off by numbing or suppression of feeling in relation to the environment. Lifton believes that a sustained form of adaptation can only be explained through doubling, not splitting or dissociation, as Fred and his contemporary Pierre Janet have suggested. Doubling can include elements such as, "a disorder of feeling (swings between numbing and rage), pathological avoidance of a sense of guilt, and resort to violence to overcome "masked depression" (related to repressed guilt and numbing) and maintain a sense of vitality" (423). Lifton also sees this sort of doubling as temporary and conditioned by larger structures and external environment. The external environment sets the tone for an individual's internal environment, in the same way as the overall structure of the concentration camps prompted transformation of the Nazi doctors from innocent humans to cold murderers. There is a connection between the double self that has become evil and psychic numbing, as it is almost "impossible to kill another human being without numbing oneself toward that victim" (442). Numbing can thus explain the avoidance of guilt when one is involved in violence.

Lifton differentiates between what he terms "doubling" and dissociation and multiple or dual personality disorder. The latter states are recognized by a radical dissonance and sustained separateness between the divided selves at the level of unconscious. Doubling, however, is affected at the conscious level and hence is not without moral obligations that follow destructive acts. As Lifton puts it, "doubling is the psychological means by which one invokes the evil potential of the self.… To live out the doubling and call forth the evil is a moral choice for which one is responsible, whatever the level of consciousness involved" (423-424).

Victims experiencing psychic numbing also experience "depression and despair" as a result this may become a more lasting condition. All too often victims are overwhelmed with feelings of emptiness and nothingness and loss of meaning in life. To describe this emotional vacuum, the *hibakusha* frequently used the term *kyodatsujotai* which is translated as "state of collapse" or "vacuum state" (Lifton, *Death in Life* 86). Elaborating on the difference, Annie Schofield writes: "Temporary psychic closing-off is a life-preserving mechanism. Its pathological extension – psychic numbing – carries with it the danger that it can destroy the life it seeks to preserve" (28). Psychic numbing is, therefore, a chronic condition involving permanent extension of the state. Lifton observes that encounter with death left A-bomb survivors vulnerable. For these survivors, psychic closing-off was one way to deal with their vulnerability. It protected them by providing a temporary withdrawal from the effects of deaths they had to witness. But there is a danger for this psychic closing-off to become "exaggerated" and "leading to an extended withdrawal from life by the survivor" (Schofield 27). Schofield goes on to argue that in case of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, two events of traumatic scale, psychic closing-off turned into psychic numbing.

2.3.2 Death-Guilt

The survivor also adapts to the new situation through "denial" {"If I feel nothing, then death is not taking place"} and "interruption of the identification process" {I see you dying, but I am not related to you or to your death"} (Lifton, *Death in* L*ife* 500). He is thus able to protect himself from the negative force of his environment and refuses to be "acted upon or altered" (500). Apparently, he manages to exist under extreme conditions but this existence is more like death-in-life. The inmates of concentration camps were able to protect their purity by shutting themselves off to the degrading experiences of their everyday lives: "I became convinced that these dreadful and degrading experiences were somehow not happening to 'me' as a subject, but only to 'me' as an object" (500). Dean (2019) describes the "living dead" as the survivor who managed to return from the massacres and camps but is still among the dead, in other words, they may be alive but feel dead or deeply tied to the dead. Right before he collapsed, K-Zetnik, the Holocaust survivor, exclaimed, "they [the dead] are staring at me." The Chelmo survivor Simon Srebnik said, "No, I don't sleep at night, I cannot sleep at night. I am constantly being haunted." The survivor, in this sense, assumes a

ghostlike appearance of death in life, inhabiting both the world of the dead and the living (117).

Encounter with death is one of the most important factors to be considered in relation to traumatic numbing. Close encounter of the survivors of the Hiroshima A-bomb with the dead and the dying leaves them horror struck, numb and empty. Lifton incorporates several interviews of the *hibakusha* in his book, *Death in Life*, to show how they are overcome with feelings of nothingness and emptiness right after the exposure to death. He recounts emotions of an abandoned mother who is left alone after the bomb is dropped: "…But my feeling was, there was no place to go … so if I were to die, it was all right, I would die here where the bomb fell ….A feeling of not caring – not a feeling based on understanding but just not caring…." (88). There is a particular grocer, who protects himself by "desensitizing" himself to the surrounding destruction: "I just couldn't have any reaction….I don't think I felt either joy or sadness…. My feelings about human death weren't really normal….You might say I became insensitive to human death…." (32-33)

According to Lifton, coping with death anxiety is one of the basic functions of psychic numbing process. This state can take many forms: "In the olfactory realm psychic numbing could enable one not only to accept the "smell of death" but even to require it" (*Death in Life* 33). Hence, in the extreme form, the victims take sadistic pleasure from others suffering. There is yet another danger: "the tainted joy over having survived amid others' deaths" (34). Lifton also talks about the "death guilt" and describes it as the survivor's worst trauma. The *hibakusha* often claimed that they felt only despair and guilt that they survived while their family, friends and others could not. These deaths are internalized as the survivors become captives of their worst fears: "In every stiffened corpse I saw myself" (481). Associated with it is the fear of rejoicing or moving on with life which may seem wrong akin to a betrayal. Lifton observes this tendency in both groups he studies (503).

2.4 The Politics of Terror

Weber argues that wars fought in the twentieth century including the World Wars were essentially genocidal in nature: "military operations against indigenous peoples systematically disregarded international rules of war and often deliberately aimed at annihilation of the enemy rather than at mere conquest" (14). The brutal extermination of innocent peoples is nowhere as explicit as the fatal use of Atomic

Bomb against innocent peoples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The genocidal destruction or dismemberment of social groups in modern wars is part of the efforts to gain complete control of the targeted land and its resources. Necropolitics or the politics of death is a bitter reality of the present day world politics. As the examination of the literary texts reveal, the world continues to ignore the physical, emotional, and psychological deaths imposed on an incomprehensibly large numbers of civilian peoples in Syria and Iraq. The deployment of the concepts of the Muselmann, the Homo Sacer and the "differential allocation of grievability" hearken an understanding of the total destruction of the survivors' mental faculties. The convergence of the three theoretical concepts to a single reality lends support to the researcher's claim that a holocaust is unfolding in Syria and Iraq. The survivor-victims' immersion in grotesque death and catastrophic destruction is an experience with the holocaust. As a reality that is 'unpseakable,' the holocaust is not fully comprehended. To do justice to the grave nature of the tragedy, a holocaust, the three concepts are deployed, however, for those who have gazed upon the Gorgon, the reality may be even more destructive.

2.4.1 The Muselmann

Death is the central metaphor for war-induced trauma forming a nexus with power and politics. Modern wars have left people more and more exposed to both death and operations of power. For Agamben, death has become obscure and essentially non-biological. It is a political decision; a choice: "life and death are not properly scientific concepts but rather political concepts, which as such acquire a political meaning precisely only through a decision" (*Homo Sacer*, "Politicizing Death" 135). Once defined in biological terms as the cessation of the movement of the heart and lungs, death, like life, has now become political, and in terms of Agamben's general theory is a manifestation of political and sovereign power.

These notions are further consolidated in Agamben's explication of the figure of *Muselmann* taken from the Jewish concentration camps. The *Muselmann* embody a psychological death before a physical death. Agamben describes him as "a limit figure of a special kind, in which not only categories such as dignity and respect but even the very idea of an ethical limit lose their meaning" (*Homo Sacer*, "Remnants of Aushwitz" 802). For Agamben, while the figure of *Muselmann* is an ethical category, it must not be reduced to an object of moral study: "Simply to deny the *Muselmann's* humanity would be to accept the verdict of the SS and to repeat their gesture" (803). The

Muselmann is an apathetic figure not only because he is excluded from the political and social context of other prisoners, but because of the precarity and uncertainty surrounding his existence. He is destined for death-in-life before his biological death and passes into another world "without memory and without grief" (*Homo Sacer*, "Threshold" 151).

The *Muselmann*, literally "the Muslim," is the most pathetic, pitiful figure of the concentration camps. He has become a metaphor for abjection which is beyond redemption. Ironically, his fellow inmates never took pity on him in the concentration camps because they saw his weakness as a sign of betrayal: "the *Muselmann* is universally avoided because everyone in the camp recognizes himself in his disfigured face" (*Homo Sacer*, "Remnants of Aushwitz" 795). Despite his inability to see and register what is happening around him, Levi insists that he is the true witness, the "complete witness." Levi also distinguishes between the "drowned" and the "saved" prisoners. The *Muselmann* is the "drowned" prisoner, because he is a misfit in the prison culture; he lacks the art to survive by cunning. Primo Levi tells us that in the concentration camps the law of Nature prevails: in the struggle for survival, those who prevail are either the fittest (101) or the "insane" (112). Giving a glimpse of their pitiable condition, he writes:

> They, the Muselmanner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear as they are too tired to understand. (103)

It is not clear how this term came into use among the camp inmates but as several survivors' testimonies reveal, the word was used to designate inmates who had become the walking dead. The term was especially common in Auschwitz from where it spread to other camps. Agamben notes:

> The most likely explanation of the term can be found in the literal meaning of the Arabic word Muslim: the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God. It is this meaning that lies at the origin of the legends concerning Islam's supposed fatalism, legends which are found in European culture starting with

> the Middle Ages (this deprecatory sense of the term is present in European languages, particularly in Italian). (*Homo Sacer* 790)

In Encyclopaedia Judaica, the particular sitting posture of the detainees is supposed to given them the name: "Used mainly at Auschwitz, the term appears to derive from the typical attitude of certain deportees, that is, staying crouched on the ground, legs bent in Oriental fashion, faces rigid as masks" (790). Or, as reported in Sofsky (1997) that the origin of the name goes back to "typical movements of *Muselmanner,* the swaying motions of the upper part of the body, with Islamic prayer rituals" (Agamben 790). Agamben notes how ironical it is that the Jews realized "with a kind of ferocious irony" that they were not to die as Jews in the concentration camps. Commenting further on the different ways the *Muselmanner* has been brought up in conversation, Agamben acknowledges the overwhelmingly mysterious albeit unique nature of the *Muselmanner* in which all other categories are neutralized*:*

> At times a medical figure or an ethical category, at times a political limit or an anthropological concept, the *Muselmann* is an indefinite being in whom not only humanity and non-humanity, but also vegetative existence and relation, physiology and ethics, medicine and politics, and life and death continuously pass through each other. This is why the *Muselmann's* "third realm" is the perfect cipher of the camp, the non-place in which all disciplinary barriers are destroyed and all embankments flooded. (792)

The survivors' testimonies show that the *Muselmann* cease to be human. They have been called variously as "walking corpses," "mummy-men," "objects" and with "the divine spark dead within them" (797). This study makes use of the notion of *Muselmann* as a lowly, hated and abject creature who gets no one's attention or empathy. The novels engage with and throw light on the *Muselmann*-like state of the survivor-victims of wars in Syria and Iraq. These people are less than human beings; their honour, dignity and self-respect are razed to the ground with deliberate calculation.

2.4.2 Homo Sacer & Differential Allocation of Grievability

The particular way in which some deaths are made to look more horrible than others is another aspect of thanatopolitics. Leftists like Judith Butler are alarmed by the selective nature of violence and grief. Some humans have been reduced to spectres: they are unnamed, unmarked and their lives are not considered real. Obituaries are

written for the US and its allies, but no obituaries are written for their enemies. The *San Francisco Chronicle* turns down a Palestinian man's request to publish the story of the massacre and killing of two Palestinian families at the hands of the Israeli soldiers, marking death as essentially political: "Is it that these deaths are not considered to be real deaths, and that these lives not grievable, because they are Palestinians, or because they are victims of war" (Butler *Precarious Life* 35)?

Inherent in the world politics today are standards and policies which are duplicitous and dichotomous. Judith Butler criticizes the US policies and describes them as divisive and contradictory. In *Precarious Life* (2004), Butler questions the wisdom of particularizing grief which she describes as the "differential allocation of grievability," which makes some deaths seem more sacred than others: "The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, *What makes for a grievable life?"(20).* Criticizing how certain forms of grief are made more significant, she exposes the hegemonic discourse that places some lives above others:

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (xiv-xv)

With the deployment of differential forms of vulnerability, violence against some peoples become justifiable. In the aftermath of Sept 9, 2011, innocent lives were lost and international human rights laws were held in abeyance. There was less mourning in the US over the loses and damages suffered by those who were made to pay for the work of a few. However, the imbrications of the "sacred" and the "non-sacred" in the othering discourse are clearly pronounced here. The "non-sacred" or *homo sacer* can be punished or killed with impunity and their deaths cannot be avenged which is a privilege reserved for the "sacred." Butler speaks out against the aggressive response of the US in the wake of 9/11 attacks and calls for new culture in which "unexpected violence and loss and reactive aggression are not accepted as the norm of political life" (xiv). According to Butler, the term "terrorist" was also exploited to alienate a particular political group in pursuance of political objectives. She writes:

> There remains ever-increasing ambiguity introduced by the very use of the term "terrorist," which is then exploited by various powers at war with independence movements of various kinds. The term "terrorist" is used, for instance, by the Israeli state to describe any and all Palestinian acts of resistance, but none of its practices of state violence….The United States, by using the term, positions itself exclusively as the sudden and indisputable victim of violence, even though there is no doubt that it did suffer violence. But it is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering. (4)

In today's world, enemies are constructed through discursive representations, hence, the journalistic narratives centring on a systematic dehumanization of Muslims or representation of Islam as a "cancer" and "virus" in the aftermath of 9/11(Carlton-Ford et al. 259). The problem with this kind of narrative is that it is dichotomous and unilateral. Since 9/11, the polarization has only increased with the US and its allies forming one block and much of the Muslim world forming the other block and denounced as "axis of evil."

There are lives that have no value and are consistently marginalized in major discourses. It is not easily possible to empathize with their plight because they are "already negated" (33). The politics of violence does not make possible an empathic understanding with those who occupy the margins. The Arabs in the Middle East have been marginalized in popular discourses across the Western world. Their lives are not "sacred" and their deaths are not a cause of much concern:

> It is another thing to say that discourse itself effects violence through omission. If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath, do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly of collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to those children? (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34)

2.5 Methodology

In the light of the research questions, the analysis of the selected novels is distributed over two chapters. Each chapter deals with the issues highlighted in the research questions and follow different patterns or techniques of analysis in accordance

with the theoretical framework. Chapter Four answers the first research question which requires an on-ground assessment of the traumatic exposure of the trauma victims. It employs a textual, thematic analysis of the selected texts to reveal the psychological make-over of the survivor-victims of wars with reference to Iraq and Syria. This chapter identifies how numbing, as a psychological phenomenon, contributes to a worsened form of psychological impairment among the survivor-victims. The textual analysis is carried out in the light of Lifton's theory of numbing, however, new insights in relation to numbing are also developed and discussed to give the notion a new dimension. Chapter Five discusses how the politics of terror is imbricated in the trauma discourse. The discussion in the chapter employs the notions of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben elaborated in their monographs, *Precarious Life* and *Homo Sacer*. This engagement with the texts allows for better understanding and interpretation of the survivors' mental states.

2.5.1 The Nature of Textual Analysis

While exploring psychological and political traumas in the Middle East fiction, this study appropriates the Holocaust to show that all traumas are unspeakable and unthinkable in altered time and place. However, no attempt is made to provide similarities and differences between the two groups; the Holocaust is simply used as a metaphor for continuity of cycle of violence against humanity. Through the analysis, the study intends to bring out terror and trauma experienced by the civilian population in the chosen texts. On that account, this study does not offer a comparative analysis of the historical events nor argues in favour of either one of them. This is an objective account of the atrocities meted out to the helpless victims of war and of their struggle to survive in a world devoid of meaning and hope. Like Mandel writes in her book, *Against the Unspeakable*, that she wants to "trouble the Black/Jew dichotomy," (14) this study also attempts to unsettle the Muslim/Jew divide. Pitching the two works together and locating terror and trauma in both worlds, this research project wants to show that pain must transcend cultural and religious divide.

Can we compartmentalize or even hierarchize pain and suffering? Is pain sexist or racist? In trauma studies, the trend has been away from the event towards the victim's response to it, as a result, the event no longer remains the locus of power. Can we assume that some victims are somehow superior to others on the basis of the wounds that they have received? While it is true that people's capacity to bear pain is not the

same, it would be wrong to categorise or differentiate between them on the basis of suffering. When it comes to suffering, we are only humans; our emotional, mental and biological processes partake in our responses. Hence, the study argues that suffering transcends not only time, place and situation but also race, religion and gender. This is not a far cry from Paul Gilroy's concluding remarks in *The Black Atlantic*: "What would be the consequences if the book had tried to set the Holocaust of European Jews in a provocative relationship with the modern history of racial slavery and terror in the western hemisphere?" (Gilroy 217).

The events in this study are important insofar as they shape psychological, emotional and political responses of the characters. They are otherwise not privileged over the characters. However, the complex relation of the event with the unbearable atrocity and identity politics do inform this study. The silence of the world community to the atrocities committed against humanity in the Middle East imbricate them with the aggressor/s. The United States and Nazi Germany created "Hiroshima" and "Auschwitz" and a new tragedy is taking effect in the Middle East which if not prevented, will go down in history as another human tragedy of colossal scale. Mandel notes that the Holocaust effects a global influence while a tragedy like Hiroshima is projected as a "specifically Japanese experience" (Mandel 18). The human tragedy in the Middle East is not taken seriously as it is happening mostly to the Muslims. The Holocaust is significant because it was a western phenomenon happening to "white, monotheistic, primarily European people" (Mandel 17).

The theoretical framework emphasizes the catastrophic nature of violence inflicted on the survivors of Syria and Iraq. The different approaches that are employed come together to support the researcher's claim that the civilians' traumatic exposure is of extraordinary nature - a holocaust. As a primary theorist, Robert J. Lifton's notion of numbing is applied to underscore the severity of the traumatic encounter which, as the analyses will unfold, finds manifestation in different psychic tendencies or behaviour patterns of the characters. The theoretical concepts of Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler further strengthen the total collapse of the mental faculties of the victims through their likening to the figures of Muselmann and homo sacer (Agamben), and through enactment of the binaries like grievable/not grievable (Butler). Butler and Agamben's theorizing upsets the power relation between the aggressor and the victim through the very act of calling it out. However, the politics of terror as it is played out

in the lives of the characters becomes a threat to their mental faculties. The selected frames shed light on the mental states of the characters which is the main focus of the study and at the same time brings into this debate the cruel reception of their plight in the Western academia. Butler's and Agamben's frames are discussed in a separate chapter to emphasize the survivors' extreme abjection as a result of unequal power dynamics between aggressors and victims. This approach allows the researcher to also bring into trauma debate the destructive but consequential role of the aggressor/s. It further emphasizes that the resultant traumatic injury is not a simple outcome of wars but is a war strategy employed by the aggressors to completely maim the enemy, in this case, the Syrians and Iraqis who have survived aerial bombings. And, as the entire analysis of literary texts reveal, there is an unfolding of a holocaust in Syria and Iraq.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, trauma is taken not just as a marker of unsettling traumatic experiences but is seen as a collective, cultural experience. Critical trauma theory questions the basic assumptions of classical trauma theory and is informed by socio-cultural and historical-contextual responses to trauma. While, the main thrust of this study is the psychological analysis of trauma as it is represented in the Middle Eastern narrative fictions from Syria and Iraq, it is also informed by debates in critical trauma theory. Maurice Stevens describes trauma as a "cultural object whose function produces particular types of subjects, and predisposes specific affect flows that it then manages and ultimately shunts into political projects of various types. Trauma does not describe, trauma makes" (Stevens 2016). In order to understand the imbrications of the psychological and the political, the study examines the selected texts in their specific cultural and political contexts. In doing so, I hope to address a broader discourse on the politics of trauma in the Middle East through fictions produced specifically in Syria and Iraq. By threading these different perspectives together, I wish to demonstrate that Middle East is witnessing a human tragedy which is reminiscent of the Jewish holocaust in its magnitude and severity. However, as the result of pervasive anti-Muslim narrative, the perpetration of violence in the Middle East seems *normal* and the world watches in silence as human life is destroyed.

3.1 Conceptualizing Trauma

Trauma comes from Greek word which means 'wound' or 'to pierce' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973). Laplanche and Pontalis also concur that trauma is a psychic phenomenon rather than a physical one with three distinctions namely, a "violent shock", the "wound" and "consequences affecting whole organisation." They write:

> Trauma is a term that has long been used in medicine and surgery. It comes from the Greek τραῦμα, meaning wound, which in turn derives from τιτροσχω, to pierce. It generally means any injury where the skin is broken as a consequence of external violence, and the effects of such an injury upon the organism as a whole; the implication of the skin being broken is not always present, however– we may speak, for example, of 'closed head and brain traumas'. In adopting the term, psycho-analysis carries the three ideas implicit in it over on to the psychical level: the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organisation.

In her ground-breaking work, *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth explains trauma as "the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" and unlike the wound of the body which is curable, it is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 4). Caruth's position is that trauma is not discerned in the first occurrence or original event from a person's past, and in this way the traumatized survivor does not *know* what he is suffering. This ambiguity is central to the theory of trauma highlighted for the first time by Austrian Psychologist, Sigmund Freud, who revolutionised the concept of mental life in later half of the nineteenth century. The concept of *nachtraglich* showed that the process of traumatization was "bi-phasic" where the traumatic event was "first understood in the second event reminding of the first then causing the traumatic reaction (Varvin). This points to a complex interaction between traumatic psychic processes and external reality. Freud is also careful to distinguish between the event and the psychic trauma laying greater emphasis on the event as Caruth informs us that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche" (Caruth 4). What is significant in Freud's elucidation of trauma is that traumatic events are "shocking and unexpected" and leave a huge impact on life (4). Caruth's definition also establishes the "repressive, repetitive, and dissociative nature of trauma" and at the same time "connects individual trauma to cultural/historical trauma" (Balaev 5).

Judith Herman (1992) argues that trauma is a condition that is too terrible to utter ("unspeakable") and to dismiss from memory:

> The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims. (1)

In other words, a traumatic experience can endanger the physical as well as psychic well- being of the individual. These deep wounds are not easily healed and time only exacerbates the problem. While trauma victims find it unbearable to go on living their lives, they do not necessarily want to end it. Caruth informs us of the tension in the life of the survivors of traumatic experiences between wanting to live and die: "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. It is only by recognising the traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognise the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience" (Caruth 58).

Polish sociologist, Piotr Sztompka, defines trauma as change that is 'sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected' which 'may produce painful shock for the social and particularly cultural tissue of a society' (275). Trauma, in other words, has social and cultural ramifications and is characterized by systemic change. It gets represented in cultural productions and is infused, spread and upheld through other discourses. Effects of armed conflicts are also felt on cultural and collective scales and have the power to transfer traumatic experiences across generations. However, symptoms of trauma may not be equally distributed among the population resulting in an unreliable assessment of the condition of trauma. Trauma is not manifested in all individuals at the same time nor does it frame social groups collectively. In the same way, not all individuals and societies take the same course against trauma. Responses and defences against trauma are mixed and multiple, leading to different results at personal and structural levels. Sztompka borrows the concept of *trauma* from psychiatry and applies it in social and cultural settings to understand the value of change. It is developed from the understanding that change in the social fabric, irrespective of the groups it effects, may produce unhappy and unexpected results.

Collective traumas are reflections of neither individual suffering nor of 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 (Alexander et. al 4). Cultural study of trauma removes it from the burden of locating effects of a calamity on the psyche of an individual. As Alexander underscores in the above definition, cultural trauma is concerned with the symbolic, collective impact of a tragedy, the results of which are not readily and easily comprehended by a society under threat from an extreme event such as war, natural disaster, famine etc. Whereas the psychoanalytical model focuses on how individuals respond to terror as it lies buried deep in their unconscious, trauma as cultural response takes the form of narrativization in search for meanings. Cultural trauma becomes part of collective unconscious of the social group and as with psychological trauma, healing process is initiated with the recognition of abuses. Collins shows how creation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped rescue the victims from oppressive memories through a process of recognition and social representation of their suffering (106).

Alexander et.al trace the genealogy of the Jewish holocaust in their book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* and show how recognition and sympathy for holocaust survivors was effected globally. The material outcome of the suffering endured by the Jewish people during the World War II has been only possible due to their almost consistent rhetoric of cultural trauma that they have had to experience. Through this appropriation of trauma and culture, Jews have been able to assert an identity which has made possible their existence and security in the Middle East, as Collins explains, "it especially served to legitimate the founding of a Jewish state as a physical sanctuary from any such future threat" (107). Even today, the Jewish holocaust is seen as an historical event that is unique in terms of suffering and the traumatic experience is lived and re-lived by generations of Jewish people decades after the actual event.

Ann Kaplan, however, bridges the individual and cultural trauma by "addressing problems of definition of trauma and in distinguishing different types of trauma, and analysing different ways people relate to traumatic events" (*Trauma Culture* 1-2). Describing her personal experience of Sept 11 attacks on the Twin Towers, she relates the shock with her childhood memories of World War II. There is an attempt on her part to understand how the new trauma affects her and how far it is

personal and subjective, and at the same time, transforms her as an individual and as citizen of the US. For her, trauma is not about how cataclysmic the event but, rather, about how it alters the "psychic identity" of an individual (5). She asserts that some events, no matter how insignificant or small they may be, have the potential to figure as tragic in some people's lives and that impact may vary from person to person. Therefore, it is not at all about historically significant events that the term trauma must be reserved, "This is important because there are some who want to reserve the concept of trauma only for large public events, like the Holocaust" (5).

Sigmund Freud writes that suffering results from three main sources: the body, the external world and the other men. In his book, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), he writes:

> We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other. (24)

Freud is suggesting that trauma may be the cumulative result of several experiences. Freud noticed a pattern in the symptoms of soldiers returning from World War 1. He called it "traumatic neurosis" and its symptoms resembled that of hysteria. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud writes that the effects of traumatic event that may be lost over time, and return later to haunt the individual, thus creating a traumatic circle. The traumatic effects of wars and conflicts leave deep marks. They return from time to time to haunt the person giving him/her no respite from the painful memories.

These ideas were later developed by Hans Keilson in his concept of "sequential traumatization" in his study of Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands (Becker 106). He distinguished three traumatic sequences: "1. The occupation of the Netherlands by the enemy and the beginning of the terror against the Jewish minority. This implies attacks on the social and psychic integrity of the Jewish families. 2. The period of direct persecution, which included the deportation of parents and children, the separation of mother and child, the hiding of the children in foster families, and the experiences of the concentration camps. 3. The postwar period, during which one of the main issues

was appointing guardians for the parentless children" (Becker 106). By highlighting the sequential nature of trauma, Keilson has reinforced cumulative trauma in Jewish children. These children undergo extreme traumatic experiences one after the other and cannot escape the cumulative effect of trauma. The sequence helps in understanding the nature of repression, political or otherwise, as Becker suggests that it also reveals that "traumatization can continue even when the actual persecution has already stopped" (Becker 106). Hence, trauma is seen as independent of time and understood due to its intensity. Trauma, in other words, is both an individual experience and a "socio-political process" (Becker 107).

Robert J. Lifton has discussed trauma in relation to the notion of death. He puts the encounter with death - grotesque death - in the centre of his theorization and discusses death as a conceptual reality and not just a biological phenomenon. Tracing the impact of horrific deaths on the survivors, he underscores that they suffer greatly from that encounter. His other concepts like death immersion, death guilt, numbing, loss of meaning, and nihilistic tendencies stem from the same idea. Lifton argues that insights from death encounters can greatly contribute to the understanding of psychological problems. He defines a survivor as someone who has come into contact with death, or who has experienced death and has survived it. However, as Lifton argues, this survival comes at a cost. The encounter with death leaves deep imprints on the survivor's psyche triggering a chain reaction which reopens previous wounds or experiences with death. The feeling of being stuck overwhelms the survivor at these times as his inner imagery breaks down and he loses touch with reality. This feeling of stasis is further aggravated by the feeling of guilt which Lifton describes as death-guilt. Death-guilt or the feeling of guilt as a result of trauma gives a moral dimension to the suffering. The survivor cannot come to terms with the death and agonizes over being left alive. These feelings can contribute to the trauma being experienced by the survivor. Lifton further complicates this trauma experience by linking it to the notion of psychic numbing. Psychic numbing relates to psychic and emotional death due to sudden or extended exposure to death. But Lifton calls this a defensive mechanism or a survival strategy by the survivor who undergoes a temporary psychic death in order to avoid a permanent death. The immediate response of the survivor when encountering traumatic event of catastrophic proportion is to shut himself down:

> Thus, the survivor's frequent use of such terms as "nightmare, like a dream," "the dream realm," and "like walking ghosts —his entire sense of a death-saturated "unnatural order"—is part of his closing-off process, a means of creating emotional distance between himself and the intolerable world immediately around him. (*Death in Life* 34)

But this shutting down may become chronic and the survivor will experience all or some death related traumas. Psychic numbing is an impaired state in which the mind experiences a disconnection from reality. Lifton's notion of psychic numbing as a response to trauma is the subject of this study and is discussed in detail in the next chapters.

According to Stromsted & Sieff, trauma is a "deep and lasting wounding resulting from overwhelming pain, [that] can also sever our connection with our bodies" (47). In other words, if the pain is too great, our body will go into the defensive mode, blocking all/any pain from being realized and verbalized, however, while the 'real' is prevented from being processed, a counter-reality is created which is usually self-critical. This process of dissociation that begins with our bodies can shape our reality, our worldview in most negative ways (Stromsted & Sieff 47). The writers argue that healing must also involve our bodies because that is where trauma resides: "if we can return to the site of the wound, with the additional resources of adulthood and embodied, depth-oriented therapeutic practices, we can heal ourselves" (56). Since body is where it began, the authors argue that it is where the healing process must begin. This study shows that our bodies share a strong connection to our psyche, which can also lead to a number of psychosomatic diseases. However, as the analysis will later reveal the psychosomatic ailments are only symptoms of the underlying psychic problem.

3.1.1 PTSD & STSD

Judith Herman (1994) points out that "unlike commonplace misfortunes…traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (33). What is clear from this definition of trauma is that exposure to violent events causes behaviour changes which are visibly different from normal everyday responses of individuals to calamities. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, involves study of symptoms diagnosed as psychiatric disorder involving people who have been directly exposed to traumatic

events. The term was first introduced in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 (APA). With the introduction of DSM-III-R and the DSM-IV, the popularity of the term has grown immensely. However, the term does not effectively deal with traumatic experiences of those who may not be directly exposed to traumatic events but "mere knowledge of the exposure of a loved one to a traumatic event can be traumatizing as well" (Figley & Kleber 77). Figley and Kleber distinguish between the primary and secondary stressors where the former involves direct contact with the event, the latter refers to behaviour and responses of people who are affected by knowledge of the event. These are people who are family members, friends, doctors, social workers, neighbours, emergency personnel and colleagues who may be trying to help a person suffering from trauma. These have been described variously as "peripheral victims" (Dixon 1991), "secondary survivor" (Remer and Elliott 1988 a.b), and "vicarious traumatization" (McCann and Pearlman 1990). In other words, traumatic events affect a much wider range of people than it is often assumed. The most common symptoms of this secondary stressor or vicarious trauma are powerlessness and disruption brought upon by a process of identification with victims and their suffering (Figley and Kleber 93). The empathetic response for victims results in greater identification and stronger emotional bonding which produces secondary stress or vicarious trauma. Studies have suggested that close family members suffer the most when a loved one is suffering. The institution of family is greatly affected by events such as wars. In a study conducted on children of US prisoners of war during the Vietnam war, the secondary stress symptoms were found on children in these families (McCubbin et al. 1977). Children from these families showed strained relationship with parent while their school performance was also visibly affected. In a similar study carried out on the children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, "negative effects" of their parents' experiences could be traced (Figley and Klebber 85).

Francine Banner writes about effects of violence especially rape against women during Russo-Chechen war from 2000 to 2004. In a society where social norms centred around the body of a woman and great sense of shame was associated with rape, families suffered profoundly when any female member of family was victimized and tortured through rape. The lasting effects of this deep sense of shame were visible when in 2004 doctors visiting more than three hundred refugee families in camps in

Chechnya and Ingushetia revealed that more than 70% had "heard about" rape. This not only points to the enormity of violence committed against women by Russian army but also reveals the traumatic effect on those who experienced it vicariously. In the incident involving rape of Hedda Kungayeva which made headlines, the father of the girl is reported to have said, "As Chechen…I am ashamed that I have to talk about my daughter's rape. In our culture, we don't….Hedda's death isn't the worst thing. Her rape humiliates my family, my clan, and the whole of Chechen people" (Banner 47). The family was deeply wounded by what had happened to the girl and at the same time, strong socio-cultural bonds lead to collective trauma. As Kleinman notes that in societies that have experienced "long-standing conflict," trauma is not an individual, subjective experience but becomes a "cultural representation," a "transpersonal experience," and "the embodiment of collective memory" (Banner 37). During wars, when social structures collapse and individual safety is compromised, there is an increasing collective realization and coming together for identity, safety and belonging. The abuse and violence trigger a sense of collective loss derived from their desire to protect their culture. The individual trauma gets transformed into collective-cultural trauma. The effects of such trauma are deep and recovery is often slow since many crimes and atrocities do not get a fair chance to be heard or recorded.

The case of Bahareh, the little girl living with her mother in Iranian political prison, shows how devastating the effects of secondary trauma may be for children (Talebi 101-110). Unable to understand what is happening to their parent, the young children respond to traumatic events and to their parents' suffering by internalizing shock and grief unknown to them. Bahareh's response to her mother's grief was manifested in delayed speech, as Shahla Talebi informs us that: "According to the doctors, there was nothing wrong with Bahareh's vocal cords to prevent her from speaking. She however did not speak, at least not in conventional sense of the term. Yet, she understood us perfectly and spoke, if not in words but by sounding their intonations" (102). Although not able to communicate or grasp the contours of change in her position and her mother's, Bahareh's mind responds to traumatic situation. She does not lack language but is impelled under the severe circumstances of her existence to lose her ability to use language for communication. In her memory, this trauma may remain fixed for interminable time and its recurrence is not without possibility. Psychoanalysts, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok spoke of transgenerational trauma

in terms of "phantoms," "ghosts" and "revenants" (Kaplan, *Trauma Culture* 106). Abraham further writes, "The presence of the phantom indicates the effects on the descendants, of something that had inflicted a narcissistic injury or even catastrophe on the parents" (Kaplan 106). The children's lives are haunted by traumas experienced by their parents and are never freed of it because the trauma "passes…from the parent's unconscious to the child's" (106). This makes a great of deal of sense in the context of Bahareh in whose unconscious are lodged the painful memories of her father's death and mother's lingering trauma. Bahareh has internalized her mother's grief and it exists in her like a "phantom" pressing her down and crippling her ability to talk in intelligible way.

Patricia A. Resick distinguishes traumatic stress from stress in her study "Stress and Trauma." She writes,

> Although everyone experiences stress during life, traumatic stress is caused by life-threatening or self-threatening events that are accompanied by fear, helplessness, or horror. A range of disorders may result from traumatic stressors including adjustment disorder, acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the dissociative disorders. Associated disorders may include depression, other anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. (Mostafa 210)

Traumatic stress or traumatic injury goes far beyond the daily experience of stress and pain. It pierces deep and tears apart the innermost defences of the individual. A range of symptoms may follow this rupture of self; all of them defined and coloured by the traumatic injury. Parson introduces the term post-traumatic self-disorders (PTsfD) for the description of traumatic injuries that are related to the individual's self. He describes this pathology as a "narcissistic injury to the self" that adversely affects the personality of the victim (251). This perspective holds that there is a nuclear self which is essentially composed of two parallel structures: the grandiose self and the idealized parental image (249). Parson states that a psychic condition is a response to the stunting of the normal narcissistic development in a child. And in the case of war, the trauma may lead to fragmentation of self if corrective healing strategies are not applied (250). The notions of PTSD, STD and PTsfD are not directly used in the analyses of the selected texts. However, an understanding of these disorders have contributed to the understanding of the psychic injury in war victims.

In the essay titled, “Treatment Issues in the Psychotherapy of Holocaust Survivors,” Phyllis Ehrlich examines previously conducted studies on Holocaust survivors to understand the coping mechanisms. In what is described as the “survivor syndrome,” he names several symptoms that appeared to be most commonly pervasive in the Holocaust survivors, for example, guilt, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, and personality shift (286-287). These symptoms are further aggravated if the survivors encounter death. Ehrlich reveals that the studies of Holocaust survivors suggest that all participants experienced a complete sense of loss and meaning. They felt that they lost everything: home, family, homeland, friends, mental and physical health. This sense of loss aggravated when they had to make new family and friends in a totally new environment. Many survivors talked about the daily challenges of living in a new environment. Ehrlich concludes that the relationship between the survivors’ coping skills and their social adaptation is not an easy one (289).

J. D. Kinzie suggests that a parallel structure exists between the Holocaust survivors and the Cambodian refugees despite the differences in culture and belief systems. His Cambodians patients exhibited almost similar symptoms as those found in the Holocaust survivors. Although Kinzie agrees that the Cambodians suffer from symptoms described in DSM III as post-traumatic stress disorder, he points out that the condition of the Cambodians is very different from that of other refugees who have suffered less losses. A large number of Cambodians suffer from PTSD and show symptoms like nightmares, intrusive thoughts, startle reaction, and anxiety. Kinzie discovers that pervasive depression is also very common. This research is significant because it suggests that Western treatment methods were not very successful with the Cambodian patients who suffered more than just displacement. The research leaves unanswered questions about treatment methods for non-Westerners who have suffered massive trauma.

Tom Williams argues that the treatment methods do not succeed because the survivor guilt is left unresolved. This is largely because the DSM III criteria for mental health symptoms does not talk about it (319). Williams states that the trauma victim is never really okay. Their life is completely altered by the traumatic exposure. They cannot make long relationships, have sleep issues, and feel that they are always misunderstood. Such behaviour pattern may seem normal but for a trauma victim, they are manifestations of a bigger and more complex problem. Survivor guilt aggravates the already felt anxiety and depression. Williams notes that due to the survivor guilt, a

person keeps "cycling between anxiety and depression" (322). He also notes different forms of survivor guilt: existential survivor guilt and content guilt. Existential survivor guilt, as the name suggests, is the result of a survivor's guilt of having survived when other died. In contrast, content survivor guilt is the result of the survivor feeling that he somehow did something to stay alive. The author suggests recovery models for such patients through successful intervention techniques each focussing on the individual's high points. He establishes survivor guilt as a separate but important criterion in the study of trauma. The insights from this essay are useful for the present study as the notion of survivor guilt is further exploited in the analyses sections.

Kahana et al. try to understand the relationship between stress and coping strategies. They define coping as an effort to master a problem under difficult circumstances. However, they show that coping can be individualistic and relative. When it is possible that the strategy of changing the undesirable environment with a better one may be helpful in bringing down stress, it may not be very useful when dealing with extreme levels of stress. The writers argue that trauma is not that simple; it blurs the lines between coping and defensive behaviour. The trauma survivors interpret stress differently from others largely because they experience a loss of meaning in life. A continuous sense of loss makes them totally powerless to take control of their lives or manage stress on their own. However, as discussed by the authors, the survivors suffering from extreme trauma are threatened at multiple levels – physical, emotional and psychological- and feel the need to remain vigilant at all times. The authors suggest three coping strategies for extreme stress. These involve change of situation, change of meaning, and controlling/subverting negative emotions (67). These strategies may provide temporary relief, but as already mentioned, the trauma victim may find himself continually striving to achieve peace. This essay offers helpful insight regarding trauma and coping strategies which have improved the understanding of trauma and its mechanism.

3.1.2 Collective Trauma

Through an investigative research, Somasundaram shows the limitations of PTSD and its failure to address the wider implications of traumatic events in social and cultural domains. She explains the inadequacies of the Western psychological model in "non-western collectivistic cultures" (46). Her work reveals that in non-western cultures which are not individualistic, the effects of a traumatic event are felt keenly by

the entire community. These 'collectivistic communities' including Cambodia, North American Indians, indigenous Australian population, Srilanka and other places, where community life is important part of social fabric, Somasundaram finds that not only was there a collective sense of traumatization over disasters but that these communities have also developed a collective healing mechanism. Moreover, strong belief systems within such communities have also provided support against the destructive effects of trauma: "the term collective trauma represents the negative consequences of mass disasters at the collective level, that is on the social processes, networks, relationships, institutions, functions, dynamics, practices, capital and resources; to the wounding and injury to the social fabric" (Somasundaram 47).

WHO International Classification of Diseases (ICD) has included the concept of collective trauma for PTSD and offers a long description of the manifestations of collective trauma under cultural considerations. These include: "collective distrust; loss of motivation; loss of beliefs, values and norms; learned helplessness; anti-social behaviour; substance abuse; gender-based violence; child abuse; and suicidality" (Somasundaram 48). While western classification systems initially focused on studying the effects of trauma on individual psyche, there is now a general recognition of disruption caused at cultural-collective level also. Massive natural disasters or catastrophes caused by modern warfare disrupt community life at the basic level of existence leading to multiple injuries in the collective conscious of the community. The destruction of the social capital makes room for mental and material control of the targeted community (49). Helpless against the external threat of bombings and invasions, a community is at a greater risk for collective, cultural bereavement. Such events call for an engagement at collective, cultural level.

The impact of modern wars is massive, effacing huge material and emotional damage on people affected by it. In most conflicts today, as with the World Wars I & II, narratives are organised around ethical and political issues seldom touching upon human casualty as means of understanding and critiquing the brutality of the aggressor. At the same time, it is not always easy to locate the real aggressor in present-day wars. Proxy wars threaten complete collapse and shattering of conscience and remove any label of guilt or blame on any one party involved in crimes during war. With no fear of being identified as perpetrator of crime against human life, the aggressor escapes

accountability. The most tragic aspect of such wars is that the terror which is struck in the hearts of people is overlooked as the great blame game ensues after attacks.

The Jewish Holocaust reveals how generations after World War II have been affected by the first exposure to extreme events involving violence and abuse. Summerfield (1995) informs us that as opposed to previous wars, "in current armed conflicts, over 90% of all casualties are civilians….The target is often population rather than territory, and psychological warfare is a central element" (17). Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran, Somalia etc. are examples of this new strategy. It is thus imperative to study regional/international politics and its complicity with psychological terror effected at cultural, collective level to understand the very nature of trauma. The present study attempts to reveal this mechanism of terror which is aimed at total destruction of the peoples of Syria and Iraq.

For Reimann and Konig, collective trauma is possible where individuals share a strong sense of belonging with each other, in other words, they display a "collective identity marker" (5). The collective identity marker/s are reflective of different stages of the conflict phase a victim passes through: "1. Collective narratives and memories of loss and despair; 2. Collective victimhood; 3. Collective angst; and 4. Exclusive values, norms and mental models." Both of them also believe that it is too simplistic to assume a 'linear cause-effect logic' when studying individual and collective trauma to deny other possibilities such as, 'resilience' (2). They believe that through resilience victims and survivors can overcome trauma whether individual or collective. Resilience, in this context, is seen as individual's capacity to withstand trauma and its effects through such factors as, "strong emotional attachments and bonds," "a shared ideology," and "actual opportunity for healing (7). Reimann and Konig study these factors with respect to war trauma and emphasize a greater role of positive and safe environment for the victims. As Hans Keilson's report suggested, a secure and protected environment of foster families was instrumental in healing the post-holocaust trauma suffered by Jewish orphans (Becker 107).

Resilience, therefore, is a dynamic and progressive attitude towards personal development. Contrary to the popular notion where resilience is interpreted as the ability to sustain original state, these writers have shown that it as a process which is "always geared towards human development" as opposed to processes that reinforce instability and curb syntheses of post-traumatic emotions (7). Through linking

resilience with collective models, the writers have offered a more comprehensive understanding of trauma. They also highlight the importance of cultural differences in dealing with trauma admitting the role of religion and social norms in the process of healing. However, the authors do not develop a comprehensive model to show how resilience, at individual and collective level, will be effective in the wake of complex, conflicting situations. The authors appear to presuppose a healthy, constructive and ideal environment for healing process to take effect which is not ordinarily the case. In societies where individual rights are systematically ignored or misused and where civil or imposed wars have uprooted the civic and social fabric, there is little hope for the healing process to take its natural course as implied by Keilson. The contextual and circumstantial factors that have caused the trauma in the first place are encountered daily by individuals in such societies. These stressors leave them incapable of mastering their situations and coming out of trauma state. It is, therefore, essential to study victims of such societies and to see what strategies and coping mechanisms they have to offer. While in most Western societies, basic health and trauma care coupled with psychological and psychiatric assistance are easy, accessible and socially acceptable, this may not be the case in all countries around the world. For example, in most African and Asian countries the ethnic, religious and cultural beliefs are almost unsurpassable. Their treatments methods most of the time have come down through generations and interestingly these unscientific methods have an almost holy status with the people.

Jeffrey C. Alexander in the *Introduction* to his book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004) elaborates the notion of cultural trauma. He writes, "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 suggests that group identity is an important marker of cultural trauma. People sharing similar beliefs respond to a calamity as a group rather than individually developing closer bond as a group or nation. Often this cultural trauma is shaped into a strong sense of national identity or group belongingness which may become an antidote for the incumbent trauma.

As in Middle Eastern countries where political uncertainty coupled with stubborn indifference of the ruling elite toward the suffering of their people, which has plunged these societies into chaos and even made possible military interventions or

proxy wars, collective consciousness is growing. The collective shock has resulted in a sense of togetherness. Ethnic and religious identity markers are erasing the national identity which people associated with. This has been furthered by the divisive 'us' and 'them' narrative developed by the West. For political reasons, sympathy with victims of proxy wars in the Middle East is checked. Far from being empathetic, the Western discourse promotes anti-people narrative with labels such as 'terrorists' and 'Islamic mujahidin.' This narrative has helped create an image of all Muslims in the affected Middle East countries as intolerant and inhuman. The effects of this negative propaganda are visible from the great humanitarian crises in the Middle East and the lack of support from the Western world. In the wake of such injustice, these victims are forced to form new identity which separates them from the rest of the world. The idea is explained by Alexander in these words: "It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but "take on board" some significant responsibility for it" (1).

A social change that is abrupt or catastrophic results in cultural trauma. In this sense, as Alexander explains, trauma is embedded in everyday life and language. Military interventions are followed by complete disruption of social life. Such changes are abrupt and extraordinary enough to cause national level traumas. Dismissing or ignoring the psychological and sociological impact of a large-scale radical change is not going to alter reality though it may affect recovery process. Cultural traumas can be threatening for the physical and mental wellbeing of a community. These experiences, shared by community members, can result in emotional wounding which is carried across generations. There is a need to understand this collective nature of trauma for the wellbeing of community. Kellerman writes, "Major traumatic events such as war, terrorist bombings and natural disasters, transcend the realms of individual suffering and enter the universal and collective sphere" (Leveton xix).

Saul (2014) writes, "collective trauma refers to the impact of adversity on relationships in families, communities and societies at large" (3). Further explaining collective trauma, Kai T. Erikson writes that collective trauma is a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (154). It grows gradually and steadily unlike individual trauma which is sudden but is nevertheless a form of "shock" which shatters

the sense of "we" (Erikson 154). From the Buffalo Creek disaster, Erikson concludes that it was the indifference of those responsible for the incident and a betrayal of "social trust" that resulted in collective trauma for the community. The authors recognize that collective trauma is of the consequence of betrayal of trust by those who are supposed to be your support system. These may be the government, nature or loved ones. Shattering of trust leads to distress and difficulty in effective coping. Both Saul and Erikson exclusively focus on relationships after a social, political or economic transformation and the disintegration of the communal bond. They emphasize social and cultural contexts for trauma as well for healing. Saul stresses the need for strengthening family and community resources for better healing. After examining various studies, he concludes that a strong familial or communal bond can offer the much-needed reparation from injury and shock. Saul defines resilience as "a community's capacity, hope and faith to withstand major trauma and loss" (Saul 8). Communities who are better equipped to combat traumatizing consequences of a severe event are able to promote healing and recovery.

It is not that events are more or less traumatic. The destruction of Native Americans, the complete collapse of infrastructure and life in Afghanistan after the US invasion, the brutal mass killings of Syrians, Rohingyas and Sudanese, and the loss of life during the 9/11 attacks in the US, all are devastating events. But more than the event, it is "the ways in which the events are interpreted" that makes them more significant than other events (Hunt 5). An event's traumatic character is constructed through interpretation and reinterpretation at collective rather than individual level. Hunt writes: "if the allies, including the USA, had lost the war against Germany in 1945, then the situation – the social construct – would be very different" (5).

Individual suffering is a matter of concern for psychiatrists but when wounds impact social identity, they become collective traumas. Jeffrey Alexander and Elizabeth Breese explain that while responses to individual traumas include repression and denial which are eventually brought into consciousness for a working through, collective traumas are enacted through "symbolic construction and framing, of creating a narrative and moving along from there" (xiii). They further emphasize that it is important to have a sense of "we" after a calamity and a reflection of the collective shock and pain in cultural narratives. Collective traumas are experienced after defeat when collective identities are obfuscated or challenged. The authors recognize that it is

not the "massive suffering of many individuals" that leads to any sense of "collective political and moral perceptions" but it is the identification with injury and pain at collective level that makes possible cultural trauma. Klebber et al. (1995) explain this imbrication of trauma and society in these words:

> Trauma goes beyond the individual. It has a far wider context. We interpret war, loss, violence, and disasters in ways shaped by our culture, by our society, and by its values and norms. We cope with serious life events in ways provided and approved by our surroundings. (1)

Rui Gao throws light on how massive torture and deaths are forced not to go beyond individual suffering due to lack of symbolization (Alexander & Breese xvi-xvii). She interrogates the failure of Maoism to reconstruct suffering of Chinese people at the hands of Japanese during World War II. This was, in part, due to repression of collective memories by Maoist regime forcing them to remain "private and individual" and seldom finding their way into "the public sphere of expression" (xvii). Without the necessary projection, these memories of injustices failed to raise to the level of collective consciousness of the nation. No mechanism was adopted at national level to redress the pain endured by individuals. As Gao reveals, the experiences of the masses were not allowed to translate into any collective form of representation and were even replaced with the trauma narrative of the ruling Chinese elite who saw themselves as victims and not the Chinese people *per se*. If trauma narratives are to be constructed by the elite group in society or those in power, it cannot represent collective consciousness of the masses. Without this recognition of trauma as cultural phenomenon and the subsequent repression of painful memories, the trauma remains at individual level at the mercy of individual mechanisms of control and management and does not enter the mainstream cultural discourse.

Cultural trauma underscores that social processes and political repression invoke trauma. It is not just the symptoms as with PTSD but processes and sequences that become relevant. It tries to understand how a nation or ethnic group become traumatized in a particular social and political context. This is a cumulative ongoing process which interfere with personal development over an extended period of time. Victims of extended wars as well as refugees endure long term issues that pertain to their physical and psychic health (Veer 1995, McIntyre & Ventura 2003, Gould 2003, Paulson 2003).

In his study on the dominant attitudes of the Holocaust survivors' children, Fran Klein-Parker examines the parent-child relationship to get a better understanding of the children's attitude toward their parents. Through the examination, she wants to show how the children of the Holocaust survivors or the second generation of Holocaust survivors respond to the Holocaust pain. She notes that a distinguishing feature of these children was a "survival complex" passed down to them by their parents (197). Issues of survival have come up often during the developmental phase of these children. Parker believe that some children of the survivors display a preoccupation with the parents suffering as a result they tend to repeat that suffering. Some children responded to their parents' suffering by faking attitudes that would not further the pain of their parents. That kept the relationship at the superficial level and no depth could be achieved. Some children spoke of the deep attachment with their parents knowing what they have been through and a sensitivity to their pain. Interestingly, the findings revealed that all children kept their problems to themselves to shield their parents from anymore trauma. The children believed that their parents still lived in the past and were disconnected from the present day experiences. However, most children felt that they "overidentified" with their parents and felt belonged to their past. These studies underscore that trauma is a collective, cultural process that has the potential to affect generations after its inception. This analysis strengthens the argument of the researcher in favour of the Syrian and the Iraqi civilians for whom trauma will take generations to settle.

3.1.3 Critical Trauma Studies

Critical trauma theory frames trauma as "a product of history and politics, subject to reinterpretation, contestation, and intervention" (Wertheimer and Casper, 2016). Writers of *Critical Trauma Studies*, show that works of Caruth (1995), LaCapra (2001), Sturken (1997, 2007), Kaplan (2005), Leys (2000) and Orr (2006) take trauma theory beyond the biomedical domain and invite consideration and, inevitably, intervention. However, writers of *Critical Trauma Studies* aim at "challenging hegemonic modes of diagnosis, rehabilitation, recovery, and redemption" (Casper & Wertheimer 5). They regard critical trauma studies as an intellectual and ethical engagement. For them trauma is not a category simply describing overwhelming experiences but deals with power dynamics that relate to the injury. According to Maurice Stevens trauma "predisposes certain affect flows that it then manages and

ultimately shunts into political projects of various types" (20). Hence, a generally understood trauma theory presupposes a certain history and sets of ethics on a group when subjecting them to a study. It alienates them from their own value systems and histories, creating a hegemonic system which inscribes its own principles and values on the subjects. Critical trauma theory questions whether European models of trauma can be transferred to study across cultures. In a study conducted on Chechen female suicide bombers, it was seen that the actions of these women were not unusual or strange from their stand point (Banner 38).

Maurice E. Stevens defines critical trauma theory as "sensitive to the filaments of social interaction that both inform one's sense of interpsychic experience, and are informed by discursively inflected identity and social subjectivity" (20). He goes on to explain that trauma is not simply a psychological category but a "cultural object" that is responsible for creating a certain kind of "subjects" in a predisposed environment. Ultimately, trauma makes possible political engagement, "Trauma does not describe, trauma makes" (Stevens 20). Taken in this sense, trauma is an agent having the potential to disrupt and destabilize the "subject" who was once whole, in other words the subject is thus seen as both the "subject of trauma study and is created through trauma study" (Stevens 26). Our sense of trauma and of the subjectivity of the traumatized individual is ordered and managed by our predisposed understanding to trauma and trauma studies. Trauma is best understood as affect where individual sentiments have been "universalized" and "repetitively territorialized" (31). Stevens believes that "trauma" is hijacked and forced to function as a "state servant and ideological apparatus" which translates affect into "appropriate and state supporting practices" (32). As a result, populations are controlled and managed by "bio-political apparatus" which "while labouring to manage affect, to improve emotional states, or to alleviate suffering" is "turned to the work of globalizing capital and political flows" (35). Stevens theorizing of trauma sustains the argument developed in this study. Trauma is seen as a cultural and a political category having manifestations beyond the predisposed, ideological apparatus.

In the essay "Naming Sexual Trauma: On the Political Necessity of Nuance in Rape and Sex Offender Discourses," Breanne Fahs shows how the simple act of naming can have ideological or political import. She argues that naming can both transform the way we view things, and how we experience them (62). As for example, the name "rape

victim" has been made obscure by its repeated and indiscreet usage such that it almost evades sympathy with the victim. Fahs argues that the categories like 'rape victim' obscure and challenge the pervasiveness of rape against women in the same way as categorizing sex offenders as 'rapists' puts them outside of the normal masculinity thus obscuring the pervasiveness of the act, "normal masculinity dictates consent as an assumed and enforced norm of heterosexuality, leading to violence and discrimination toward women who refuse to have men as sexual partners" (75). Bahs sees victimhood as a cultural category which is how this study engages with the trauma victims. Although the implications of naming are not within the ambit of this research, naming is understood as a power mechanism. Juxtaposing the 'Holocaust' with the Middle East humanitarian crisis in this research is therefore suggestive and is not without political import.

Goman and Kelley offer insights into conceptualizations of forgiveness within the framework of trauma. They distinguish between interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness to understand the various possibilities for forgiveness. According to them, intrapersonal forgiveness relates to the self where the individual tries to come to terms with the offense by letting go of the negative feelings and overcoming anger and hurt. While the process of interpersonal forgiveness involves the offender and upon ways to preserve the relationship. It is a two-way process, and works by achieving a dialogue with the accused or the offender and trying to find common grounds upon which to build a relationship. The authors believe that a traumatic event calls for both interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness. As a response to trauma, forgiveness can have very positive impacts on an individual's emotional life. However, as the study carried out by Goman and Kelley reveals, forgiveness can be a very complicated process when interrupted by traumatic memories. Their study showed that the Jews were unable to let go of the Holocaust memory which they wanted to preserve to show respect to the memory of people who had undergone suffering. Most members of the study group challenged the notion of forgiveness and viewed it "as a desecration of both that memory and the sanctity of forgiveness" (Goman & Kelley 94). The Jews also argued that forgiveness only served the offender because it rests his conscience whereas it does not benefit the victim(s) by any means. The inability of the victim(s) to show grace and mercy to the Nazi persecution clearly underscores the complexity inherent in the process of forgiveness. The study offers clear insights into the process

of trauma as an unprecedented event that leaves scars that cannot be easily encompassed and passed into a study. The wounds of the survivors of the Holocaust refused to be sealed even years after the event. These observations, notwithstanding, more insights may be gained if forgiveness is seen as a mechanism of politics in these studies. Although it is not the objective of this study to bring in debates surrounding forgiveness, the analyses of the selected texts show that the process of trauma and forgiveness can be complicated especially catastrophic events.

While examining the nature of 'forgetting' vis-à-vis trauma in the essay "No Other Tale to Tell," Amanda Wicks suggests that precisely because it is impossible for a trauma survivor to erase the trauma memory altogether, they must be put through a process of recuperation wherein the traumatic memory is relived and re-enacted through use of language. For her, testimony, oral or written, is a means of recovery from trauma. She argues that even though testimony may be a helpful strategy in overcoming trauma, yet to narrate an event after having undergone "both physical and mental disruption in the cognitive memory systems" may not be easily possible (354). That's because the trauma victim's cognitive processes were disrupted at the time of encounter, making it difficult to process information. As a result, no meaning is achieved even though the victim tries to recollect forgotten memories. This is also due to the fact that "memory changes with each recollection and is reconstructed with each remembering" (345). The author thinks that forgetting impedes the process of working through past traumas. She argues that severe or chronic trauma can damage the brain "specifically those areas related to the more developed systems of memory" (346). Hence, there is a scientific evidence that shows forgetting as a natural outcome of brain injury. Traumatic encounter, in other words, can alter the emotional state besides bringing changes to the psychological makeup of the victim. These insights have significantly informed the present study although not directly. But the issues raised here are in resonance with the ontological crisis detailed in the analyses chapters of this study.

In the essay, "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age," Stef Craps argues that the founding texts of Trauma Studies have failed to emphasize cross-cultural ethical engagement as a result it "risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities" (46). In his opinion, trauma theory is essentially Eurocentric; it supports constructions with

which identification is possible and neglects others. Craps agrees with Summerfield that the uncritical application of Western concepts of trauma is a form of "psychiatric universalism" which has rendered indigenous forms of treatment as irrelevant and ineffective. In 2004, following a tsunami in Srilanka, the Western psychological counsellors landed there to help the affected population. Craps notes that these counsellors ended up causing more grief because they lacked essential knowledge of the culture and systems of healing of the local population. The foreign models could not work on the local population since they had their own long-standing belief systems which were mobilized in times of traumatic encounters. Craps argues that in such societies, Western models have failed because of the individualistic nature of PTSD. By focussing on the individual psyche, the individualistic approach leaves out the social actors that may have contributed to the psychological trauma like war, racism or economic exploitation. Craps argues that the problem with this structure is that it perceives the victims as "subjects" or "victims without agency" and their problems are set against the imperial Western models of assessment and healing which are mostly alien to them (50). Craps also criticizes the notion that trauma puts limits to language or narration. He argues that this approach has limited the field of trauma studies to only a small number of texts and events. He stresses the need to broaden the scope of trauma studies to include all kinds of texts that can engage with cross-cultural traumatic events. Against the notion of 'impossibility of narration' he suggests that we make room for the 'possibility of narration" and include the possibility that trauma can be represented as opposed to the modernist crisis of representation: "trauma theory should take account of the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these contexts invite or necessitate" (51). These insights have informed the analyses of the selected texts; the characters' emotional crisis and psychological trauma is studied in their specific contexts and through the lens of their social, cultural and historical structures.

3.2 The Holocaust & The Politics of Trauma

Alford (2016) argues that the holocaust survivors and their children live a deeply impacted life in which the memory of Auschwitz is constantly at war with the ordinary memory. The testimonies of Auschwitz survivors revealed that they felt as if they had two lives, separated yet connected in strange ways, one in Auschwitz and the

other in the present. They could not reconcile the two worlds. Charlotte Delbo describes her life after Auschwitz in these words:

> Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise, but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self. Unlike the snake's skin, the skin of memory does not renew itself. . . . Alas, I often fear lest it grow thin, crack, and the camp get hold of me again. . . . I live within a twofold being. The Auschwitz double doesn't bother me, doesn't interfere with my life. As though it weren't I at all. Without this split I would not have been able to revive. (Alford 55-56)

It is in this sense that Alford describes two states for Holocaust survivors: "the Auschwitz self" and "the post-Auschwitz self." However, his premise is that the post-Auschwitz self is so shattered that it no longer finds any "value" or "meaning" (58) in life. This happens because traumatic memory has the quality of being profound, or what Delbo describes as *memoire prodonde* (Alford 57). The disbelief that this could happen to them coupled with the inability to communicate those horrors effectively in language, puts the survivors under immense psychological pressure. The burden of the memory that they must carry is not made easy for them even when they have the privilege to unburden it. Yet, this "doubling" has benefits: "for a vast majority, doubling allows life to go on. Doubling serves Eros in its largest sense, the drive for life after having lived through a world devoted to death" (Alford 62). Alford comes to the conclusion that doubling allows the survivors to live a full live despite their troubled traumatic past lives. This notion of doubling is transformed from passive to an active force in the novel *The Sirens of Baghdad* where the protagonist trains to become a suicide bomber yet retains his natural innocents. The double is the product of some past trauma, as revealed in the novel. He is the 'other' – the self residing somewhere in the dark corners of his unconscious.

Alexander and Breese write in *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (Eyerman et al. 2016) that the Jewish massacre, or the Holocaust, was initially understood by the Western non-Jewish community as just another event representing war and its atrocities. They argue that its symbolic signification grew later when from "war crime rooted in a particular time and space" the holocaust became a "universal event of such singular evil that it moved beyond history and territory to become a moral lesson 'for all mankind'" (xxxi). The "legendary status of the Holocaust as a sacred

evil" (xxxi) resulted in a collective empathetic response in the Western world to this tragedy. The authors recognize that the Muslims, particularly the Arab world, remained sceptical of the Jewish Holocaust. This outrage was and is affected due to Israel's aggressive military posturing against the Palestinians and their forced expulsion from their land. Jews have used the holocaust trauma to further their goal of legitimizing their occupation of the Palestinian land.

Far from becoming a symbolic event, the Holocaust remains a tragedy particular to the Jews and excludes comparison with other tragedies. Partly due to this tendency, the Holocaust narrative is not only divisive and encourages hyphenation, it is also trapped in time and space. The idea of Holocaust has become attached solely to Jewish persecution during World War II at the hands of Nazi Germany. In the same way, trauma is narrowly forged as the holocaust trauma specific to Jews. It is important that trauma studies and holocaust literature transcend these boundaries for transmutation to take effect. The inclusivity will make room for transcending the spacio-historical boundaries that trauma discourse has become captive of.

Alexander and Dromi write that the post-Zionist narratives connected the Jewish trauma with Palestinians victims. Although they recognize that "revisionist Israeli historians" ("Narrating Trauma" xxxii) have challenged the "one-sided accounts," the huge impact of the holocaust narrative sustained over years is not going to go away just like that. Holocausts in other time and space are as significant as the Jewish Holocaust. Human tragedies must not be allowed to develop into polarizing narratives that promote schism rather than global empathy and planetary consciousness.

The word *holocaust* comes from Greek word meaning total consumption by fire and as Lifton points out, in its literal grotesqueness, this definition applies to Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Nagasaki and Hiroshima ("The Concept of Survivor" 1980). However, Lifton expands the definition of holocaust and calls it "total disaster" or "the physical, social, and spiritual obliteration of a human community" on the basis of its effect on the survivors (113). Yet he differentiates between the Holocaust, as specific to the "Nazi project of genocide", and holocausts, as his own psychological project: "to suggest certain general principles around the totality of destruction as it affects survivors" (113). As a psychologist, his prime concern is with human mind and emotions, but to forge a link between tragedies through an innovation – "I will thus speak of the Holocaust *and* of holocausts" – that is uncalled for. Even when he states his task is to gain insight into

the complex processes of human mind and emotions as they come into contact with "total disaster" he is conscious of the distinction: "*To observe common psychological responses of survivors, however, in no way suggests that the historical events themselves can be equated*" (Author's italics 113-114). This is also paradoxical and ironical because scholars in Trauma Studies have invested more in Holocaust survivors, creating the impression that the Holocaust survivors are the only real victims of trauma and that their experiences can be generalized on other population.

This project of popularizing and generalizing purely Jewish experience of the Holocaust on other trauma victims has been and is still largely practiced: "the symbol of the Holocaust survivor is a pervasive image of clinical trauma in which people are alive but feel dead or deeply tied to the dead, and the image of ghostly possession is an important theme now in the work of some psychoanalysts and literary theorists who work on survivors' trauma" (Dean 117). Psychologists and social scientists also recognize the role of social environment, belief system and cultural ethos in providing the much needed relief against the onslaught of traumatic grief. Our responses to a calamity are cultivated and nurtured over time. They do not happen in a vacuum. This makes it imperative that we understand the culture as well as the ideology on which value systems are constructed, if we are to understand the psyche and emotions of the victim. In the essay "Deconstructing Counseling Psychology for the African Context," Muthukrishna and Sam argue that eurocentric counselling practices are insufficient in providing relief to the Africans mainly because they are based on models, practices and values that have little resonance with African mind (74-75). In an interview, Stef Craps points out that traditional cultural trauma research is essentially eurocentric: "The impact of different cultural traditions on the way trauma is experienced and on the process of healing is rarely acknowledged" (191). Gilroy confronts Bauman's claim to the uniqueness of holocaust experience in a harsh rebuke: "Whether born of ignorance or disregard, his view of the Jews as 'the *only* 'non-national nation' (writer's emphasis) and the only group 'caught in the most ferocious of historical conflicts: that between the pre-modern world and advancing modernity' typifies a Eurocentrism that detracts from the richness of his intellectual legacy" (213).

Eurocentrism, or psychological universalism, are well understood and debated in trauma theory now. Starting with PTSD, which is a temporally, historically, and politically subordinated construction, scholars and critics have shown the prescriptive

nature of trauma theory. Bracken argues that while trauma theory offers appropriate solutions in a Western context, "when exported to Third World or non-Western societies, [the idea of trauma and the proposed psychological solutions to it] become confusing and problematic" (Bubandt 293). Similarly, Gibbs states, "I think there are multiple problems of taking this relatively temporally and geographically local phenomenon of PTSD and trying to universalize it" ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 190).

The trauma narrative that has emerged from the Jewish persecution of German Nazis is entrenched/focussed on how the experience of trauma and encounter with extreme terror can be transformative psychically, spiritually as well as physically. Years after years, the trauma discourse has sought new ways to explain the old problem – the emotional, spiritual, and psychological impact of the Holocaust. In his book, Trauma: A Social Theory, Jeffrey C. Alexander throws light on how powerful narratives are framed:

> Which narrative wins out is a matter of performative power. The emotional experience of suffering, while critical, is not primordial. To find the meaning of suffering, it must be framed against background expectations. But effective performance depends upon more than creating powerful symbols. It is a matter also of material resources and demographics, which affect, even if they do not determine, what can be heard and who might listen. Who can command the most effective platform to tell the trauma story? Some stories are repressed by ruthless states, while others are materially sustained. Some stories are enriched by long-standing background representations; others seem so counterintuitive vis-à-vis established traditions as scarcely to be believed. Some trauma narratives address homogeneous audiences, others face fragmented and divided audiences; for others, there is nobody listening at all. (Introduction ii)

The trajectory of trauma narrative is, hence, not always a straight one. It is part of the power politics which dictates which is to be heard and which not.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben argues that it is important to know the reasons that made some into lesser human beings – the very lowly of the low: "And we will not understand what Auschwitz is if we do not first understand who or what the *Muselmann* is – if we do not learn to gaze with him upon the Gorgon" (52). If we are

to understand the true experience, the lived experience of the victims of extreme catastrophes, we need to "learn to gaze with him upon the Gorgon." There is no alternative way. The horror has to be seen in all its ugliness, brazenness and filthiness. How can we then avoid looking at the horror that has struck at the heart of Arab Muslims especially Syrians and Iraqis. They have been the most miserable of the miserables for decades now. Years of non-human existence is enough to leave scars and wound the West will never see until they will want to see it.

In an interview given to Gunther Gaus in 1964, Hannah Arendt describes her reaction upon learning the truth about the camps: "This ought not to have happened. And I don't just mean the number of victims. I mean the method, the fabrication of corpses and so on – I don't need to go into that. This should not have happened. Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. None of us ever can" (Agamben 71). Pain and resentment pour out strongly from every word she utters. But what is it exactly that 'they' cannot reconcile with? If she means by them the crimes committed against humanity, Auschwitz should give us the biggest lesson in peace. What is it about the Holocaust that it belies forgiveness and compassion? What is the meaning of this desire to continually live in a painful past? The Jews claim to have been most inhumanly treated by the fascist Nazi government. Having witnessed inhumanity themselves, how can they not become advocates of peace, justice and equality?

The question that immediately comes to mind is: what have Muslims in the Middle East done to deserve such persecution and abjection? The answer is complicated by the historical, political and religious dimensions of these conflicts. In the attempt to reinterpret history of the Hebrews and to understand Nazi persecutions of the Jews, Freud was posed with a similar problem: "Faced with the new persecutions, one asks oneself again how the Jews have come to be what they are and why they have attracted this undying hatred. I soon discovered the formula: Moses created the Jews" (Freud 1970).

Freud was trying to locate the persecution along an historical scale but rather than recounting the Jewish history in a continuum, he invents the notions of 'departure' and 'return' (Caruth 1996). Caruth explains that repressed memories from their past caused the initial trauma: 'Centering his story in the nature of the leaving, and returning, constituted by trauma, Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure (Caruth 1996). Caruth finds a traumatic possibility in the 'captivity'

experienced by the Hebrews as slaves under the Egyptian Pharaoh before their 'return.' Therefore, in Freud's texts, liberation, in Jewish memory, is inextricably wound up with trauma - the trauma of exodus. The Nazi persecution brought back the black, repressed memory of their first exile and return, which created a traumatic impact greater than the previous one. Though separated in time and place, the trauma of European Jews was exaggerated due to memories of the other trauma – the original wound. The use of term 'latency' by Freud to denote 'the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent' (Caruth 1996) throw further light on Jewish predicament. What is striking about this is how memory and forgetting are imbricated. While memory of the event returns to haunt the survivors, it is the latency of the experience and the forgetting that is the actual cause of trauma in the first place. The return is followed by a period of latency where the survivor-victim has pushed into the unconscious any trace of the event.

In Freud's conception, the event that later triggers trauma leaves the victim "unharmed" (Freud 84) and apparently without any imminent danger. This nachtraglich or belated response later determines the severity of shock and trauma. In the striking case of Jews, the affect is realized in different time, space, and setting, in twentieth century war-ridden Europe when they are once again exiled and liberated at the same time. In their liberation lie the seeds of their trauma. The birth of Israel, the land of their origin, has not been able to remove their sense of lack and insecurity. This constant return to history of bondage and persecution, which has acquired a kind of revered status, has not made possible any 'working through.' The Holocaust is not a European experience alone but goes back to the age of Pharaoh when the Jewish people experienced great persecution and deaths under Egyptian ruler. In the Jewish memory, both events hold a significant place marked by dialectics of forgetting and return. Caruth agrees that the Jews do not want to admit "the guilt that the Christians, in their recognition of Christ's death, have admitted" (Caruth 1996). She is, however, referring to the death of Moses.

For the Jews, trauma is latent in their exiles separated by different times and places. This imbrication of trauma with exile is apparently specific of Jewish memory. Exiled to live as slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt after which they reclaim their homeland, but centuries later forced into exile once again and scattered across Europe to return once again to Jerusalem, their place of origin. There is a vicious

cycle of exile, liberation and return in which the Jewish people are historically caught up. Could it be that at the level of unconscious, they fear the repetition of history? If so, what is the relation of this fear with trauma? The Jews are afraid of being forced out of the land they call their homeland but they are also fearful of admitting this. They have pushed this thought into their unconscious where it lies forgotten and any event that jeopardizes their sense of security brings back the painful memories of exile. This return occurs with an unconscious force, against the will, and despite its apparent latency which Freud describes as "traumatic neurosis" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Caruth 1996). This instinct to forget is directly associated with the instinct to survive, hence in the collective Jewish memory the return is kept alive.

What is the relation of this story with Muslims from the Middle Eastern countries who have been experiencing torture for some years now? Western trauma discourse has been shaped largely by Jewish responses to their traumatic experiences. A great wealth of literary and creative writings representing Jewish trauma deals with theoretical issues concerning trauma. The Jewish Holocaust is represented as the single most catastrophic event in modern history. However, even though the full extent of the human tragedy is still to be determined, the Middle East has become the site of present -day holocaust while Syria and Iraq Palestine are the new Auschwitz. Human tragedy is grossly underrated in the Middle East which has been torn apart by indiscriminate and massive human tragedy.

3.3 The Politics of Terror

The effects of violence and destruction on civilians during war are immense. The social, political and economic collapse force upon them a life-style that is inhuman. In the hostile environment, they are always afraid for their own lives and of their loved ones. In recent conflicts, not only have the civilian casualties soared and multiplied, but the wars have also increased in terror and brutality (Kolb-Angelbeck 2000; Kripper and McIntyre 2003; Guille-Escurret 1999; van Geuns 1987; Winkelman 1993). Kripper and McIntyre in their book "The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians" (2003) narrate several incidents of civilian torture and abuse. They narrate the story of Sudanese children who are sold into slavery and are forced to take part in Sudan's ethnic wars. They tell us of one boy "who could not stop crying after seeing his parents beheaded in front of him. He was shot in the head. When his sister, who had witnessed

everything, could not stop crying, the raiders cut off her foot and left her to bleed to death (2). Since 1983, there have been an estimated 1.9 million civilian deaths and 4 million refugees due to war in Sudan. The authors term this suffering as "collective stress" and "social suffering" since it affects the entire community (2).

Krippner and McIntyre define war as "an armed conflict between countries; between groups in the same country; or between ethnic, political, or religious groups regardless of their country of origin" (5). Ethnic wars refer to conflict between "members of a group distinguished by a distinctive history, culture, and/or language" (5). The authors agree that several social and cultural factors mediate the impact of war stressors on the population. The recovery time varies from culture to culture with some societies recovering in a short span, like in Northern Ireland 75% of population recovered from psychic pressure within 18 months (Krippner and McIntyre 7), but East Germans took longer to get out of their post-war trauma.

As Paulson notes, wars in recent times have been conducted against civilians. The victims, more often, are civilians who belong to minority groups. The examples of recent wars include, Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indian-held Kashmir, East Timor, Israeli-Occupied territories, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Peru, the Philippines, Russian Chechnya, Rwanda, Sierra Leon, Somalia, South Africa, Srilanka, Sudan, Timor, the former Yugoslavia, and Zaire (Paulson 2003). He further notes:

> In creating a state of terror, normal economic social, cultural, and political relations are disrupted, making it easy for the warring state to achieve its goal: control and subjugation of the civilian population. Further, the destruction of social and cultural institutions, which connect people to their past and provide shared values, meaning, and goals, has been extremely effective in disenfranchising civilian victims. (111)

Studies reveal devastating impact of wars on the psychological health of children, adolescents and women (Freud and Burlingham 1943; Fraser 1973; Milgram and Milgram 1976; McIntyre and Ventura 2003). In a study conducted by McIntrye and Ventura (2003) on Angolan refugee camps in Lubango, it was revealed that children and adolescents were at a high risk to develop symptoms of PTSD. Out of 40 young age subjects, PTSD was reported in 17 out of 19 male subjects and in 19 out of 21

female subjects (41-42). They also found these young refugees had developed multiple behavioural problems which affected their positive outlook on life: "The results showed that high-war-exposure adolescents with PTSD fared worse in terms of affective, cognitive, and behavioural adjustment than those without a PTSD diagnosis" (44). Moreover, children and adolescents who were without parents experienced symptoms of depression more than those who lived with their parents. Machal notes:

> Modern wars are exploiting, maiming, and killing children more ruthlessly and more systematically than ever…. Millions of children have been killed as deliberate targets in warfare or drawn in as fighters. And millions more have fallen victims to malnutrition, disease, sexual violence, and the depredations of forced flight. (Krippner and McIntyre 203)

In Afghanistan, long wars have resulted in systemic abuse of human rights. Women, in particular are denied freedom to choose their own life-style and make important decisions. Fish and Popal state that Afghan women are victims of "epistemic violence" which takes into effect after the Taliban come into power (20). Men were given unlimited power over women. Quran, the Muslim holy book, was used to justify the patriarchal life-style. The self-interpretation of Quranic injunction was used to terrorize and control women: "Taliban's radical rendition of the Quran allowed it to perpetuate gender apartheid toward women, accompanied in many instances by physical and psychological abuse." Women were not allowed to leave home without permission from their male relative and were supposed to wear *burka* in public. They weren't allowed to get education or jobs. Fish and Popal reveal that studies conducted by Physicians for Human Rights (1998) showed high levels of mental stress and trauma in Afghan women. They found 97% of participants suffering from major depression; 87% suffering from anxiety; and 21% demonstrated suicidal tendency (20).

Another form of violence that is used against women during war is rape. Pappas suggests that rape is used as a "war tactic" to control the enemy or to "demoralize" them which can be seen from the estimated 20, 000 to 60, 000 women who were raped in Bosnia in 1992 (277). Gordon reveals that high incidence of rape during Bosnia war show how very little significance is accorded to it in the Geneva Conventions: "the soldiers receive minimal punitive measures, which inadvertently legitimates the practice of rape (Pappas 278). Pappas uses the term "dissociative container" for rape victims during the war. This is a process by which the rape victim withdraws from what

is happening to her and becomes preoccupied by some inner reality. This detachment is a form of protection and safety against trauma and a means to "avoid conscious awareness and responsibility" (278).

Studies conducted on Rwandan genocide also show an impairment of psychological well-being. Rwanda endured 100-day war during which between 80,000 and 1 million people were murdered. The society has taken long to overcome psychosocial problems that resulted from this genocide that affected the entire population. Bolton's study conducted on 40 local people reveals that depression and other related trauma symptoms were present. The in-depth interviews reveal scores problems that the effected population faced as the result of genocide. These included poverty, lack of food, lack of people, suspicion/mistrust with breakdown of neighbourly relations, too many widows or orphans, lack of possessions – land, housing, shelter, illness, mental trauma, lack of motivation, lack of justice, too many people in prison, lack of schools, physical disability, grief, ignorance, drunkenness and unwillingness to change (Bolton 70). These issues are enough to create a trauma while some of them are evidence of trauma.

Barrett and Behbehani (2003) show that victims of war are most likely to suffer from repetitive nightmares. In a study conducted on Kuwaitis after the Iraqi invasion, they found that nightmares were common among the victims of war. Men, women and especially children showed a high incidence of nightmares which is also one of the symptoms in PTSD. The traumatized children reported disturbing repetitive nightmares which were related with their material reality during the war. Among the children who were interviewed, a six-year old child reported his recurrent dream which was narrated by his mother since he would be overwhelmed with emotions at the recall. In the dream, the child sees his father being butchered by enemy soldiers and thrown into a ditch. The child tries to rescue him by throwing a rope into the ditch but would fail to save his father. The dream shows the great traumatic effect of war on the psyche of the child and fears for his father's life.

Stenter and Wills look at how discourse and propaganda shape new realities in war times especially with reference to the war in Iraq. They argue that wars are fought and fuelled by emotions rather than cool intellect. In the run-up for war, raising and cultivating emotions of the population in support of the war is more wanted than providing them useful information. The authors agree that the war on terror relied more

on emotions for public support than logical or fact-based information: "public feeling collects and crystallizes around the figure of the enemy. This intensifies a sense of national hostility that can be discursively produced and effectively marshalled by overt propaganda and by news media" (258). This is how the enemy figure of the Muslim was created in the US media and its results were far reaching. Even when the futility of the Iraq war was made plain and the lie of the Bush administration was exposed, public support in the US for the devastated population of Iraq remained minimal. The Other became systemized and part of an organized body of thought, indistinguishable because of the way it was constructed in Western media. The authors agree that the war on terror relied on masses "to intensify threat and justify response" (260). The Muslims were constructed as the "undifferentiating them" lacking individuality and uniqueness, making them easy targets of indiscriminate bombing. The authors note that in the past too, enemies of the US were called with vicious names, as in 1942 Germany and Japan were enemies of the US, the adjectives used to describe them included "warlike," "treacherous," and "cruel" (260). However, these words were not used for Russia who was an ally at the time. But later when the Soviet Union became a threat, the same words were used to describe them. This homogeneity is a characteristic feature of the US approach towards its enemies especially Muslims. The Muslims have been cast in popular films as fanatics, or terrorists. The authors believe that casting the Muslims as homogenous rather than individuals responsible for their actions are setting the stage for racial discrimination or worse genocide. This essay is significant for the present study. It demonstrates that the practice of fabrication of enemy as a mass can have profound consequences. The indiscriminate target of the peoples of Syria and Iraq, destruction of public/religious places, and the economic sanctions point to this reality.

In the Middle East, little attention is paid to the atrocities committed against civilians or the "noncombatants" (McIntrye 2003). In case of Palestinians, who are indisputably the weaker side in Israel-Palestine war, violence is used against the civilians who hurl stones and crackers at the Israeli army. The continued aggressive policies of the Israeli government leave a strong impact on the psychological health of Palestinian survivor-victims. Their world is destroyed and the life that they enjoyed previously has turned upside down. They have been forcibly displaced from their homes and their collective reaction is justified against the aggressive policies of the Israeli government who continue to use repressive tactics against unarmed civilians. In Iraq

and Syria, the international and national players are fighting wars for hegemonic control. The victims are largely civilian population who have no means to escape from the terror these wars have introduced into their lives.

3.4 The Politics of Labelling & Shaming

Labelling or naming is a strategy for gaining control and power (Fahs 2016). In her essay, "Naming Sexual Trauma: On the Political Nuance in Rape and Sex Offender Discourses," Fahs contrasts the title of an acclaimed film, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, with the original title of the book it was based on, *Men Who Hate Women*. For Fahs, both titles suggest very dissimilar approaches and meanings, whereas the book title clearly "illuminates conditions of misogyny," the film title suggest a "fetishization of violence" (Fahs 61). The film clearly strips the political project of the novel in which sex offence is taken as normal and uncritically digested. She highlights how the process of naming strips the victim of agency at the same time liberating the offender of any guilt. She makes a bold claim to make her point:

> This essay considers the naming of sexual violence not simply as a categorical strategy, but as a political tool….because sexual violence is so pervasive – where men internalize sexual violence done to them as normal – categories of rape and sex offending obscure the pervasive qualities of perpetration and victimhood in the culture at large. The "rape victim" and the "sex offender" become categories of "Otherness" – often seen as outside the norm and outside of ourselves – that blur and erase the many different ways sexual violence disrupts, traumatizes, and circulates within women's lives. (Fahs 62)

The main argument raised in the essay is how the politics of labelling radically alter the fate of the victims by constructing trauma narratives that minimize traumatic experiences of victims of sexual violence. Alarming as it is, if this framework is applied to victims of other traumatic events like war, we notice great resemblance in the way social and political implications are reconstructed to condemn the victims themselves and not the perpetrators. More specifically, in the case of victims of conflicts in the Middle East, the perpetration of violence is come to be seen as "normal" and images of violence that are circulated widely worldwide are viewed from a detached position as "outside the norm and outside of ourselves" (62). This lack of empathy is worsened further by the introduction of labels like 'Islamic terrorists' and 'war of terror' (implying war against Muslims) which are widely circulated in the media and academic

discourses generated in the West. This category of "Otherness" (62) functions to veil the atrocities and crimes of perpetrators while allowing the victims' plight to go unnoticed. When narratives are constructed to forge a particular viewpoint only like the recent constructions of 'Islamic terrorist' and 'war on terror,' the most obvious consequence is obfuscation of reality and creation of an imaginary in which the victims perform a symbolic role.

This collective identity of Arabs and Muslims created by the U.S and allies is a political manoeuvre for control. The Muslims in Syria and Iraq cannot be victims and perpetrators at the same time. Their collective identity has been so distorted by the U.S led narrative that a counter narrative can only hold through sustained and serious cultural productions. Due to the unequal power dynamics between the U.S and the Middle Eastern Muslim countries, the U.S led narrative against Muslims and Arabs has sustained and effectively blocked or erased other accounts. Talking about the processes that determine signification, Akiko Hashimoto insists that the reason some events become "more consequential than others" is because "we manage to make them more consequential" (4) for the sake of self-definition and identification. The Germans, unwittingly, came to accept their role as perpetrators of war crimes and were reluctant to speak of themselves as victims (Sebald 11), much in the same way the Muslims from the war-stricken countries are framed in a particular way only. Butler mourns the "rise of anti-intellectualism" in the US after 9/11 which dictated only two possibilities: "either you are with us or you're with the terrorists" (4). This mechanism, in the opinion of Butler, exposes the "vulnerability" of the state and questions "the very value of dissent as part of contemporary US democratic culture." She writes:

> The point I would like to underscore here is that a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. It seems crucial to attend to this frame, since it decides, in a forceful way, *what we can hear*, whether a view will be taken as explanation or as exoneration, whether we can hear the difference, and abide by it. (4-5)

The imbrication of political and ethical that Butler has underscored in her argument raise a lot of questions regarding the role of super powers in the current wars in the Middle East.

Lina Khatib (2012) explores the political struggle in the Middle East through images that are 'battling, reversing, erasing and replacing other images' for control and 'visibility' (1) in her book, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the visual has become a key component of political power. Khatib takes us through images that helped shape world politics as it is today and unveils a process of repeal and resurrection. The rapidly changing reality is reflected through images competing for authority and construction of a specific reality. Her work exposes the hideous struggle for control and power in the world controlled by a variety of mediums, including television, internet, street art and print. Trauma is revealed as an 'ontological assault' in which the basic assumptions about oneself are shattered and there is a total collapse of meaning from life.

The ethical and political dimensions surrounding war and trauma are also explored by Sontag. In her book, *On Photography* (1977), she reveals the difficulty in transforming the way we think and feel when we see pictures of traumatic events all over the newspaper. Her basic question is whether or not these visuals bring about a change in our behaviour and sympathy towards the victims. Sontag is sceptical about how photographs that depict "images of war" (*Regarding the pain of Others* 1) can transform people's attitudes towards victims. Her first concern is, who these pictures are intended for: "Who are the "we" at whom such shock-pictures are aimed? That "we" would include not just the sympathizers of a smallish nation or a stateless people fighting for its life, but – a far larger constituency – those only nominally concerned about some nasty war taking place in another country (9)." She further argues that the images can get our sympathy but they fail to transform or alter the way we think or act: "they create an illusion of consensus" (8). She distorts this illusion by looking into the ways the images are received in the first place. She tells us that a photograph of a Jewish or a Palestinian child "torn apart" would not generate a universal response from Jews and Palestinians. The identity of the victims and our preconceived notions about them play an emphatic role in the way we respond to such visuals. So, our responses are fashioned by our political beliefs rather than ethics. Protesting, she tells us is different from "acknowledging" suffering (33). This acknowledgement has to do with empathy and basic regard for individual's right to live but the sheer volume of the images of suffering endured in wars in the Middle East has had a rather supple effect. A few days or weeks of clamour and then silence.

Sontag also addresses the issue of censorship while projecting images from war fields. She reports how censorship was used for the benefit of one side during the 20th century wars and how such intervention supported the powerful adversary: "What the American military promoted during the Gulf War in 1991 were images of the techno war: the sky above the dying, filled with light-traces of missiles and shells – images that illustrated America's absolute military superiority over its enemy" (52) What the American television viewers were not allowed to see was how the thousands of Iraqi conscripts were brutally killed as they tried to cross into Basra, Iraq. They were "carpet bombed with explosives, napalm, radioactive DU (depleted uranium) rounds, and cluster bombs" (52). Such accounts point to power politics that shape world's perception about a certain war and also dictate who the perpetrators and the victims are. However, Sontag acknowledges that we get used to images of horror that are thrown at us in multitudes these days and feel less sympathy for the victims. She does not explain why one feels normal after being exposed to the images of horror and that is okay to put behind us human suffering when it does not directly affect us. The idea of vicarious trauma is not explored by her. Nevertheless, she successfully reveals how politics of images is a new weapon in the hands of military aggressors.

Ann Kaplan takes up where Sontag leaves off. Her concern with representation also allows her to explore the possibility of empathy in viewers who witness a catastrophic event from a distance. The concern with representation and perception is central to her argument what she calls "mediatized trauma" (*Trauma Culture* 2). Kaplan throws light on the complicated practices of empathy in the context of trauma after 9/11. Her main argument is that the impact of an event of catastrophic proportion is shaped by the political and ideological contexts, in other words, the dynamics of power politics play a huge role in the reception of an event. She also traces how individual trauma borders on collective trauma during events of traumatic potential.

In the Introduction to *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (2016), Alexander and Breese write:

> Which narrative wins out is not only a matter of performative power. It is also a matter of power and resources and the demographics of the audiences who are listening. Who can command the most effective platform to tell the trauma story? Some stories are repressed, while others are materially sustained. (Alexander and Breese xii)

The Middle Eastern anti-war narrative has not sustained against the polarizing and divisive narrative of the US. This has been made possible, as Alexander and Breese have suggested, by the material advantage the US and its allies have over the Arab world. Powerful media houses are controlled by the US and its allies which project to the world only one side of the story. The collusion invites a power play in which one side is politically better placed than the other and takes advantage of the position.

Trauma created from war experiences is political and not merely personal (Humphrey 51). The war deaths are commemorated and the sacrifices of soldiers are publicly recognised through memorials and other services by governments and the military. The names of the dead are carved in stones and public memorials offer tribute to the brave acts of the dead. However, these political manoeuvres cannot erase the sense of loss and damage of the traumatised. Trauma generates a critique of power in that it exposes the limits of its ability to prevail completely. The steps taken by a state are in the larger national interest disavowing a proper working through of the trauma which is essential if the community has to become psychologically stable.

Trauma studies is a Western phenomenon and scholars in trauma studies have criticised application of Western concepts of suffering and healing to non-Western cultures. Psychologists have recognised different patterns of behaviour among victims of trauma which may vary from culture to culture. Alfrod writes that flashback is not a universal phenomenon and hence manifestations of trauma may vary according to people's value system. Talking of other cultures, Ethan Watters (2010) writes that "cultural narrative and beliefs" create a structure within society whereby suffering is given meaning: "The experience of horror or violence in these places is interwoven into religions, social networks, traditions, and rituals of burial and grieving" (Alfrod 99).

There are many ways to look at trauma as a political category, among them are "abuse of power" (McNally 2005), "decontextualization of trauma" (Alford 2016), "official trauma" (Alexander et al. 2004). Summerfield argues that introducing PTSD in postcolonial studies has done more harm than good in that it takes attention away from the aggressor and transforms the "political relationship" into a "medical malady of the powerless" (Alford 9). Herman describes psychological trauma as "an affliction of the powerless" (12).

The objectification is a question of growing concern with political philosophers also. The most interesting analogy is advanced by Agamben in the figure of *homo sacer*. According to Agamben, *homo sacer* refers to "a body that can be killed but not sacrificed" (*The Omnibus* 61). The life of a *homo sacer* is not sacred enough to be offered as sacrifice but it can be taken; he can be killed and it will not be a homicide. The irony is inescapable. Stripped of dignity and protection, the victim of modern war is no better than *homo sacer* and to take Agamben's words: "modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it…." (103). The refugee camps are the new concentration camps where men, women and children live under inhuman conditions. These camps have turned into "the laboratories in the experiment of total domination" (Agamben, *The Omnibus* 99). The killing of civilians and their displacement is justified and legitimized for exercise of total domination. Agamben argues that liberal democracies have become increasingly indistinguishable from totalitarian regimes where sanctity of human life is concerned. The displaced have no rights. In "What is a Camp?" Agamben argues that a camp resident is someone who is "stripped of all legal protection and thereby accorded the status of 'bare life'" (Weber 10). Alienation and estrangement further intensify feelings of degradation and humiliation among refugees. Confined to no man's land, with their citizenship suspended, the refugees are stripped of all legal and political status and protection.

3.5 Civilians' Response to Traumatic Events

Samar Yazbik's book *The Crossing* focusses on the irrepressibility of the Syrian civilian population despite being in the thick of war and destruction. Several volunteer organizations work to provide relief to people hurt and destroyed as a result of the aerial bombing. Prominent among them are "White Helmets" who risk their lives to save survivors at the scene of explosions. Syrians have survived the worst by coming together and helping each other, their sole aim being restoration of peace and rebuilding the society (McHugo 121). There are no clear cut answers to the Syrian debacle. The civilians, who are the worst hit by the proxy wars on their soil, have paid a huge price.

French psychologist, Pierre Janet and Cathy Caruth have explained trauma as the unassimilated memory, which is fully known to the individual until he re-experiences the same. This unassimilated nature of trauma can make it very difficult to live with. The Syrian refugees displaced across the globe as well as the IDPs carry unrecognized, unassimilated memories of the total assault that resulted in banishment

from their own homes and country. Wendy Pearlman observes that the refugees still remained in a state of denial. It was not easy for them to accept the possibility of long or lasting rehabilitation on some foreign land. They did not expect to remain long in that state. Pearlman tells of a visit to Syrian families staying in apartments in Turkey and who have a family member who could travel back and forth to Syria. They would like to remind themselves that they were still in Syrian and not Turkey. A mother asks Pearlman, "How long have you been in Syria?" (303). She tells us of resilience among these refugee groups and associates it with their will to return to Syria (304). Despite being dispersed, they have not abandoned the idea of return. This is because the Syrians have a strong sense of community.

In another essay, "Narratives of Fear in Syria," Pearlman highlights four types of fears among the Syrian people: silencing fear, surmounted fear, semi-normalized fear, and nebulous fear. The aim of the silencing fear, she argues, is to effect submission from the people through political repression, imprisonment, and even torture. This king of repression affects the Syrians' perception of themselves as individuals and as members of a society. Whereas the silencing fear coerces individuals into submission, the surmounted fear pushes the individuals into action. After having surmounted their fear, the individuals take to revolt and show aggressive behavior in response to repressive policies. The semi-normalized fear is a step further than the surmounted fear in that fear now becomes part of nature. At this level, the population becomes accustomed to terror and must decide whether to revolt or submit. The nebulous fear is the fear of an unsure future. This is the most acute form of fear because it snatches from the survivors their hopes and dreams of a better future (25-29). In revealing the four types of fear in the Syrian population, Pearlman indicates the serious nature of mental assault perpetrated upon them. A heightened sense of fear can be coercive and/or lead to aggression. In the novels, fear is seen as the real force behind the different ways the characters respond to terror around them.

Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirisci contend that the civilians inside Syria face increasingly deteriorating conditions. Most have been displaced several times as bombings shifted across localities. The writers believe that internally displaced are more vulnerable than the refugees because of their proximity to terror and violence. With the collapse of more than half of the country's civil structure, they face all sorts of challenges. While there are external threats like the proliferation of arms, presence of mines, and unexploded bombs, internal threats like the collapse of family as a unit

and cessation of social activities have had serious impacts on the survivors' mental health. The writers' report serious hazards for children who are the worst hit by the threats. The young are forcibly recruited in rebel groups, and the children are occasionally used as human shields during insurgencies. The civilians are left to themselves to fend for their basic needs including food, water, security, and shelter (77-79). Aerial bombings have destroyed civilian infrastructure, razed to ground several medical facilities, and disrupted aid operations in several areas across Syria (106). It is quite natural for the civilians, who are in the thick of this terror, to feel that they have been abandoned by all sides. A future in which they can live in peace seems impossible while they are thus exposed to violence and terror.

Paul H. Wise writes, "Sooner or later, a breakdown in the bonds that define collective peace, indeed that ensure social justice, will find tragic expression in the clinic, on the ward, or in the morgue" (139). This is the reality that threatens the collective peace of the Syrian civilian population. The writer argues that there is a general lack of empathy and understanding of the human impact of war. In the execution of war plans, humans occur only as 'collateral damage' while victory – physical and psychological – is the main aim. We have seen this in all modern wars of this century where use of modern technology has brutally destroyed land, resources and humans. Paul Wise argues that violent death is the central human consequence of war, upon which the aggressors build their victory. However, wars also disrupt natural progress of a society by halting or destroying human bonding, and/or damaging the collective will of the people. When economic sanctions are imposed alongside military aggression, the effects on the civilians are far reaching. Wise considers sanctions as a "type of warfare" that are pursued to force the population into total submission. While the direct effects of wars are visible to all, the indirect effects are only felt by the civilians under threat (139-144). This calls for a deeper understanding of the modern wars and their overt and covert mechanisms. As the present study reveals the civilians in Syria and Iraq are faced with both kinds of threats. The wars have the dual aim of destruction of land and the destruction of the will of the people.

Centre for Civilians in Conflict was established to provide relief to the civilians in conflict zones especially those harmed by US military operations in the Middle East. Armed with an understanding that it is the law makers and policy shapers who can actually halt civilian casualties or prevent civilians suffering during military invasions, Sarah Holewinski and Marla Keenan approach those at the helm of affairs like a military

commander, a senator or a regional coalition officer. They also document civilian life during warfare to get the policy makers to make the right decisions or choices during wars. The centre has adopted the principles of Geneva Conventions that offer protection to civilians from harm during wars and engage both with state actors and the non-state actors (NSA). In an interview, Sarah Holewinski, describes the different kinds of harm done to the civilians during military conflicts which include killing, injury, displacement, and losing jobs to say the least, while trauma and torture also figure high. She recognizes that even after the conflict has ended, there is a possibility that the civilians will become target of retributive violence and suffer the consequences of indifference by the international community (15-18). The Centre works with the different warring parties to reach an understanding to adopt ways to protect civilians, however, whether they have been successful in countries who have suffered military violence, is another story. There is a need to seriously engage with the offenders and aggressor to curtail civilian losses. With regard to Syrian crisis, Holewinski admits that the Syrian civilians will need assistance even after the conflict is over. This speaks volume about the scale of damage experienced by the Syrian civilians. The centre recognizes that a vast majority of civilian population in Syria is living without lack of medical facilities, education and proper shelter. A large majority of the population lives under constant fear and trauma (21-22).

A report published by British Medical Journal (2018) focusing on healthcare in Eastern Ghouta, Syria, admits that the offensive killed around 1600 civilians, and internally displace over 50 000 civilians. They believe that systematic attacks on hospitals shows that healthcare is used as a weapon by the aggressors. The report shows that the internally displaced have little or no access to clean drinking water, shelter, and medical treatment. In all of Syria, but especially Ghaouta, as the report points to, there is a serious threat to civilian life after the healthcare was directly targeted. There were patients with chronic diseases, injured civilians, cancer and diabetes patients. All of them required immediate care which was not available to them due to the humanitarian aid blockade that usually followed military conflicts inside Syria. The report says that "the events unfolding in Syria, and particularly Eastern Ghouta, are setting a dangerous precedent in terms of attacks on healthcare and accountability for such attacks" (1). Moreover, it is not unusual in Syria that healthcare workers are targeted or detained and prevented from their services. There have been reports of around 492 attacks on healthcare facilities, and 847 deaths of medical personnel between 2017 and 2018 alone

(1). This figure highlights the compounding of the problems for the civilians inside Syria. Despite the high numbers and frequency, the world watched in silence as innocent civilians suffered and lost their lives.

Nabil Al-Tikriti argues that Mosul tragedy (Iraq) is a humanitarian failure, "Understanding the course of events and identifying the participants in the battle of Mosul is a difficult task. What is certain is that all parties neglected the fate of civilians and were unable to provide proper emergency medical relief" (26). Drone footages of Mosul reveal destruction of the scale of 1945 Berlin, and the casualty figures are unreliable. Different claims have been made from different sides; the government claiming between 5000 civilian deaths, Associated Press puts this figure between 9000 and 11000 civilians, and Patrick Cockburn claims 40000 civilian deaths as a result of the battle. The writer believes that both the Coalition forces and the Iraqi government disregarded the international humanitarian law in the case of Mosul. He alleges that the Coalition forces announced a special classification, a non-international armed conflict (NIAC), to distance themselves from the tragedy and to justify their use of force on innocent civilians. Despite the grave humanitarian tragedy that took place in Mosul, there was little media coverage of the battle (29-30). The Mosul tragedy exists in video clips, yet there is no call for retribution from any side. This shows how small is the value of human life for the parties engaged in military conflict.

In the essay, "The Media and Iraq: A blood bath for and Gross Dehumanization of Iraqis," Daoud Kuttab, an award-winning Palestinian journalist, reveals that there was and has been no attempt from any side to focus on the human tragedy that unfolded in Iraq. In his words, "Iraqi civilian death tolls are treated as nothing more than statistics" (879). He agrees that wars are fought for the hearts and minds of the people in question, in other words for psychological and emotional victory. A report on Iraqi casualties reveal that in the year 2003 alone, 124 journalists of which 102 were Iraqi citizens, were killed (Kuttab 881). Unfortunately, most of these deaths occurred as a result of US military firing. The journalists from the "enemy media" are open targets because their reporting can upset the narrative claims of the other side. While there are reports of the involvement of the US army in Iraq in the killing of the journalists, there has been no serious attempt from their side to carry out investigations. The author also contends that the US defended its violence against the Iraqi people in press conferences and media talks (886). The US military, who had come as liberators, ended up committing and perpetuating more violence. All major Iraqi cities became points of

violent crimes against the civilians who were the main casualties. Kuttab writes about the US indifference that "nowhere was this dehumanization (*of the Iraqi people*) more evident than in the absence of an actual counting of Iraqi casualties" (887).

Yamada et.al. write that the Iraqis have endured a lot of suffering over the years as they confronted protracted wars at their doorstep. The writers contend that their suffering has not been understood by the public outside Iraq. They blame the electronic media and press in the Western countries for not showing the true pictures of assault on the Iraqi civilians. Nor were Iraqi casualties reported accurately by the media and press. The authors attribute most of the civilian deaths to the US military airstrikes or rocket attacks. They question the morality of the West when confronted with images of horror and suffering of the Iraqi civilians. They ask why there were no protests against the gross human tragedy that was ascribed to the US military. They wonder how come the world watched without empathy the tale of horror that unfolded with the US invasion. They describe the Iraqi civilians as victims of violence – "violence in which individuals in the United States and the United Kingdom are complicit" (407-409).

The wars in Syria and Iraq have destroyed everything. Children and women are the worst affected as most of them are left to fend for themselves after their men are either abducted or killed in wars. A documentary by France 24 English records an Iraqi child's traumatic response to the violent experiences he and his family members have experienced. The child, aged 5-10, breaks down in tears as he narrates what happened to him: "My father was killed by Daesh. They often came to terrorize us. When we asked why, Daesh told us it's because you're insurgents…One day I was working with my brother and they slashed my fingers. It's not fair, you can't do that. May God kill them, torture them. It's not fair (*Iraq's Lost Children* 3:14-3:50). Children have witnessed violent killings of their loved and dear ones. There is no telling how these unseen scars and wounds present themselves afterward. The mental health construct PTSD is insufficient to explain their complex mental health issues. Clearly, the situation of Iraqi and Syrian survivors calls for a renewed understanding of trauma and its coping mechanisms. Mental health experts working with Iraqi and Syrian survivors of war agree that scars of war are deep seated and lasting, but they also acknowledge the resilience of these survivors. A constant state of fear has had a crippling effect on the mental health of the children. Most of them suffer from sleep disorders and complain

of nightmares. The effects of numbing may not readily be experienced but as Lifton points out numbing can be lasting and crippling and more devastating.

Iraq is the story of long, sustained crises and in the aftermath of wars its people have sustained long-term injuries on their bodies and mind. They have lost loved ones, seen children dying, survived in exploded neighbourhoods and looted houses and most significantly internalized terror. Their trauma cannot be simply explained within the neat boundaries of PTSD. It requires foreshadowing of the complex political and moral trajectories and a reassessment on humanitarian than merely political grounds. Afana points out the need to assess the political, cultural and economic factors in formulating and understanding the mental health of survivors in Middle East conflicts. He writes that "events that would be widely perceived as traumatic in countries where there is little violence or oppression may not be perceived as extremely distressing in societies living with daily conflict and political conflict" (30). The civilian population faced different types of traumas since Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Gulf War in 1991 and economic sanctions, Civil Uprising, and US War on Iraq in 2003. The situation deteriorated after 2014 when Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) occupied many important places in Iraq leaving thousands of internally displaced persons without shelter, medical care or education.

These writers have shown that civilians in Syria and Iraq have been deliberate targets of military violence. They are always on the run for shelter because aerial bombings have destroyed their houses. Surrounded with complete destruction and living without basic amenities of life, there is a very strong possibility that large number of population has been traumatized. This terror is also voiced in the fictional narratives coming from the region. The present study focuses on how the civilians are the hardest hit by the protracted wars and the deployment of binaries and facing a holocaust.

3.6 Syrian Crisis in Context

The Syrian conflict is seven-years long conflict. From being regional, it has become a totally global issue. Hashemi and Postel (2013) report that between March 2011 and April 2013 nearly two million fled the country and 4.2 million were internally displaced; by 2017, nearly 12 million were rendered homeless and half a million dead (Yassin xi). U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres said: "we have

not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost 20 years ago" (Hashemi & Postel 3).

The Syrian crisis began in 2011 and by 2016 an estimated 470,000 were killed, 1.9 were wounded, 4.8 million fled the country, and 6.6 million were internally displaced (Philips 1). According to United Nations, by 2013 Syria had fallen behind 40 years in human development. As war progressed, fragmentation of Syria plummeted. The Syrian regime under Bashar al Asad controlled most of South, the capital Damascus and the coast. As the regime forces slackened and withdrew, these areas were taken over by different rebel groups who often fought with each other for control. The northern border was held by the Kurdish forces while the ISIS occupied the East. Some of the regions in the North and South were ruled by different militia groups, some of them secular but mostly radical.

How did Syria get here? In 2011, in the southern of Derra peaceful protest broke out calling for reforms. The regime responded with force as a result the protests spread to other cities which were also met by violence. The opposition to this state terror grew and the protestors began demanding the removal of Assad. But the regime resorted to brutal tactics which led to more violence. There were reports that the regime infiltrated the protester with their security agents who would disrupt the peaceful protest by initiating firing at the troops, to which the troops would respond killing innocent civilians on the scene. The protests snowballed due to the aggressive stance of the regime and as situation got worse, the skirmishes between the regime and local opposition groups became a routine event. These opposition groups were not very effective because of lack of a centralized command. They acted on their mostly, hence could not offer strong resistance to the regime (Philips 1-3).

The Syrian conflict is not as simple as it appears. The role of international actors is significant in prolonging the crisis. Philips argues that "the international and regional environment in which Syria's uprising began was key to its transformation into civil war" also that "external factors have been essential in enabling and facilitating both regime and opposition actors" and that "the war's character, scale and scope has been greatly impacted by these factors (3). The regional political environment has been crucial to the development in Syria. The failures of Iraqi invasion proved crucial to US policy makers that occupation was not the answer. There was an increasing influence

of Iran and Turkey in the region and Russia also started strengthening its ties after a long absence. Many argued that the US presence in the Middle East was coming to an end (4). This was not to be, as the Syrian crisis have shown. There is a presence of "multiple actors" whose interventionist strategies have succeeded in creating a stalemate. There is a likelihood that the crisis will deepen and not get resolved in some near future: "the more external actors involved, the longer civil war is likely to last, as they are unlikely to cease their involvement until their agendas are met and the more actors in play, the more difficult for any resolution to satisfy all agendas" (7). Philips names the international players who he thinks have escalated and prolonged civil war, namely, the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. There were also non-state actors that played their role like Hezbollah, the PKK and the ISIS. The writers of the monograph, *The Consequence of Chaos*, believe that the Syrian crisis represents, on the global stage, the failure of the international system to protect and prevent human losses. It also shows the limitations of the United Nations to resolve the crisis (xiv). The writers also point to the failure of the actors to protect the rights of the civilians. There is no sustainable policy to support the Syrian refugees and the internally displaced. In the absence of serious thinking, there is a possibility that the refugee issue may turn into a long-term displacement crisis for the developing countries (xiv).

Stephen Gowans notes that the US was involved in supporting the opposition groups who belonged to the jihadist outfit, not democratic (12). Bashar Al-Asad was the US proclaimed brutal dictator who was to be removed surely. He believes that Syria, like Iraq and Libya, had opposed the US-backed Saudi Arabian influence in the region. These countries had interests that clashed with the hegemonic US-led Saudi Arabian policies in Middle East. These countries also refused to allow US to open military bases on their soils. Also significant are the steps taken by the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party under Bashar Al-Assad to deescalate the situation in Syria and to reach a compromise. They agreed to make amends in their constitution to allow members of other parties to run for presidential elections. Yet, the unrest continued. Another reason for the US alleged involvement in the Syrian war was due to Syrian government's anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist positions. Bashar's son, Hafez al-Assad posed a threat to the US political strategy in the Middle East because of his close association with Russia. While his father developed ties with Iran, a country US described as the "axis of all evil." Bashar also opposed Israel and sought Arab independence from Western influence which were seen as threat to the US policy in the Middle East (14-16).

In his book, *The Dirty War on Syria*, Tim Anderson also describes the US intervention in the Middle East as a strategic execution of their long-standing policy for the Arab world. He states that after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, Syria was the next target of the US. According to Anderson, a weakened Syria and an isolated Hezbollah is part of the plan for a "New Middle East.' The ultimate aim is to strengthen Israel in the region. In order to bring about a regime change in Syria, the US, along with its regional Arab partners, supported Syrian rebel groups including the Jihadists. The writer believes that the Islamist attacks in Syria were staged with the help of NATO and Gulf countries (1). The war in Syria is not sectarian, "promotion of sectarianism in the Middle East mostly comes from Washington's key allies, Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf monarchies, and the ethnic cleansers of Israel. They share the US aim of keeping the regions weak and divided" (1). The writer traces Syria's role against the expansionist Zionist state beginning with 1967 and 1973 regional wars. Later on Syria's support for the Iranian Revolution (1979) saw a falling-out of US-Syria relationship. Back in 1980, the US had also planned regime change of Bashar's father, Hafez al-Asad, which did not materialize. It was then the US and its Arab allies used the Muslim Brotherhood to carry out insurgencies inside Syria and received heavy backlash from the state forces. The US policy makers "used the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood at Hama to demonstrate 'the true establishment of Syria as a totalitarian state" (2). Anderson states that after the Iraq occupation, the US started to spread the idea of another war against those who were "on the other side of the divide" namely Syria, Iran and Hezbollah (3). The envisioned plan for the New Middle East called for total control of the Middle East and its resources by the US. Anderson claims that the US wanted to project the war in Syria as sectarian in nature. The bombing of various sites revered by the Shia Muslims was part of this strategy. Only this time, the US did not use its troops and played through proxies as it had done in Central America, in Africa, and in Afghanistan. The stiff resistance by the Syrian regime and its allies offset US plans of early victory. The US and its allies underestimated their enemies' strength: "the NATO and Gulf Arab proxy armies would face an Axis of Resistance, with some powerful allies and with experience of sectarian provocations" (5).

Thus, the Syrian war is no accident but a well thought out strategy removal of the al-Assads who have posed a serious threat to the US interest in the region. The

powers that be have yet to find a way out of this lengthy war and find ways to protect ordinary Syrians.

Studies have shown that symptoms of trauma are not universal and that PTSD is not a universal phenomenon. Responses to trauma are known to be context-related. Similarly, the responses of Syrian survivor-victims are also affected by their particular circumstance. Karim, a refugee in Lebanon and a beneficiary of different Syrian Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is not satisfied with the treatment he has received. Estrangement of the mental health practitioners from the Syrian cultural and religious norms does not yield desirable results. Karim laments: "*They* turn us into the aliens of the country. *They* write about us and try to help us, and then are surprised when their help doesn't work, and then write about us again. What's the result? Nothing changes except that we become aliens" (Brykalski and Rayes 32). This dissatisfaction shows the wide gap that exists between the mental health practitioner and the subject. Karim also opens up about an American therapist who fails in his endeavor to establish a bond between himself and the Syrians through his music classes. When children start to drop out from his classes, he thinks they are not "committed" and tries to "discipline" those who are left (Ibid 32). The American therapist failed to see where he was lacking, insisting on the known models of intervention. A female Syrian refugee is similarly very critical of the mental health services they have received in refugee camps. She does not feel she has received any help: "If I told people about my experiences, my sadness, there's no result. I will receive nothing, no care, no attention, and nothing will change. So why talk? Talking makes it worse" (Ibid 33). These survivors do not think the therapy sessions do any good, hence the indifference. They do not feel connected to the models of practice being applied to them, and see them as repressive and unhelpful: "Do you think these programs make life in prison easier or worse? They make life worse because they offer fake hope and remind us of our "*ajiz.*" But I am not helpless," insists Khadija (Ibid 33).

Studies on Syrians have generally taken PTSD as the reference point, and have put up a value to indicate the prevalence of PTSD among the survivors, for example: 33.5% (Almoshmosh 54), 35.7% (Georgiadou et al. 2), 47.3% (Aoun et al. 1), 35.4% (Kazour et al. 41), 38.7% (Basheti et al. 1), 35.1% (Perkins 1231), 27.2% & 41.8% refugees in Lebanon, 33.5% & 83.4% refugees in Turkey (Tekeli-Yesil et al. 2018). Tekeli-Yesil used the structured Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview to

collect required data. However, most of those who were interviewed felt that the interviews were "useless" (e3). This is a reflection of the weakness in the Western method of enquiry which treats all subjects as same.

This complex nature of psychological and mental trauma can be seen in the Syrian survivors' responses to a tragedy. As a medical practitioner, Lindsey Smith, who was working with Syrian survivors, came to the understanding that in view of the complexity of the patients' traumatic experience, a "multi-modality approach" was more useful than the simple medical approach that they followed. She came to this understanding after she evaluated a small girl who was having seizures. The girl's seizures, Smith finds out were not normal medical phenomenon because these seizures had a pattern and were linked to her underlying fear of bombing: "As I watched the little girl rest, I started to wonder if it is possible that these people have been through so much trauma that it's presenting as neurological disorders? Could complete devastation of all you know and love affect you so deeply that it presents as actual physical neurological symptoms?" (SAMS 27). These professionals are struggling to capture the full scale of the tragedy the survivor-victims have been through.

Another study (Kerbage et al. 2020), designed to explore perceptions and experiences of policymakers, practitioners, and Syrians involved in mental health services in Lebanon, show how misplaced notions about Syrian culture and their values can impede objective evaluation of their emotional and mental states. The professionals interviewed for the study hold the view that there is little to be gained from these mental health interventions because Syrians are incurable as they are culturally very backward: "Illiteracy is very common among Syrians….it is in their culture….," {social worker}; "Syrians are ignorant, they are not educated…it is a cultural trait…"{psychiatrist}; "they are very traditional, they don't see the need for all this…they are mainly concerned about material things" {social worker} (5-6). This is an instance of cultural insensitivity which prevents from determining the complexity and magnitude of Syrian refugees' problems.

The effects of this war will be far-reaching and lasting especially in terms of human resource and mental health. The worsening economic condition and failing infrastructure have crippled the lives of the Syrians even in the government controlled areas. Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS) propose a new label to describe the mental health of the Syrians, namely, Human Devastation Syndrome (HDS). They

suggest that lables like depression and PTSD cannot fully encompass the mental health of these survivors. They believe that the unique context of the Syrians demands a new diagnosis which can effectively explain the magnitude and complexity of their traumatic affliction. These symptoms cannot be attributed to the psychological category post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because the "post" in PTSD has not yet been achieved. The stress factors have not been eliminated and most Syrians still live in fear. Dr. M. K. Hamza, who is the chair at SAMS, thinks that the mental health disorders affecting Syrians are the result of the total destruction they have experienced. He thinks that the repertoire of mental health idioms cannot describe the "total demolition" experienced by a Syrian survivor: "I searched the criteria of all psychiatric stressors and traumas and could not find a description for those psychological injuries. I am perplexed and humbled by our lack of ability to define, diagnose, and treat this complex condition, which I refer to as Human Devastation Syndrome (6). The Human Devastation Syndrome or HDS, which Dr, Hamza describes as an essentially Syrian phenomenon, is useful in understanding and realizing "the severity of the emotional and mental problems" faced by Syrian people, whereas, constructs like PTSD, are "culturally and politically limiting because they do not account for [this] intentionality" (Brykalski & Rayes 34). Dr. Humza argues that the experiences of the Syrians find no equivalence in the modern history of warfare. These people have witnessed horrors beyond anything that literary imagination unfolds: "They have seen dismantled human beings that used to be their parents or their siblings" (Davis 2017). In a family of six or seven or ten, there is sometimes one survivor, sometimes two, and they have seen blood of their family members. Their traumatic injury is not easily comprehended even by the mental health practitioners who work with them. This is largely because the existing standards of psychological health fall short of explaining the severity and complexity of this new wave of trauma, as understood by Dr. Hamza and his team. Dr. Hamza believes that PTSD cannot account for the emotional, psychological and spiritual devastation of the Syrians:

> A lot of what [Syrians] are experiencing is dehumanization and humiliation. When you cause the other person to despair, what are you aiming for? You are trying to humiliate him, to rip him or her from their own identity and state of being. You are demolishing the human inside. You want him to become a walking shell. This is different [than trauma]. (Brykalski and Rayes 34)

Dr. Brophy believes that the mental damage for children is going to be "permanent and irreversible" (1). Especially the children are likely to develop long-term mental disorders like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), overanxious disorder (OAD), separation anxiety disorder (SAD), and major depressive disorder or MDD (Chen 3). According to Chen, when children go through "strong, frequent or prolonged adversity without adequate adult support," they are more likely to respond with severe forms of stress disorders (3). As the war continues, these children live and experience a traumatic reality on a daily basis and encounter a bleak future ahead of them. A survey of Syrian children in Turkish refugee camps by Save the Children (2017) reveal that mental, intellectual and development disorders are very common among these children. Due to long-term exposure to violence and death, they have lost their childhood and have become "desensitized and emotionally numb:" "Some children desensitize as a way of trying to cope with the violence they see, with significant risk that they grow up as adults who lack empathy and are indifferent to acts of violence around them" ("Invisible Wounds" 13).

Save the Children further show the devastating effects of living in fear. Even from their safety zones in the refugee camps, sound of a fighter-jet overhead creates fear and anxiety among them. Even the slamming of door by a gust of wind is enough to send them back to the conflict zones fearing a bomb has exploded nearby. A Syrian child, aged 5-7, who has lost his father cannot stand the sound of aircraft, "I hate the aeroplane, because it killed my Dad" (7). A social worker from southern Syria reports that the children have difficulty falling asleep and experience "a lot of nightmares" which were not there before the war (7). Another child reveals that he cannot process the horror he has witnessed: "I always feel angry, all the time" (7). A child from Southern Aleppo shows signs of aggression and violence at the world's cold indifference at their plight, "When an aeroplane hits and I see people dying, I get the feeling that I want to take the aeroplane to ground with my own hands" (12). A small girl laments that children are forgetting what they learned from school: "there are people like my brother [aged nine] who are failing and have forgotten everthing they knew. When you ask him what is one times two or one plus one he doesn't know. A lot of children don't know the letters of alphabet, it's all gone" (8).

Depression and anxiety are the most common responses to terror. A child says that he sometimes feels his whole body go numb: "I cannot move my body" and another

shows a different face of anxiety; anger stirs up inside him whenever someone close to him dies: “My chest hurts and I can’t breathe, so I sit alone because I don’t want to scream at anyone or hit anyone” (“Invisible Wounds” 14).

3.7 Iraq Wars in Context

Iraq was never safe from conflicts and its people have a long history of turmoil and suffering: “Conflicts and wars fought on its territory have always been the lot of Iraq. It has had the geographic misfortune of lying across the fault lines of civilizations and empires, and its peoples have suffered the waves of conquerors and battles fought over its lands” (Allawi 17). The population of Iraq is varied although Islam is the religion followed by a vast majority and Arabic is universally spoken and understood. However, the Kurds in the North hold a distinct language and culture and have never merged with the mainstream culture. There is an overwhelming number of Shi’a Muslims in Iraq while Sunnis are an important minority. In such a situation, even a small incident can incite sectarian and extremist clashes. All sides need to be tolerant towards each other and not allow external powers to play with them. The Shi’a-Sunni split in Iraq became significant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Allawi 25) resulting in Iran-Iraq War which also saw a network of international supporters playing significant role in the country’s politics. These included both the United States and the Soviet Union who fell behind Iraq to defeat post-revolutionary Iran. During the war, the civilians were often targeted on grounds of suspicion and deaths in a family were a routine matter. The toll on the population, in general, was huge and the trauma that engulfed them reverberates in fictional writings. In one incident, the Iraqi government forces launched a massive chemical weapons attack on the people of Halabja in which nearly 5000 civilians were gassed to death (Allawi 37). The USA, also titled in favour of Iraq, launched offensive against “Iranian military and civilian targets in the Gulf area” (Allawi 39).

Iraq’s relations with Kurds, numbering around 5 million, were not very stable (Allawi 32). The Kurds occupied mountainous borderlands in the North and North-East with Turkey, Iran, and Syria. During Baathist regime, “nearly one and a half million people were displaced and half the landmass of Kurdistan was depopulated. The savagery of the assaults on innocent civilians was unprecedented. Gas was the weapon of choice. In Bazi Gorge on 29 August, 1998, nearly 3,000 Kurds were gassed to death. All in all, the Anfal led to the death of nearly 200, 000 civilians in a planned,

methodically executed, genocide (Allawi 37-38). During uprisings in 1991 in Iraq, the Kurdish population was forced into exile along the borders of Iran and Turkey where they lived in tent cities without basic life necessities.

In the events that followed the murder of Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq Al- Sadr in Iraq, hundreds and thousands of civilians were crushed to death. Coupled with this, the economic sanctions on Iraq in the aftermath of Kuwait War caused great suffering among people. Falling incomes, soaring prices and collapse of infrastructure due to wars had brought the Iraqi population to their knees. Iraq's plummeting economy destroyed a large number of populations across the country. Allawi writes that eroding economy forced people to take their children out of schools as the result of which "by 2003, nearly half the adult population was illiterate" (128). Imports increased as agriculture suffered and the middle class crumbled. Wars resulted in physical displacement, broken families, physical disability and long-term psychological illnesses.

Successive wars destroyed this powerful and most ancient civilization in the Middle East. The present upheavel started with the US invasion. At around 5:30 am on 20th March 2003, the US forces invaded Iraq without authorization from the UN Security Council. Within hours of the invasion, the US president George W. Bush gave a nationally televised speech from the Oval office announcing that the war has begun: "American and coalition forces are on the early stages of the military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." Fighting a country which was no match to its military prowess, the US army faced no greater military challenge in Iraq. Six weeks later on 1st May 2003, President Bush landed on the deck on USS Abraham Lincoln off the coast of San Diego and declared the end of major battle: "My fellow Americans, major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our Allies have prevailed." As the US celebrated, hundreds of civilians continued to be killed or traumatized but that never made to the president's victory speech because politics took precedence over human life. The British medical journal *Lancet* puts the civilian casualty during the first 14 months of the invasion to around 6 hundred thousand ("Democracy Now"). The Iraqi-American author, Zahra Ali, describes the US operations in Iraq and the consequent war as the "criminal war" because the US led surgical strikes since 2003 have indiscriminately targeted civilian sites and led to grave humanitarian crisis in Iraq ("Democracy Now" 3:35-5:00). Sami Rasouli, an activist from Iraq, thinks the invasion

meant the end of a future for Iraq: "Iraq entered a tunnel in 2003 with no light at the end. From the invasion to occupation to sectarianism then terrorism, ISIS, and we should not forget about the Iranian expansion in Iraq ("Democracy Now" 8:46-9:10).

Ironically, as Bob Woodward reveals in his ground-breaking book *Plan of Attack*, the Bush administration had decided long before 9/11 that it would invade Iraq. 9/11 gave Bush administration the reason for starting a war rhetoric and denouncing Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan as the 'Axis of Evil.' They also used inconclusive data on Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their intention to share them with Al-Qaeda terrorist network to justify the war. The main purpose of war was to remove Saddam from power. However, the deceptive manner in which this war was planned and executed has raised questions, as Woodward tells us: "The story of Bush's decisions leading up to the Iraq War is a chronicle of continual dilemmas, since the president was pursuing two simultaneous policies. He was planning for war, and he was conduction diplomacy aiming to avoid war" (4). He further reveals how in the post-9/11 scenario, the war rhetoric was intensified by the Bush administration and as Afghan was pounded with precision bombing with help from 'friends' from among Afghans which was made possible due to "years of covert contacts" (5), the Bush administration was making plans to hit the new target.

The attacks on Iraqi civilians were immoral because they were planned and engineered even before 9/11 took place (Bonn & Woodward). There was no consideration for safety of human life and no steps were taken to safeguard life and property of civilian population. By creating "moral panic" (Bonn 2010), Bush administration was able to lead the war on Iraq with full support of his allies. A study by two non-profit journalism organizations found that President Bush and his administration made 935 false statements on at least 532 occasions to the effect that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or was trying to produce or obtain them. The study named top officials of Bush administration in the counting including, Vice President Dick Cheney, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and White House press secretaries Ari Fleischer and Scott McClellan (Daniel 2008). The cumulative effect of these false statements was massive as they successfully orchestrated the campaign in favour of the invasion. Bassam Romaya (2012) deconstructs the myths propagated and supported by American administration and media regarding the four key functions of war on Iraq: just war theory,

humanitarian intervention, democratic realism and preventive war doctrine. He exposes how each of the doctrines failed and describes the real cause of war as global capitalism.

The traumatic experiences of the people cannot be easily confined to diagnostic category such as PTSD nor can they be dismissed as matters belonging to individual psyche. These are collective experiences and as such are of significant proportion. As a result of wars, whole generations grow up with physical and psychological disorders. Children are born with defects and there is a rising rate of suicide and depression among the survivors of wars. These complexities integrate into collective memory and their affects will last a long time. Iraq is the story of long, sustained crises and in the aftermath of wars its people have sustained long-term injuries on their bodies and mind. They have lost loved ones, seen children dying, survived in exploded neighbourhoods and looted houses and most significantly internalized terror. Their trauma cannot be simply explained within the neat boundaries of PTSD. It requires foreshadowing of the complex political and moral trajectories and a reassessment on humanitarian than merely political grounds. Afana points out the need to assess the political, cultural and economic factors in formulating and understanding the mental health of survivors in Middle East conflicts. He writes that "events that would be widely perceived as traumatic in countries where there is little violence or oppression may not be perceived as extremely distressing in societies living with daily conflict and political conflict" (30). The civilian population faced different types of traumas since Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Gulf War in 1991 and economic sanctions, Civil Uprising, and US War on Iraq in 2003. The situation deteriorated after 2014 when Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) occupied many important places in Iraq leaving thousands of internally displaced persons without shelter, medical care or education.

3.8 Middle East Literature

Mai Al-Nakib believes that all Arab literature is political because in recent decades "local and global political machinations have reduced the raw materials of existence in the region to rubble" (32). The Arab writers use what is available and the residual politics is inherent in what they produce. Nakib also believes that because of its content, the Arab literature also has a humanizing force against what he calls the "often brutal and alienating conditions of its own production" (32). She contends that like literature everywhere, the emerging Arab literature exposes injustice and invites tolerance and empathy. She does not take into account Arab fiction from all Arab

countries but uses Sinan Antoon's works to emphasize the surreal beauty of the Arab novels.

Roger Allen throws light on the mode of characterization and evocation of imagery in Arab literature especially narrative fiction. He believes that an important aspect of Arabic fiction is the use of economy in character portrayal and in description of events. He suggests that while the emerging writers are using new and creative ways to engage with current themes, they are disconnected from their illustrious literary past. The present literature is a continuation of the glorious Arabic literature. He writes: "If critical schools have been in search of time manipulation, framing, symbol, and the mysterious or striking, do we need to look further than Arabic's largest and most famous collection of tales, allusion wo which is still as powerful as ever as seen in the title of a recent novel by Najib Mahfuz, *Layali alf Layla*?" (481)

Fabio Caiani and Catherine Cobham agree that in Arabic literature there is an engagement with themes of dissent and protest inspired by recent political events. At the same time, the literature provides aesthetic and intellectual entertainment and some serious food for thought. As for the theme of death, he writes that the story help the reader go beyond the idea of death and find some moral lessons in it, and this is indicative of the writers' mastery to draw the readers towards a particular tension between the characters and society. Commenting on the portrayal of characters, he writes that "the characters are embedded in their surroundings, but, at the same time, are struggling in their minds to be detached from them in order to survive or start again" (238). The characters' struggle against despair is reflective of the writers' own struggle against injustices. Their works allowed them to transcend the material and physical realities of their times especially war.

In "Translating Arabic Fiction," Roger Allen explains that literary translation is an act of interpretation, but he is also cognizant of the perceived cultural hegemony and the underlying purposes of translation between two languages. He also underscores that a translator has to develop familiarity with the target culture which is essential for capturing and translating the cultural nuances into language. Allens' article shows the difficulty faced in translating a foreign language especially Arabic but more importantly he points out that translations of Arabic literary texts are rarely evaluated for bool reviews or academic journals. This lack of readership, he believes, can be very frustrating for the translator (166).

Maara Naaman argues that in the field of Arabic literature, there is a "cultural divide" in the way it is perceived in the West and in the Arab world. She believes that some serious effort in needed to address the issue of applicability of critical discourses from the Arab world to the Western discourse practices. She concludes that the US academicians have a responsibility towards their Arab friends to engage with their literary works and critical discourses (448). Mohamed Salah Omri also regrets that Arabic literature does not receive attention in the Western universities; it is "rarely studied by itself or for itself" (731). He contends that the "traffic" between the Western and Arabic literature is bound to issues of "power, value, and hierarchy" (731). Therefore, it is important to find ways so that a dialogue is established between the two instead of a one-way traffic usually from the West towards the Arab world. He believes that through a close reading of the Arabic texts, Arabic literature can be fortified. The translator of Abdel Fattah Kilito explains the tension that possessed Kilito who could write both in English and Arabic. He saw bilingualism as a violence against his native language because it allowed corruption. For him bilingualism is like the battle of sexes in which "attraction is inextricably mixed with the desire for domination both at the personal and the geopolitical levels" (xxxiii).

Talking about Syrian literature, Mohja Kahf enquires tantalizingly: "Is there a Syrian literature?" and answers ruefully: "There is, of course, no such thing as Syrian literature" (225). She concedes that the label Arab literature serves as the umbrella term for literatures written across the Arab world. And goes on to say that "Syria lacks the geographic cohesiveness of Egypt and has been spared the Palestinian and the Lebanese traumas" (226). This insight is remarkable because the present day Syria has a serious engagement with war and trauma. Works have been written to cover the human sentiments and devastation. Perhaps this aggression will finally help create a separate category under Arabic literature as 'Syrian literature.'

On the other hand, Iraqi literature explicitly reference the conflicts of the recent years in Iraq. They cover the destruction and the wars fought without the approval of the people. However, an important question to ask is whether these stories tell the entire story? Hassan Blassim, Iraqi story writer and film maker, has an answer to this: "Is reading one book about Russia, or England, or Nigeria enough to find out about the lives of these societies?" (Ashfeldt 12). All consequent wars in Iraq have left their marks on different aspects of life, including literature. Iraqi writers brought the war to

the pages and infused life through their magical description. Sadek Mohammed writes that Ahmed Sa'dawi's novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad,* captures the reality of violence that engulfed the country after 2003 (36). In the novel, the protagonist collects the body part of the victims of bomb blasts and stitches them together to demand decent burial for those bodies. The novel was awarded International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF award) in 2014. It is recognized for its brilliant capture of Iraq's violent landscape. Bahoora writes that this literary strategy produces in readers "shocking portraits that disrupt a status quo in which the horrors of violence in Iraq have been neutralized and often forgotten" (188). Sinan Antoon's novel, *The Corpse Washer,* carries the same theme of violence and dismemberment. Nightmares and metaphysical experiences give a surreal quality to the novel which is held together by the protagonist. These events help "stage a relationship between embodies and disembodies violence, between the terror of violence inflicted on the physical self and the concurrent psychic processing of the event" (Bahoora 185). A video installation featuring Bilal, whose brother was killed by a US drone strike, titled *Shoot an Iraqi* asked the internet viewers to shoot at him. The video project yielded 65,000 shots and 80,000,0000 hits by participants from 136 countries. The objective, according to Bilal, was to allow people to experience how disconnection and distance can affect our responses. In Bilal's own words, "Only when I watched an interview with an American soldier who was sitting in Colorado, directing these drone planes and dropping bombs on people in Iraq, did I realize that she was completely disconnected psychologically and physically" (Bahoora 187). Bahoora argues that such enactments of the violent events can reveal the structures of power and domination, otherwise concealed from the larger audience.

Miraim cooke writes that Iraqi writers have been writing through wars without pause. And she points out that censorship has damaged the heroic efforts of the Iraqi writers writing in times of chaos and uncertainty. In Iraq, the distribution of most works has been checked both internally and externally throughout different regimes, although now the internet and cyberspace have given the writers an alternate platform to reach across the world (26). She acknowledges that a large part of Iraqi literature is about war. Hassan Blasim's *The Reality and the Record* paints a "bewildering, dark, surreal, and often grotesque depictions of Iraqi life amidst extreme violence" (197). Everything is at the mercy of war. Blassim's seems to be asking if ever the horrors of war can be recorded and communicated? The lines between reality and imagination seem to be

merging exactly where violence begins. The macabre horror created in the novel gestures toward the impossibility of a resolution. Another novel *Closing his Eyes* by Luay Hamza records the lingering effects of violence on the psyche. The novel depicts horrors of war in the most visual detail. The story follows a man's slaughter on the roadside, "just like that, for no reason," whose soul is alive and can see the slaughtered, scattered dead bodies with the heads severed from the bodies while "some heads have gaping eyes, and a thick white film begins to cover them" (Bahoora 201). Such grotesque detail and imagery brings home the suffering of the people. About *The Sirens of Baghdad* (*Les Sirenes de Bagdad*), Michele Levy writes that Khadra denounces war and violence by creating a character who is timid and abhors violence. But he is propelled to join terrorist group after a series of brutal events happen before his very eyes. Despite the turn of events, his innocence is despoiled. He places humanity before and above his prejudices and does not detonate himself as planned. Levy is all praise for the artistic beauty of the novel, "Finally less lyrical and haunting than *Les Hirondelles de Kaboul*, and lacking the dialogic complexity of, say, Dostoevsky's *Demons* (another political portrait lifted from contemporary horrors), *Les Sirenes de Bagdad* remains an intense novel that puts the Western reads on the Iraqi 'street' (65).

The contemporary Iraqi literature deals with the dismal state of the country. Geula Elimelekh takes a look at this tragic reality and the traumas the Iraqi citizens have had to face under Saddam Hussein and later after the US invasion. She contends that the Iraqi writers are not just contemporaneous but also highlight universal issues in their works, "the devastating effects of hatred, division, and lust for power on human societies at large" (254). However, she believes that the Iraqi novel does not expose the grim realities facing modern-day Iraq, but also ask the readers to imaging beauty by dwelling on goodness. These works, in her opinion, keep the beautiful soul of Iraq alive.

Roger Luckhurst's essay "In War Times: Fictionalizing Iraq" explores the relation between cultural representations and contemporary situation. Luckhurst understands that the modernist aesthetics of the impossibility of representing traumatic violence are the outcome of the Holocaust criticism which favours indirection and aporia and that this framework "isn't necessarily helpful when transposed to contemporary event, where the urge to convey the hidden or suppressed consequences of violence in the most literal ways possible can have significant political impetus" (714). Regarding Iraqi fiction, he feels that it has not successfully encompassed the

traumas experienced by the Iraqi population: “It is hard to think of prose fiction about Iraq that has had the cultural impact to rival Norman Mailer’s Why are we in Vietnam? (1967) or Tim O’Brein’s If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home (1975)” (719). However, he pays tribute to Khadra for bringing to life the Iraqi experience of war and terror in his work *The Sirens of Baghdad.*

The above discussion has shown that themes of war and violence have dominated the Middle Eastern literature especially the fiction coming from Iraq and Syria. Death, destruction and traumas have figured heavily in the Arab fiction also. However, as can be seen from the available criticism, there are no serious attempts to understand the scale of damage effected on the human psyche in relation to cultural texts. Most of the available criticism involves very basic, almost superficial analyses of the available cultural texts. There is, also, little critique available on the texts that have been selected for this study. In view of this, the present study becomes very significant as it brings into focus the human suffering viz-a-viz Iraq and Syria. By engaging with trauma, as a psychological and political enquiry, this study also makes an attempt to reinforce, if not introduce, the Middle East and Middle East literature to academic discursive domain.

CHAPTER IV

TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NUMBING IN THE SELECTED FICTION

> In the end, though, war is war, and it wouldn't be over easily or quickly. It carried its stench with it wherever it reached, wafting over everyone, leaving nothing as it had been. It altered souls, thoughts, dreams; it tested everyone's capacity for endurance.
>
> (*Death is Hard Work* 93)

> But war doesn't explain everything.
>
> There's nothing to explain. You kill, and then you die.
>
> (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 9)

4.1 Introduction

Death is the central metaphor in the novels *Death is Hard Work, The Sirens of Baghdad* and *The Corpse Washer*. The novels capture the indifference, despair and changing attitudes towards death influenced by the protracted violence and repeated wars in Iraq and Syria. Death has become a daily affair in these countries but it's not only physical death that the survivors have to contend with, it is the psychological, spiritual death that reveals the true intensity of traumas visited upon them.

If Syria and Iraq are the "Kingdoms of the Dead,' the survivor-victims have become the living-dead because Death is a regular visitor in these countries. In these societies, the living as well as the dead have lost sanctity. With people dying in great numbers every day, someone would be really fortunate to get a decent burial. In *The Corpse Washer*, only the fortunate make it to the corpse washer place. They are the ones whose dead bodies were intact and could be recovered while in most cases the

dead have even lost this privilege. A decent burial is impossible to think of, hence, the title of the Syrian novel *Death is Hard Work*. Life is miserable for Syrians and Iraqis and as these works reveal the dead too have lost sacredness. This dehumanization, in other words, extends beyond the realm of the living: "Death had become hard work. Just as hard as living…." (*Death is Hard Work* 41).

The destruction witnessed by Syrians and Iraqis can leave multiple unseen wounds and unhealed scars. Their trauma is expected to live through generations, as long as these wars and the terror they have invoked remain a part of their cultural memory. For a long time, terror and trauma will lay siege of the survivor-victims who have all kind of hope snatched from them. The list of the affectees is long: women, children, university students and the elderly are included among the sufferers. They have witnessed probably the worst form of terror in the modern history and there is no hope this will end soon. Is it possible for them to be at peace after witnessing gruesome deaths and total destruction of their homes and homelands? Can the children, who in their tender, formative years have everything snatched from them, forgive the world for its indifference and lack of empathy? The protracted wars in both countries have replaced dreams with nightmares.

As war continues to devastate and kill, the civilians, who are in the centre of chaos, struggle to keep their sanity intact and numbing is one of the ways this is achieved. Psychologists like Robert Lifton argue that numbing is an involuntary, instinctive response to external situations of life threatening proportion. However, it can be a conscious response also especially when a victim feels completely overpowered and helpless, as Herman notes: "The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness" (31). The survivor-victims see this method of disengagement as a survival strategy. After having to willingly induce an altered state of consciousness in extremely traumatic situations, they force an altered face of reality upon themselves which is less painful and more bearable. These alterations in the consciousness are not immediately recognizable and can have long-term consequences on the victim's mental well-being. Numbing is therefore both a reaction to a traumatic event and a coping strategy. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1962), Freud is acutely aware of these issues. He reflects:

> No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations - of a galley slave in antiquity, of a peasant during the Thirty Years' War, of a victim of the Holy Inquisition, of a Jew awaiting a pogrom - it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people, to divine the changes which original obtuseness of mind, a gradual stupefying process, the cessation of expectations and cruder or more refined methods of narcotization have produced upon their receptivity to sensations of pleasure and unpleasure. Moreover, in the case of the most extreme possibility of suffering, special mental protective devices are brought into operation. (p. 55-56)

Lifton has argued that prolonged psychic numbing produces apathy and eventually despair in the individuals. Ten years into the conflict, Syrians and Iraqis have managed to cope through repression and by limiting their psychological and emotional investment in the conflict. A relentless exposure to shelling and killing, which has become a norm in present day Syria and Iraq, together with total destruction of community life and health facilities, has far-reaching mental health consequences for civilian population. What was perhaps a coping strategy to deal with the total destruction around them, numbing takes the form of a chronic mental illness. The survivor-victims experience a total loss of connection with life-events and loss of meaning in life. This figurative death is a sign of chronic numbing and is reflective of a complete breakdown of the inner imagery. Lifton observes that, in response to the pervasive death and destruction, survivors undergo a mental transformation which he describes as psychic numbing. The world and culture known to the Syrians and the Iraqis is completely uprooted. In order to survive in the shattered world and face the uncertain future, they require a numbed state of functioning, or a diminished capacity to connect with such experiences. Elaborating upon the state of numbing, Wilson et al. write that psychic numbing is multidimensional and is concerned with emotions, psychoformative cognitive processes, capacity for self-monitoring, capacity to experience affects, cessation in empathic attunement, and loss of capacity for genuine interpersonal relations (123).

4.2 Overview of the Selected Fiction

Death is Hard Work dwells on the characters' mental and emotional states as they embattle multiple traumas in a country ravaged with wars. The story opens in Damascus with the death of Abdel Latif al-Salim, whose final wish is to be buried in

his ancestral village. Little did he know how difficult this would turn out to be, hence the title of the novel – *Death is Hard Work*. What would have a few hours trip during peacetime turns into a projected, life-threatening three-day journey for his three children: Hussain, Bolbol, and Fatima. The siblings soon realize that death like life has lost all sanctity. They find themselves captured, interrogated, and imprisoned despite carrying a decaying dead body with them. As they negotiate through the numerous checkpoints and evade their own death, they come to doubt their decision to honor their father's death wish. At one point in their journey, Hussain, the eldest son, is ready to offer the decaying body to the dogs gathering outside their van:

> It was becoming impossible to believe that their father's body merited such risk and sacrifice, that it should be treated so respectfully, when death reaped hundreds every day throughout the length and breadth of the country. (*Death is Hard Work* 117)

Death and numbing of people's collective consciousness in the thickness of war are the main concerns of the novel. A country blighted by violence and war, Syria has turned into a deathbed where bodies fall every day, and where the "exceptional had become habitual, and tragedies were simply mundane" (Ibid 14). Death is all-pervasive and is no longer a source of anguish. This growing indifference towards death is reflected in the novel as the al-Salim siblings navigate their way through air raids, tank convoys, militia, and road-side snipers: "Death passes by and you can't grasp it. In war, death is blind. It never stops to look at its victims" (107).

The novel opens in a world where death is a norm and is accepted with painful indifference. No longer a source of distress, it has become "an escape much envied by the living" (*Death is Hard Work* 5). However, as the novel reveals, it would be naïve to describe the emotional crises in such a straight forward manner. The Syrian trauma is much more complex given the magnitude and severity of their suffering. When Bolbol tells a taxi driver that his father has died in hospital of old age and expects some sort of sympathy from him, the cold response from the taxi driver shocks him: "The driver laughed and informed him that three of his brothers as well as all of their children had died a month before in an air strike" (7). Bolbol is suddenly faced with the ugly reality that in Syria encounter with death is a common occurrence. His own father, even though he dies a natural death in a hospital, has been an active member of a rebel group and has been a witness to numerous deaths and extreme hardships: "like everyone living

under the siege, he hadn't eaten a full meal in months" (6). He knows that old Syria is fast slipping away. He spends most of his time with the dead, looking after graveyards in the besieged town of S, the rebel's stronghold. He is also charged with looking after a demolished church after Father Walim leaves the town. While there is nothing left to protect, Abdul Latif feels that his duty is "to care for the soul of the place" and "every now and then he would go there and wander around the rubble" (90). This metaphor applies to Syria, which has turned into a huge rubble, as incessant, indiscriminate shelling and bombing brings down, one after the other, all standing structures. Lost under the debris is the "soul of Syria," its culture, traditions and history. There are echoes of this changed Syrian character and landscape in the novel:

> They left the village at dawn. The weak light revealed the extent of the devastation. It seemed as if souls were still moaning under the rubble, shreds of clothing and body parts strewn over the abandoned fields and mixing with the skeletons of their goats and mules. The dogs had scavenged what they could and left the rest for the flies. It was complete and utter ruin. (153)

The pre-war Syria is now only a memory. With more than half of Syria reduced to a rubble, nothing of old times remains. People can only reminiscence how it used to be like before war. At one point in the novel we get a glimpse of the old times when life was normal in Syria, when roads were surrounded with "groves of olives, peaches, and apricots and grapevines," and when the "houses were spacious and welcoming" and "the doors were always left open" (84). This is all gone now.

The complete devastation of all that you know and love is deeply disturbing and can cause long-term neurological and psychological damage (Smith, *SAMS* 27). Unfortunately, the destruction of Syria is complete: the country as well as the people are destroyed completely. The outer and inner realities have come together in a most devastating manner. With both worlds destroyed, the survivor-victim becomes the 'walking dead.' What has life to offer to him now? He becomes disconnected and disenchanted with the world around him and life in general. Syrians who are internally displaced do not have easy access to food and clean, drinking water. They are starved, and their children must starve but they can do nothing except wait endlessly for aid or else succumb to miserable death.

The Sirens of Baghdad brings us face to face with the ugly reality that empathetic understanding is impossible especially when terror and trauma become political. The novel testifies that repeated wars turn the city of Baghdad into a market of terror where humans are first branded and later traded as ammunition. In such putrid atmosphere, it is the power-relations that determine the value of human life. Psychological terror is created and sustained to inflict extreme trauma on the civilian population of the country.

The reverberations of war and terror are soon heard in the isolated town of Iraq where the novel is set. Kafr Karam and its people witness unspeakable acts of violence against their lives, property, and culture. The war affects the entire spectrum of their community life, destroys their family system and brings all activities to a halt. For the people of Kafr Karam, life takes a turn for the worst: "We were poor, common people, but we were at peace. Until the day when our privacy was violated, our taboos broken, our dignity dragged through mud and gore (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 12). The novel's protagonist is a young college student whose studies have been interrupted by the US invasion and who is forced to return to Kafr Karam, his village. A series of events destroy his peace of mind: first, his encounter with brutal killing of a fellow villager and later, bearing witness to his father's humiliation - both at the hands of the US soldiers. Shaken by these encounters, the protagonist traces his transformation from a "docile, courteous boy" to someone filled with an "inextinguishable rage" who can even take innocent lives (134).

Repeated traumas here are shown to have more serious, life-threatening consequences. While the prolonged effects of psychic numbing are visibly present in the characters, they also exhibit an extreme form of mental breakdown. Their failure to cope with serious external threat and trauma takes on another dimension involving self-slaughter or suicide and mass-slaughter. Lifton associates suicide with what he has described as the "*hibakusha* state" which is a state of being benumbed. He wonders if death immersion or identification with the dead is the major cause of this total psychic meltdown and the reason for giving up on life. Lifton argues that a survivor's identity becomes subsumed in the identity of the dead leading to such chaotic thoughts as *it is impure of me to be alive; I had better been dead too* (207). Nevertheless, as can be seen in the novel *Sirens of Baghdad*, traumatic events such as death encounter are not the only causes of total meltdown. Humiliation and guilt can also act as strong catalysts for

traumatic collapse taking away the desire to live. While a majority of the survivor-victims make a "psychic bargain" to live at a "devitalized level" through numbing, some are goaded into action by a deep sense of shame and guilt from which they fail to recover. Lifton writes that "the suicidal attempt can, in fact, represent a desperate effort to emerge from psychic numbing, to overcome inactivation by the act of killing oneself" and that "suicide can be a way of seeking both to master death and to reassert, however magically, *a form of symbolic integrity* and a sense of immortality" (507). In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, humiliation not death-encounter sends the narrator down the path of self-annihilation:

> I heard the foul beast roar deep inside me, and it was clear that sooner or later, whatever happened, I was condemned to wash away this insult in blood, until the rivers and the oceans turned as red as the cut on Bahia's neck, as my mother's eyes, as the fire in my guts, which was already preparing me for the hell I knew was waiting….(102)

A sense of meaninglessness, also common with numbing, weighs heavily on the survivor's consciousness forcing him to throw his life away. According to Frankl "if each and every case of suicide had not been undertaken out of a feeling of meaninglessness, it may well be that an individual's impulse to take his own life would have been overcome had he been aware of some meaning and purpose worth living for" (Arons 131).

Wars have defiled and despoiled Iraq. Khadra tells us that the country has become "disfigured, filthy, at the mercy of its demons" (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 132). The writer offers a contrast when he reminisces about old times before bombs disfigured the country's capital city, Baghdad. Baghdad used to be beautiful "with its great thoroughfares and its posh boulevards, bright with gleaming shop windows and sunny terraces" (132) but is now turned into a "battlefield, a firing range, a gigantic butcher's shop" (148). Protracted wars, killings and large-scale destruction have led the Iraqi civilians to a spiritual collapse. The survivor-victims struggle to live with intense feelings of loss, intensified by a sense of disintegration, isolation, and stasis. There is a breakdown of community structure and human connection at all levels.

In *The Corpse Washer*, the protagonist, Jawad, is the son of corpse washer or *mghassilchi*, whose job is to wash dead bodies before their burial. However, the novella

extends beyond the ritual of corpse washing and describes Jawad's journey through the wars and its horrors. The novella is sequenced around short stories each revolving around Jawad and Iraq. The events in the novel point to a country devastated by unending wars and growing hopelessness. The characters show a lack of purpose and meaning because wars have destroyed everything they loved: their country and families. The novella shows that sectarianism is not the cause of violence in Iraq but invasions and external influence are.

4.3 Analysis of the Selected Fiction

The analysis of the selected works reveals certain themes that further the concept of psychological numbing advanced by Robert J. Lifton in his notable work "Life-in-Death: The Survivors of Hiroshima". The catastrophic nature of the traumatic assault suffered by the survivors cannot be described under a single label, like PTSD, which as a uniquely Western phenomenon fails to take stock of the trauma suffered by the Arabs in Syria and Iraq. Their traumatization is of catastrophic nature, a holocaust, that cannot be contained within the neat boundaries of the Western trauma theory. Because of the protracted exposure to death and devastation, their trauma is now a lingering phenomenon and without proper support, its effects can be far-reaching for the region.

4.3.1 Encounter with the Grotesque

There is not anyone among the Syrian survivors who has not seen or felt death. A young Syrian refugee narrates how war has changed her completely, "What angers me most, is that wherever I went in Syria, I saw the injured. I would see the dead. I would see blood. All the people dearest to me have been killed by this war" (*Refuge* 6:13-6:27). Although the refugees know leaving Syria is the best thing for them under the circumstances, still they feel "dead" and more "scared" than they had ever been (*Refuge* 8:14). The survivors failing to cope with the toxic stress make an attempt at their lives. Surveys conducted by "Save the Children" reveal a rise in such incidences even though such actions remain taboo and are unreported by communities. Sharif, one of the psychosocial worker from Southern Syria, reports:

> The children ask a lot about death, and they want to know the details about death. About five to six months ago, a child who was 12 years old committed suicide. We never had something like this before, even for older people. His dad was killed in a car bomb. They tried to explain to the child that now your

> dad is a martyr and his going to paradise, so the child thought that if he died he would see his dad. He hung himself with a scarf. ("Invisible Wounds" 14)

Most Syrian children welcome death because they think it means an exit from the horrors of their situation. They struggle to get basic food items to sustain them through the day. Struggling with starvation, they often wish they get hit by sniper and go to hospital where at least they will get food, or, they wish "they were dead and they would go to heaven [to] be warm and eat and play" ("Invisible Wounds" 15). Having witnessed great many deaths, they are no longer afraid of death. Their religious and cultural upbringing too play a role in overcoming the fear of death. Every Muslim firmly believes that death is the will of Allah. Time and place of death too are pre-ordained and fixed. This helps in the grieving process, making the unbearable, bearable. At the same time, this concept cuts through the fear of death which is at the heart of multiple psychological disorders. If they are in a state of protracted numbing, how do we explain their renewed passion and energy to help their brethren when bombs fall again? Clearly, their situation calls for a renewed understanding of trauma and coping mechanisms. Mental health experts working with Iraqi and Syrian survivors of war agree that scars of war are deep seated and lasting, but they also acknowledge the resilience of these survivors. Dr. Keane, who has worked as a psychiatrist in both Syria and Iraq, says, "People have experienced war in Iraq since 1991. Multiple experiences of displacement. And people have learnt ways of managing that – not always healthy ways – but they've learnt coping strategies" (Barker 2017). That is not to say that these survivors do not need help. They have been able to survive for eight years in the worst conditions imaginable and are not giving up. There are religious and cultural reasons behind this display of resilience. But the Syrians have been besieged by war and destruction and starvation for too long now, and the frail human body can only take what it can and no more. They need help.

The Syrian setting exacerbates individual trauma into collective, cultural trauma. Kleber et al. point out that "the psychological atmosphere in a society is clearly a factor that facilitates or hinders the process of coping with stressful life events" (2). Without support and recognition from the society or family, which itself is shattered and destroyed and traumatized, the problems of the survivors are intensified. Researches carried out by Kleber et al. on combat veterans reveal intensifying "feelings of detachment and isolation as well as significant problems in the areas of intimacy and

sociability" (3). This is also true of civilian survivors who find themselves at the mercy of a collapsed social world which offers no consolation or therapy for their trauma. It is in a social setting that trauma and its effects are played out hence there exists a strong relationship between the traumatized individual and his immediate environment. In *Death is Hard Work,* the characters' trauma is played out in the backdrop of crumbling social world order. Their estrangement, bitterness and feelings of isolation are directly connected to the external reality. According to Summerfield the "cultural bereavement may turn out to be a key determinant of longer-term psychosocial outcomes for whole societies" (21).

The Al-Latif siblings in the novel take upon themselves to bury their father in his hometown to honor his death wish. The journey from the city to their hometown under normal conditions is not more than three hours but at times like these, it could take days. Even inside the city, they encounter indifference and hostility. Hussain, the eldest, has turned his minibus into an ambulance by installing a faux siren in it but he soon realizes that it's no use whatsoever. No one makes way for him on the busy roads of Damascus even when they hear the ambulances approaching. This is in sharp contrast to the old times, before war destroyed the societal values, when the dead were "respected" and "cars would pull over, passerby would stop; and cast you genuinely sympathetic looks…." (11). This indifference is also seen in the altered attitudes towards martyrs and martyrdom. Sickened by the daily occurrences of mass deaths, people no longer differentiate between the dead. Also, the war has cast doubts on the integrity of all fighting groups. People do not know who to call a martyr and who not to. This has resulted in an indifference towards something as sacred as martyrdom which is accorded great value in Islam. Several verses in the 'Quran,' the holy book of Muslims, glorify martyrdom or shahada, for example: "And do not think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision" (3:170); "And if you are killed in the cause of Allah or die – then forgiveness from Allah and mercy are better than whatever they accumulate [in this world]" (3:169). Muslims accord great honor to martyrs on account of these verses. A special reference in the novel to show growing disregard of the people for their beliefs shows that apathy has set in at the level of the society. Khalifa highlights the uncaring and apathetic attitude of the drivers when trucks loaded with martyrs fall behind them.

The loud call, “make way for the martyrs, make way for the martyrs” falls on deaf ears and “no one cared” (*Death is Hard Work* 12-13).

Carolyn Dean argues that the survivor’s ability to honor their dead gives them a reason to live (*The Moral Witness* 124). In their determination to ensure the dignity of the dead, the survivors find justification for their own existence. In doing so, they find a strategy to deal with their trauma of death. Although the siblings encounter numerous obstacles during their journey, they do not abandon the dead body of their father. Nevertheless, on more than one occasion along their journey, Bolbol and Hussain do consider getting rid of the dead body and leaving it in the middle of nowhere. As despair grips the siblings at the second checkpoint, Hussain suggests that they throw the body on the road and leave before they are also implicated in their father’s ill fate. His total lack of feeling is a sign of complete psychological breakdown. He adds that “the dogs were eating plenty of bodies nowadays, so what difference did it make? Why didn’t they just leave it or bury it anywhere and go back to Damascus?” (*Death is Hard Work* 37). Yet, Bolbol, does not allow this. More than others, he needs to get this done for himself. Having lived most part of his life with unnamed fears, here is an opportunity to finally bury them as well. He needs to get this done despite the risks and challenges it poses to their lives. His life has lost all meaning; in his father’s death and his last wish he sees an opportunity for a new beginning. What he does not know is that with the war waging around them in all its ugliness, he and others will be pulled further into an abyss of despair and despondency. Although there are times when he regrets promising his father to do as he had asked and wishes if he is “transformed into a man with a little less sympathy” like his brother, Hussain (38).

When the siblings reach the second checkpoint, they are asked to turn in the dead body to the authorities since it was long wanted by the Mukhabarat: “The officer explained that according to their records, Bolbol’s father was still alive and still wanted. It didn’t matter if in the meantime he had turned into a cadaver” (*Death is Hard Work* 31). This is not something the siblings could anticipate. That a dead body would cause so much trouble never crossed their minds when they decided to take this trip. As a trope for Syria, the dead body imbricates the psychological with the political. Abdul al-Salim’s corpse represents Syria in that different factions continue to wage their political and military battles even though Syria is a destroyed, albeit dead, state now. The battle lines are not even well defined now, the war being so entrenched and warring factions

too many and everywhere. There seems to be no one in control in this war, and this makes the civilians the largest casualty. The taxi driver who drops Bolbol and his ailing father to hospital in the middle of the night does not want to leave the hospital building and Bolbol doesn't want to ask the reason, afraid of the answer. He was reminded of an earlier occasion when upon asking the same question from another taxi driver, he was rebuffed: "the driver had sneered and described his home in Zamalka in detail, including the fact that it had been bombed and his wife lay dead beneath the rubble. In the end he had asked Bolbol, "So what home do you mean, sir?" (42).

> The corpse had become an object of revulsion without an identity; it wasn't merchandise and it wasn't a person. After death a person becomes a third sort of thing, neither animal nor mineral. (117)

In *The Corpse Washer*, the protagonist's father is a *mghassilchi*, a body-washer. He washes bodies of the dead and prepares them for burial. The protagonist cannot bring himself to wash the dead bodies and even after his father's death, he lets another helper, Hammoudy, do the washing. During wars they receive all sorts of dead bodies, in all sorts of states. The protagonist cannot bring himself to look at the dead but is aware of the reality that the dead have multiplied with the wars. He thought he had distanced himself from the dead and its rituals especially after his father's death but he discovers that that even though he was not dealing directly with death, "death's fingers were crawling everywhere" and that every day there are "more and more corpses" (84).

In the novel *Death is Hard Work*, there are a growing number of instances when death in all its grotesqueness and ugliness confronts the helpless survivors. This encounter is deeply unsettling and has serious mental health consequences for the characters. At both times that Bolbol goes to collect his father's dead body from morgue inside the hospital, he felt sick. More than anything, it is the deplorable condition of the dead bodies in the morgues that he finds unbearable. In the hospital in Z, Bolbol finds the dead bodies piled "on top of one another like lemon crates" and feeling disgusted he gets hold of his father's release papers, signs his name in the hospital's register and "left like he was fleeing hell, almost deranged by fear" (*Death is Hard Work* 61). He is horrified at the sight of the dead bodies that are waiting outside the morgue: "some had lost their lower extremities, others half their heads" (60). He knows he must numb his feelings if he is to survive these encounters. Pushing them back from consciousness can help him cope with the gory reality. Moments later, he is with others and "the five of

them sat in silence, sipping their coffee, surrounding the dead man, and waiting for dawn" (61). Psychiatrists see bereavement as a serious threat to one's mental health and a leading cause of many physical and mental disorders. Keyes et al. conclude that a loved one's death can influence psychiatric disorders especially in case of sudden death of a loved one: "Sudden death of a loved one might therefore have consequences specific to attachment loss as well as those explainable by stress mechanisms" (7). They reveal elevated levels of anxiety and "pervasive associations between unexpected death and other mood and anxiety disorders" (8). Their findings suggest a strong association between an unexpected death and manic disorders.

Nevine receives her son's disfigured and dismembered body in her home and what she has to witness takes away her peace forever:

> Haitham's body didn't have any fingers, and the fate of those severed fingers remained a mystery, though his face and most of his other limbs had been returned. He had been shot in the back of the head before being cut up…. Nevine lifted the shroud from his face and looked into his eyes for the last time, wanting her hatred to reach its fullest extent. (*Death is Hard Work* 148)

The grotesqueness influences a kind of despair as well as repressed anger at their helplessness. Like the rest of the mothers, Nevine also surrenders to her fate not knowing "how to carry on living" without her sons. The revolution means no more to her; everything seems trivial and meaningless: "She'd spent years embroiled in gratuitous conflicts whose triviality she felt only now" (*Death is Hard Work* 94). Bolbol feels inundated by emotions too heavy to carry. Death inspires thoughts that are more grotesque in character: "He often imagined whole communities committing suicide in protest against a life so soiled" (174).

Chronic numbing of unpleasant emotions as well as experiences of loss and terror can result in psychosomatic disorders over a course of time. As the war in Syria spiraled over years without hopes for an end, direct exposure and contact with gruesome reality has had a crippling effect on the Syrian population at large. The somatic manifestations of the underlying psychological problems are manifold. One of them is insomnia. The novel throws light how the Syrians besieged by war and endless trauma, are struggling with sleep depravity. We are told in clear terms that almost everyone in Syria suffers from insomnia: "Everyone suffered from insomnia and interrupted sleep

these days, from panic attacks and nervous breakdowns; everyone spent entire nights discussing sleep aids…." (*Death is Hard Work* 38).

In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, after the protagonist witnesses death of his fellow villager, Sulayman, who is mentally unsound, he experiences unexplained body aches and tiredness: "I felt stricken by an incredible weariness; I could hear only my breath, emptying me, and in my temples the pulsing of my blood, its rhythm matching he lingering echoes of the detonations" (59).

Kafr Karam is a quiet town which has not advanced with the rest of the country. Here people still cling to old traditions and customs. Respect and love for fellow villagers grows deeper in their veins. Sulayman is the blacksmith's eldest son and is mentally retarded. Whenever he is overcome with a fit, he would run off in one direction without looking back with his father scampering after him. Soon the whole village finds a way to come to his father's aid as they realize that these "headlong dashes" are bad for his heart: "the villagers organized a sort of rapid-response system designed to intercept him as soon as the alarm was given" (29). The US invasion leads to a breakdown of community bonding: "if relations in the village were turning ugly, it was because of the news coming out of Fallujah, Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra" (45). Differences on national issues erupt and divide the peaceful people of Kafr Karam along political lines. The first trauma experienced at collective, community level as well on a personal level by the protagonist is the murder of Sulayman by the US soldiers. At a checkpoint, the protagonist, Sulayman and Sulayman's father are manhandled and shouted at by the soldiers who appear to feel threatened by them. Disturbed by the hostility of the soldiers, Sulayman takes off "like an arrow, running so fast that the GIs were flabbergasted." Despite the father's pleading with them that his son is mentally unsound, the GIs open fire at him:

> The first gunshots shook me from head to my feet, like a surge of electric current. And then came the deluge….Every bullet that struck the fugitive pierced me through and through. An intense tingling sensation consumed my legs, rose, and convulsed my stomach….Sulayman's head exploded like a melon; his unbridled run stopped all at once." (57)

After this encounter with grotesque death, the protagonist experiences a psychological breakdown and his first response to this terror is numbing: "My body had lost its power

to react" (58). As time passes, this grief grows into symptoms of more serious nature: "I wanted to be left alone. From time to time, a sob shook me, but I did everything I could to contain it" (59) and "I didn't completely grasp what was happening. I was inside a sort of evanescent bubble, sometimes suspended in a void, sometimes fraying apart like a cloud of smoke" (60). As Lifton points out, psychic numbing stops the symbolizing or formative process. The survivor-victim finds himself incapable of functioning well just as the protagonist here fails to make sense of anything after the traumatic experience. Nightmares haunt him during sleep: "Memories of the awful scene tormented me without letup. As soon as I fell asleep, the black GI's screams would assail me" (69). He is assailed by death-guilt; his fundamental inner question is: "Why have I survived?" This feeling reflects the psychic death experienced by the survivor-victim. The protagonist after the deathly encounter is haunted by images that can't be erased from his memory. He feels "trapped in the trauma" (Lifton "From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 18) and is forced to relive the horror in his dreams: "I dreamed of Sulayman running, his stiff spine, his dangling arms, his body leaning sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other. A multitude of minuscule geysers spurted from his back. At the moment when his head exploded, I woke up screaming (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 70).

While Lifton underscores the issue of death, it has traditionally been omitted from posttraumatic stress" ("From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 12). Survivors' death immersion has direct impact on their attitude towards life and the feeling of guilt they carry after the death encounter: "If you haven't lost your mind yet, that's because you haven't seen very much," a driver tells the protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad* (127). He also tells him that he has nightmares every night because of what he has had to witness. Omar, a fellow villager, decides to quit the army after a rather close encounter with grotesque deaths: "when I saw those mountains of shoes at the site where the panic took place, those kids with blue faces and their eyes half-closed…" (159).

4.3.2 Immersion in Fear

Fear is most often the immediate response to a threatening event. It may be manifested in two dominant states of mind: sudden outbursts or alarm reactions and emotional numbing (Horowitz "Stress-Response Syndromes" 50). In this sense, there is a strong connection between fear and numbing. The symptoms of numbing also vary

including, but not limited to, a clouding of perception, diminished awareness of bodily sensations, and feeling of being dead.

> Bolbol reflected that when the wall of fear around you crumble, there's only a strange emptiness inside. Nothing can fill it but a new type of fear, perhaps. You don't know what to call it, but it's still fear, no different in flavor, really, than the old type. (*Death is Hard Work* 174)

Fear features dominantly in the lives of Syrians. This is reflected in the restricted life the people living inside Syria are forced to live. Death is a constant reality and everyone fears they may be next to go. Bolbol takes extreme steps fearing that his father's involvement with rebel group's may get him into trouble with the state police. He shuts himself inside the house leaving only for work. He severs all connections to keep a low profile and avoid trouble. He even cleanses his home of everything that might raise suspicions, making sure to cancel "all the television channels that regime supporters considered "biased," such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya" and instead to fill his favourites list with "pro-regime channels" (45). This life of fear takes its toll on the mental wellbeing of the people. Bolbol's mental health shows signs of damage as a result of this fear. The effects of this mental terror and trauma are especially pronounced when his father comes back from the rebel village of 'S' to spend his last days with him. He insists on closing all the windows of the house for fear that "the laughter of his father and the doctor would leak out." He is half-paranoid with fear that they would be discovered and killed. He even keeps a huge portrait of President Asad in the house out of fear for his life. When his father arrives at his home, he removes the portrait from the wall and Bolbol is forced to keep it in his bedroom where it weighs heavily on his mind: "This was odd; it was just a picture, after all, but spending night after night in the same room with it caused Bolbol's worst and most terrifying preoccupations to resume" (49).

Fear paralyzes its victim; makes numb the very sentiments that cause it. The terrible pressure can be totally transformative, forcing the survivor-victim into a defeatist attitude. Bolbol, like all Syrians, is convinced that his predicament is not going to change and that he is a failure. His act of holding himself responsible for his predicament is a sign of deep trauma. Judith Herman explains that "trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life" ("Recovery from Psychological Trauma"). Numbing, as a response to trauma suffered, is equally

disabling. It messes with cognitive functioning, slows down information processing mechanism, and destroys self-esteem. The siblings don't face an easy task and at the very outset of their journey they feel incapacitated:

> What did his father's body mean? It was a harsh but justified question that night. All three of them were wondering it, but none had a clear answer….The sounds of missiles and anti-tank bombs were getting closer; Hussein said dispassionately, "They are bombing Homs," before retreating back into his silence. They were hoping for a miracle to come and save them from this desolation, the fear they couldn't put into words, which burrowed into them all the same. (*Death is Hard Work* 51)

Anarchy and chaos are part of Syria. There is no security as even a slight suspicion can lead to abduction or death of an individual. Humanity is dead; the militias target anyone who supports their enemies: "they burned down a family's house when they discovered the son had been arrested at a checkpoint for smuggling medicine into the area of Homs still under siege" (80). On another occasion, they kidnapped a girl who died after being raped continuously for four days. If this was not enough, the family was forced to report that the girl died in a road accident to get her body back. Yet, incidents such as these are received with total indifference by the community. There is no uproar, no display of sentiments anymore. If anything, the pain is directed at the victim rather than the aggressors: "The neighbors stayed silent; deep down, many approved of the punishment her family had received. No one came to mourn with the girl's family after her body was thrown into their living room, wounds still fresh" (81).

Paralyzed with fear, Syrians have become their own enemies. Constant jostling and battling with fear can be very devastating for mental health. Bolbol is very much preoccupied with his fears and often wondered that "he would wake up one day and see his street empty, everyone having run for their lives" (82). Because of these fears he no longer feels capable of trusting anyone and is "deeply lonely." Fear is the new enemy the society is confronted with: "Fear had become the only true opposition; it was now each individual versus their own fear…." (81). The cause of this fear is obvious: death - painful death. Nobody knows what might happen the next moment; all certainty has disappeared from lives. Punishment without any crime is the fate of the people: "Suspicions alone were enough to lead to corpses lining the streets. Suspicions alone were enough to cause someone to disappear without a trace" (82).

Some Syrians respond to terror in a different manner. Rather than succumbing to fear, these people find meaning and happiness in their lives through saving and helping others. They have realized that help may not come from outside as the world powers are too busy destroying what is left of their country. This is the story of the group called *Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently*. The group comprises Syrian refugees from the city of Raqqa, who in concert with men and women living in Syria formed the underground reporting group to tell the world about life under ISIS rule. The group and its members risked their lives to report to the world how innocent civilians were being treated, yet when Raqqa was liberated, it did not mean the end of suffering for the people. Abdalaziz Alhamza, a member of the group, writes that even though the ISIS may have left Raqqa, the city will take a long time to recover: "understand: my people have been living under the worst conditions in the world and under the most brutal group, ISIS." The US and its allies knew that the ISIS uses civilians as human shields, so innocent lives were offered as sacrifices at the altar of power. Civilians of Raqqa lost their lives as ISIS fighters made their way out, "ISIS used civilians as human shields. People reported that as they were fleeing the city during the air strikes, they could hear children, women, and men shouting from under the rubble, but they couldn't do anything to help them" (Remnick 2017). In their acceptance speech, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently draw a poignant but grim comparison: "Let me illustrate the size of our suffering. This beautiful city, New York, has a population of about eight and a half million people. Imagine that more than two million people were forced to flee and the city had no teachers, doctors, postal workers" (cpj.org).

If anyone is successful in bringing down the walls of fear, it is Abdul Latif. His resilience in the face of extreme adversity is exemplary and even earns him the respect of his comrades who call him "ustadh." Instead of succumbing to unknown fears, he boldly chooses the path of adversity and terror, and decides to dedicate the last few years of his life to the struggle against tyranny. He likes to see himself as a "living martyr seeking death at every moment, a man who had truly destroyed the walls of fear by reviving a cherished notion: that of the brave man who couldn't have cared less about that cruelest of all humanity's fear – death" (88). In his case, personal faith interacts with trauma and defeats it. A believer defeats fear and death. A martyr exchanges 'death' for 'life': "And say not of those who are slain in God's cause, "They are dead": nay, they are alive, but you perceive it not" (2:154).

Kroll-Smith and Couch (1993) state that a breakdown of a person's social support system can adversely affect his psychological well-being resulting in what they call "alienation" (83). While Mirowsky and Ross conclude that alienation is one of the most significant causes of psychological distress or trauma (Kroll-Smith & Couch 84). Alienation is also closely linked to feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. An immediate outcome of wars is the shattering of a sense of control. Victims feel powerless to do anything to protect their families and themselves. Their loss of faith in themselves is well exhibited in the death-in-life like state they succumb to. In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, this deepening sense of alienation is clearly visible in the protagonist whose university life is halted because of the US invasion. Everything he looks forward to as a young boy in a university comes crumbling down. War destroys his plans to propose a girl he fancies at the university: "I was just on the point of declaring myself and unveiling to her the prospect of a bright future, when strange fireworks lit up the sky over Baghdad. The sirens echoed in the silence of the night, building started to explode in smoke, and from one day to the next, the most passionate love affair dissolved in tears and blood" (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 19). This and other experiences of war deepen his alienation from his physical world.

The city of Baghdad exacerbates his fears and feelings of alienation. Wherever he goes in Baghdad, his fears accompany him. As this fear grows, it is internalized and becomes a part of his character noticeable to everyone. In a restaurant, he gets paralysed with fear upon being surrounded with strangers. The waiter, with an air of cold indifference, asks him if he has been through a traumatic situation: "I've been holding out this plate to you for a good minute, and you just stare right through me. What's wrong? Have you escaped a raid? Or maybe survived an attack?" (144). The waiter's response clearly indicates how terror and death have become the order of the day in Iraq. The nightmarish existence is relived in the dreams at night. The protagonist dreams of himself as an animal trapped for slaughter in the capital city of Iraq which like a "sieve" leaked everywhere (148).

4.3.3 Psychic Split or Doubling

Lifton argues that as a result of this experience of alienation or, what he calls, radical discontinuity, there is a danger that the self may be dislodged "from its forms" and become vulnerable to "doubling." He states that "severe stress can make contact with some prior vulnerability to dissociation, to splitting, to discontinuity" ("From

Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 12). The protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad* is the victim of 'doubling.' His embittered traumatic self becomes a danger for himself and others. In a dissociative state, where his mind loses its ability to function properly, he finds it easy to commit evil. Additionally, his involvement in killing other people gives him an opportunity to overcome his own death anxiety. In this sense, doubling is a way of adapting to evil and is enabled by overcoming conflicts (21). Emery and Emery explain this phenomenon of traumatic doubling from another perspective. They argue that psychic trauma is the outcome of the conflict between the desire to destroy and desire to surrender which they explain as the "split in the ego." The traumatized state experiences a double identification with the aggressor and the victim, which eventually create feelings of extreme helplessness in the victim (Brett "Psychoanalytic Contributions to a Theory of Traumatic Stress" 64). This simultaneous psychic reenactment of victim and aggressor roles also suggests a breakdown in the synthesizing process. The embittered, conflicted, and vulnerable trauma victim is a danger for himself and others.

The rising number of individual suicide cases as well as mass suicide bombings in Iraq and Syria during wars and even afterwards clearly indicate the extreme nature of their trauma. The novel *The Sirens of Baghdad* reflects this total destructive nature of trauma. The protagonist and his fellow villagers select the path of destruction out of sheer helplessness. Omar, a fellow villager, deserts the Iraqi army after he witnesses too many innocent deaths. He too is the victim of psychic doubling. Before he joins army, he is assailed by thoughts of destruction and wants to inflict the same pain, if not more, on everyone else: "I wanted to turn the country into an inferno from one end to the other. Everything I put in my mouth tasted like blood; every breath I took stank of cremation" (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 159). This aggressive attitude, however, does not last long. An encounter with horrific death replace this aggression with helplessness and withdrawal. The protagonist also alternates between different psychic states, like acute numbing, life-in-death, anger, and dissociation. After taking a destructive course and offering himself up for a suicide mission, he observes calmly that he is no longer the delicate boy from Kafr Karam: "another boy had taken his place," and feels as if he is born again as someone else: "someone hard, cold, implacable" (194-195).

Doubling is a means of adaptation to depression and anxiety arising from extreme situations. In order to feel whole again, the survivor-victim dissolves his

traumatized, shattered former self. Through this he achieves some semblance of order, meaning in his world. Doubling, therefore, becomes an important tool for survival: "If an environment is sufficiently extreme, and one chooses to remain in it, one may be able to do so only by means of doubling" (*The Nazi Doctors* 422). The protagonist in the Iraqi fiction is overwhelmed by the deaths and destruction he has had to witness. His kind, docile self cannot cope with the extreme stressors from his immediate environment. He has no option but to adapt and change. However, this transition from a delicate boy who breaks down at the sight of innocent killing to someone devoid of conscience and empathy, does not take place at a conscious level. His personal traumas and exposure to perpetual terror produce a lingering form of psychic numbing which acts as a catalyst for transformation. The survivor-victim's second self, in this sense, is a reflection of the internalized trauma and guilt. Even though he is aware of the transition, he is incapable of halting or reversing it. After witnessing a murder close at hand, the protagonist recalls with complete indifference how it's changed him: "I'd witnessed the killing of the two officers with the same detachment I observed when I contemplated the victims of terrorist attacks." His original self was a "weakling" that passed out at the sight of blood and lost his head when shots rang out, whereas the transformed self is like an empty vessel, devoid of all emotions (194-195). The officer's appeals for life make no impression on the protagonist and his companions: "I beg you. I've got six kids…." Quite contend to see him writhe in pain, they finally kill him in a cold-blooded fashion: "Sayed slipped a plastic packing bag over the captain's head…." (192). The same boy who, until a few months back, would collapse at the sight of death and killing, is now hardened and emptied of all emotion. Sulayman's murder devastates him: "I felt stricken by an incredible weariness.; I could hear only my breath, emptying me, and in my temples the pulsing of my blood, its rhythm matching the lingering echoes of the detonations" (59). In Baghdad, he undergoes a psychic transition. Every horror he has experienced takes a toll on his psychic and emotional health, causing him to break with his original self that is burdened with guilt and shame. Any reminder of the weak, helpless self must be repulsed, repressed and numbed if he is to carry on. Only when he is asleep, his original self comes back to life beckoning him to his previous self but the sense of forlorn and emptiness which now prevails upon him, is not easily shaken. His dreams also become feeble as his other self becomes assertive; since he left his village, he has wanted to push every memory associated with it out of his mind but the memories resurface in dreams, however, feebly: "My head was stuffed

with indistinct images, fixed on a screen that smelled of burning, and I woke up with the odor of my village in my nose" (207).

The protagonist is not the only one who experiences a transition from his older self. Another villager from Kafr Karam, Hussain, joins a terrorist organization in Baghdad. His transformation is so complete that he feels nothing when innocent people are blown up before his very eyes. Something resembling a lingering paralysis of the mind occurs resulting in the inability to process the experiences of death and destruction. Initially, the protagonist is also fooled by the transformed self of Hussain, who he always finds in an armchair, before the TV screen, laughing loudly: "It was all I heard, day and night, because Hussein never slept" (209). However, Hussain seems aware of the change that has come over him though he can't undo it, "I laugh because…because…well, I don't know exactly why". He even asks the protagonist if he thinks he has gone nuts though he insists that he is not: "I can count on my fingers, and I can tell what's right and wrong." Essentially, it is the diminished ability to tell right from wrong that defines this other, transformed self in the traumatized individuals but they are not aware of this. In case of Hussain, his double self comes into being after having to undergo a terribly, shattering incident. His friend gets fired at when he panics during a suicide mission and his body explodes into pieces right before his eyes. Hussain's original-self experiences extreme trauma and death-immersion: "when the cops fired on him and he exploded, it was as if I disintegrated along with him. He was someone I really liked. He grew up on our patio." However, Hussain finds himself incapable of processing this grief psychologically and emotionally. Sometime later another self emerges out of the ashes of his original self, which is marked by indifference and apathy: "I sincerely mourned him, but then the mourning was over, and now, whenever I picture him stabbing at his explosive belt and cursing, I burst out laughing" (210).

The protagonist is seen sometimes to sway between the two selves. At one place in the novel the weak, soft and more human sides of his previous self-briefly emerge and topple the other, transformed self. After listening to Hussain's story, he is shaken badly and while groping for meaning in the grotesqueness and emptiness that surround him, he tries to re-connect with his true self. It does not come easily; he has to make an effort to recall his life at village: "I tried to retrace my steps, to return to the village; my memories refused to follow me. The images blurred, stopped, and disappeared under a

great brown stain…." (213). The verbal encounter with grotesque death connect him to emotions of empathy that he has thrust away in the deep recesses of his mind. If only for a brief period, his emotions consume him completely. In that moment, he realizes that the path he has chosen only leads to terror and more injustice. He remembers nothing of what he might have encountered, or seen, or heard, in that moment. All he can hear is the hollow, resounding echo of his pent up emotions: "I was lost in Baghdad, my obsession drowned out by the roar of the void, surrounded on all sides by whirling shadows – a grain of sand in a storm" (213). However, in this moment, the protagonist is aware of his loss and understands that something in him has "broken and collapsed." This psychic split is the result of long, protracted exposure to trauma and as can be seen happens when the survivors fail to cope with the trauma.

4.3.4 Survivors' Death-Guilt

Lifton sees anger and resentment as an "integral part of the symbolic death and rebirth process" which could either "enhance mastery" or present a "formidable barrier to mastery" of experience (318). The "static persistence" of these emotions as with numbing result in compromised psychological functions. In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, the protagonist's feeling of hatred towards invading US army stems from his sense of irreparable loss and unresolved anger. His inability to process this anger becomes the reason for his gnawing sense of alienation and detachment from everyone around him: "I don't like crowds and I detest this city" (3). Beirut and its life is abhor-able because of his unprocessed trauma. His psychological stagnation renders him incapable of realizing any life outside his reckoning and experience: "I hate it with all my heart for its gutless, illogical pride, for the way it falls between two stools, sometimes Arab, sometimes Western, depending on the payoffs involved" (2). As rage consumes him, his hostility gives way to cold indifference of others: "I had only one desire. I wanted the whole planet, from the North Pole to the South Pole, to go up in smoke" (Ibid 8). Lifton states that emotions of revenge are more common among the survivors of concentration camp whereas the hibakusha have seemed to attain wisdom by transcending revenge (535). He also contends that revenge may take many forms depending upon the severity of trauma and individual psychological response to it. However, as with numbing, feelings of revenge invite a "profound formative impairment" (536).

The U.S. soldiers show a total disregard for Iraqi culture and their long-standing values when they invade their villages and homes. As members of a society that shows extreme sensitivity towards a cultural outlook that has shaped their lives for centuries, the peoples of Kafr Karam see this violation as an attack on their honor. As a result, when the protagonist's house is invaded and searched he feels threatened and betrayed in his own house: "I didn't have time to reach for the lamp switch. A squad of American soldiers barged into my privacy….Those shouts! Atrocious, demented, devastating. Capable of unraveling you thread by thread and making you a stranger to yourself" (99). This and the humiliation meted out to his family members cause him great distress; he feels incapable of action; a sort of psychic numbing takes hold of him: "I felt faint. My hand search in vain for something to hold on to" (100). Unable to do anything, he witnesses with horror as his father and mother are dragged out of their rooms under-dressed and terrified. Not used to seeing his parents, especially his father, without proper clothes, the protagonist is horrified by what he has to witness. His father, always careful and immaculate before his children, feels as though he has been publicly dishonored: "With his threadbare undershirt hanging loosely from his thin shoulders and his stretched-out drawers fallen nearly to his knees, he was the very image of boundless distress, walking misery, an affront personified in all its absolute boorishness" (101). The invading US soldiers do not understand the cultural mindset of the Iraqi peoples. Seen as the basic unit of society, family is central to Iraqi culture. Within this system, elders especially fathers, are regarded with utmost respect even after they can no longer fend for their family. In a culture like this it can be very distressing to witness the dishonoring of one's parents. In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, the protagonist battles with this shock at the night of the raid. Knowing fully well how important it is for the father and children not to see him naked, the mother tries to shield him: "My mother tried to walk in front of him, to spare us the sight of his nakedness. Her terrified eyes implored us, begging us to turn away" (101). But no amount of begging can undo what happens next. The father's private parts are exposed and the protagonist's world comes to an end. He feels as if he is part of an unending cycle of violence which will destroy not only him but the rest of the world too: "That sight was the edge of the abyss and beyond it….I heard the foul beast roar deep inside me, and it was clear that sooner or later, whatever happened, I was condemned to wash away this insult in blood" (101-102). Cultural norms have a symbolic value for a society and its members, and any injury to those principles can seriously undermine human

connectedness. They give meaning to life. The protagonist cannot overcome his sense of shame and anger when the long-standing traditions of his community are destroyed by war. He describes the pain as a "venom" with which he will destroy everyone because for a Bedouin "honor is no joking matter. An offence must be washed away in blood, which is the sole authorized detergent when it's a question of keeping one's self-respect" (133). Honor cannot be negotiated and in a closed society like Iraq it is part of their psychological makeup.

The immediate response to such traumatic encounters is numbing which renders both physical and psychical actions virtually impossible. Lifton explains this through the equivalent of a soldier who witnesses his fellow-soldier killed - he wants to help him survive and at the same time feels inundated with emotions. Unfortunately, the soldier-victim can do neither: "both physical and psychic actions are virtually impossible. One can neither physically help victims nor resist victimizers; one cannot even psychically afford experiencing equivalent feelings of compassion or rage" (*From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors* 17). The inactivation may have serious psychic consequences as opposed to the capacity for activity. This may result in the victim feeling responsible for what they have not done or felt. This self-condemnation is the prime cause of psychological guilt. Associated with extreme helplessness at the time of trauma, both self-condemnation and psychological guilt are forms of a lingering, perpetual trauma (12). The protagonist's cry is reminiscent of the guilt which he cannot comprehend: "I had been saddled, once and for all, with infamy…. I found myself hating my arms, which seemed grotesque, translucent, ugly, the symbols of my impotence; hating my eyes, which refused to turn away and pleaded for blindness; hating my mother's screams, which discredited me" (102).

The protagonist's internalization of grief and trauma results in self-hatred. However, as Horowitz notes self-blame, disgust, and hatred are common grief reactions which become pathological when an individual is exposed to trauma repeatedly. Freud and Abraham distinguish between normal grief and pathological grief. The former is characterized by feelings of painful dejection, loss of interest in life functions and loss of activities, while the latter is marked by reactions such as panic, self-hatred, narcissistic self-preoccupation and deflated self-esteem (53-54). Consumed by self-hatred and guilt, the protagonist becomes numb to every other sensation. He is 'stuck' in time and in that moment when calamity struck. There is no joy worth living for and

no meaning left in life worth struggling for: “The gates of hell would have seemed less catastrophic!” (102) Whatever he does, he cannot shake off the image of defeat and disgrace he saw on his father’s face. Even the random people at the checkpoints remind him of his father “because they all carried on their faces the unmistakable mark of the defeated” (120). This is a manifestation of the unresolved grief and trauma.

Another incident perpetuates this self-hatred in the protagonist. In a country where direction of life cannot be dictated, the protagonist finds himself in deeper mess than after he leaves Kafr Karam for Baghdad. The destroyed city is the shadow of his lost self: “we were very much alike; we’d lost our souls, and we were ready to destroy others” (134). With bombs exploding almost every hour, the city is an image of total anarchy and chaos. In the absence of law and order, nobody is safe anymore. There are destroyed neighborhoods, and everywhere beggars and thieves, a product of wars and economic sanctions, fill the roads. These survivor-victims are struggling against absolute destruction which cannot be explained neatly under the simple head PTSD. We are told that the city is infested with famished orphans, the “tatterdemalion young werewolves covered with sores, who would stop at nothing” (142). The protagonist describes his own encounter with these kids who have lost everything to war and who are now left to fend for themselves under very harsh conditions. The society has become so disintegrated that nobody seems to care about others, not even orphans who have otherwise a special place in Iraqi Sunni/Shia religion and culture. The protagonist describes these small street kids or orphans as “a pack of cubs” who will attack and even kill for food or money. He describes a kid of ten who follows and then attacks him with a knife before cutting a hole through his bag: “He had disturbing eyes and a treacherous smile playing about his mouth. His long shirt reaches his calves, his trousers were torn, and he was barefoot. His damaged toes, black with dirt, smelled like a dead animal” (142). Can the Western notions of trauma and post-trauma explain this form of total destruction experienced by Iraqi children? They are stressed to their limit and there is no purpose to their life except gross survival. Even the protagonist knows he has nothing to live for. He feels nothing, and knows not what he wants from life. It is as if he is in “another dimension” where he feels “neither anxious nor galvanized” (160).

In his lecture titled, ‘Why Export Mental Health?’ Derek Summerfiled critiques the idea of global mental health and argues against exporting Western mental health concepts and methodologies: “When we globalize mental health, concepts of mental

health, practices, and the ideology behind them, we are globalizing a particular way of being a person, a contemporary Western war of being a person." Human responses to stress and traumatic events are shaped by specific socio-cultural conditions. Ways of living, literacy-level, technology, connectivity, self-worth, nationhood, belief-system, etc. impact the way individuals perceive and respond to threat, injury or loss. Therefore, Summerfield thinks that it is imperative to find and develop a method of analysis that is not one-sided and takes into account various culturally specific expressions of grief.

Caroline Yoder, Director of Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR), maintains that "incomplete mourning" can thwart healing and lead to aggression at the level of community (Schick 1845). Following 9/11, the Bush administration immediately issued a bold black-and-white statement –"Either you are with us or with the terrorists" – leaving no possibility for middle path. The world was to be seen through the lens of good or evil, the American president told the American citizens. Although these political measures taken by the Bush administration were aimed at garnering support for his revenge attacks, there were no real steps taken to address the grief, loss and resentment felt by American public. No measures taken by state to work through their trauma and help them see through the tragedy and process it. Taking advantage of this confusion, the Bush administration started another war in the name of freedom and democracy.

4.3.5 Life-in-Death

Political activist and writer, Elie Wiesel believes that indifference is "an epitome of all evil." He aligns it with death:

> The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.
> The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference.
> The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference.
> And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference. Because of indifference, one dies before one actually dies. To be in the window and watch people being sent to concentration camps or being attacked in the street and do nothing, that's being dead. ("Wikiquote")

The Syrian war has led to a humanitarian crisis on a colossal scale. International aid agency like 'Save the Children' have highlighted that only in 2017, 13.5 million people and 5.8 million children were affected by air raids, while 4.6 million were held prisoners

in areas closed off to aid workers. Hundreds of thousands of people have died, with figures pointing at 470,000 in 2017 alone, although the United Nations officially stopped counting in early 2014. Latest statistics suggest that there are more than 2.5 million Syrian children that are registered as refugees in neighboring countries. Around 900,000 are not getting formal or informal education. United Nation Human Rights Watch (2019) stated that in 2018 alone over 920,000 persons were internally displaced and over 5.6 million were forced to flee to neighboring countries.

"I don't think the human mind is able to understand the suffering we've experienced;" these are the words of a Syrian refugee in Mathew K. Firpo's short documentary, *Refuge* (2016). The words reveal the harrowing life and terror that has become a daily happening in Syria. Another refugee reveals how there is no escape from encountering death and pain, "wherever I went in Syria, I saw the injured and the dead." The documentary *Children of Syria* (2016) claim that some 6.7 million people, which makes up more than a quarter of the global refugee population, have fled Syria. There is an even bigger number of innocent people who are internally displaced, either forced to relocate to new places or living out their time in buildings destroyed by random airstrikes and undifferentiated bombing. Almost everyone inside Syria, and that includes very young children, encounter unannounced, brutal, and grotesque killing, sometimes several times in a day.

The dead now outnumber the living in Syria. The morgues are always full and a large number of dead bodies become food for the animals. Everyone in Syria knows that death is only a few steps away. A long struggle with death anxiety has made them indifferent and benumbed. They no longer fear death, even grotesque death. The general feeling is that death would overtake them "today or tomorrow, or by next month at the latest." They regard everyone not so much as "alive" but as "pre-dead." Khalifa tells us that even though it is not a particularly pleasant notion, "each citizen had to live under the shadow of this understanding" (*Death is Hard Work* 12).

Death is everywhere they turn to: "it was a terrible flood drowning everyone" (ibid 13). To escape from drowning, the civilians benumb themselves against the onslaught. Fear gives way to despair and tragedies like death are no longer received with sympathy. At the second checkpoint, the siblings are shifted to 'goods to declare' lane as if the dead body is a merchandise or a commodity. Later they are asked to produce the identity card of the deceased at which Bolbol starts explaining that the dead

do not belong with the living: “that they slip away from their histories and families in order to affirm their membership in one family alone, the family of the dead….” 17).

As we see in the novel, *Death is Hard Work*, the characters have learned to numb their feelings in the face of extreme terror. These grotesque killings continue without respite and they can only survive through cold indifference. This indifference is a manifestation of extreme helplessness the survivors experience. While they are unable to change their condition, they shut themselves off to reality, to pain. This is a survival tactic. Khaled Khalifa writes in the novel:

> When people died, no one bothered asking after the hows and whys. They already knew the answers all too well: bombings, torture during detention, kidnappings, a sniper’s bullet, a battle. As for dying of grief, for example, or being let down by your body, deaths like that were rare….” (40)

If the siblings thought their troubles deserve more attention, they soon discover that they are wrong. The desensitization is at the level of society. At Lamia’s place, where they stop to spend the night, they find that no one in interested in their story: “The story of their father’s body got no sympathy from them; they had seen too many bodies already. As ever, death was so close to them that they had stopped giving it any particular consideration” (58).

Abdul Latif’s second wife, Nevine, is an epitome of the horror that is visited upon the Syrians and her life-in-death condition captures the chronic nature of their trauma. Having lost her husband and both her sons to the war, she carries the burden of her life with agonizing indifference. Even her marriage with Abdul Latif cannot bring her back to life; she accepts him with a resigned heart: “Men were plentiful everywhere; there was no use getting attached to one” (78). When Abdul Latif falls sick and they know his time is near, she wants him to go back to his sons and refuses to allow him to be buried with her: “Several times he asked her to reconsider and allow him to stay close to her, as he wanted to die in her arms, but she wouldn’t discuss the matter. She wasn’t interested in surviving any more loved ones. She had no intention of being a custodian for any more graves” (78). It is not the fear of death that overwhelms her but, rather, the “abundance of time,” and in this state of mind, death is more endearing than life. As despair closes in upon her, she shuts outs the painful memories so that “everything superfluous would be shed” (78).

Left with nothing but "graves", Nevine's greater problem is "how to carry on living" without her sons (88). She is deeply lonely and broken from inside, and her immediate environment does not help her either. The town is completely destroyed, only a few houses remain. Food supplies are scant; water and electric supply system is totally destroyed. Life is tough and starvation makes it worse: "Everyone wanted to smash their mirrors. It was hard enough looking at other people's faces without feeling miserable, let alone one's own" (89). The survivors fight over "a handful of herbs and a few wild mushrooms" which is all they are left with or survived on soups concocted out of "narcissus bulbs and nameless herbs" (90). Abdul Latif himself rummages through the rubble for anything edible: "rabbit, dog, cat – anything would do" (89). Life, under these circumstances, is a burden and a meaningless existence.

Nevine has stopped 'living' her life. Even her marriage with Abdul Latif does little to change her attitude towards life. There is no longer any joy for her in life; detached and indifferent, she only exists from day to day. Freed even of fear of death, she walks through the town during bombardment like a ghost, not caring about anything, not feeling any emotion and without any trace of life knowing that there is no one left to kill. The living are no better than the dead:

> After losing their compassion, a person becomes little more than another corpse abandoned by the roadside, one that really should be buried. She knew that she was already just such a body, but she still needed to die before she could find peace under the earth. (94)

Like everyone else, everything she had built was destroyed by the war – her family, her house – and "the only thing she could do now was wait to die" (94). Loneliness surrounds her, just as nothing stirs up her interest; before her marriage with Abdul Latif, she used to "wake up alone every morning, unconcerned with the preoccupations shared by the rest of mankind" (94). Keyes et al show that sudden death can be significantly traumatic and enduring: "Unexpected death of a loved one is most frequently cited as the most severe potentially traumatic experience in one's life, even among individuals with a high burden of lifetime stressful experiences. Unexpected death is associated with heightened vulnerability for onset of virtually all commonly occurring psychiatric disorders." The sudden loss of her sons destroys Nevine's peace and makes her vulnerable to depressive episodes and other anxiety disorders. She finds it difficult to connect with life around her and spends her time yearning for her lost sons. DSM-5

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed.) recognizes and labels this condition as "persistent complex bereavement disorder." Psychiatrists understand that it is common for the sufferers to feel extreme longing for a deceased loved one accompanied with self-destructive thoughts. Researchers including Shear et al (2011) point to the persistent nature of bereavement for some individuals which may manifest in other mental disorders. The sufferers will continue to experience intense emotions and display symptoms that disrupt normal functioning. This disabling or life-altering aspect of the disorder poses a serious threat to the mental health of the sufferer who feel "stuck" in the grieving process. This life-in-death condition has serious consequences for the sufferer's physical as well as mental well-being: "A prolonged state of abnormal grief has been associated with elevated rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Cancer, hypertension and cardiac events are more likely after several years, and immune disorders and evidence of immune dysfunction are more frequent" (Fleming).

Carlson et al. have found these symptoms of "diminished cognitive functioning" and "emotional numbing" among victims of post-traumatic stress disorder (Pappas 278). These and other findings suggest that traumatic events disrupt normal memory and cognitive integration leading to a failure to cope with an intense negative environment. As it happens with Nevine, trauma victims suspend connection with the external world, dissociating themselves from life around them, while keeping alive an inner attentional involvement. This numbing response "suggests loss of normal feelings due to the embodiment of trauma" (Pappas 279). Lifton also identifies many levels of disintegration or various forms of the breakdown of order that the trauma victims experience. He believes this disintegration is reflected in the emotional state the trauma victims develop and is characterized by despondency, abstraction and emptiness (86). When conditions are overstretched, the trauma victim experiences symbolic and bodily forms of death. Bolbol cannot reconcile with the loneliness and the horror of his situation and feels "as though his head had been gnawed by the dogs that had attacked them and that he, too, was now just a cadaver" (*Death is Hard Work* 180).

In the novel, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, this indifference grows to another level. As fighting between different sub-groups escalates, there is a deadening of all sorts of compassion. The ugly realities of war become more pronounced with the rise in killing and torture. After years of perpetual death-linked trauma, the survivor-victims experience a severe form of numbing which involves the annihilation of physical as

well as psychic life. The mind tries to dissociate from the traumatic and grotesque death, and becomes "deadened" resulting in the self being "severed from its own history, from its grounding in such psychic forms as compassion for others, communal involvement, and other ultimate values" (Lifton "From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 19). This paralysis of the mind suggests a stasis and disintegration of the symbolizing process. In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, the protagonist experiences this sense of annihilation, of being dead, which assails him completely, "I was finished. Everything was finished – irrevocably, irreversibly" (102). His mind immediately dissociates and deadens his cognitive impulses:

> I don't remember what happened after that. I didn't care. Like a piece of wreckage, I let myself drift wherever the waves took me. There was nothing left to salvage. The soldiers' bellowing didn't reach me anymore. Their weapons, their gung-ho zeal hardly made an impression. They could move heaven and earth, erupt like volcanoes, crack like thunder, I could no longer be touched by that sort of thing. (103)

The humiliation of parents before their children is not a small thing in Iraqi culture. They are not prepared to cope with the distress it causes them, as a result when calamity strikes the protagonist's family, his mind fails to respond as it is trained to do in ordinary situations. His mind refuses to process the sensory input just as all his systems experience a shut down: "I couldn't turn away. I was hypnotized by the spectacle the two of them presented to my eyes. I didn't even see the brutes who surrounded them. I saw only a distraught mother and a painfully thin father in shapeless underwear, his eyes wounded, his arms dangling at his sides, stumbling as the soldiers shoved him along" (103).

Wars have turned the city of Baghdad into a pool of death where "murderous attacks are the order of the day" (148), and its people are shown to have become benumbed by the excessive trauma and terror they have had to witness. The protagonist witnesses death almost daily and realizes how ordinary life has become. There is nothing like normal life there; the people or the survivor-victims experience a life-in-death like situation. Khadra tells us that the sidewalks are filled with "sleepwalking people" who have no idea where to turn (148).

The missile attack on a wedding feast is another event that unsettles the protagonist emotionally and shakes his whole being: “My hands bandaged, my shirt torn, and my pants stained with blood, I left the orchards on foot and walked home like a man stumbling through for” (95). He feels as if the sky has fallen on me and that he would never be able to forget the appalling scenes he witnessed there. His mind is unable to reconcile with external reality, and this failure leads to a shocking realization – that he is dead too, “A voice knocking at my temples kept repeating that the death stinking up the orchards was contaminating my soul, and that I was dead too” (97). His guilt embroils him in the murder of the innocents. Hurting himself is his way of coping with the terror. He doesn’t know how to process this terror or what name to give it: “People don’t die in bulk between dance steps; no, what had happened at the Haitems’ made no sense” (98).

Just when the protagonist is preparing himself to become a suicide bomber, he realizes that he has lost all sensibility, that his senses have become numb. Days before he is supposed to carry out the plan, he tells his comrades that he feels nothing and nothing disturbs him now. After witnessing a suicide bombing, he realizes that nothing stirs inside him and that he has simply yielded to impulse of the city. He is not repulsed by the repelling act of the suicide bomber who has heaped misery on his own people. He feels nothing, as in his own words: “While the victim’s relatives raised their hands to heaven, howling out their grief, I asked myself if I was capable of inflicting the same suffering on others and registered the fact that the questions didn’t shock me” (179). And later just days before he is supposed to carry out the act, he is more like a dead man walking the earth. No emotions stir up inside him to disturb his peace and no regrets bother him. He is a dead man, “I’m a dead man waiting for a decent burial” (263).

In *The Corpse Washer*, the corpse washer’s almost daily encounter with death leaves him indifferent. The protagonist witnessing his father wash the dead bodies away is shocked at this possible numbness of feelings. While his father moves to his routine chores after washing the dead bodies, the protagonist is stung with terror for a long time after his encounter with death. As he listens to his father’s radio, he feels that the song is coming from a distant world which is not yet submerged in death as his room was for the past few hours. He envies his father for his ability to return to normal life every time he washes a dead body as if nothing has happened, “as if he were merely moving from

one room to another and leaving death behind" (17). The protagonist is haunted by these encounters with death; he doesn't find it as easy to move on as his father does. Death is the haunting metaphor for his meaningless existence. He dies internally when his girl-friend is abducted right before his eyes. He doesn't name the attackers because it doesn't matter. What mattered to him is lost forever now and he couldn't protect her. The death-guilt weighs heavy on him for the rest of his life, "I cry out her name but can't hear my voice," "I am screaming and cursing them but I can't hear myself," "Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep" (2). He believes that death is punishing him for escaping it clutches that day because awake or asleep he is haunted by the images of Reem's death. And if this is not enough, his profession as the corpse washer now has brought him face to face with grotesque deaths but, unlike his father, he doesn't learn to master the terror of the dead. As a corpse washer, he must numb his feelings but Reem's image keeps haunting him. With Reem's death, he gives himself a life-long imprisonment with death as companion, "If death is a postman, then I receive his letter every day. I am the one who opens carefully the bloodied and torn envelopes."

The cessation of education process is a serious psychological threat for the young ones who see no future for themselves. Their hopes for better future are dead; there seems no end to the cycle of violence they are caught in. Without future, without dreams, without hope, the children and the young adults cannot escape despair. Studies reveal that Syrian children have suffered the worst damage in these wars. Around 3 million Syrian children under the age of 6 have been made homeless and forced to live on bombed streets (Brophy 1). Interviews conducted in the affected areas including Allepo, Damascus, Dara'a, Hasakah, Homs and Idlib by "Save the Children" report severe mental distress among children from these areas. The results of the interview reveal the following: the children live in a continuous state of fear which results in them occasionally wetting their bed and suffering from speech related problems; there is an increased tendency to violent and aggressive behaviors; the children are also hired by armed groups; many of them have either lost one or both parents and start working at a very early age to fend for themselves and their siblings; they often turn to drug and alcohol to escape the horrors of their present situation; their mental distress is often translated into other physical health issues ("Invisible Wounds" 10-14).

Without education, these children face a grim future. The statistics suggest that there have been more than 4000 attacks on schools since the outbreak of war ("Invisible Wounds" 8). Air raids and aerial bombings have make it impossible to carry out any type of educational activity. The falling bombs do not differentiate between buildings. Before the war, the literacy rate in Syria was at 95% out of 100% enrolled in schools, but now the figures have shown marked decline becoming the lowest in the world (ibid 9). This means poor prospects for these children when they grow up in the world that awards only the fittest. The huge death toll in Syria has disrupted family life and contributed to high levels of depression and anxiety. Separation from parents and family can be one of the most significant war traumas of all especially for younger children ("Invisible Wounds" 11). Mustafa, an aid worker in Idlib, reports:

> I met four children aged nine, 11, 13, and 16 who left Aleppo after many battles. Their mother was hospitalized in Turkey and they don't know anything about her, and their father passed away. They're living on their own in one of the cams, with no school, stressed and afraid and insecure. They're suffering from many psychological side effects and disorders as a result. ("Invisible Wounds" 11)

Survivors of the Syrian wars recount how Syria has become uninhabitable, lacking the basic amenities for life, "No power, no running water, no safety, and no security" (3:31). The survivor sums up the cruel dilemma of the civilian population, who feel as if they are caught in a cross-fire:

> We suffered at the hands of both the Regime and ISIS. And we couldn't appease either of them. For you to be allowed to stay in a certain territory you would have to pledge your allegiance to them. If you are in ISIS territory, you have to join them. If you're in the Regime's territory, you would have to join them. And be forced to kill your neighbors, your cousins. (3:56-4:11)

4.4 Conclusion

The above discussion shows that it is vital for the victims to have control over both the representation and interpretation of their suffering. By voicing their own subjectivities, they are liberated from the burden of re-living tragedies, or having to be misrepresented and spoken for. Narrativizing is an effective strategy by means of which

those who are misrepresented can redefine their identities and impact a radical rethinking of the held notions.

The characters'/civilians' exposure to grotesque deaths, which is a norm in war-afflicted Syria and Iraq, reveals a deterioration of mental faculties. Prolonged numbing of the negative emotions by the characters, assumed initially as a defense strategy, result in long-term disorders that multiply and worsen as time passes. Almost all of the characters that are discussed have seen death or experienced grotesque death. The texts reveal a strong connection between the characters' mental breakdown and their experience with death. Constant exposure to random deaths or death of their loved ones send them into a state of complete indifference which the characters assume to save themselves from being emotionally invested in the horror they witness around them. Yet, as the analysis reveals, a prolonged state of indifference or numbing can lead to chronic despair which may eventually cause other psychological problems like unexplained fear, anxiety, loss of reality, self-harm, aggression, and psychosomatic disorders.

The discussion in the chapter is indebted to the concept of numbing proposed by Robert J. Lifton (1967) in his ground-breaking monograph "Death-in-Life: Survivors of Hiroshima" in which he describes numbing as a form of resistance against grotesque death. His notion of death-guilt is also used to describe behavior of the characters, but not altogether in the same manner. Themes other than those proposed by Lifton have emerged from the textual analyses. These include unexplained fear, self-harm, aggression and doubling. All themes are examined under the theoretical lens of "numbing" but conclusions arrived at are contextual and offer an understanding of the trauma suffered by survivors of wars in Syria and Iraq.

CHAPTER V

TRAUMA AND THE POLITICS OF TERROR

> The modern world has succeeded in swallowing what is perhaps the hardest thing in the world to swallow, since it is something that in itself, almost in its texture, has a kind of special dignity, something like a particular incapacity to be swallowed: death. (Charles Peguy)

5.1 Introduction

Modern wars are fought for psychological control at the grass-root level. Civilian population is targeted with the aim to instill terror in the hearts of people. Derek Summerfield notes that,

> In current armed conflicts, over 90% of all casualties are civilians, typically from the poorest sectors of society. What predominates is the use of terror to exert social control, if necessary by disrupting the fabric of grassroots social, economic, and cultural relations. The target is often population rather than territory, and psychological warfare is a central element. (17)

The scale of physical and psychological damage in modern wars is grotesquely high. Total annihilation of civilian infrastructure and social life is the main goal in today's technological wars followed by labelling, shaming, and isolation from world community to gain psychological victory. Modern wars are not only won with modern machinery but through 'words' that further escalate chaos and fear in the hearts of targeted population.

Iraq and Syria tell a story of terror. The population of these countries has been incriminated in wars they did not sign up for. The aggressors not only destroyed buildings but also the very 'soul' of the people. Missiles and rockets have pounded the

civilian areas as well as hospitals and schools with the aim to strike terror in the hearts of the innocent civilians. Unfortunately, these acts of terror are carried out by the self-proclaimed 'liberators' who have convinced the world that they were fighting a 'just' war. John Berger writes that these invasions were pre-meditated. Interestingly, Baghdad posed no threat to the invading armies and was taken within five days from the first order for attack, but Baghdad was not the ultimate destination: "Baghdad has fallen….The statues of Saddam Hussein have been overturned. Meanwhile, in the Pentagon at a press conference, Mr. Rumsfeld is suggesting that the next country to be liberated may be Syria" (49). The reverberations of the unjust US policy in the Middle East can be heard in the selected fictional texts.

The Syrian novel, *Death is Hard Work*, takes into account the role of the aggressor/s to completely destroy the spirit of the people through acts of terror. While military aggression is definitely one way to maim a social group, there are other mechanisms through which psychological control is exerted. However, as the novel shows these acts can be psychologically extremely debilitating.

In *The Sirens of Baghdad* there is a realization that Iraq has been part of a greater political game. What meets the eye is only half-truth or no truth at all. The young Iraqis understand that human life is not 'sacred' and that death is just a number. They do not accept the narrative advanced by the Western Allies and see American presence in Iraq as a threat to their security and sovereignty. The dissent is verbalized in the novel at a number of places. The characters see the US invasion as a strategy - a "trick" a "diversion" - for complete control over their resources and freedom (35). The US checkpoints throughout the country act as brutal reminders of their loss of freedom and sovereignty. Their movement is restricted and they are treated as foreigners or second-rate citizens in their own county: "A checkpoint was blocking our route with barriers on both sides of the road-way. Two individuals dressed in bright colors were on the shoulders of the road, holding automatic weapons at the ready" (53). The novel explains the humiliation felt by the innocent Iraqis on their own soil through a meticulous enactment of the checkpoint scene. The aggression of the American soldiers at the checkpoint throws the Iraqis in a state of mental paralysis and fear. By a cruel irony of fate, the invaders have become restorers of order on a foreign land, against the natives who are painted as aggressors. The novel paints this horror and disbelief in evocative imagery:

> Around us, the impenetrable, silent soldiers kept a close eye on our slightest movements…. I was astonished as I looked down the barrels of the weapons pointed at me from all sides, like so many tunnels to hell. They seemed vast and volcanic, ready to bury us in a sea of lava and blood. (56)

The selected novels reveal certain themes that throw light on the destructive strategy adopted by the aggressors to crush the spirit of those who are left alive. The previous chapter discussed the devastating effects of wars and military invasion/occupation on the characters' psyche and concluded that the characters suffered from symptoms of chronic numbing that are associated with war trauma. Modern wars with technologically advanced machinery produce destruction at a massive scale; land and people both become casualties. It was important to study the effects of these wars on the civilians especially as they became prolonged stretching over years. In this chapter, the debate is grounded in the notion of politics of terror. In continuance of the debate from the previous chapter, the survivors of the massive traumatic injury are here met with further traumatic assault in the form of aggressive, dehumanizing policies of the aggressors. This total destruction of body and soul is no less than a holocaust, a complete devastation.

The different themes arrived at after analysis of selected fiction are discussed below:

5.2 The Muselmann & the Homo Sacer

Large numbers of civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria wars cannot be a simple coincidence. It raises a lot of questions, like: What kind of wars are being fought in Iraq and Syria? How can they be justified against colossal damage to human life and property? What measures have been taken to prevent civilian casualties? Unfortunately, all these questions point to the grave reality that destruction of civilians and civilian infrastructure is part of the greater plan for total control over land as well as the peoples. The target are the resilient people of these countries. Their will is crushed, their souls are taken, they can no longer dream as sovereign people. These appear to be the long-term objectives of the aggressors. With sophisticated machinery and up-to-date war arsenal, the aggressors have an upper hand in these wars. Their military prowess strikes awe and terror in the hearts of the civilian population. The novel brings to light this awe experienced by the people as they watch the slaughter around them: "on one side, extravagantly equipped soldiers, supported by tanks, drones, and helicopters, and on

the other side, a populace left to shift for itself, held hostage by a group of ragged, starving "rebels," armed with filthy rifles and rocket launchers and scampering around in all directions" (76). The sheer might of the aggressors is not hidden from anyone. The people react with all sort of emotions – fear, hate, anger, despair, even indifference – as the cycle of death continues around them. But the greatest loss is the complete state of surrender to the events more like a psychological impasse that forbids any thought beyond the state of abjection they are experiencing. In this sense, they are likened to the *Muselmann* – failed, disfigured and neutralized. In the novel, we find traces of this thought. At one point, a character lament that they have been left alone even by God:

> At night, when I am lying in my bed and I hold my breath, I can't even hear Him breathing. The night, all night, every night, belongs to them. And in the day, when I raise my eyes to heaven to implore Him, I can't see anything except their helicopters – their very own Ababil birds – burying us with their fiery droppings" (78).

This kind of "vegetative" existence is their life now and they are likened to "walking corpses," "mummy-men," "objects," and having "the divine spark dead within them" (Agamben 55). In *Remnants of Auschwitz,* Agamben argues that it is important to know the reasons that made some into lesser human beings – the very lowly of the low: "And we will not understand what Auschwitz is if we do not first understand who or what the *Muselmann* is – if we do not learn to gaze with him upon the Gorgon" (52). The empathetic understanding this statement invites us to undertake must not be specific to the Jewish Holocaust. If we are to understand the true experience, the lived experience of the victims of extreme catastrophes, we need to "learn to gaze with him (them) upon the Gorgon." There is no alternative way. The horror has to be seen in all its ugliness, brazenness and filthiness. How can we then avoid looking at the horror that has struck at the heart of Arab Muslims especially Syrians and Iraqis. They have been the most miserable of the miserable for decades now. Years of non-human existence is enough to leave scars and wound the West will never see until they will want to see it.

When state of affairs degenerate to this level and reality is muddled, a cognitive paralysis occurs. In this state, the mind cannot tell right from wrong. This mental obfuscation is also purposely constructed by throwing multiple conflicting discourses of the same reality at the people. Consequently, the Iraqis are at a loss to discern what's in their favour and what's not. Unable to assess the ongoing events in their true context,

they no longer know whether a given attack is a "feat of the arms" or "a demonstration of cowardice." The same action is both vilified and praised. A climate of tension prevails at all times. Nobody knows when they would become the next target of unannounced military raid. The novel, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, discloses how these sudden, unannounced attacks have become a norm in Iraq. Not only do these events strike terror in the hearts of the local population, they are instrumental in garnering public wrath against the aggressors. A wedding feast is spoiled when a misguided missile lands in their midst. Reeling from the immediate shock from the blast, the mind fails to describe what it has witnessed. When a man is asked to describe what happened, his mental faculties fail him:

> I don't know anything. The guests were having a good time, and then the chairs and tables blew away, like in a windstorm. It was crazy…It was…I can't describe it. Bodies and screams, screams and bodies. If it wasn't' missile, them it must have been lightning from heaven (91).

The wedding site is the scene of horror. The air is filled with pleas and cries and wailing. Those who had miraculously survived the attack are looking for their loved ones, shouting and crying. Volunteers search for any sign of life under collapsed walls and burnt beams. The novel explains that "survivors staggered about, their clothes in rags, holding their hands out in front of them like blind people. Some mutilated, charred bodies were lined up along the edge of a path" (92). These horrors cannot be explained; they can only be felt. The people experiencing this blood bath are affected long-term. Yet, the aggressors refuse to acknowledge the damage and try to hide under such euphemisms as "collateral damage" and "legitimate defence." In most of these attacks, the victims are women and children. In the wedding event too mostly dead are women and children and when a foreign reporter approaches the scene of death, a grieving father shouts at them in anger. His words are like a dagger that cuts through the misleading media propaganda: "Look! Nothing but women and children! This was a wedding reception! Where are the terrorists?....The real terrorists are the bastards who fired the missile at us" (95). While this pain turns some into *Muselmann*, it turns some against themselves. They hate themselves for not being able to do anything despite knowing that there is little they can do. When this anger and hate turn inward, against their own self, it takes extreme form manifested in their desire to throw away their own life. The fear of death is no longer a threat. In his first essay, "Individual and Mass

Behavior in Extreme Situations," published in 1943, Bettelheim argues how concentration camp victims became docile and obedient, an allusion to the psychoanalytic concept of identification with the aggressor, as a form of defense against external threats. This identification is linked to the feeling of guilt among the victims - for not having done more to help those who perished, even if there was nothing they might have done (119). Bettelheim thus links guilt to a will to survive turned against the ego**.**

These people are aware that they are part of an unjust war; unjust because they are not responsible for what is happening. There is a realization among the peoples that no outside help is genuine and real and that they must stand on their own to get their country out of this mess. But what course is left open for them? Abandoned by the world as they are how can they find some light at the end of this dark tunnel? When they go down the path of confrontation, it is because they have no other choice. There is no one listening to them or coming to their aid. Their cries have fallen on deaf ears, so what choice do they have? Their anger and guilt must find a natural outcome in the absence of global empathy and help. It would not be wrong to say that when they take to the extreme course, they are in effect pushed in that direction by wrong decisions and policies. An event such as the above is catastrophic for survivors yet there is no one making an effort to understand them. The uncalled-for attack on the wedding feast and killing of innocent civilians becomes instrumental in shaping their determination to fight terror with terror. We are told that the angry young men vow not to return to village until "the last 'American boy'" is sent back home in a "body bag." A few days later the residents of Kafr Karam find out that the district police superintendent is shot to death in his official car and on the same day, a military vehicle is blown up by a homemade bomb. In the chaos that is prevailing, nobody knows who they are fighting against; all they know is that their only response to terror is terror. That is the reason the "war on terror" has bred more terror. Hegemonic policies had made peace and stability impossible. But this exactly is the goal of the aggressors at least in Syria and Iraq where peaceful people are forced to take violent course, as with the protagonist of *The Sirens of Baghdad* who is transformed from a dreamer to a suicide bomber. He refuses to take up arms after the wedding carnage and indiscriminately attack "everyone and everything in sight" like other young men from Kafr Karam (99).

The desolate landscape painted so vividly in the novel *Death is Hard Work* captures the death-like state to which the population has been reduced to:

> Damaged tanks, burned –out cars, dried bloodstains. The houses by the road were destroyed and abandoned, and other houses in the distance seemed to have been scorched. Very few people and animals moved through the streets of the small semi-abandoned villages; the only visible morning activities were death and exodus. (96)

Terror is used for psychological gain. The civilian population feels betrayed and threatened from all sides. It has become very difficult for them to tell friends from enemies. Trust has become a very rare commodity in such times. This kind of psychological terror can be more damaging because its crippling effects will be transferred down generations. In the novel, *Death is Hard Work*, Syria is likened to the rotten body of a dead animal which is pounded by a pack of hungry wolves. The image of dogs attacking Abdul Latif's decaying corpse in the minibus is a sorry reminder of the politics of terror. As the dogs attack the minibus carrying Abdul Latif's decaying body, the gnawing helplessness and lingering despair at once becomes apparent:

> They opened the door for a few seconds and immediately saw a pack of wild dogs rushing toward them. Howls filled the area, and they slammed the door to escape this almost unreal ferocity. The dogs leaped at the bus, attacking it from all sides. They bared their fangs, utterly enraged, and Bolbol had the feeling they would never leave them in peace again." (138)

Any threat to individual's security is perceived as a betrayal of their family or social community. Bolbol and the siblings experience a total psychical collapse as the bond of trust between them and the social world around them is suspended. The political and the security systems of the country have failed to protect them causing mass-scale deaths and destruction. The survivor-victims feel utterly helpless in their forced encounter with horrific deaths and violence. Ferreira & Marcelina contend that it is possible for individuals to survive in a shattered, collapsed social order, however, the "meaning" of existence is changed: "Commonplace solutions to do with who and what we are and what life might be provided by culture, religious beliefs, patriotic sentiment or close family relationships are overwhelmed" (4). The crumbling social order leads to existential crisis with far reaching consequences for the survivor-victims. As Caruth

points out, the survivors' traumatic encounter with death can change how they see the world, and as violence continues the reality changes in what they perceive as the "counterfeit universe" (Caruth 166). Feeling deceived and abandoned, the survivor-victims experience emptiness and emotional deadness which becomes chronic as time passes.

Such traumatic incidents lay bare the relations of power between the survivors and the aggressors. Total destruction and total extermination has turned Syria into a "territory of death" (*Death is Hard Work* 149). We are told that whole families have fled the town since "the specter of death hovered over every house; university students left their studies, tradesmen and day laborers their work, and young men of every age and profession left their former lives, all to join the Free Army" (150). This state of terror is purposefully created and sustained to ensure that victims remain in mental and spiritual bondage. By killing the life-within, the aggressors aim for total monopoly and control. That is how modern war machinery works. With precision guided missile attacks, the targeted territory is usurped and its inhabitants are forced into psychological and spiritual submission. In such a compromised state of mind, the peoples are unable to see through right and wrong - their faculties being occupied with 'death' alone. In *Death is Hard Work*, the characters enter into a state of submission whereby terror becomes acceptable. The dead body which was carried along with reverence becomes an obstacle, a burden: "They had lost their awe of death, and the body no longer meant anything to them – this morning they could have offered it to that pack of hungry dogs without a second thought" (154). This submission is likened to the attitude of the *Muselmann* who is an embodiment of psychological and spiritual death. The *Muselmann* embody a psychological death before a physical death. Agamben describes him as "a limit figure of special kind, in which not only categories such as dignity and respect but even the very idea of an ethical limit lose their meaning" (*Remnants of Aushwitz* 63). The *Muselmann* is a pathetic figure because of the precarity and uncertainty surrounding his existence. Both his life and death are "without memory and without grief" (Agamben, *The Omnibus* 151). This is the fate of the Syrian survivors of war.

The complete surrender to abjection, exemplified in the category of the *Muselmann*, is most strongly seen in the character of Fatima, the only daughter of Abdel Salim who mostly keeps herself busy by taking care of the decaying corpse in the

minibus she is traveling in with her brothers. She cannot fathom the repulsiveness and the terror of their situation and is struck dumb:

> The maggots were multiplying uncontrollably, it seemed, climbing the windows of the bus and covering the seats. Fatima moved to the front, tried to speak and couldn't. She knew she would never be as she was. She was mute, and that was that. She lost all desire to try speaking again and surrendered to her new world" (*Death is Hard Work* 169).

Unfortunately, like the *Muselmann*, she and others like her don't inspire empathy. Politics, unfortunately, has taken precedence over basic ethics and morals. Abjection and negation influence the very being of the survivor-victims: "Bolbol wished it had been him rather than Fatima; he envied her eternal silence" (177). Lifton associates humiliation with the sense of being victimized and argues that both have strong psychological ramifications. These conditions have resulted in with very low self-esteem, an almost nihilistic attitude which is not going away easily. The last lines of *Death is Hard Work* recall this sense of humiliation as Bolbol walks into the bedroom and slips into his bed; he feels "like a large rat returning to its cold burrow: a superfluous being, easily discarded" (180).

The decayed body of Abdel Salim is unrecognizable after days of traveling on the roads. The siblings can't decide what is worse: the crawling maggots or the foul odor. An utter helplessness and horrid sense of despair overcomes the siblings as their journey draws to an end. They come to see the futility and meaninglessness of their own actions, and feel compelled to leave themselves to the tide knowing very well that they are submitting to the 'tide of death.' However, they encounter something worse than physical death:

> It's hard to admit your emptiness after half a century of delusion, to be reduced to a suppurating mass giving out foul odors, with maggots sliding in and out of your sides…Putrefaction is the real insult to the body, not death" (160).

The "real insult" is not death itself but the denial of basic human right to live with dignity. It is the denial to give equal rights to all humans regardless of their religion, color, or nationality. Through the process of objectification involving naming and shaming, it is the survivor-victims who are bracketed as aggressors.

Agamben's explication of *homo sacer* becomes relevant here. According to Agamben, *homo sacer* refers to "a body that can be killed but not sacrificed" (*The Omnibus* 61). The life of a *homo sacer* is not sacred enough to be offered as sacrifice but it can be taken; he can be killed and it will not be a homicide. The irony is inescapable. Stripped of dignity and protection, the victim of modern war is no better than *homo sacer* and to take Agamben's words: "modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it…." (103). The refugee camps are the new concentration camps where men, women and children live under inhuman conditions. These camps have turned into "the laboratories in the experiment of total domination" (Agamben, *The Omnibus* 99). The killing of civilians and their displacement is justified and legitimized for exercise of total domination. Agamben argues that liberal democracies have become increasingly indistinguishable from totalitarian regimes where sanctity of human life is concerned. The displaced have no rights. In "What is a Camp?" Agamben argues that a camp resident is someone who is "stripped of all legal protection and thereby accorded the status of 'bare life'" (Weber 10). Alienation and estrangement further intensify feelings of degradation and humiliation among refugees. Confined to no man's land, with their citizenship suspended, the refugees are stripped of all legal and political status and protection.

Deaths are so common that there is no longer any fear of dying. Life is a burden in times like that and death often times looks appealing. The case of Nevine in *Death is Hard Work*, who loses two young sons to war makes a strong statement in this regard. She exhibits a complete detachment from her surroundings. She simply stops living her life and exists in a life-in-death condition. Even death has become political: the enemy decides when somebody is to die and nobody believes chance plays a role anymore. Much worse than death of the body is the death of the soul and the aggressors take the soul before the body. Nevine experiences this kind of death when her sons die; she knows her emotions are dead: "After losing their compassion, a person becomes little more than another corpse abandoned by the roadside, one that should really be buried. She knew that she was already just such a body…." (94).

These survivors are even excluded from public consciousness so as not to pose any threat to the collective conscience of the Western world. In the novel, *Death is Hard Work*, the protagonist, Bolbol's acute sense of despair reveals how this politics of terror is played out in the lives of these survivor-victims. He tells himself: "The regime

allowed him to eat and drink whatever he wanted, to spend his free time watching old Egyptian cinema. That little was enough for him; what would be gained by freedom? He had lost all his dreams, and it was difficult to break his cocoon and re-form himself" (*Death is Hard Work* 156). They experience death before their biological death having been reduced to "a collection of walking lumps taking up space, spending their lives striving to negate death" (158). In such compromised and submissive states of mind not even religion comes for their rescue. There is no light, no hope: "It would have taken a powerful faith to stave off the questions that kept him awake at night, not a half faith" (159).

The effects of this indifference can be are far reaching. They are looking into an uncertain future and a life without support and hope. Having lost everything, specifically a supportive community life, a great deal of psychical strength and moral courage is required to master the terror inflicted on their souls and minds. Everything around them reminds them of death: the putrid air they breathe, the blood-stained soil they walk upon, even the flashing shooting stars in the night sky are now confused with missiles. The terror of death is inscribed with impunity and without empathy. Every village the Al-Salim siblings pass though during their journey bear marks of destruction and death: "They could smell fresh death and saw clear signs of mass graves. Everyone wanted to forget and make the time pass quickly so this nightmare would be over" (162). Unfortunately, for the Syrians this nightmare will take a long time to cease. They are the victims of an organized yet unending spiral of violence and terror.

RT Documentary has been reporting on Syria since the conflict began. The maker, Maria Finoshina, covers the survivors' stories of horror most of whom are children. In the documentary "Growing up with War: Children of Syria. The tragedy of kids who have never known peace" (2017), she says that eight out ten kids in Syria are in need of aid. As the tragedy continues, she claims, the war has become the new normal but it comes at a great price. One child's account, possibly 8-10 years of age, shows how war has snatched their childhood from them: "I wake up, have a wash and go to work. I work at the mill from 9 am to 9 pm. I've learnt how to grind, how to move boxes, and I learned to drive a car" (14:32-1446). When he was asked about his father, who was killed in war, his reply was very mature: "I love him. We miss him. God rest his soul. He was martyred in a battle" (14:52-15:06). And to the interviewer's comment that he is so young to be fending for his family, the kid's response is heart-warming:

"I'll endure it…what can I do? I have to provide for my family" (15:05-15:16). Finoshina informs the viewers that this kid makes less than $16 in a month for all this time and effort that he puts in. The war has taken everything from them but has not broken their spirit – the child's words show their resilience in the face of so much horror. What is it that makes them going despite enduring and suffering so much pain?

Their stories rarely make it to the international news galore. Unfortunately, their lives are not important enough to push the world community to ask its leaders to stop trading human lives for achieving its ends. The whole region is under fire for years now and human tragedy is colossal in countries like Iraq and Syria. There is no escape from death. It must come to them in one of the two forms - mental or physical. Those who escape physical death by some stroke of luck soon realize how unfortunate they are to have been left behind for they are no better than the living dead. They walk the earth and fend for the needs of the frame, the body, they must carry, but are dead within. Their bodies are alive but their souls are dead. Compared to physical death, this form of death is so much worse and agonizing. Unlike the common belief, in this state the survivor-victim does not find any relief from traumatic stress. Stress, anxiety, depression, agitation, frustration, also betrayal, in short, all emotions, too heavy and toxic to carry, constantly and incessantly plague the victim. The mind keeps the pain alive even at rest, creates monsters and demons, so that life resembles more like what after-death must be like in hell. All of this is easier said and imagined than borne and understood. In order to truly understand the traumatic suffering of the victims from the Middle East's war-torn regions, we need to live their lives. They have lost everything, literally everything, have been internally and externally displaced; their children do not go to schools; they have limited available medical care; they have no means to earn their living and are dependent on aid; most women are widowed and are tending after their children without any support; there are no opportunities for the young ones so they end up joining one fighting group or the other. From the comfort and security of our homes, with full tummies, it is easy to sympathize with their plight and do nothing about it. However, it is our collective responsibility to make sure that this world is home to everyone.

Meira explains what is being exposed to trauma in Syria looks like. She writes: "For those living in Syria during the war, pre-flight trauma exposure includes air bombardments, shooting, shelling, harassment by militia, death of loved ones, and loss

of home." Among civilians who are the main victims of the war, children and women are the most effected. According to an estimate, approximately two-thirds of Syrian children are adversely effected by the ongoing war becoming victims of anxiety and stress them incapable of making sense of their lives or search for happiness and meaning. Meira further informs us that mental anxiety has led these children to an adverse course including symptoms such as "increase in bedwetting, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, suicide attempts, and increasing number of adolescents … turning to drugs or alcohol." Their experiences make it difficult for them to follow a normal life especially when the ground realities have not changed around them. The harrowing stories of children are collected in RT documentaries prepared by Maria Finoshina who has been reporting on Syrian conflict since it began. Her stories reveal a world of terror, a world in which the children cannot dream of safety or education or play. Some have lost a parent, some have lost both, some have crippled parent to take care of. Listening to them it is not difficult to imagine the long term effect of the trauma: "My mum was killed there (points to a destroyed building). Then my dad and sister went to the roof. The attackers threw a bomb in my father's face and he died instantly (0:36-0:39). As Dr. Marcia Brophy points out, most of these children are in a state of "toxic stress" which if left untreated can lead to long-term physical and mental health consequences. She writes,

> For the past six years, children in Syria have been bombed and starved. They have seen their friends and families die before their eyes or buried under the rubble of their homes. They have watched their schools and hospitals destroyed, been denied food, medicine and vital aid, and been torn apart from their families and friends as they flee the fighting. Every year that the war goes on plumbs new, previously unimaginable depths of violence against children, and violations of international law by all sides. (1)

5.3 The Differential Allocation of Grief

The American philosopher and academic, Judith Butler, in her book, *Precarious Life*, critiques the ethnocentricity of Euro-American trauma discourse what she calls the "differential allocation of grievability," which makes some deaths seem more sacred than others: "The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, *What makes for a grievable life?"(20).* Butler criticizes the role of the U.S administration in the wake of

9/11 which led to the public approval for military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. She explains that the word "terrorist" was used to justify military violence and invasion. Talking about the indefinite fate of detainees of Guantanamo Bay, Butler describes their imprisonment as an "indefinite detention." The inmates of Guantanamo Bay were not protected by international law and faced charges without any legal and political protection. The same applies to the people in Iraq and Syria who are vulnerable and their security less contested making them easy victims of violence.

Butler associates vulnerability to global politics and how certain forms of griefs are made more significant than others. She criticizes the hegemonic discourse that places some lives above others: "some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?" (xiv-xv)

In *The Sirens of Baghdad,* the young boys find themselves out of work as the war and embargo progresses. With universities closed and no jobs at hand, they become easy prey for war machinery. They get trapped by different ideological groups fighting the war in their country. They are angry and restless and want to do something for their land. Nobody is happy with the Americans who have invaded their land and turned their lives upside down. The novel voices their anger at numerous places. In one of such debates, Bashir the Falcon, who had once been a highway robber explains to his other brethren how Americans have vested interests in Iraq:

> Why do you think they are here, the Americans?...They're businessmen, we're commodities, and they're ready to trade. Yesterday, it was oil for food. Today, it's Saddam for oil. And what do we get out of all this? (33)

The opening of fire and brutal killing of a "mentally ill" Iraqi kid by the American GIs reveal craters in the grandiose American narrative. The 'glorious cause' for which Iraq was invaded is not too glorious after all. The loss of life of an Iraqi is not to be questioned on a moral, humanistic ground. For the American soldiers the catchall term is "legitimate defense." Something like this happening to an American is differently received and a "murder" like this would be blown fully for sympathy and moral support. But the lives of Iraqis and Syrians are not as significant or vulnerable. As Judith Butler

points out that grief and vulnerability are differentially allocated which determines why some deaths are acceptable and others are not (*Precarious Life* 31). Butler is alarmed by the selective nature of violence and grief. Some humans have been reduced to specters, unnamed and unmarked. Their lives are not real and hence of little consequences. While obituaries are drafted for the US and its allies, there are no obituaries for their enemies. Butler informs us how a Palestinian citizen's story about "two Palestinian families who had been killed by Israeli troops" was not published by the *San Francisco Chronicle* (35). She wonders how grieving can be an offence: "Is it that these deaths are not considered to be real deaths, and that these lives are not grievable, because they are Palestinians, or because they are victims of war" (*Precarious Life* 35). That's exactly how politics of grieving works. Those who decide who are to be mourned and who are not, often belong to the higher echelons of power and it is they who shamelessly put up price on human life:

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death? (xiv-xv)

These issues are concurrent with America's goal of global hegemony and unipolarity. Daniel Lieberfeld recognizes that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime is actually an effort "to enhance U.S. reputational and symbolic power beyond challenge" (3). He sees the U.S. act of aggression as an assertion of its unrivalled power. At the same time, the U.S. made clear that war was inevitable in the interest of national security, thus setting into motion the narrative that the war was justifiable on ethical grounds. In a special report published by the United States Institute of Peace, the panelists discuss the U.S. aggression against a sovereign country on moral principle. Gerald Powers, director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, defends the U.S. war on Iraq insisting that the U.S. is morally bound to act: "The United States, in collaboration with others, has not only a moral right but a grave obligation to defend against mass terrorism and the threat Iraq poses" (1).

The murder of the young imbecile Iraqi in front of his father is clearly unjust: "The search had yielded nothing – no firearms, no big knives, not even a medical kit" (58). But this is not enough to force the American soldiers to relent their action. There

is no question of mourning the loss of an innocent life especially when they are fighting a 'just war.' Even though they realize that made a mistake, they choose not to make a big deal out of it: "Incidents of this kind were commonplace in Iraq. Amid the general confusion, everyone sought his own advantage. To err is human, and fate has broad shoulders" (59). This is because life of these people is cheap; cheaper than their aggressors. It is this kind of attitude that fills people with anger and hate against the aggressors. And without the kind of arsenal their aggressors possess, they are left to extreme measures. Their lives are no more secure and death can knock any one down at any moment. When death is imminent, what they can do is choose how to die.

The anger at the Americans and the West for not understanding them and not treating them as fellow humans runs deep in every survivor's traumatic memory. Kadem, a cousin of the protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, is an artist who is proud of their cultural heritage. He believes that Iraq's history is reflective of its rich cultural heritage:

> If the West could only understand our music, if it could even just listen to us sing, if it could hear out our soul in the voices of Sabah Fakhri and Wadi es-Safi- if it could commune with our world-I think it would renounce its cutting-edge technology, its satellites, and its armies and follow us to the end of our art…." (71)

Unfortunately, the West only understands the world through the binaries it has created and because these binaries protect the moral supremacy of the West, other nations or cultures that the West comes into contact with must be debased and dehumanized.

The fundamental difficulty with the wars in the Middle East is that they are conceived in relation to the artificial creation of differentiation on moral principles. The U.S. did the same in the Vietnam War. A false distinction between South Vietnam and North Vietnam was created on grounds that North Vietnamese were 'outside' communist aggressors trying to destabilize and take over the South. Similarly, after the World War I, Britain reneged on its promises made to the Arab leaders who supported the Allied Forces defeat the Ottomans and divided the region into smaller nations offering them as prize to those it wanted to appease. These territories were defined without taking into account the political, historical or ethnic realities of the peoples of this vast region and merely represented the victors' (the British and the French) vested

interests in the region. As a result, the region, since then, has been rife with ethnic riots and political feuds. In creating a 'homeland' for Jews and effecting forced dislocations of Palestinians from their own lands, Britain once again abetted an artificial distinction. The Palestinians are forcefully evicted from their homelands, whereas, Jews are relocated on their land.

Their war is no longer for survival because that is not in their hands; it is for honor. In Arab culture, the tribal notion of honor is upheld and ruthlessly guarded. In Kafr Karam too life changes after the U.S. missile attack on the wedding feast. It is a matter of honor for their village to avenge this ruthlessness regardless of the price. The protagonist has to put up with "reproachful looks from the elders" and "sardonic smiles from the youngsters" because unlike other young men he is not ready to counter terror with terror. But this doesn't last long. Soon his own private space is assaulted and family honor is violated. One night the GI's force themselves into their house and manhandle every member of the household. All hell breaks loose for the protagonist when his father is beaten up and his phallus is exposed: "And I saw, while my family's honor lay stricken on the floor, I saw what it was forbidden to see, what a worthy, respectable son, an authentic Bedouin, must never see." This sort of emotion and terror is not easily understood by the Westerners who share a different value system. Nevertheless, the action of the U.S. soldiers leave only one course open for the protagonist – to wash away this insult in blood. Unfortunately, such encounters become the reason why innocent people take up arms and become 'terrorists' – if I must use this 'othering' and 'dichotomous' label. When the powerful wage an orchestrated war, it is described as noble. But a reaction from the other side is painted as an act of 'evil.' As Agamben points out, death is a political decision; a choice: "life and death are not properly scientific concepts but rather political concepts, which as such acquire a political meaning precisely only through a decision" (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power & Bare Life* 164). Once defined in biological terms as the cessation of the movement of the heart and lungs, death, like life, is a political concept, and a manifestation of political and sovereign power. Hence, the U.S. describes its deaths as unjust and invasion of its own territory as an 'act of evil' while deaths on the other side are either 'collateral damage' or simply just. During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Western allies tried to push the human devastation in the background. Yamada et al. reveal how the Western media backed the unjust invasion of Iraq by Western allies and lent support to their

narrative. They write: "Thus, CNN "describe[d] the exploding soldiers in their bunkers as 'softening up'; it describe[d] slaughtered Iraqi units as being 'degraded.'" Also, civilian casualties were not reported mostly (Yamada et.al 406). During siege of Basra in April 2003, civilian deaths were not reported as human tragedy; they were either the "terrorists" or "collateral damage" (Spencer 2008). In the name of liberation, the American forces have violated and abused human rights in Iraq with flagrant impunity. Media censure has made sure that the organized project of human destruction undertaken by the US military in both Iraq and Syria is kept from the world at large.

Yamada et al. argue that the war's morality was not questioned during or immediately after the war. The same happened during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. American and British reporters made sure that on-ground devastation and war-carnage were not 'spilled out.' Yamada et al. point out that the journalists even adopted the jargon of the military in their reports: "Thus, CNN "describe[d] the exploding soldiers in their bunkers as 'softening up'; it describe[d] slaughtered Iraqi units as being 'degraded.'" Civilian casualties figured little in their reportage" (406). Killings of civilians and children during siege of Basra in April 2003 siege was not reported, and when they were they were counted as "terrorists" or "collateral damage" (Spencer 2008). Media control has ensured that harrowing images of civilian massacre are not made public so as not to jeopardize the organized project of human destruction. The fickleness of human life before the great power game becomes all the more apparent and poignant in the destruction of Iraqi people. Talking about the military occupation of the US, Naomi Spencer writes:

> Five years of bloody US occupation have seen numerous crimes against humanity unfold in Iraq. Millions of Iraqi civilians have been killed and wounded, with millions more made into refugees. Ancient, once-vibrant cities have been destroyed by air raids and chemical weapons. Thousands of Iraqis have been imprisoned by the US military in barbaric conditions, and in many cases tortured. In carrying out the occupation, more than 4,400 military personnel—most of them American—have died and tens of thousands have been wounded. ("Military Censorship of the War in Iraq" 2008)

John Berger criticizes traditional Western cultural aesthetics by raising questions about hidden ideologies in visual images in his historic work *Ways of Seeing* (1972). He points

out that there are discourses of authority within textual narrative which tell us what to think, see, and understand. He writes:

> The world has changed. Information is being communicated differently. Misinformation is developing its techniques. On a world scale emigration has become the only means of survival….The visionary political vocabulary of three centuries has been garbaged. In short, the economic and military global tyranny of today has been established. ("Hold Everything Dear" 1)

As he points out, conscience is drowned in the "rubble of words" (ibid 7). The destruction in Syria and Iraq is not hidden from the rich nations of the world but no one has taken notice of the injustice and dehumanization faced by the civilian population of these countries. What Berger has to say for Palestine, is also true for these war ravaged countries. What is happening is the careful and methodical destruction of peoples and their lands followed by "small words and evasive silence" (9). Berger accuses the U.S. and the Western democracies for their hegemonic policies, or more specifically, their "ideological strategy" which undermines every other life. Unfortunately, the nature of this hegemonic power structure is not easily visible: "It's not easy to grasp the nature of the tyranny, for its power structure (ranging from the 200 largest multinational corporations to the Pentagon) is interlocking yet diffuse, dictatorial yet anonymous, ubiquitous yet placeless" (37). And all of this is for gaining unending political dominance and economic power!

The protagonist from Kafr Karam in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, volunteers for a suicide attack on the foreigners who are polluting their land. His choice is as much personal as it is political. Death becomes an opportunity; it can help him get rid of all the pain, guilt and anger that he is keeping inside. Most importantly, he wants to be stop loathing himself for failing to protect his country, his family and his honour. Death offers him freedom from his suffering and also restore his self-worth. In his present state, he likens himself to a beggar who has no dreams, no hopes to live by, waiting for someone to take pity on him (245). He calls the beggar "one of the living dead" and refuses to accept that he is not better off himself. His soul has been murdered; there is no life, no meaning in his life. Numbing has affected his ability to rationalize, to think straight. He can only think of the lost honor and nothing is more important to him than redeeming himself, for his own sake. He tells himself, "I've been waiting! I'm waiting for the moment when I'll recover my self-esteem, without which a man is nothing but

a stain" (246). The self-loathing is the outcome of the trauma he experienced when his house was raided by the American soldiers. His whole life is pivoted around that traumatic encounter; and it becomes agonizingly difficult for him to recover his self-worth in all of this mess: "The night was like a freezing-frame. That was when the earth stopped turning for me" (246). Only that moment is a reality for him; all else is counterfeit.

Yassen, a young man from Kafr Karam, explains why he becomes an insurgent: "if we don't go to the fire, the fire will come to us" (171). As Lifton points out anger, guilt and hatred contribute to the numbing of psychological and cognitive processes, these survivors are pulled into the war without their better conscience. The failure of the U.S. soldiers to differentiate between the insurgents and innocent civilians further deepens the gulf of suspicion that exists between them. This is not uncommon in wars; the invading army cannot tell a friend from an enemy during war because suspicions run high. Jonathan schell, the legendary Vietnam war reporter, in his globally acclaimed book *The Military Half* (1968) reveals after his interviews with FAC pilots who targeted Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam, that they had little or no way of differentiating between the Viet Cong guerillas who they were supposed to kill, and the South Vietnamese civilians, whom they were not supposed to bomb. The military word for these unjust killings is 'collateral damage'!

One of the best sources of keeping track of civilian casualties in Iraq is the site Iraq Body Count (IBC) which provides regular/daily updates since the conflict began. IBC is a reminder that nothing has changed in Iraq even though the world has moved on. The post-invasion war in Iraq continues to this day with varying intensity but barely a day goes by without civilian casualties. As armed groups fight for control, civilians become easy targets. They are not only suffering under perpetual war and killing it brings, but also from economic meltdown. Unable to cope with daily pressures, many are resorting to suicide which is reflective of the deep, devastating effects of the conflict. Reporting from *Baghdad Post*, IBC brings to light this grim reality:

> Not a day passes but new cases of suicide are recorded in various Iraqi provinces, in light of the difficult living conditions and high rates of poverty and unemployment, as a result of the failed government policies. (Hamourtziadou et al. 2018)

Confronting the scattered dead bodies after airstrikes is another great challenge for the civilians which takes a massive toll on their nerves. As cities get destroyed, there is no telling how many civilians perish in the process. With the collapse of local systems, there are no organised mechanisms in place for record-keeping and body-count. Most of the bodies do not even get burial and become food for stray animals (*Death is Hard Work*). Take the case of Mosul. When the air and ground launched offensive finally subsided, the city was in a rubble with civilian houses, hospitals, schools and other public buildings completely or partially destroyed. From the West of the city alone, 2,140 civilian remains were removed, and in the old city roughly 1,000 dead bodies lay under the rubble days after the battle. An Iraqi newspaper reported: "The old city on the right side is still replete with the bodies of the families, most of them children and women who were killed as a result of the American bombardment" (Hamourtziadou et al. 2018).

Yamada et al. contend that the US is careful not to commit the same mistakes it committed in Vietnam which were instrumental in turning the American population against the war. They have done this by controlling the media:

> As part of the attempt to 'kick' the Vietnam Syndrome during the first Gulf War, the media were denied access to the battlefield, and the public was largely presented U.S. military videos of 'smart' weapons hitting their targets. Such portrayals by the media fed triumphalism in the United States (Yamada et al. 403).

5.4 War on Terror or War of Terror

Unfortunately, wars have increased the political, religious and sectarian divide. In Iraq and Syria, all communities lived peacefully for decades prior to the wars. The mutual understanding rested not only on tolerance but on respect for others. Wars have changed all this and distrust and suspicions abound as communities and social structures collapse. In the novel, *The Corpse Washer*, the characters reveal how the religious/sectarian crises have deepened since wars. The U.S occupation of Iraq means not just an occupation but destruction of age old traditions. The wars destroyed the infrastructure and the social fabric and lately have turned people against each other. The protagonist's uncle believes that the occupation has created a void which is being filled by sectarian clashes: "Their rhetoric touched people's hearts and they knew how to exploit the political climate" (72). Nevertheless, the characters are hopeful that the

long-standing tradition of tolerance will win in Iraq because the Iraqis by nature are secular, "the history of secularism in Iraq was well known, and that religious parties had no solution to offer, just obscurantism" (72). This rise of the ISIS and other religious groups in Syria and Iraq are just another facet of the war on terror. As a result of the invasions, religious sentiments have grown considerable and different political parties play the sectarian/religious card to woo people in their favor. There is something sinister here than what meets the eye. The invasion and breakup of these countries cannot be simply confused with the high moral plan of the invaders. This is a well-organized and systematically executed destruction of the people – body and soul.

The characters in *The Corpse Washer* are seen debating among themselves if the wars are just. There is a realization among them that what has happened to them cannot be bracketed as 'just'. They understand that the destruction of Iraqi cities and buildings is not a mistake but acts of deliberation on part of the invaders. They destroyed universities and libraries and did not distinguish between public property and the dictator that defied them. The protagonist is surprised to find out that the U.S. bombing has destroyed his department in the university and the library. He is shocked because the Americans were required to protect public institutions by international convention. The protagonist had a different, better opinion of the Western world and saw them as beacons of civilization upholding the staff of democracy and justice. The painful realization is summed up by the maternal uncle of the protagonist who has just returned from Germany. He tells his nephew that the Europeans cannot understand what they are going through because they were "never subject to an embargo which starved them and took them back a hundred years" (68). He tells them that the U.S. played a double game in the region; it supported the dictator and then destroyed him and his country. His disillusionment with the U.S. policies is manifested in his opinions. He says that "the Americans hadn't supported Hitler the way they had Saddam and that they'd helped rebuild Germany after the war with the Marshal Plan" (68). The protagonist cannot fathom the destruction of public place by the U.S. and its allies. He does not hide his disappointment with the great powers who he always looked up to as bastions of democracy and champions of human rights. He is shocked initially because it's difficult to understand how an institution can become a "strategic target" (56). But as an old man sitting beside him proclaims, the American have just replaced Saddam in terror: "The student is gone and the teacher is here. The student is gone and the teacher

is here" (57). And the protagonist is overcome by its wisdom whenever a calamity strikes Iraq: "I found myself repeating it whenever we were slapped silly by an event" (57).

In *The Corpse Washer*, the writer's vivid description reveals how the locals are made to feel insecure and threatened in their own land by foreign occupiers or their "liberators" as the U.S. liked to call themselves. As in *Death is Hard Work*, putting the dead to his grave becomes a tedious affair for the protagonist of *The Corpse Washer*. The protagonist is to take the dead body of his father to Najaf but as the Americans at that time were near Najaf, he can only imagine the difficulties and dangers he would encounter on his way there: "Only a mad person would want to be inside a moving car while bombers and fighter jets were hovering overhead, ready to spit fire at any moving object" (52). On their way they come across a U.S patrolling platoon and a soldier orders them to step out of the car in a commanding tone as if they are criminals, "Get out of the car now." They are searched and humiliated in vain before the soldiers decide to move away, "As we got our car back on the road, Hammoudy said, "Looks like these liberators want to humiliate us" (55).

The local Iraqis soon realize that the terror is inflicted on them may have no name but that it is not easy to escape its crippling effects. The protagonist recalls how his factory is hit by the American bombers in the middle of the night and he lost his friend to the vicious bombing. Blassim's body lay outstretched face down on the burning ground when the protagonist finds him: "I screamed his name as I ran, but he didn't move….I called his name again and put my ear to his chest but could hear only my own breathing and the screams of others….I don't remember how long I stayed there sobbing by his side" (ibid 48). If this wasn't enough, he, the corpse washer, must wash his friend's body and prepare him for burial but the realization that they are part of an unjust war becomes clearer to him: "The southern building was never repaired or rebuilt. The rubble was shoveled into a mound and just left there" (48). That the Americans have no intention of admitting their mistake or make any attempt at rectification, is the sore, gross reality for the Iraqis.

The Corpse Washer paints the horrific reality of wars for the survivor-victims. They are no better than the dead. Like the *Muselman* they are emotionally and psychically dead, unable to reason or feel any emotion. And, they don't call for empathy like the *homo sacer*. These survivor-victims are likened to statues in the novel. The

protagonist finds several white statues on the lawn in a public garden in Baghdad. The park has been the sight of missile attack before the protagonist enters it. He finds several bodies of men, women and children "standing, sitting, or lying on the ground." They remain as they were at the time the missile landed among them. These innocent people had come out in the park in search of comfort which is nowhere now. The human destruction the protagonist has to witness here leaves him devastated and in shock. He tells us that one of those statues shrouded in white in groaning and asking for water, "this is how I was when I died and I cannot move. Please, take me to the water, because I'm suffering" (97). The dead bodies of these innocent people are lying in the same position as when the calamity struck. After the protagonist gives water to the shrouded male statue, he hears another voice asking for water. These people were victims of the chemical attack and they suffered before they embraced death. They died calling for help or water but there was none. The protagonist himself is struggling with repressed emotions. Hate, anger and guilt overcome him from time to time. This is because he lost his girlfriend to this fruitless war. The heavy shelling and chemical missiles can have immediate and long-term effects on the people who are exposed to them. Reem dies of breast cancer which may have been caused by the chemicals used in the shelling. The doctor tells them that cases of breast cancer have quadrupled since the wars due to increased exposure to depleted uranium. This wound has stayed as a scar on the protagonist's memory, as a reminder of the terrible pain he must endure, "The tears kept falling afterward, but deep down inside. I felt they had amassed and settled in my chest and would remind me now and then that they were residing there forever" (93). Such details do not make to the media galore. The aggressors have controlled the outflow of information from Iraq, hence very little got to the mainstream media. And even when it did, it mostly favored them. With regard to wars in Iraq and Syria, media censure has been crucial to the outcomes of the wars and how are they are received by public worldwide. Yamada et al. point out that civilian casualties were not reported by the mainstream media in the West (406). Shelling of civilians and children during April 2003 siege of Basra was not even reported, and when eventually they did, they were counted as "terrorists" or "collateral damage" (Spencer 2008). In the name of liberation, the aggressors have violated and abused human rights in Iraq. Media censure has ensured that harrowing images of civilian massacre are not made public.

Military occupation of Iraq has resulted in lots of bloodshed and destruction of infrastructure and buildings. Naomi Spencer writes:

> Five years of bloody US occupation have seen numerous crimes against humanity unfold in Iraq. Millions of Iraqi civilians have been killed and wounded, with millions more made into refugees. Ancient, once-vibrant cities have been destroyed by air raids and chemical weapons. (Military Censorship of the War in Iraq 2008)

Fisk highlights the conditions of the hospitals at the time of invasion and the suffering of the general population because of it. As the Americans pounded the public places with their guided missiles and cluster bombs, hundreds of Iraqis were killed and wounded. The wounded unfortunately had no place to go to. For them life became a living hell. Some of the hospitals were hit too; others couldn't function because the Americans targeted the electricity system early on the invasion. Dr. Baeri, director and chief surgeon at Adnan Khairallah Martyr Hospital, told Fisk that there was only one generator for the hospital and half the operation theatres were out of use. He treated more than a hundred injured in a day. Fisk's reportage confirms the deathly legacy of wars which justifies civilian casualties as just "collateral damage." The irony is that the US created a humanitarian tragedy while professing to be their saviors. The indiscriminate US bombing on civilians was pre-meditated; there can be no other explanation for it, because the US used guided missiles and cluster bombs with deliberate show of strength and power. The *Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper* titled "Cluster Munitioins a Forseeable Hazard in Iraq," published in March 2003, not only shows that the US is the producer of high levels of cluster ammunitions, but is also supplying to other groups around the globe. The report also asks the US and allies to stop use of cluster bombs "in attacks on or near populated areas" (7). This was never complied with. In a report by Iraq Body Counts (IBC), 2003, Sloboda and Dardagan reveal the US government's attempt to play down the damage done to Iraqi civilians by cluster bombs. They quote General Richard Myers as saying that there was only one recorded case of "collateral damage" from cluster munitions. Data collected from reliable sources by IBC shows around 372 deaths from cluster bombs during that time, with almost half this number being children. Contrary to US claims of minimum civilian tragedy, the damage was colossal and the literature that gradually emerged brought this truth before the world. Cluster bombs have been used in civilian populated

areas, in Basra, Nassiriya, Najaf, Manaria, and Baghdad. Robert Fisk shows the terror they inflict:

> Terrifying film of women and children later emerged after Reuters and the Associated Press were permitted by the Iraqi authorities to take their cameras into the town. Their pictures – the first by Western news agencies from the Iraqi side of the battlefront – showed babied cut in half and children with amputation wounds, apparently caused by American shellfire and cluster bombs. Much of the videotape was too terrible to show on television and the agencies' Baghdad editors felt able to send only a few minutes of a 21-minute tape that included a father holding out pieces of his baby and screaming "cowards, cowards" into the camera. (Sloboda and Dardagan 2003)

Citing the Mirror's reporter Anton Antonowicz, the authors further reveal that all the 168 patients being treated in Hillah Hospital were victims of shrapnel caused by cluster bombs. The bombs "peppered" their bodies, "blackened" their skins, and "smashed" their heads into pieces. According to Amnesty International, each bomb canister contains 202 small bomblets which are the size of a small soft drink can, and at least 5%, which makes 10 bomblets from each bomb, do not explode on impact turning into a landmine and becoming a threat to the lives of people who may come into contact with them. The danger posed by these cluster bombs is unimaginable and unfortunately a large number of small children and young teenagers get killed by these bomblets. Hamza Hendawi of the Associated Press came across a little girl, barely 8 months old, with lower half of her body blown away by a one of the cluster bomblet her brother had brought home (Ibid). Andrew Buncombe, the *Independent* correspondent reports that more than 1,000 civilians were killed or wounded by the cluster bombs used by the US and Allied Forces, and that only on a single day, 31 March 2003, 33 civilians were killed and 109 injured by the bomblets ("Allied Cluster Bombs Blamed for 1,000 Deaths in Iraq"). A report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) says the US and British forces used nearly 13,000 cluster bombs, mostly in populated areas. The report also says that its researchers found unexploded bomblets littered in the cities of Iraq which they visited between April 29 and June 1.

By controlling the flow of information, the US and the Allies effectively quashed the critical and dissenting voices during the war. Bombings of Arab media Al-Jazeera offices in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Baghdad shows just how seriously the US

wants its writ to be implemented in war zones. Photographers have increasingly been prevented from entering battle zones. James Lee, a photographer embedded with a Marine unit, said that he was not allowed to enter Basra during the offensive in Aril 2003 because the top military brass "did not want any Western eyes down there (Spencer 2008)." The US has played down human suffering and casualties in the war to control public outcry and to sustain the narrative of a just/moral war.

The wars and the bloody U.S occupation have also resulted in destruction of sacred sites and buildings. Some of those sites are sacred both to Shia and Sunni like the Tomb of Hazrat Zainab (RA). In *The Corpse Washer*, there is a mention of the destruction of the Askari shrine by the Americans (107). The protagonist tells of his mother's grief when they hear the news. She starts crying and beating herself in grief and agitation and wishes that she were not alive to witness this sacrilegious act. She is beside herself and fears other sites would follow: "Who can stop them if they want to blow up al-Kazim. God help us!" (108). Robert Bevan writes that destruction of sacred sites serves dual purpose: "The more abstract rationales of retribution and inculcating fear are often coupled with concrete goals of eradication. Here, terror merges with ethnic cleansing and genocide" (73). He believes that destruction of physical, material fabric has the capacity to "demoralize" even in the face of "considerable evidence of 'stiffened resolve'" (66). Within a year of its destruction, the building of WTC was reconstructed because it represented the country's might. Attacks on building and sacred sites are also a means of control and of exerting power, and as Bevan points out rather than an articulate message, this form of aggression delivers a mood of "demoralization" which is its greatest power (62).

Edward Said denounces war on Iraq as aggression by the U.S and its allies. He highlights the duplicitous standards of the West whereby some countries, e.g. Iraq, are deemed fit for attack and occupation while some, like Israel, are not. The fact that Iraq is a Muslim country makes it possible for the Western powers to launch a united offensive against it but more importantly, Said points out, it's the oil reserves in Iraq that were the real reasons for war and occupation. On the other hand, Israel's aggressive policies are ignored like its "invasion and occupation of the West Bank and Golan Heights, its annexation of East Jerusalem, and the implantation of settlements" which are not seen by the U.S and its allies as requiring intervention. Said also deconstructs the label "fundamentalism" that is almost automatically associated with Islam. He

writes that the relationship is deliberately created to ensure that "average reader comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as one and the same thing" (xvi). Hatred against Islam, its rituals and founder, is perpetuated without making any serious effort to define "fundamentalism" or showing 'racism' (a Western phenomenon for Said) is associated with fundamentalism. Said also deconstructs Judith Miller and Samuel Huntington for their prejudice and racism against Islam and Muslims. Both associate Islam and Muslims with terror, despotism and violence and assuming for themselves the role of Mesiah. He is very right in assuming the anti-Islam narrative "eliminates the possibility of any sort of equal dialogue between Islam and the Arabs, and the West or Israel" (xxxv). For any dialogue to happen, the West must change the glass through which it looks at the Islamic world and stop the negative propaganda against Islam and Muslims. When the filter is changed, empathy with the innocent victims of wars will grow naturally.

5.5 Civilians' Response & PTSD

The complex nature of the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by the Syrian and the Iraqi survivor-victims cannot be easily explained through PTSD. Mental health workers working with refugees especially find that the nature of trauma is deep seated and complex (SAMS 2018).

In the novel *Death is Hard Work*, Abdel Latif is a symbol of resilience and strength in the face of terror. His refusal to cow down before indiscriminate killing can be seen in his attempts to continue fighting the fascist policies until his death. Old age and disease cannot upset his passion and resilience. A visit to the rebel town Anabiya would be enough to restore his "confidence and sense of self" and he would feel better (27). For his involvement in what the regime terms as "terrorist" activities (36), he is wanted by the state department. His death changes nothing. When the siblings, carrying his dead body for burial, arrive at a check-post, there is a surprise awaiting them. Their father's dead body is not allowed to pass through because the agents at the check-post declare him a terrorist and a wanted man. The officers at the check-post explain to the siblings that according to their records their father "was still alive and still wanted" and that it didn't matter "if he had in the meantime turned into a cadaver" (31). The siblings are held captive and their bus is taken into custody by the agents. Abdel Latif had been a freedom fighter who stood up for his country instead of cowing down to the brutalities. While in custody a very old woman tells Fatima that she has been arrested three times

before also and was still not afraid: “Bolbol wasn’t surprised at the old woman’s mettle; she reminded him of his father and his fahter’s friends, in whose hearts fear had seemingly died forever” (33). Despite their old age, these people have stood up to claim peace in their country and to oust traitors from their lands. They are not afraid of tanks, shelling or imprisonment and are not ready to forgive the aggressors. The old woman tells Fatima that it will take generations to forget this terror, adding that “a thousand years would pass before this outrage would be forgotten” or forgiven (33).

When Abdel Latif returns home to Bolbol due to his failing health, he still hasn’t given up on his dreams. After a lot of deliberation, Bolbol finds a doctor for him who he believes is not one of the informers. The doctor and Abdel Latif soon become good friends and share their dreams, hopes for a better Syria. “Their eyes would gleam” when Bolbol’s father shares his stories of life inside the siege and they “laughed and spoke vehemently and with great hope of victory” (48). No amount of surmounted terror can shake the resolve of people who have refused to become captives of fear. Abdel Latif is one of them. His old age does not deter him from his mission, neither does brutal siege of his town can shake his resolve. The siege was devastating for the people who were trapped inside but that did not affect their determination which grows stronger as terror increases. Abdel Latif tells how those who remained behind were forced “to cook the leaves off the trees and to eat grass” (49). His hope for victory never dies, not even during the darkest periods of siege. Abdel Latif sees Russia, America, and all the West as their enemy and despises those who tow their line (80). He is also not afraid of imprisonment and whenever he would pass by check-posts guarded by the Mukhbharat, he would spit on the ground “with clear show of defiance” (80). He would not be intimated by these “traitors” as he likes to call them: “these traitors and invaders should all drop dead” (80). The fears that kept Bolbol in captive are not his. Bolbol feels incapacitated with fear; he is “frightened of getting tangled in the same net of hatred and turning into yet another person bent on revenge” (80). Bolbol’s fears are multiple and are inflicted upon him via the terror spread through the entire breadth and width of the country. He cannot think straight. His father, on the other hand, defies terror and takes part in protests and vigils that are called to restore freedom of their country. Even during siege, he does not let fear overcome him. Unable to fight because of his age and failing health, still makes himself for his people. He is reverently called *ustadh* (master) by the freedom fighters: “he seemed different from the other men of his age: younger, more vigorous” (81). Nothing frightens him and he would save the wounded from the

middle of the battle ground "heedless of dying himself" (81). He would not even leave his house of which what remained was a single bedroom and the remnants of a kitchen. He couldn't care much for the aerial bombardment. He is happy with the little he possessed for martyrdom fascinated him: "he liked seeing himself as a living martyr seeking death at every moment" (88). He brave death – "the cruelest of all humanity's fears" (88). He keeps a vial of potion containing poison in his pocket to swallow whenever he is imprisoned. When his health fails him, he still tries to make himself useful. He looks after the graveyard and organizes every detail into a 'register of memory' for those who get burial or who receive burial rites in these times are considered very fortunate. He would include minor details like their names, how they died, their last words, their family names and ID numbers, as well as their physical description.

The doctor, Nizar, is another character who shows resilience and who comes out as a dreamer. He boldly calls himself a revolutionary and refuses to "flee the country" even though he is imprisoned and tortured for three months in custody. The torture does not break his resolve for revenge which gets stronger. Also in the novel, Lamia and her husband are images of defiance and resilience. They too are revolutionaries and proud defendants of their country. Their house is always open for people who are left homeless and who need shelter and food in those trying times. Lamia is a strong-willed woman who relentlessly and passionately defends the country's freedom even if that requires a compromised life on her part.

In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, Dr. Jalal, an Iraqi physician, who has also worked in the West, has now turned against them. He admits that he has been a victim of racism – racism in academia. He deconstructs the Western myths of justice and equality, of human rights and freedom of expression: "If by some chance, the Aryan inner circles feel forced to make some sort of gesture toward their homebred ragheads, they choose to anoint the worst and belittle the best" (10). He is bitter about the duplicitous standard of the West whereby they initially welcome the intellectuals to their soil, and later snub them: "True racism has always been intellectual. Segregation begins as soon as one our books is opened" (10). He believes that peaceful coexistence is no longer possible, that hatred and mistrust has resulted in a divide that is no longer possible to bridge. There are several characters in the novel who are seen blaming the US and the West for the sorry state their country is led to. The bitterness is revealed squarely and without

mincing words. There is a realization among the common people that the Americans have occupied their country for material benefits. Bashir, the Falcon, tells his village people that the Americans have not come to Iraq for charity, rather for them the Iraqis are "commodities" which they are ready to trade: "Instead of crossing oceans to come to the aid of some poor, emasculated ragheads, they'd do better to put their own house in order" (33). Another character, Jabir, known among people as the Doc, tells his people that the US not only has vested interest in the region, but also seek to protect Israel from its enemies, and Iraq being one paid a horrible price. He understands that they create diversions in order to conceal the essential objectives of their invasion. People like him have no fear and they are ready to pass on a portion of their spark to others. In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, we see that these characters stand fearlessly before the aggressors, the invaders of their land. Their resolve is to send the invaders back to their soil. Their struggle is not easy but no amount of terror can break their resolve. Another character, Malik, tells his people to stand up to the invaders rather than waiting passively for God's intervention which he says will never come unless they do something about their condition. He rubbishes the idea that God alone can save them: "We are alone in the world. We can count on no one but ourselves. Heaven will send us no reinforcements, and no miracle's going to rescue us" (78). He calls out to the Americans for profaning their mosques, manhandling their holy men, and preventing them from offering prayers. But his anger only stirs up more anger among the common villagers who are already seething at the unjust and brutal sieges of Falluja and Basra and the raids in other cities by the American soldiers. Yassen, another spirited young man from Kafr Karam, decides to take matters in his own hands as violence and terror runs rampant in Iraq. He rebukes the protagonist for his inaction and passivity and calls him a coward for not trying to avenge his dishonor. He regrets the indifference of his people: "the country's at war, and millions of fools act as if everything's cool" (172). He asks the protagonist if he would rather sit around and wait for "the fire to come" (172). He calls for action; instead of crouching with fear, people like him battle with terror with a show of resilience. Sayed, his fellow fighter, talks about their rich culture and history: "They know nothing of our customs, our dreams, or our prayers. They're particularly ignorant of our heritage and our long memories." (175). He thinks that the only thing Americans are interested in is the "immense pool of petroleum" (175). He understands that the aggressors want to break the will of the people and stop them from

thinking straight. In all the mess and the chaos, Yassen and his fellow young men are able to survive and take steps to free their country of the invaders.

There is another way of looking at mental distress and this one is based on the notion that distressing experiences can have positive outcome. Dr. Renos Papadopoulos, a Jungian psychotherapist, has pointed to the emergence of resilience among refugees even though they have been through some serious existential crises. He argues we must eschew the tendency to oversimplify complex situations and experiences of the refugees: "The very fabric of their being has been shaken by these situations: their identity, their beliefs, their trust. Is that just simply psychological or psychiatric – and mental health? It seems to me that by following the path of identifying them as mental illness, we're actually committing another serious error" (CMAJ e98). He sees PTSD as serving a political function. Used mainly to seek asylum, PTSD has become a convenient label to describe the plight of refugees. This self-imposed denial or refusal to go beyond the already given categories is unhelpful as well as restrictive as it limits the understanding of mental health. This is a dangerous tendency which must be avoided and prescriptive tendency should be discouraged.

The war has unending consequences for the civilians. They are forced out of their homes, their country, in life-threatening conditions. Most Western countries initially refused them entry. This was happening at a time when the war was at its peak and Syrians were forced to find shelter elsewhere. According to Dr. Papadopoulos, the Syrians arriving on Western shores were not shown any compassion on humanitarian grounds. That they were treated as illegal immigrants was evident from the images of abandoned jackets that were spread across the Western beaches. He denounces the Western media for its double standards on the presence of Syrian refugees on their soil. At one end of the spectrum, they are the "savior", while simultaneously the Syrian presence on their soil is seen as a threat to the "European way of life" ("Traumatising Discourses and Orange Stigmata"). Dr. Papadopoulos dismisses the Western philanthropy as hypocrisy:

> They are icons of trickstery, deception, and exploitation. They are 'orange stigmata' on our European conscience. They are painful reminders of turning human tragedies into political football, into hurtful wounds of betrayal and treachery. They are grotesque testimonies of breach of trust, of falseness,

> duplicity, callousness, merciless cruelty, cynical pretension. These stigmata on our European body testify to our sanctimonious intentions gone wrong. (ibid)

The effects of this war are going to last especially in terms of human resource and mental health. The worsening economic condition and failing infrastructure have crippled the lives of the Syrians even in the government controlled areas. Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS) propose a new label to describe the mental health of the Syrians, namely, Human Devastation Syndrome (HDS). They suggest that labels like depression and PTSD cannot fully encompass the mental health of these survivors. They believe that the unique context of the Syrians demands a new diagnosis which can effectively explain the magnitude and complexity of their traumatic affliction. These symptoms cannot be attributed to the psychological category post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because the "post" in PTSD has not yet been achieved. The stress factors have not been eliminated and most Syrians still live in fear. Dr. M. K. Hamza, who is the chair at SAMS, thinks that the mental health disorders affecting Syrians are the result of the total destruction they have experienced. He thinks that the repertoire of mental health idioms cannot describe the "total demolition" experienced by a Syrian survivor: "I searched the criteria of all psychiatric stressors and traumas and could not find a description for those psychological injuries. I am perplexed and humbled by our lack of ability to define, diagnose, and treat this complex condition, which I refer to as Human Devastation Syndrome (6). The Human Devastation Syndrome or HDS, which Dr, Hamza describes as an essentially Syrian phenomenon, is useful in understanding and realizing "the severity of the emotional and mental problems" faced by Syrian people, whereas, constructs like PTSD, are "culturally and politically limiting because they do not account for [this] intentionality" (Brykalski & Rayes 34). Dr. Humza argues that the experiences of the Syrians find no equivalence in the modern history of warfare. These people have witnessed horrors beyond anything that literary imagination unfolds: "They have seen dismantled human beings that used to be their parents or their siblings" (Davis 2017). In a family of six or seven or ten, there is sometimes one survivor, sometimes two, and they have seen blood of their family members. Their traumatic injury is not easily comprehended even by the mental health practitioners who work with them. This is largely because the existing standards of psychological health fall short of explaining the severity and complexity of this new wave of trauma, as

understood by Dr. Hamza and his team. Dr. Hamza believes that PTSD cannot account for the emotional, psychological and spiritual devastation of the Syrians:

> A lot of what [Syrians] are experiencing is dehumanization and humiliation. When you cause the other person to despair, what are you aiming for? You are trying to humiliate him, to rip him or her from their own identity and state of being. You are demolishing the human inside. You want him to become a walking shell. This is different [than trauma]. (Brykalski and Rayes 34)

Despite grave human tragedy, the world community has largely remained indifferent and detached. The decline in media coverage of Iraq starts as early as 2007, which shows there was growing boredom and tiredness with the war. From 23% in 2007, coverage of Iraq war plummeted to staggering 3% in 2008 on TV news, and on cable networks fell from 24% to 1%; as for newspapers, the Associated Press found 457 Iraq-related stories on the front pages by Sept 2007, which in the next few months fell to 49 (Ricchiardi 2008). The question is whether this is the case of abnormal becoming normal because we have gotten used to it? Or, is this indifference systematically induced through the cleverly orchestrated policies and statements of the aggressor?

The US is not concerned with the body count, as General Tommy Franks reiterated with impunity, "We don't do body counts." Ira Chernus, a professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado, argues a good soldier takes responsibility for his actions which demands that he knows how many lives he has taken. Criticizing the US army's decision to hide the casualties, he says:

> Today's killers avoid that responsibility. They perpetuate the fiction so many Americans want to believe – that no real people die in war, that it's just an exciting video game. It's not merely the dead who disappear; it's the act of killing itself. When the victim's family holds up a picture, US soldiers or journalists can simply reply ''Who's that? We have no record of such a person. In fact, we have no records at all. We kill and move on. No time to keep records. No inclination. No reason. (Kuttab 887)

Some journalists admitted to the presence of "patriotic police" in the newsrooms which increased their discomfort (Kuttab 887). While all this covering up of war crimes was going on, Iraqis suffered under increasing political uncertainty, lawlessness, and sectarianism under the American occupation.

The mental trauma visited upon the survivors of the war is not without consequences. Many Iraqis have witnessed violent deaths of family members and have lived in constant fear of their own. They are forced to live through worst form of poverty, with nothing to sustain them, and depending solely on aid to survive. Children and women are the worst affected as most of them are left to fend for themselves after their men are either abducted or killed in war. A documentary by France 24 English records an Iraqi child's traumatic response to the violent experiences he and his family members passed through. The child, aged 5-10, breaks down in tears as he narrates what happened to him: "My father was killed by Daesh. They often came to terrorize us. When we asked why, Daesh told us it's because you're insurgents…One day I was working with my brother and they slashed my fingers. It's not fair, you can't do that. May God kill them, torture them. It's not fair ("Iraq's Lost Children, 3:14-3:50). Children have witnessed violent killings of their loved and dear ones. There is no telling how these unseen scars and wounds present themselves afterward, because as discussed in case of Syria the mental health construct PTSD is insufficient to explain their complex mental health issues. A constant state of fear has had a crippling effect on the mental health of the children. Most of them suffer from sleep disorders and complain of nightmares. A father of five tells the France 24 English correspondent that his children keep screaming and waking up all night until dawn. Another child whose brother has been kidnapped by Daesh says he can't sleep all night because he keeps having nightmares ("Iraq's lost children" 5:20). A mother in a refugee camp complains that her child suffers from mental health issues since she witnessed her father's death. The child's father was killed while she was still holding his hand. The traumatic memory haunts her still and every day at the same time that she lost her father, she starts screaming involuntarily. Her little brother sleepwalks and calls out to his dead father in his sleep as he runs around in the refugee camp ("Iraq's lost children" 6:28). Yamada et al. agree that wars should be considered a public health problem considering the nature of damage to mental and physical health of the survivors (401).

5.6 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter and the analyses of the literary texts foreground the apparatus of terror unleashed upon the survivors who were already suffering from psychic breakdown/collapse. This terror is seen as a strategy of the aggressors to completely destroy the survivors in both countries. As can be seen from the

examination, the strategy is very effective in disrupting the culture and value system of the peoples from these countries. This distance from something the peoples hold very dear results in a state of confusion and anger which can have long term consequences for the mental health of the survivors. The characters in the novels *The Sirens of Baghdad* and *The Corpse Washer* direct their anger at the U.S. for the destruction of their country, community and their long-held traditions. They resent being treated like second-class citizens inside their own country by the invading U.S. army. This resentment, as the analysis reveals, takes several forms from doubling to self-harm and from despair to aggression, or when terror strikes the heart, feelings of helplessness, fear, guilt and revenge consume the body. The characters' bitterness is an admission of their weakness before the threatening aggressor/s, and also an expression of the divisive policies of the West in the Middle East. The texts reveal how terror is used to bring the innocent civilians into complete submission. Through their likening to the figures of the *Muselmann* and the *homo sacer,* the survivors' total mental breakdown is revealed. The analysis takes these claims a step further by linking these two notions to understand the psychological trauma experienced by the survivors. This interventionist approach makes possible new findings and help arrive at fresh understanding of the mental collapse of the Syrian and Iraqi survivors of wars. Coupled with destructive wars, the hegemonic apparatus invites a grievous human catastrophe – a holocaust.

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the selected fiction reveals that the civilian population in Syria and Iraq have suffered massive psychological trauma and that terror has also been used to inflict long-term psychic injury. The characters in the study are seen to experience extreme form of violence with serious consequences for their mental health as well as their general well-being. An account of their anguish, traumatic injury along with its psychic manifestations was given in the analyses chapters. This chapter outlines the conclusions and findings that the researcher has arrived at after a detailed examination of the selected texts.

6.1 Findings

The aim of the study was to investigate the imbrication of trauma and politics and also to examine the psychological state of the survivor-victims in the selected texts to support the claim that a holocaust is happening in Syria and Iraq. The study made several discoveries, for instance, as analysis of the selected works progressed, it became very clear that the civilian population or the survivor-victims were facing a great many challenges to their mental health. The fictional works revealed a symbiotic relationship between the events, the survivors and their responses. The events happening in the lives of the characters directly impacted their psychological health. With an altered state of mind, the survivors can sometimes become dangerous for their own selves and others perpetuating the terror they witnessed around them. The study attempted to understand the compromised and afflicted state of mind of the survivor-victims faced with war, trauma and terror.

In the course of the study, it was also revealed that the survivor-victims or ordinary civilians were confronted with challenges that were beyond their capacity to overcome. They faced grotesque deaths, were moved to act on impulse, faced

persecution, felt threatened in their own country, felt that their culture was being eroded, and lived in total fear. These are just a few of the experiences of the people living under threat of unending war. Most importantly, they have no one to turn to. The world has failed them by effecting indifference to their suffering.

The examination also strengthened the premise that psychological numbing is the psychological weapon available to the survivor-victims as they engage with terror on their soils. However, it was seen that the numbing process was not a saving strategy but a leading cause of failure - failure to act reasonably, failure to take important decisions, failure to address complex issues, and failure to contribute constructively to the society. This is in line with Lifton's concept of chronic numbing, which was used as a tool to understand the complex behavior patterns of the characters. Chronic numbing may take several forms as has been discussed in the analysis chapter. But numbing is not the only response to their trauma; each character responds in different ways to threats and terror from their environment. Doubling and resilience are also adopted as coping mechanisms and survival strategies. The analyses also reveal that 'absolute fear' is a way of life for most survivors with serious consequences for their mental health. The analyses of the works call for a socio-cultural understanding of trauma. PTSD primarily addresses symptoms like intrusion and flashback which were not exhibited by the characters. The study shows that the survivors of these wars have experienced terror over years, not months, and that they have a rich cultural history, the knowledge of which is required for a holistic understanding of their trauma. Most significantly, the debates in this study further inform the psychological processes especially with respect to numbing and doubling. Lifton does not see numbing as a failure, nor does he explain how the enactment of doubling relates to the process of chronic numbing.

The examination of selected works has also shown that trauma is not personal, but a political category. The characters or survivor-victims have been forced into abject submission by design. Their homes, other buildings and caravans often become targets of missile attacks. Wherever they go, they witness grotesque deaths of ordinary people. Every time this happens, something dies within them. It was seen that the characters eventually gave in to the terror. This surrender is manifested in many forms in the selected works. Some survivors respond by complete submission, displaying a cognitive-symbolic dysfunction, in their failure to adapt to changing circumstances. They become incapacitated and non-existent. However, some survivors have shown

resilience in their character. They become the conscience of the people and are unnerved by the surrounding terror. However, they too become victims of the power politics, without knowing about it. They seek revenge for their losses through brutal acts – terror in response to terror. In their anger and hate, they do not realize that they too have become actors of greater politics. The study also showed that all morals were violated in these wars. The people did not trust the foreigners who were violating their lands before their very eyes. They suffered huge losses and a humanitarian crisis loomed large as the wars progressed. Yet, nothing is done to get them relief. The novels show that no discrimination is made between the ordinary citizens and the fighters. All and everything is bombed. The main end, it appears, is total collapse of humans and their will – a holocaust.

The study concludes that the devastating effects of wars will continue into an uncertain future as the survivor-victims from these Middle Eastern countries grow up with overwhelming memories of the devastation. Confronted with all sorts of external and internal threats, a bleak future looks imminent. This generic survivor experience finds its way into survivors' general health conditions as well as behaviour disorders. The protracted violent events create a world of shattering dreams and unfulfilled hopes such that, caught in its unending vicious cycle, the survivors can only instinctively think of saving themselves without realizing that something dies within them every time they do so. The overwhelmingly painful events do not allow assimilation of these experiences at the conscious level and the victims wilfully numb themselves against such experiences. The inability of the victim to process the experiences lead to denial and distortion of the events. For Laub, the loss of event is analogous to loss of self: "This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (82). There is also, on part of the victim, a complete abandonment to hostile events which are beyond their control. This is very true of the survivor-victims of Iraq and Syria as the analyses of the selected texts reveal.

Trauma is perceived as irrelevant to the operation of world politics. However, as the study reveals, trauma can profoundly affect global security. When trauma is not allowed its proper working through, it may become poisonous for the individual as well as the community. While political solutions do not address psychological wounds and may become problematic in the long run even perpetuating violence, the process of

working through gradually enables a diffusion of violence. Mourning for loss is a way of coping with grief and coming out of trauma. In this context, Gillian Rose writes:

> [The] impotence and suffering arising from unmourned loss do not lead to a passion for objectivity and justice. They lead to resentment, hatred, inability to trust, and then, the doubled burden of fear of those negative emotions [...] It is the abused who become the abusers, whether politically as well as psychically may depend on contingencies of social and political history. (51)

The analyses of selected works further reveal that failure to work through the traumatic experience perpetuates further violence not only in the aftermath of trauma but also decades and even generations later. In his acclaimed work *If this is a man,* Primo Levi remarks in connection with the drowned and the saved that "a country is considered the more civilized the more the wisdom and efficiency of its law hinder a weak from becoming too weak or a powerful one too powerful" (100). He goes on to state that in the concentration camps the law was different, "with the adaptable, the strong and the astute individuals, even the leaders willingly keep contact, sometimes even friendly contact" but that is not so with the weak, "the men in decay," because of fear "that they will complain and will speak about what used to eat at home" (101). They must not only be subjected to the most inhuman treatment imaginable but also passed through a "pitiless process of natural selection" (102) which dictates that survival is a privilege to be enjoyed only by those in power: "in solitude they die or disappear, without leaving a trace in anyone's memory" (102).

The study focused on the subject of death and the politics of death. It was revealed that the survivor-victims encountered death almost as a routine. It came to them in one of the two forms - mental or physical. Those who escaped physical death by some stroke of luck understood that they have become the living-dead. They walked the earth and fended for the needs of the frame but were dead within. Compared to physical death, this form of death was so much worse and agonizing. Unlike the common belief, in this state the survivor-victim does not find any relief from traumatic stress. Stress, anxiety, depression, agitation, frustration, also betrayal, in short, all emotions, too heavy and toxic to carry, constantly and incessantly plagued the victims. The analysis shows that the mind keeps the pain alive even at rest, creates monsters and demons, so that life resembles death. In order to truly understand the traumatic suffering of the victims/characters in the selected texts, we need to live their lives. They have lost

everything, literally everything, have been internally and externally displaced; their children do not go to schools; they have limited available medical care; they have no means to earn their living and are dependent on aid; most women are widowed and are tending after their children without any support; there are no opportunities for the young ones so they end up joining one fighting group or the other. From the comfort and security of our homes, with full tummies, it is easy to sympathize with their plight and do nothing about it. However, it is our collective responsibility to make sure that this world is home to everyone. Lifton contends that 'death' and traumatic reactions to horrid death experiences have "traditionally been omitted from posttraumatic stress" ("From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 12). As we see in the selected texts, survivors' death immersion has direct impact on their attitude towards life and the feeling of guilt they carry after the death encounter: "If you haven't lost your mind yet, that's because you haven't seen very much," a driver tells the protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad* (127). He also tells him that he has nightmares every night because of what he has had to witness. Omar, a fellow villager, decides to quit the army after a rather close encounter with grotesque deaths: "when I saw those mountains of shoes at the site where the panic took place, those kids with blue faces and their eyes half-closed…" (159).

The study examined anarchy and despair in Syria and Iraq. It was revealed that the civilians are not secure inside their countries. Over a slight suspicion, they could be abducted or killed. In Syria, the militias targeted anyone who supported their enemies: "they burned down a family's house when they discovered the son had been arrested at a checkpoint for smuggling medicine into the area of Homs still under siege" (*Death is Hard Work* 80).

The analyses further showed that the immediate response to traumatic encounters with death was numbing which renders both physical and psychical reactions virtually impossible. Lifton tells a story of a soldier whose fellow-soldier is fatally wounded before his very eyes - he wants to help him survive and at the same time feels incapacitated: "both physical and psychic actions are virtually impossible. One can neither physically help victims nor resist victimizers; one cannot even psychically afford experiencing equivalent feelings of compassion or rage" ("From Hiroshima to the Nazi Doctors" 17). Numbing leads to further complications. It results in the victim feeling responsible for what they have not done or felt. The self-

condemnation is the outcome of the psychological guilt. Both self-condemnation and psychological guilt are adverse forms numbing (Ibid 12). This guilt becomes the very reason for self-annihilation as with the protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad*: "I had been saddled, once and for all, with infamy…. I found myself hating my arms, which seemed grotesque, translucent, ugly, the symbols of my impotence; hating my eyes, which refused to turn away and pleaded for blindness; hating my mother's screams, which discredited me" (*The Sirens of Baghdad* 102).

There is also the danger that the unhealed trauma may be passed down generationally with all the bitterness and resentment experienced by the first generation, such as in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The Jews who were once victims have now become oppressors themselves. It is ironic that those who have experienced the monstrosity of abjection, isolation and annihilation should concur with the same principles and practices when power is restored to them. Instead of becoming harbinger of peace and calling for an end to all forms of violence, the state of Israel is unashamedly violating human rights in occupied Palestinian territories. If anything, the tragedy of the Holocaust must offer opportunity for transformative learning. It must inform against persecution, war and genocide. It must call for an end to divisions and hate on the basis of ethnicity, religion or sex. It must speak of love for humanity because it was humanity that failed in Auschwitz and other concentration camps during Nazi occupation. Talking about his peace pilgrimage to My Lai, Dr. Roy writes, "The soul-searching and meaning making involved when bearing witness to the inhuman can lead to knowing what it means to be human" (61). What this means is that witness-bearing helps us unlock our darkest, innermost recesses and brings us face to face with our base self. In this moment of awakening, rather than hating the perpetrators, survivors learn to hate the crime. This human factor has been conspicuously absent from the trauma discourse on Holocaust. Given the centrality of the Holocaust to trauma discourse and the particular vantage point from which its scholars write, it could be used to promote peace and rally for an end to wars and prison/refugee camps. The Holocaust survivors' testimonies are a collection of dark, grim memories, devoid of any glimmer of hope for worldwide human solidarity and love.

So, what are the lessons learned from the Holocaust and holocausts elsewhere? We see that those who were once victims of war have now become perpetrators of war crimes. The Jews, who were once persecuted and made homeless, are meting out

exactly the same treatment to Palestinians living under their control. The Holocaust discourse barely talks about reconciliation and human capacity for goodness. It is a constant reminder of evil and suffering. In contrast, the Vietnamese and the Japanese have used their traumatic experiences of the past to build a better, peaceful future for the world. The My Lai museum is a site of intractable human catastrophe, yet, the message encoded in the guidebook at the Memorial hints at the "revised identity of the Vietnamese people as vigilant peace-seekers" (Roy 73):

> Vietnamese people, traditionally magnanimous and merciful, consider Sơn Mỹ a thing of the past although it has still been painful…looking back upon Sơn Mỹ, a piercing event of the past, is not to wake up the hatred but to understand an unforgettable historical occurrence, and more importantly, to keep vigilance, to pray and struggle for peace, so that the world will never witness such things as Sơn Mỹ. (Roy 73)

Dr. Roy recognizes Son My as a "deeply sacred space" because this is where profound suffering has given way to identity redefinition and transformative learning (74). He recalls the first Hiroshima Declaration of Peace to reflect a "revolution of thought for a culture of peace" outlining the "city's new identity." Dr. Roy comments: "By choosing to view itself as a city of peace and a sacred site where affirmation, compassion, and gratitude would grace everyone, whether resident or visitor, Hiroshima City's "revolution in thinking" and reinvented identity opened the pathway to reconciliation and restoration of dignity, even alongside "limitless sorrow" and continuing suffering" (74). Most importantly, he notes that in the act of identity redefinition, the identification as victim is "deemphasized." This is a very crucial step towards healing and reconciliation. Once the survivor stops bracketing himself as victim, he can rise above his personal pain and loss and claim his humanity despite extreme suffering.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben argues that in Auschwitz, the "degradation of death," rather than death itself constitutes the specific offence: "the dignity offended in the camp is not that of life but rather of death" (70). Like factories churning out products, the concentration camps laid out corpses with absolute no dignity for the dead. Can we say that the same is not happening in Syria and Iraq? Weapons of mass destruction are used on civilian population without discrimination and with total disregard of the value and dignity of human life. But what is worse is that death has become a number game; dead bodies are debased into corpses in the manner of serial

production. The dignity of the dead, too, is gone. This must be recognized in order to understand the true sense of the pain and anguish, and the trauma and the grief experienced by the survivor-victims from these war ravaged countries. Heidegger had said: "But to die (Sterben) means: to bear death in one's own Being" (Agamben 74). This dignity is negated for the many who perish in war in the Middle East as they fall prey to sudden, unexpected, and indiscriminate shelling. It is not that death comes as a surprise to them. They expect to die every minute, every hour, every day; the uncertainty grows with every passing time instead of diminishing. Just as the dignity in death is negated for them, so is dignity in life is stolen from them. Bound to a life shorn of human dignity, these survivor-victims experience 'death' before their bodies are pronounced dead. They are walking corpses with "death borne in its very Being" (Agamben 74). Death is an everyday affair for them, and in this reality "both death and dying, both dying and its ways, both death and the fabrication of corpses, become indistinguishable" (Agamben 76).

These texts have shown that the Middle East writers are looking to rewrite the war narrative framing their people as humans and not as 'collateral damage'. Khaled Mattawa, the Libyan-American writer, encouraged Muslim writers particularly the Arabs, to claim their own space in the academic discourse to avoid being misrepresented: "If the image of us is truly being created by the American imagination, the time has come to invalidate that image and render it unrecognizable both to ourselves and to the world" (2014).

6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the findings of the study. They are as follows:

The study makes important observations regarding modern wars and how they destroy everything. The effects of these wars are felt along social, political and ethical lines, and are very devastating for the civilian population. The study calls into question the use of modern warfare machinery on civilian population and raises important concerns for their mental health. Thus, the study makes an important contribution as it highlights the destructive nature of modern wars. Syria and Iraq have become graveyards with dead bodies and destroyed buildings. Bombing, shelling and missile attacks have turned these once-blooming countries into no-man lands. The study makes a strong protest against the use of modern warfare weaponry upon civilians and public

places. I recommend that more and more academic researches on war and its destructive machinery should be conducted, with the collective aim to end this form of terror.

Most significantly, the study reveals the disastrous effects of the hegemonic discourses in academic realm. These discourses are generated by those in power in order to sustain their leadership or hegemony around the globe. The Holocaust as a discourse is too sacred to be "re-imagined" in a new light. Similarly, the discourses paint one event as tragic and others as 'just' and 'necessary.' For example, the 9/11 is unjust and necessitates revenge; but the massacre of Afghan civilians is retribution and permissible. When a discourse become too sacred to allow dissent or when a discourse loses credibility due to its hegemonic line of thought, it is the responsibility of the academic world to question it. The study questioned the sacredness of the hegemonic term 'Holocaust' and dared to describe the catastrophe in Syria and Iraq as a holocaust. The idea was to displace the term from its origin – the Jewish massacre – and use it to describe the massacre of the Syrians and Iraqis. This new application of the term was not without consequences, as I learned in the course of my evaluation process. However, I have persisted because I believe in the sacredness of all humans and not some. Here, I would like to recommend for future researchers that they must challenge the hegemonic practices in order to upset the status-quo.

I believe the resilience of the targeted populace or individual should be taken into consideration when studying survivors' mental states due to the traumatic exposure(s). This will allow for a more cohesive analysis of the trauma suffered by them. The psychological discussion informed by socio-culture background of the peoples can be helpful in both locating the true cause of trauma and in predicting interventions that are more enduring. This raises several questions, like: How do such societies/ individuals heal when faced with calamities that are natural or man-made and that leave a discernible impact or trauma? What helps them cope with everyday trauma? These are important questions. A great deal of research on trauma has focused on Western societies and evolved coping strategies based on their immediate understanding of systems of faith and Western laws that govern their lives rather than a generic conception of healing. People living in the Middle Eastern countries including Syria and Iraq are exposed to atrocities and deaths almost daily. Faced with harsh living conditions and lack of basic health facilities, these people are left to cope on their own with daily stressors caused by wars. It is pertinent to ask what keeps them going despite

having to live with trauma through all the years of conflict perpetuated by internal and external factors? As Kleber et al (1995) point out: "Essential to the scientific study of trauma is that attention be focused on events, situations, and circumstances. Starting points are serious life conditions that confront an individual with powerlessness, disruption, and death, as in acts of violence, human-made and natural disasters, combat, human rights violations, and the sudden loss of loved ones" (11). This disruption may take multiple forms as have already been examined by theorists concerned with cultural, psychological, intrafamilial and communal dimensions of trauma and is imbricated in the material, that is the "economic, political, national and international (Danieli ix)." But, as Danieli points out, these systems work within a time dimension to create a sustainable view of life for every individual yet for the traumatized, whose lives have been turned upside down, time stops and they are "stuck in this free flow" of time (Danieli 1995).

Another recommendation is to locate the trauma in the socio-cultural frameworks. It has been noticed that not all individuals facing an impasse in their lives require outside help nor do they all behave in the same way. There are cultural, religious, and familial factors that make up an individual's identity which call for a variety of responses in conditions of extreme stress based on a particular socio-cultural and/or ethno-religious model. It is for these very reasons that Post Traumatic Disorder (PTSD) cannot be accepted as a universal category (Summerfield 1995): "It follows that PTSD, like other psychiatric models of mental disorder, does not easily explain the complex and shifting relationship between subjective mental life and observable behaviour (Summerfield 19)." PTSD alienates social realities with its emphasis on individual-centred approaches as a result that behaviour patterns of individuals do not get much attention. Concerned primarily with psychosomatic disorders, PTSD fails to address the role of human behaviour which is not just socially constructed but also culturally strengthened and maintained. Studies conducted on "war-displaced peasants in Nicaragua," revealed that rather than becoming casualties of atrocities committed against them, these individuals "were active and effective in maintaining their social world as best as they could in the face of the continuing threat of further attacks (Summerfield and Tosser 1991)". It can follow from this that collective pain requires collective methods for redressal and healing especially in societies bonded with cultural and religious belief systems. These values help victims cope with their pain and guilt

in the face of extreme stress. Recent studies reveal how religion may be a factor in stress management and recovery from suffering……

Moreover, an understanding of beliefs of people can be more helpful in prescribing methods to manage stress. Stress-management can be a very relative affair. In cultures where God or some deity is seen as controlling life events, recovery from trauma may take a course very different from the way it affects societies bereft of such belief systems. For Palestinians and Israelis exchanging fire-bombs daily, the everyday trauma is translated into the metanarrative provided by their religions. All the suffering they experience and the pain they have to undergo is for greater good and that sustains them against lasting effects of trauma. For Palestinians, getting thrown out of their homeland is more traumatic than their daily struggle against those they see as colonisers and illegal occupants of their land. Their day to day struggle against Israeli occupancy is manifest of their deep-seated pain for being dislodged forcibly from their own homes. In such circumstance, is recovery even possible? Nachträglichkeit is not possible with them for they are trapped in a past. There can be no "afterwardness" or "apres-coup" until their scars are scrubbed away which is only possible if they are allowed to return to their homeland. Such is the precarity of trauma; life for the victims and survivors moves in a circular fashion with no psychological relief. The circulatory nature of *nachtraglichkeit* complements both directions of time and is also helpful in understanding the "psychic causality" (Eickhoff 2006). However, this also complicates the notion of "working through" (Freud, 1914) culminating in repetitive-compulsive behaviour in a victim. Freud explained *nachtraglichkeit* as a "mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of sexual or traumatic meaning to earlier events" (De Lauretis 2008). It would be interesting to apply this concept to survivor-victims of Middle Eastern conflicts who display an equally strong bonding to land, culture and religion they possess. What are the contours of this "belated understanding" if at all it is to be found in these war victims? And, how much recovery is possible for these survivors of trauma?

I propose that socio-dramas may be effective in addressing traumas. In collective relationships or groups, sociodramas are often used for studying and remedying problems. As a curative method, it is often used by organizations for understanding and empathizing with a specific social situation. It is a method developed by the psychiatrist, Jacob Levy Moreno, MD (1889-1974). Sociodrama is an

"unscripted enactment of a social situation in which various techniques are used to help a group explore the social context in which the members live" (Leveton, 5). As an extension of psychodrama, it deals only with problems facing an individual in dealing with real life situations. Through enactment of different social roles of individuals, the real nature of their suffering and behaviour is explained. As a healing method, sociodrama enables recovery through embodiment of painful experiences and memories. In other words, the focus of sociodrama is the context or the society. Enactment normalizes the negative emotions within traumatized persons. It helps them recover from psychological ailments that ensue from severely traumatizing events. This collective effort leads to compassion and support from others and the individual trauma was no longer a personal problem: "the only true therapeutic goal was all of mankind" (Garcia 20). Involved in healing is also the role of expectations inherent in a culture's value system. In studies conducted on Iraqi women regarding their social, economic and political priorities, it was revealed that 73.3% women felt that they were expected to adhere differently to value system (Dunne 44). Another study on 310 women in Lebanon after the military conflict revealed pervasive mental health issue among women. These women had suffered loss of property and deaths of family members, and faced future uncertainty. Engagement with trauma victims at cultural levels is possibly the best way to reach out to them and heal their traumas.

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