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**Towards Voicing the Traumatized Voiceless: Exploring
Children's Construction of Resilience and Search for Home in
Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* Trilogy, *My Name Is Parvana*
and N.H. Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo***

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Degree in Literature and Interdisciplinary Approaches

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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Date: 19/06/2023

Signed: *Chahinez Ezzine*

DEDICATION

This humble work is dedicated to the purest souls and dearest persons below

My deeply missed grandfather, al-Mujahid Mohamed Aroussi, whom I lost in the process of writing this thesis and who would have been proud of me if death were not destined

My softhearted mother and warmhearted father whose unconditional love, moral support and sincere prayers are what protects me from the frenzy of academic loss and despair

My caring sisters, Hanane, Yasmine and Ferial with whom I share my pains and my happiness

My brother (in-law), Zineddine, whose kindness is limitless

My adoring nephews and niece, Adam, Samy and Dania, whose presence flavors my Ph. D journey with laughter and joy

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ABSTRACT

In the shadowed alleys of conflict zones and through the hushed corridors of evil regimes, traumatized children are faced with a suffocating aura of horror which makes them inhale trauma, yet exhale resilience. Not knowing who the monster is, where to seek refuge and how to survive, these traumatized children are drowned in the deep end of suffering, immersed with repressed feelings and swamped by a relentless flux of memories. Alone, they succeed in building resilience from within psychic chaos, to shove traumatic ghosts and to pick their way through their tragic life. Still, the sun seems to never shine to children in today's war settings as they become refugees, unwanted subjects. Through the lens of trauma theory, the present research work provides a psychoanalytic reading of Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* tetralogy and N.H. Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*. Closer to the crux of argument, it steps in to explore bruises of the psyche and history wherein trauma resides cozily. Imbued with tenets of realism and modernism, the corpus under study triggers a cascade of the war novel genre, mirroring children's reception of, and reaction to, war atrocities. In the melancholic symphony of trauma, the study adds melodic notes throughout the four chapters, harmonizing with the chorus of the selected novels and appeasing the suffering of children in contact zones. Like a literary voyage, the analysis navigates through the abstract layers of the fragmented psyche and the tattered pages of the broken history. In doing so, it invites the intellectual to go to the frontline and to take upon himself the duty of providing therapeutic facilities, and therefore sewing the psycho-historical chasm. Based on a comparative approach, the findings of this research work reveal that Ellis and Senzai are faithful to the war novel genre in their depiction of the psychological interiorities that overweight heavily upon the children's fragile mind, the unconscious mind. Despite the differences that separate the authors under study, they meet at forging a vivid narrative of trauma which bears witness to the Afghan and Syrian children's overwhelming experience with war.

Keywords: Children, Conflict Zones, History, Intellectual, Modernism, Psychoanalysis, Realism, Trauma, War Novel Genre.

INTRODUCTION

Wounds are indeed not always apparent to the eye; they may only be visible to the soul, evoked by repressed feelings and stealthily inscribed on the unconscious mind. With the rapid advance in plastic surgery, a scar that physical wounds often leave on the body can carefully and aesthetically be repaired. A scar that psychological wounds leave concealed on the unconscious mind, however, results in an indelible blemish to which my avid interest in this thesis steps drastically in exploration. Psychological wounds are therefore hard to be treated and most of the time, if not always, incurable. Still, the creation of therapeutic facilities, which invite the examination of the fragile unconscious mind so as to liberate repressed feelings, is urgent to help alleviate such tormenting pains. Although they are unexpressed and invisible, their echoes are louder than those of the bleeding physical ones – reference is being made here to trauma, which is intrinsically an everlasting infliction of voiceless, wordless and timeless wounds.

To say that time heals wounds is axiomatic; yet it often proves to be fallacious. And one can only think of a traumatic experience s/he went through to vouch for this claim. Actually, time does not heal; instead, the pain becomes less bearable because reality sets its foot in the malleable mind. Thus, in a trauma context, it is neither time nor forgetting that are part of the healing process; it is rather the resilient capacity to accept the inflicted trauma and to cope with the random influx of traumatic memories. In psychoanalysis parlance, memory is viewed as an indecipherable concept insofar as it embraces trauma manifestations and disturbs the time fabric. In other words, the experience of trauma metamorphoses into a timeless memory, inducing psychic nausea, distorted history and jumbled chronology. This indecipherability is also due to the fragile category of people this thesis focuses on, children in conflict zones, which requires an in-depth elucidation of trauma internalization and exteriorization, and a careful diagnosis. Because war is not simply a past event but rather a collective trauma that continues into the present in the form of a memory, it is of pivotal importance to scrutinize its hazy role and its inextricable relation to trauma.

What further adds to the complexity of trauma is the major part it plays in subverting the layered horizon of history. More precisely, it is when the “traumatized ... carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” that trauma gets malicious (Caruth 5). What is also intriguing is that even the doyens in psychoanalysis struggle with how to frame and where to locate war trauma in research. To keep on the track of the thesis’ thread, war trauma is an elusive subject that certainly requires taking a bumpy journey into ambiguity; yet, it entails a noble pursuit of healing humanity through espousing ethics and morality. Philosophizing this way is the fundamental trajectory that the thesis at hand follows and endeavours to imagine, perceive and examine the experience of children with trauma, as projected in the war novel genre.

So, it goes without saying that trauma has become a fertile ground and an emerging field of study for scholarly interest due to the constant unrests, the sudden inception and reception of psychic turmoils -such as the random arousal of emotional outbursts- the human mind are always prey to. Over the last few decades, trauma has been one of the most conspicuous phenomena in social sciences and humanities; it has even gained popularity in the contemporary world that is inhabited by humanitarian plights, such as the refugee crisis and the Covid-19 outbreak. In fact, the abundance of research on trauma theory can be attributed to the way people are always haunted by the feelings of fear, uncertainty and loss which all come as a global side effect of modernisation in general, with its industrialised technology, and constant wars in particular. In this light, founding theorists and key figures in psychoanalysis govern the theorisation of trauma and contribute to its elusive nature, among them Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, Shaushana Felman, Anne Whithead and many others. Extending the wealth of critical discussion on trauma studies proves a challenging task, for it necessitates delving deep into the thin layers of the unconscious mind as well as meddling with the dark secrets of historical events. Still, such a venture is one that culminates in the understanding of vulnerable people’s sufferings, and therefore helps restore humanness in a soulless world.

On the difficulty of translating trauma into a memory narrative and accessing the buried truth of history, literature has its unique language and style, however equivocal and opaque, to make optic these abstract matters that harbour repressed feelings of melancholy and shelter hollow echoes of inner pains. It simply collects the debris of traumas the mind carries and mends the cries of pain the history shrouds. In *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead emphasizes the capacity of both fiction and non-fiction to narrate trauma, even when trauma itself poses challenges to language and resists representation (3). According to her, this capacity is realized through the translation of traumatic memories into a ‘narrative memory’, a pivotal element in testimonial accounts that facilitates the reconfiguration of past experiences and weaves it into the tapestry of personal history. As the psychic translation process unfurls, the dissonance of fragmented narratives, haunting echoes, fractured temporality and elusive hints can be reshaped into coherent and linear narratives. So, the sensitive act of shaping the unfathomable and carving meaning from chaos becomes the guiding light for the battered psyche towards solace, while enshrining the once-shrouded memories within the realms of conscious perception (Whitehead 4). In brief, literature, which is the main avenue of the present research work, champions the intricate nature of trauma.

On the nature of the study, the thesis adopts a comparative approach. As such, it takes a juxtaposed mode of analysis that oscillates between two narratives, notwithstanding their nuances and differences. More precisely, the analysis pivots on Deborah Ellis’ tetralogy: *The Breadwinner* (2001), *Parvana’s Journey* (2002), *Mud City* (2003) and *My Name Is Parvana* (2012) in comparison with N. H. Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo* (2017). Comparing these works has for a purpose to bridge Afghan and Syrian children’s traumatic experience of war, facilitate the understanding of their sufferings and connect them to a wider vulnerable community in conflict zones, albeit the arduous task it requires and the lack of criticism the chosen corpus receives. Additionally, it provides a testing ground for the hypothesis the traumatized subject screens in his mind about how to construct resilience and survive the haunting power of random

emotional outbursts following traumatic incidents. Faced by abstract matters that overweight so heavily upon the fragile human mind and the brittle of history, psychoanalysis is the most suitable method that is used and fused in the process of drawing the skeleton of both the theory and analysis of the present work. It must be stressed that Ellis' third volume, *Mud City*, does not dominate the analysis as the other volumes do. In other words, it occupies a tiny space that is found only in the last chapter of the thesis. The reason behind this unfair treatment of the novels is justified by the author's deviation that is marked by forging a narrative where Parvana, the main character of the tetralogy, is absent and her voice is replaced by that of her antagonist, Shauzia. Unlike the three volumes, this one is distinguished by a shift in narration, characterization, thematization and context. As it shall be examined, *Mud City* revolves around the life of Shauzia, the protagonist's best friend, and her traumatic experience of being a refugee child in Pakistan.

The present comparison may seem hazardous as the two selected authors belong to different geographical and cultural areas. One may indeed wonder how such different writers can meet at forging a comparable narrative of vulnerability and convey a universal message regarding the traumatic experience of war. For a lack of better terms, literature simply finds a way to bridge texts resulting in an intercultural harmony, regardless of the human-made geographical frontiers. The comparative nature of the study, with its potent components, ranging from modern concepts, namely dialogism, influence and intertextuality, weaves the fabric of matching plots, settings, themes and characters, in addition to making the stylistic elements harmonious and bridgeable. So, the least that can be said on the selection of the corpus is that it gives the impression of disharmony, for the context ranges from Afghanistan to Syria, two different spaces at all levels. Trauma's psychological space where war's tension and fear take place is what draws a unifying element between Ellis' tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, one that transcends diversity. Although separate, space in such context denotes the nuanced psychological environment of traumatic experience. More

than that, dealing with war trauma from children's perspective is what solidifies the delicate bridge of comparison and makes the authors dialogise.

Although both Deborah Ellis and N. H. Senzai are categorized as authors that are specifically concerned with children literature, it should be acknowledged, the thesis does neither perform a particular reading of children literature nor does it address the authors' preference to make their works limited and palatable to a child audience. The analysis, instead, leans heavily on the literary aspect of the novel, that is, the thematic dimension and the stylistic beauty through which the authors paint a vivid picture of trauma induction, reception and reaction. This limitation is necessitated by the delicate nature of the theory adopted and the aim to be achieved, an aim that departs from the assumption that war trauma is genderless, ageless and borderless. Another limitation has to do with the absence of a feminist reading of the novels. It might be unexpected to not stumble upon feminist pretexts when dealing with the Afghan context. It might be even more surprising not to refer to it when the chosen author is herself feminist. This is an essential element, indeed, but one that I must refrain myself from espousing in order to avoid any eventual deviation which might mislead the study's objectives and key results. These limitations would hopefully not undermine the arguments nor debunk the hypothesis of this thesis. Rather, they remain possibilities for future studies; they would undoubtedly widen the scope of the research, encourage further critical engagement and inspire more debates related to this pressing concern.

Accordingly, the war novel genre is the lens through which the novels under study are read and the angle from which the analysis will be conducted. Through its historical grounding and non-fictional asset, this genre constitutes a potent narrative that is preoccupied with denouncing the war realities and testifying against the dehumanizing effects of their atrocities. Furthermore, it shelters sensitive themes such as trauma, sacrifice, heroism and morality. It is in this context that the author "comes to function as a conduit for the traumatic and the wounded" (Aryan 225). As for the language of the war novel, it is

characterized by collective *ethos*, trauma *pathos* and intellectual *logos*. In other words, it has three textual arches that together frame the thematic and stylistic constructs: sensorial, emotional and cognitive. Hence, the reader is placed in the empathetic bubble, drenched in the troubled stream of consciousness and pushed to develop sensitization to war atrocities. In brief, the war novel is a shroud of therapeutic facilities; it embraces splinters of trauma, purges the diseased history of power demons and creates the cult of ethics and morals.

Moreover, this thesis ponders the question on how the experience of trauma expands its feverish psychic activity to the unknown. Cathy Caruth's argument rests on the belief that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature –the way it was previously not known in the first instance –returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In this light, traumatic memories are defined as just ephemeral images that involve backward glances towards the past; yet their captivations are haphazardly timeless. They are often more negatively perceived as humans, by nature, are more inclined to recall painful memories to the extent that they distort the good ones, creating conflicting psychologies. In short, memories are past images whose hazy shapes and paradoxical mechanisms neither specialists in the study of the mind nor sophisticated critics can fully understand. At times, they elevate us to a heightened state of euphoria; at other times, they submerge us in the deep end of pain by provoking illusory enchantment and deceitful reality. Indeed, memories never depart; they reside in the subconscious mind and evoke repressed feelings in mysterious ways.

In reviewing the well-established existing studies on war trauma, it was found out that a plethora of academic papers engaged with the examination of the traumatized subject in contact zones; yet, not as much with the case of children. Even if tackled, the focus is always put on testifying against the trauma that is experienced by Jewish Holocaust survivors after World War II. A mention of some giant works imposes itself here in order to show the solid ground upon which war trauma is built and is getting expanded in the literature enterprise. The

most explicit literary references are those of Frank's *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947), Jackie French's *Hitler's Daughter* (1999), John Boyne's *The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas* (2006) and Krystyna Chiger & Daniel Paisner's *The Girl in the Green Sweater* (2008). These are works that attracted the criticism of many scholars, theorists and critics in the context of trauma to testify, archive and commemorate the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust under the Nazi despotic regime. So, a wealth of research occupies a lengthy body of literature that bears witness to the collective experience of holocaust during World War II; yet, not much with contemporary conflicts which follow the 9/11 attacks and, more precisely, nest in the Middle East setting such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and in Afghanistan. Because the post 9/11 narrative begets global chaos and immorality, it is in such global threat that trauma finds a cosy room and a fine loom. In this light, trauma theory itself needs a backward glance and a forward expanse. To better govern the investigated topic, some of the pertinent scholarships need to be looked at.

In *Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (2014), Buelens, Durrant and Eagleston seek to put forth a collection of thoughtful articles which give an unconventionally diverse and rounded portrait of the future of trauma theory. The book offers a mosaic of perspectives that, together, highlight the problem of trauma. More precisely, each of the contributors engages critically in narrativizing traumatic memories that spawn out of trauma manifestation. Despite the fact that certain contributions explore, to a significant extent, the retrospect facet of war trauma and go as far as to map out a prospect agenda, there are few studies that focus on the displacement of trauma and the way it dilates from within refugee crisis. Such a virgin terrain is particularly glaring, given that experiences of war trauma are nowadays set in the MENA region and Afghanistan. Under this scholarly virginity, the context signals a productive area in which trauma studies could further advance.

To give a condensed overview, there is a suitable stance that is held by Stef Craps in his article on *Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global*

Age. Craps demonstrates how trauma is still a virgin site of theory-building by both artist-activists and academics. By referring to Caruth's reading of *Hiroshima, mon amour*, he implies a future-oriented perspective that positions trauma as an inclusive theory; assuming "the definitions of trauma and recovery that the West has developed are universal and often favour a distinctively modernist form in order to 'bear witness' to trauma" (5). Given this perspective, Craps critiques the "implicit Western construction of PTSD" ranging from methods to practices. He further criticizes the West's betrayal of moral values by examining Aminatta Forna's novel, *The Memory of Love* (2010) which tells the story of three traumatized men in contemporary Sierra Leone. By the same token, Ananya Jahanara Kabir, in her article "*Affect, Body, Place: Trauma Theory in the World*", suggests a fundamental reconfiguration of the Western established understanding of trauma theory, yet from an adult-focused point of view. As a response to such a Western-based context and an adult-focused categorization, what the thesis strives to reach is the extension of a relocation of war trauma from the Western to the non-Western sphere and from an adult to a child experience.

Apart from the theoretical framework, the criticism of the novels under study, too, is left out of the scholarly picture, albeit the literary aesthetics they embrace and the thematic forces they encapsulate. In other words, there is a deficit in critical engagement with the novels under study and an abandon of their criticism. To my knowledge, except for some reviews, no study has been built on Ellis' tetralogy. Similarly, Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* receives less attention. The most, if not the only, documented of all is Kayla Nicholls' article '*Stories Across Borders: Recontextualization of Home, Identity and Trauma in Contemporary Stories of Syrian Displacement through the Novels The Map of Salt and Stars by Zeyn Joukhadar, Escaping Aleppo by Atia Abawi and The Land of Permanent Goodbyes by N.H. Senzai*'. Here, Nicholls' ideas support the arguments which center on the creation of empathetic aura in order to attune to the reader's consciousness and sensibility; she limits her study to the analysis of trauma that springs from the Syrian refugee crisis and neglects war trauma which

is the seed of psychic anarchy. To this lack of literary reception and critical attention, the present research work finds its originality, notwithstanding the hassles faced in the process of analysing the works comparatively.

The originality of the present research work, thus, lies in exploring how lost in psychological murk, how out of chronological order, how swamped by uncanny feelings and how immersed with relentless memories traumatized children are. The study's core aim is then to invite the traumatized labelled oriental¹ child to the frontline of examination by joining two contexts that appear inharmonious at first glance. Another purpose, which accompanies the original asset of the research work, humbly adds a history-flavour to the solid ground upon which trauma theory guides the analysis. In particular, it involves revealing the historical haemorrhage trauma engenders on a par with the one affecting the psyche. This addition finds its echoes in the historical fissure of both Afghanistan and Syria, a fissure that bleeds just like the psyche does when annihilated by traumatic events. It further posits an original worldview of reading and healing history from the demons that haunt it through summoning up melancholic images of blood, death and loss. The analytical piecing together of the traumatized psyche and history, if done carefully, is indeed the stepping stone which makes war trauma less burdened and much more remediable.

The choice to work on traumatized children and explore their construction of resilience and search for home in conflict zones is not coincidental. Rather, it comes with its stimulating and challenging motives. It is not for nothing that the present thesis takes the child figure as a focal point of study, for it performs an ethical responsibility of reading the unreadable, speaking the unspeakable and listening to the echoes of broken voices that are stuck in the profound chasm of the psyche and history. In particular, this venture is motivated by a twofold

¹ It must be acknowledged that the present thesis probes into the traumatic experience of children labelled oriental within a psychoanalytic reading. By using the word 'oriental', one is neither adopting the Western attitude that is based on cultural deision nor reinforcing the imposed classification of the world; instead, it connects labelled oriental children to a wider vulnerable community in conflict zones, and therefore bridges the universality of war trauma across space and time.

impulse: academic and personal. When it comes to the academic, as it has already been hinted, the child category is often neglected in war trauma studies. More than that, the post 9/11 era electrifies the binary opposition between the occident and the orient; in fact, it shows a biased position towards the west which favours as much as it dramatizes the traumatising of the West. It further gives rise to a 'War on Terror' campaign which fuels the flames of war trauma in the so-Western-called 'Orient' sphere and provokes the ire of supreme powers. The marginalization of the labelled oriental traumatized subject, therefore, secures a novel terrain of exploration and exploitation wherein a plethora of perspectives are brought ahead. Hence, such paucity and lack of interest warrant more digging and a more elaborate examination of war trauma that is inhaled and exhaled by non-western innocent children in today's contact zones.

As for the personal impulse, the thesis springs first from my own experience as a traumatized child who hailed from the splinters of chaos where the psyche bleeds and terror prevails. I, an Algerian individual born in the midst of the 'Black Decade', witnessed the horrors of the civil war with a brittle membrane of mind wherein blurred images still pop abruptly up in my thoughts, taking the form of traumatic memories. More than that, being the daughter of a father whose sensitive work put his family under constant threat during the 1990s plunges me in a dark abyss of uncanniness, in an inner world devoid of tranquillity, stability and even curiosity. In the depth of it, there is a voice that can be heard but not seen, an echo that is sourceless. Only later, much more recently, I discovered that it takes an intellectual thirst to come to terms with innermost voices, hence the choice to embark on this academic journey. The aim pursued, thus, is to create a scholarly basis for reconciliation and for breaking the existing generational trauma.

Overall, this research work is merely but an attempt to unravel the wounds that are left eclipsed; whilst, the intellectual impulse is future-oriented as it is motivated by a desire to step later in the Algerian literature of the black decade, to bear witness to a lost childhood and to unveil the buried truth that shrouds

repressed feelings. In brief, the present research work is an experimental arena in trauma context, and therefore a pledge to get equipped with the necessary toolkits in order to reflect on the Algerian ‘*Lost Generation*’ in the long run, to the 90s generation, through producing fiction. Because of the Amnesty Law (1999-2005), it must be stressed, the ‘traumatic decade’ remains a *hard-to-remember* memory and a *forbidden-talk* event; hence the need to break the chains of silence, heal the wounded subject and mend the historical fissure. In brief, the aspiration of the thesis is futuristic: to wander through the literary tapestry of Algeria’s most devastating decade where healing would blossom amidst the thorns of trauma and verse into the whispers of a nation’s wounded soul.

Proceeding this way, the thesis advances four leading questions; each begs the inclusive problem statement of this research work. The latter, it should be remembered, pivots on the psychological, historical and literary readings of war trauma with a salient focus on children as a case study. The following research questions have been formulated to guide the comparative study of the chosen topic:

- Where do Deborah Ellis and N.H. Senzai meet in their attempt to forge a vivid trauma narrative which takes the genre of war novel and bears witness to children’s excruciating experience with war?
- How do traumatized children in conflict zones succeed in developing resilience by espousing the therapeutic facilities of *acting-out* and *working-through* repressed feelings, in addition to extracting traumatic memories from inner depths to outer surfaces?
- To what extent can a Western author be un/faithful to the Orient’s historicity and universal to humanitarian crises?
- What role should the war novelist and the (traumatized) intellectual character in the post 9/11 era play in sewing the psycho-historical chasm?

In an attempt to answer these thought-provoking questions, the thesis steps in the hazy world of abstractions, in the blurred layers of history and in the equivocal nature of literature. In so doing, it dives in the depth of the

unconscious mind wherein debris of traumas are left dormant, unvoiced and internalized. It begins, in chapter one, with the assumption that trauma theory has been an adult-oriented and a west-based concern while much less focused-attention is paid to the non-Western context and the children's case in point. Overall, the chapter sketches out the historical background, the theoretical framework and the literary backbone of the investigated topic. In particular, it gives a cursory glance at the way war trauma arises during the twentieth century and gets expanded in the twenty-first century. This timeline attributes the study a retrospect view and, at the same time, poses a prospect vista with regard to the vicissitudes of trauma. More than that, the chapter devotes a section to the examination of the traumatized child in war settings. It looks closely at the way children are stripped of their innocence and basic rights, swamped with violence and used as tools for political reasons. To close the discussion, the chapter offers a fuller and larger picture of the war novel genre. Besides, it highlights the literary movements, techniques and styles that shelter the novels under study, thereby enabling an exploration of the authorial responsibilities undertaken by Deborah Ellis and N.H. Senzai in their dedicated pursuit of condemning war crimes.

While chapter one endeavours to examine the underpinnings of the adopted theory, contextualize its historical inclination and delineate the literary tools that fit the corpus under scrutiny, the subsequent three chapters generate a pathway for the comparative study of the selected novels; each equally divided into three sections. Chapter two tries to render visible the reception of, and the reaction against, the inception of trauma to both the psyche and history. Starting with the examination of the setting and the psyche alike, the chapter sets the grounds of practice and launches the analysis by opening the comparison with "Sirens of War and Psychic Gore", a section which welcomes the gist of the study and touches upon the early infliction of trauma. This opening section shows how trauma subverts both the psyche and the history, signalling a jumbled narrative that is convoluted with sophisticated language, at once plain and dense. The literary anatomy includes the aesthetics of the war novel genre where

realism and modernism are fused. These are verisimilitude, real setting, composite characters, stream of consciousness, flashbacks and interior monologue. All these tools are meant to heat up a contextual reading of the war novel which often leads to a blended premise that fluctuates from realist to modernist tenets: it coincides with the accurate depiction of war realities and the malleability of the human mind in the ambiguous internalisation of the trauma seeds.

In chapter three, the analysis makes a shift in diagnosis from the internalization of trauma to its exteriorization. This shift is one of uneasy move, for it deals with the elusive nature of memory and strives to understand the mysteries it shrouds, such as crisis of exteriorisation, delusional disorder and language paralysis. In particular, the chapter digs into the metamorphosis of trauma into traumatic memories. Traumatic memory, as I personally see it, is like a surprise guest in the sense that it comes unexpected, yet deliberate; a guest who comes with charisma; he knocks the traumatized broken psyche and visits his injured souls. And so, that restful oblivion comes; the survivor never knows when it is gone. A pure spirit comes, and from that motion of pain emanates resilience from depth to surface. Within this view, the chapter provides an in-depth analysis on human psychology wherein various catalysts trigger trauma, nostalgia and memories, at once neat and conflicting.

The fourth and last chapter highlights the role of the activist author/intellectual in the post 9/11 era. Unlike the previous chapters, this one is more author-based and much concerned with the thematic dimensions of the novels under study. As such, it analyses the literary identity of Ellis and Senzai and their authorship with reference to relevant intertextual nuances; it also casts light on the figure of the intellectual through characterisation, as projected in the selected novels. In particular, it succinctly covers the discourse on Islamophobia and explores traces of neo-Orientalism in the novels under study. As such, it argues that some non-Western authors are loyal to universality. Such a robust loyalty involves steadfast faithfulness to moral values by looking closely at the

ways in which activist writers criticize even the advocates of democracy who betray democratic principles and fuel global violence. So, the chapter strives to advance global awareness of, and opposition to, human vulnerability while celebrating historical resistance and intellectual assistance. Furthermore, the creation of intellectual characters in the novels under scrutiny is, too, the chapter's gist and the analysis' wit. Through them, Ellis and Senzai mirror the moral code and the healthy journey of sewing the psycho-historical chasm. In order to establish an open ending, which corresponds to both the selected novels and the timelessness of psychological wounds, the chapter closes with the discussion of the refugee crisis and the manner it paves the way for a sequel narrative of trauma; it offers a profound insight on the continuity of psychic bruises.

CHAPTER ONE

Historicizing Literature in War Settings: Trauma
Retrospect and Prospect from Children's Eyes

*What experience and history teach
is that nations and governments
have never learned anything from
history, or acted upon any lessons
they might have drawn from it
(George Hegel).*

Because war trauma breaks the delicate psyche into silent wounds whilst it creates a chasm in history, voicing it is urgent so that unspeakable truth can smoothly be released from splinters of the fragmented subconscious mind. This opening chapter provides a kaleidoscope of theoretical outlooks that together foreground the psychological as well as the historical dilemma of trauma. As the wings of section one unfurl, the chapter begins by highlighting the early background of trauma theory in general and war trauma in particular. In doing so, backward and forward *coups d'œil* are brought on the rise of trauma theory, springing from the twentieth century to the post 9/11 era. As this chapter also casts shimmering light on the philosophy of morality through inviting the child figure to the fore and looking, mostly but not exclusively, at the way children become an emblem for the futility of the war, the second section deals with the decontextualization of trauma theory from the Western to the non-Western sphere and from adult to children point of view. The last section, for its part, is concerned with the literary backbone of the research work; it offers an unobstructed view of the corpus wherein an ensemble of literary movements and devices are explored to be later employed thoroughly in the analysis chapters.

I.1. The Rise of Trauma Theory

In essence, the etymology of trauma dates back to the late seventeenth century. It is identically derived from the Greek word ‘trauma’, which is translated into a ‘wound’ in English (Oxford online dictionary). Although trauma appeared in Western philosophy a long time ago, it is significant to stress that the light was merely casted on the ‘somatic injury’ as distinct from both the mental and the psychological sense. To put it otherwise, trauma used to be solely confined to the physical wound; ignoring the psychological agony it may cause. Under such a paucity of critical engagement, Sigmund Freud steps in the anatomy of trauma which begins to be “understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 3). This psychological wound trauma inflicted on the mind, as Freud digs deep in its delicate examination, becomes widely an influential concern onwards.

Judith Herman, in her 1992 seminal work *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence -From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, lists three changing forms of psychological trauma: ‘hysteria’, ‘shell shock’, and ‘sexual and domestic violence’. These forms pivot on psychological, socio-cultural, religious, political and historical circumstances under which the mind witnesses metamorphosis, and therefore fails to cope with certain sudden changes. As a result, trauma spouts from within an inner crisis, leaving a bleeding wound in the psyche. In Herman’s terms,

The first [form] to emerge was hysteria, the archetypical psychological disorder of women. Its study grew out of the republican, anticlerical political movement of the late nineteenth century in France. The second was shell shock or combat neurosis. Its study began in England and the United States after the First World War and reached a peak after the Vietnam War. Its political context was the collapse of a cult of war and the growth of an anti-war movement. The last and most recent trauma to come into public awareness is sexual and domestic violence. Its political context is the feminist movement in Western Europe and North America. (9)

Herman cogently demonstrates that these three unifying and divisive stages constitute a unique experience of trauma that may even pave the way for further vicissitudes with regard to the diverse world’s cultural metamorphoses. Hence, offering a retrospective glimpse and a prospective projection of traumatic events is essential to have a better command of trauma haziness. Because trauma theory marks its peak during the two wars’ context, the present section intends to touch upon, albeit in some brevity, the major trends of trauma wherein lies a deep gulf that gives rise to an interpretative horizon.

It is, by and large, difficult to conceptualise trauma because it has inconsistent definitions that reflect upon the frail somatic system, the riddle of mental disorders and the chasm in history. What is more, bounding trauma to the malleability and fluidity of the human mind proved to be a more versatile and vexing subject than expected. Whatever the case, the fascination with the mind’s equivocal activities begets in removing the myopic visions one might suffer from due to life’s abrupt tragedies. With Herman’s second phase of trauma in mind, one shall tread the path of historical exploration through the uncharted terrain of

the twentieth century and onward, an era that perfectly marks the rise of psychological ills as an outcome of constant wars. Indeed, the repercussions of World War I turn the world upside down. The latter witnessed a sudden metamorphosis with the advent of the war machinery as an outcome of industrialization. For the first time in history, the world sinks in constant fear due to the haunting power of mass destruction weapons, namely the machine gun, barbed wire and modern artillery. What is more threatening is the use of nuclear weapons that makes the world grapple with a dreadful shock, and therefore suffocates in a deep and dark ocean of pain after World War II.

So, the rapid modernisation, which entails industrialization, accelerates the consecutive calamities during the twentieth and even twenty-first centuries, such as the two wars, the cold war, 9/11 event and the outbreak of Corona Virus. Thus, trauma comes as a global result, leaving a wound inflicted on the unconscious mind, and therefore damaging the psyche into fragmentary remnants of traumatic memories. In her article entitled '*Theories of Trauma*', Lyndsey Stonebridge goes into further details by shedding light on the inextricable connection between trauma and modernity. She contends that trauma is regarded as part and parcel of what modernity brought. More than that, she argues that it symbolizes a medium through which the traumatic experience of war is fuelled by technological means. In her terms,

for psychoanalysis, trauma is what happens when thinking fails or can no longer take place. It is modern, because the experience of modernity makes thinking about and experiencing the world harder even as technology has supposedly made things easier. Modern war, the marriage of technology with barbarism as it was thought of by many in the middle of the twentieth century, has become the highly charged emblem of a moral, psychological, and existential paralysis of thought. (qtd in MacKay 194)

Accordingly, modernity is of central importance in the process of adjusting one's mind to keep pace with cultural metamorphoses and pondering the horizon of modernization. Under such violent auras, trauma is born; it finds comfort in the unconscious mind where it mysteriously operates and abruptly throws hurdles in the face of the survivor. Technology, for its part, proves to represent a double-

edged sword. It facilitates as much as it destroys our life, especially when it falls in the hands of megalomaniac rulers in conflict zones. In addition to Stonebridge's argument, a plethora of literary production springs from fragments of constant traumatic events. What emerges, thus, is a war literature genre that is concerned with how the text reveals and conceals those historical chasms. War writers, for their part, forge trauma narratives that depict not only the suffering people go through but also the syndromes they develop as an aftermath of trauma; that is to say, post-traumatic stress disorder –also known as PTSD, a point that is addressed more extensively in later discussions.

Given the fact that trauma has been approached from a neurological perspective by Jean Martin Charcot, that is, from a clearly medical angle, with a salient focus on hysteria, it starts to create an incentive scientific milieu for prominent theorists and scholars from akin subjects, mainly humanities. In this light, even a surgeon is not qualified to heal sick people. In fact, he can succeed in neither treating trauma nor stopping its bleeding, for the wound is invisible to the eye. That is why contributions from different approaches that deal with the abstract matters offer more support for the plausibility of trauma. As a result, huge efforts begin to take place for a more practical way of examining trauma. A plethora of critical discussion delve deep into the study of the mind in that their approach is largely adaptable to the vicissitudes of trauma from the twentieth century to the present time. Therefore, it is misleading to perceive trauma from a psychological angle, without taking into consideration its elastic stems in other fields, namely history, culture, politics and sociology.

I.1.1 The Twentieth Century and the Revival of War Trauma

In the light of the critique against Charcot's neglect of trauma's peculiarity, there might be a need to better fathom the phenomenon from the view point of other scholars who doubted its previous weight, among them Sigmund Freud. Charcot's valedictorian student, Freud, seeks to reconsider, revisit and refashion the perception of trauma by limiting it to the context of war psychosis as an underlying impetus for healing. The revision Freud makes on trauma, in addition

to other akin concepts in psychoanalysis, goes beyond the boundaries of psychology. In his seminal works: *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, he questions the transformation of history and the fall of the intellectual because of the overwhelming war that modern age brought. It is contended that Freud dies in 1939 in London where he seeks asylum after Hitler's invasion of Austria, his home country (Takeyesu 323). That is to say, he is affected by the multi-layered metamorphoses the world witnessed due to the traumatic experience of the Great War. In the chapter entitled '*the Disillusion of War*', he writes:

Caught up in the vortex of this bellicose age (...) we begin to have doubts about the meaning of the impressions crowding in on us, we begin to doubt the value of our own judgements. It seems to us that no event has ever destroyed so much of the precious common property of humanity, so many of the clearest minds have been made confused, the high has been brought so thoroughly low. Even science has lost its passionate impartiality; its most determined servants are trying to strip it of its weapons, as a way of contributing to the battle with the enemy. The anthropologist is obliged to declare the enemy to be inferior and degenerate, the psychiatrist must announce his diagnosis of the disturbance of intellect or psyche. (Freud)

The point is well taken; the experience of the Great War offers a broken window to glimpse the hollow time that is swollen by doubts, confusion and fear. These are the outcome of a destitute time of modernity. Science, as Freud muses on the essence of humanity, does no longer rescue ethics and moral principles from the human's side of evilness. In turn, the faith of the intellectual remains but a myth whilst the plague of dark politics begins to loom over the horizon. In this hazy worldview, the moral domain finds no place to operate but to evaporate. As it will be examined in the analysis chapters, Freud's espousal of trauma as a poisonous fruit of war ends up with introducing the key concepts of 'Mourning' and 'Melancholia'. Moreover, this hollow space further embraces disturbing feelings throughout the development of one's life. It suggests what Freud calls *Das Unheimlich*² (German for the uncanny). The latter, in this context, recalls

² For more reading about the uncanny, consult Sigmund Freud's essay entitled: *The Uncanny* (1914). For a more practical part, look at my relevant article entitled "Lost between Uncanniness and Trauma, The Psychological Journey of Afghan Children into the Unknown in Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*", published on <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/226/9/2/188680>

one's incapability to cope with circumstances due to historical accidents and psychological destabilizations.

What is pivotal to Freud's cogent attempt to the theorization of trauma is also the idea that recalls 'the return of the repressed' by means of problematizing disturbed memories and extracting the roots of pain from the depth of the unconscious mind to its surface (Caruth 5). More precisely, this Freudian conception exposes the 'shell-shock'³ notion that focuses on working with overwhelmed soldiers who returned home from battlefields during the Great War; each wounded in different ways. By wounded, he means especially not the physical but rather the psychological wound. Through the traumatic experience these wounded soldiers endure, Freud reconfigures how the mind works mysteriously and develops uncontrollable symptoms, such as recurrent nightmares, relentless flashbacks and abrupt hallucinations (Caruth 100). As found in the novels under study, Ellis and Senzai endow their characters with psychological hassles that overweight so heavily upon their fragile minds, namely the haunting of traumatic memories, crises of exteriorisation and delusional disorder. These inner nuisances capsize their life in deep oceans of melancholy and petrify their feelings of mourning, a point that is addressed in the third chapter.

Freud finds no solid ground for understanding the practicality of trauma, which basically warrants a peculiar attention to examine eclipsing thoughts and concealed feelings. Both of which are similarly attracted by the equivocal nature of abstractions that the subconscious mind engenders. He departs from no guidelines, constructs premises from *ex nihilo* and takes a thorny, yet fruitful scholarly journey. In this light, Freud cogently turns to literature, for it questions the uncanny in that literature is the fundamental, if not the sole, prism through which the mind's delicate layers can be reflected, and therefore evaluated

³ Charles Myers, a British army medical officer, first used the term in his paper entitled "*Shell-shock*" (1915) to describe the psychological pain that wounded veterans shortly developed during their returning from warzones at the wake of the Great War. It is important to note that the term 'shell-shock' becomes identical with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in post-Vietnam war context in that both concepts deal with trauma manifestations, namely dreams, nightmares and flashbacks, to cite but a few.

through imagined characters, settings and plots. Caruth, on this basis, asserts that Freud's approach to harnessing trauma in relation to literature is compatible because the latter "like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (Caruth 3). This Freudian interdisciplinary fusion is a healthy move, for the influence of trauma upon literature helps vent voiceless wounds, resulting in a homogeneous entity. As such, the authors under study paint a vivid image of war trauma through inserting realistic footings to their narratives, and therefore nourishing the power of fiction in facilitating the understanding of children's inner sufferings in conflict zones. In brief, literature is a means of catharsis; it has its own *modus operandi* of meddling with abstract matters, unveiling buried truth and eroding repressed feelings.

Moving forward to the end of the twentieth century, trauma expeditiously marks a large-scale juncture. It turns from a philosophical, neurological and psychological direction to a literary, cultural and historical reception. In fact, this radical rotation results in a complex and "challenging task for mental health professionals dealing with trauma and its aftermath" (Brandell & Ringel 10). More than that, it requires a well-furnished room for a plurality of disciplines that pertain to social sciences and humanities. The recent revision of trauma theory is believed to have exploded due to the plethora of apocalyptic historical accidents the world is constantly affected by, namely Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombing.

During the 1990s, it is noticed that the theorization of trauma surfaced from its European dive and found solid foundations in the United States of America by dint of Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Shaushana Felman and Dominick LaCapra, to cite but a few prominent theorists. Albeit, neither theoretically nor conceptually crystallized earlier, an avid vision of trauma emerges as a leading interdisciplinary field of research. As such, it transcends the confines of psycho-neurology and expands its discipline boundary to range from psychological

disorder to further historical fissure, linguistic chasm, cultural crisis, social phenomenon and literary thematic concern. In Cathy Caruth's words:

The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive, but it has done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding: if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience. (4)

The encapsulation of several elements complicates as much as it elucidates the ambiguity of trauma. It makes it more equivocal in the sense that diverse definitions sorted out of it. This, however, puts forward many valid hypotheses to have a better command on the fussy abstractions it tackles. Because trauma is concerned with the psyche, being perpetually explored and contested, and the psyche never ceases to amaze scholars converging it with various fields would but result in a thought-provoking debate.

To a great extent, trauma theory is advanced by Western scholars with a significant reliance on the study of Holocaust survivors and the testimonies they circulate during the post war era. After having evolved in response to modernity, as discussed previously, trauma now resides in history. It is noticeable that modern psychoanalyst theorists, mainly Caruth, Laub, LaCapra and Felman, build considerable parts of analysis on the trauma of the Holocaust. While Laub, being a survivor himself, relies on interviewing Holocaust survivors in his interpretation of trauma, Caruth pivots largely on the influence of the Holocaust of twentieth century writing in her examination of the '*Unclaimed Experience*'; building aesthetically a trauma narrative. Felman, on the other hand, focuses heavily on the act of witnessing that can take different forms of transmitting trauma; making it a timeless psychological malaise. To transcend abstraction and manifest a tangible portrayal, an implicit instance emerges from *Escape from Aleppo*. Senzai revisits the memory of Ghouta and summons its ghost. In the timeless echoes of history's ink, the Ghouta's lament unfurls, stretching its tendrils beyond the confines of time. Arguably, it did not end in 2013. Like an evil spirit, its memory weaves into the Syrian soul after almost one decade. As it

will be evidenced by the analysis presented in the third chapter, Ghouta attack symbolizes not only a past event, but also a collective trauma that continues into the present and penetrates the future.

The three thinkers, therefore, problematize the theory of trauma by relying on Holocaust testimonies. Each provides a rounded picture of trauma vicissitudes by reflecting thoroughly on the agonizing event where Jews were being exterminated under the Nazi regime during the Second World War. In this regard, Friedlander alludes to Lyotard's accurately metaphorsization of the Holocaust, "an earthquake which would be so powerful as to destroy all instruments of measurement. Since no possibility would consequently exist of establishing an exact, 'scientific', evaluation of this earthquake, scholars could claim that nothing was known to them about it" (5). What the quote draws upon is the idea that the destruction of moral values and ethics creates not only a traumatic memory, but also a chasm in history of which the Holocaust is part and parcel. It further suggests that trauma's casualties can neither be quantified nor evaluated as cases are better assessed on an individual basis. As such, the collectiveness of history, which enfolds collective experience of trauma and memories, demands first individual diagnosis. In other words, one should start examining the individual experience of trauma because trauma itself is unceasingly debated and debatable. Hence, the psychological, historical and cultural stability of any individual determines the construction of a sane and solid society, which is but a utopian thought, as stability is never fully achieved. Yet, the establishment of psychotherapeutic solutions is crucial to construct psychological resilience and resist historical deviance. Like constellations adorning the sky, instances of sewing psycho-historical chasms are spotted in the galaxy of novels under study through the creation of intellectual characters who fall in celestial harmony. For the sake of illustration, one might pluck a radiant star from this cosmic tapestry through Ammo Mazen. As it will be examined in the last chapter, this character is entrusted with a humane mission, and therefore embarks on a journey of alleviating the wounds of the traumatized individual and history.

Trauma theory becomes then a vehicle which provides access to history – one that is burdened with the weight of war atrocities and scarred by the echoes of trauma. In the case of Afghanistan and Syria, both Ellis and Senzai are entrusted with the task of illuminating the currents of history, embodying the timeless echoes that reverberate through the ages and reminding humanity of its collective narrative. That being said, one can "understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (Caruth 11). Accordingly, the immoral spectre of war, with its deep and intense pain, is equally addressed with reference to the Vietnam War. The latter proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back, and therefore the traumatic event that shatters the twentieth century to the detriment of humanity.

Undoubtedly, the Vietnam War weaves an intricate tapestry of psycho-historical torment and heats up fruitful contributions to social sciences and humanities. Literature finds solace in its depth, and therefore brings the question of trauma, together with post-traumatic stress disorder, into a literary spotlight during the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, one should not deny the fact that the Vietnam War remains a stigma in the American mind. Besides, it continues to somehow hamper its historical supremacy. For, far from the heavy defeat, the shameful event does not match with America's moral principles, namely that of democracy and the isolationist spirit it braces. If truth be told, America's military involvement in Vietnam in 1965 was pointless. It only resulted in both physical and psychological damages. Not to mention how many Americans, who were mercilessly chosen from the lower end of the social ladder, were lost. In the depths of the unsaid, teenagers were entangled in the armed conflict, imbibing the atrocities of war and the grims of taking lives.

For this reason, a plethora of narratives are written by American soldiers (veterans) who return traumatized from the combat zone as a response to the traumatic experience they go through. Through their narratives, these writers strive for voicing the authorities' betrayal because "in the loss there was

humiliation and bitterness and the burden of complicity in a nation's moral failure" (Hynes 177). This quote helps understand the psychological malaise wherein trauma resides and will eventually develop. In short, it symbolizes "a kind of fever that weakened the country until its people were divided and its cause was lost" (Hynes 177). Because meddling with the traumatic past implies 'a duty to remember' for individuals to promote a 'moral remembrance', American writers like Galway Kinnell, Allen Ginsberg and Thomas McGrath question moral decisions in regards to the Vietnam War. Lea David, in this regard, points out that moral remembrance is the "gradual, accumulative development from 'duty to remember' as an awareness-oriented approach to the contested past, to policy-oriented proper memorialisation standards, understood and promoted as an insurance policy against the repetition of massive human rights abuses" (David 45). This suffices to grasp the Vietnam trauma that directs intellectuals and activists' vigor, and therefore makes them provide a panacea for the dilemma so as to (re)construct moral principles.

Now that the destructive war ended, American soldiers return home overweighed with eerie feelings. They are the epitome of what Frantz Fanon called "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) in a different, yet relative, context. While psychological disruptions evoke threats to their sense of belongingness, the unbearable aura of guilt conquers their minds and makes them feel what homelessness is. Guilt seems to be the heaviest burden that traumatized veterans carry unbearably because "they had been doubly betrayed": first by the authorities and second by the civilians who objected the US involvement in Vietnam at that time (Hynes 180). Thus, the end of the war, which supposedly embraces trauma, marks only the beginning of another trauma. In other words, war trauma begins when the war ends, and therefore the scars of the past become the burden of the present. Hynes accurately explains,

in our society, guilt is a psychological as well as a moral problem, and it isn't surprising that many narratives of the Vietnam War don't end when the fighting ends but continue in psychiatric hospitals and group therapy sessions with other veterans, fighting what a tunnel rat I know calls "the war after the war". So many stories end there in that after-

war that psychiatrists have given a name to the problem: post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is to Vietnam what shell shock was to the First World War- a new kind of war damage, a new suffering that military medicine wasn't prepared for. (218-219)

Accordingly, one might realize the dual function of guilt that ranges between psychology and morality, enlarging trauma dwelling. The latter seems to deeply extend from a psychological frame and further expands to a moral concern. Whatever the case, what emerges as a threatening outcome to the Vietnam War revolves around the disturbing continuity of trauma in that the end of the external war is the beginning of another inner war. This strengthens our definition of trauma as a profound wound that keeps bleeding from within the damaged psyche which, in its turn, engenders historical hemorrhage. Hynes further points out the conceptualization of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is identical to, and interchangeable with, the previously tackled Freudian notion of 'shell-shock', notwithstanding the slight nuance the terms embrace. While the former emerged as a response to the Vietnam War, the latter appeared during the First World War. What lies beneath both terms is thus the different context. Apart from the holocaust legacies, the American medical community again finds itself struggling how to approach Vietnam trauma and its grave aftermaths.

What is peculiar about the Vietnam War's literary outputs is that they aesthetically share the theme of 'homecoming' unlike the contemporary war novels which, as it will be demonstrated in the selected novels, shelter the dream of escaping home and inhabiting the theme of refugee crisis. A good literary example of the Vietnam War would be that of Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* (1986). As the title propounds, the novel tells the story of Paco Sullivan, an American wounded soldier who returns from Vietnam and struggles to fit living due to the aftermaths of trauma he developed. Being the only Alpha Company's survivor, out of a hundred, at the Fire Base Harriette, the narrative of survival is told through the ghost of one of the killed soldiers to portray the severe trauma Paco carried from Vietnam to America. Upon his homecoming, he seems to become delirious, mentally helpless and unable to adapt to a life detached from Vietcong attack. This is reflected in one of the incidents where Paco was on his

way to town with a young mechanic; he declared, “they [medics] had me so zonked out on morphine I don’t much remember [...] But Paco remembers all right, and vividly” (Heinemann)⁴. The morphine Paco receives seems to help him only treat the physical wound; yet the psychological one is clearly beyond treatment. It further prevents him from verbalizing his trauma into a narrative. Just like Basel and Basil, two characters that are addressed in the third chapter, with regard to crises of exteriorizing traumatic memories, Paco knows that such narration happens, it will make him re-experience the trauma again; hence why he develops fierce angst and fails to construct a memory narrative. Under such angst, he can detach himself neither from the cataclysmic event nor from its repressed memories. Vietnam veterans and “The Things they Carried”⁵ out transcend resistance. To this end, Heinemann’s protagonist is but the incarnation of a worrying proportion of veterans who suffer from PTSD by developing aftermath symptoms. These symptoms, according to the American Psychiatric Association, may take unsteady labels of trauma manifestations such as “shell shock, battle fatigue, combat neurosis or traumatic neurosis throughout the twentieth century” (De Lima 41). Because the “repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing”, veterans endure constant pain. This “explain[s] the high suicide rate of survivors; for example, survivors of Vietnam or of concentration camps, commit suicide only after they have found themselves completely in safety” (Caruth 63).

More on the notion of PTSD that is pertinent to the act of suicide and the philosophy upon suicidality is found in Ellis’ *Parvana’s Journey*, a point to which I shall return in the examination of Leila in the next chapter. A brief distinction should nevertheless be made between suicide and suicidality in order to remove any eventual foggy image on the matter. By the philosophy upon suicidality is meant not only the visible attempt of committing suicide but more

⁴ This quote is taken from an e-book version, hence why one shall digest the absence of the page number in the in-text citation.

⁵ For the sake of intertextual links, reference is made to Tim O’Brien’s pertinent literary work: *The Things they Carried* (1990) which consists of twenty-two interrelated short stories. This connection makes the novel an episodic narrative that aesthetically depicts the traumatic experience of American soldiers during the Vietnam War.

the invisible way through which the formation of suicidal thoughts a traumatized individual may develop in his subconscious mind. In short, suicidality precedes suicide; yet, on many occasions, it hampers suicide and reinforces resiliency. Whatever case, however, this distinction appears more and more blurred. This is frequent in war zones, due to the forced submission of the vulnerable people to self-destruction. As tends to be the case with Leila, Ellis offers a rounded picture of suicide that is undertaken by a child character. Through Leila, she reflects on how trauma can be at stake and how suicide is the most likely end result, a point that will be thoroughly elaborated in the next chapter.

With the Holocaust testimonies and Vietnam veterans' narratives, war trauma has been aptly inserted in literature in general and in narratology in particular. Under the influence of Freud, Caruth ventures to delve deep into trauma and scrutinizes its elusiveness in research. Undeniable is her role in injecting trauma in world literature. According to her, trauma is an "infectious disease": a viral infection. Like Covid-19 virus, trauma is highly likely to be transmitted to individuals as well as to generations. It consequently engenders a collective psycho-historical malady. It must be noted that Caruth is the first theorist who dares use the term 'trauma theory'; that is to say, it is under her exhaustive theorization that trauma becomes a separate theory, the preexisting plethora of research on it notwithstanding. It is worth reiterating that in its general and frequently invoked sense, trauma is defined as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth 91). What is intriguing here about trauma is that it renders the traumatic event' sequentiality dysfunctional in the sense that the past disguises in the present, the present becomes blurred and the future signals angst and uncertainty. Broken chronology is thus nourished, as it will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapter, as soon as the traumatized embarks on the endeavor to comprehend when the trauma really happened. Furthermore, the quote brings together the perplexing convergence between trauma and shock; hence why a distinction should be made between the two terms. Although this convergence

may symbolize especially not a simple construct but an intimate affinity with a difficulty to dissociate them, one has to reflect on their psychological divergence. While shock is the pre-trauma, trauma is the post-shock in that the former embraces the latter and the latter emanates from the former. Both terms denote thus an inextricable interconnection that is a complementary process. In both cases, an inevitable inner torment is provoked. It is not for nothing that Ellis' tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* lack linearity. Such a puzzling mode of writing corresponds to the convulsive plot in which the settings are fragmentarily composed, the characters are vulnerably exposed and authors are cogently juxtaposed. By reflecting upon the twentieth century's most traumatic milestones, one might bring the notion of collective trauma to the fore.

I.1.2. Highlights on Collective Trauma and Memory

In his pertinent book *Everything in its Path* (1976), Erikson offers a rounded definition of the term 'collective trauma' that encompasses historical, psychological and philosophical dimensions. In his terms, it is

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (Alexander 4)

In Erikson's thoughts, collective trauma is a social calamity that injects pathos into life and creates a cultural chasm which, in turn, disturbs the spirit of community. An intruder-like, it implies the emergence of an alien component at the level of the unconscious societal norms. As such, it results in an inner clash among the members of the society, and therefore questions the sense of community amidst the struggle. Under such a maladjustment, the society appears broken, unstable and prone to evanescence. The point to be stressed here is not that collective trauma destroys a nation –it rarely does despite, or because of, the

failure to resuscitate history, but that it generates resilience and resistance from within despair and chaos.

The irony, though, is that collective trauma helps alleviate the pains through developing a collective memory, also called cultural memory. “Neither remnant, document, nor relic of the past, nor floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for better or for worse, links the past to the present and future” (Bal vii). In line with Bal’s definition, collective memory appears to establish relativity to past, present and future. It, according to Halbwachs, “is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion” (22). It thus covers the duty of remembering, as previously discussed, the common traumatic past by a social group. As Halbwachs would further point out, collective memory “endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. It follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society” (22). It is to Halbwachs’ social definition of collective memory that one can cogently fathom its function and mechanism of traumatization in the (re)building of a nation by remnants of violent historical events. A history –be it painful or painless- must be reserved and preserved through the act of remembrance which takes many forms, ranging from written archive to folklore. Halbwachs, in this vein, reminds us that “knowledge of the past is mainly preserved by the chronicling of events in written sources or by oral tradition” (32). Hence, it is crucial to conserve history to have a better command of the nation’s components continuity. For, it is often out of remembering that a narrative of restorative healing is produced. So, the remembrance of collective trauma simply historicizes mourning as much as it celebrates the casualties. In fact, collective trauma is not only about grieving but also commemorating human losses, and therefore a sane generation is born. If collective trauma, I argue, breaks both the individual’s psyche and the history’s backbone, collective memory consolidates recovery and lessens the suffering.

It is important to note that collective memory of trauma may take various modes of memorial such as, literary texts, oral narratives, monuments and

museums, to cite but a few. Something of the sort proves always adequate for the case of Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, for it shelters the intellectual character and entrusts him with the duty of protecting museums and preserving historical treasures from war atrocities, a point to which I shall devote an in-depth analysis in the last chapter through the examination of Ammo Mazen. With the short-term and long-term trauma complications, the crisis begets vigor and reform to one's psyche as well as to the nation's fabric. In order to better understand the functionality of collective memory that follows up collective trauma, it is useful to, fleetingly but concisely, provide illustration⁶. On the one hand, the Holocaust literature succeeded in (re)shaping a worldwide narrative of common suffering through inserting a testimonial mode of narration in which victimization is embedded and potent. The latter emerges largely from sociopolitical and cultural climates wherein a "sentiment to leave the past behind and move on with a renewed sense of national pride" spreads thoroughly (Bos 20). This explains how collectively trauma experience deplores as much as prides the act of violence, for it is out of survival that both emotional and cognitive faculties get evoked, a point to which I turn my discussion later in "The Aesthetics of, and Polemics against, Empathy" segment of the next section. On the other hand, the Vietnamese war "left a deep imprint on the minds of people who were then in adolescence and early adulthood, whereas for later cohorts it was but a historic memory with comparatively little potency" (Halbwachs 29). This demonstrates the generational transmission of collective memory, especially when the traumatized people are young, as we have seen in the previous section; most of the veterans were teenagers. What the quote further draws upon is the idea that public trauma experience of war metamorphoses into a historic memory in that it infiltrates the universe and existence timelessly.

The synthesis of the above-provided illustrations seems intriguing. Interlinked with one another in terms of producing collective memory narrative,

⁶Because of reasons of space and time limitations, my illustration here is regrettably too compendious and too limited. For further illustrations, consult the collective trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: atomic bomb literature. See Ashley Martinez's *Hiroshima and Mass Trauma Today: Treating Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Individuals and Communities*, 2015.

regardless of the differences in contexts and pretexts, trauma remains a regenerative process of versatile unrests, ranging from psychological to historical traces. But so it does evoke a profound national feeling of reform. Within this context, what trauma puts forth is a drop and what it does really encapsulate is an ocean. What if present traumas come from the past or even the future? For, in this sequence of events, nothing can arise from nothing. Hence, memory symbolizes a time machine fabric in trauma studies, a point which I shall look closely at in Ellis' *My Name Is Parvana* and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* in the next chapter. In particular, it creates a cycloidal (round) narrative whereby the traumatized voyages in time, rolls with the jumbled mosaics of chronology and sinks in the vacuum of psychological torment. In brief, the relentless back and forth between the past and the present makes the novel under scrutiny shelter the activity of the human mind through the puzzling workings of trauma, memory and time.

What is at stake is not simply the psychological micro effect of memory on the individual's psyche i.e. the traumatized, but rather the macro level it touches upon, which is to say history and culture. Within this context, memory appears to be an exceptional element in the trauma realm whose role and impact should be taken into significant consideration as long as it is concerned with collecting fragments of memories which, for their parts, are part and parcel of the remaking of history after the deplorable experience of war. Only by materializing those memories that a "narrative of the individual comes to function in the service of collective memory" (Ball 53). This being said, the abundance of personal accounts is what helps testify to the collective experience of trauma, resist history veiling and preserve memory from amnesia. A basic example is projected in Ellis' *The Breadwinner* through Fatana who, despite the risks she takes, succeeds in publishing a magazine that testifies to the collective traumatic experience of Afghan women with patriarchy⁷.

⁷ More on this intellectual errand is thoroughly tackled in the last chapter.

In an uncanny twist, it is no wonder that a resilient spirit regenerates amidst psychological crisis. In turn, the ‘founding trauma’⁸ results in a certain inner tranquility as it restructures social appeasement and culminates in history stability. It is customary for individuals and communities to undergo a rehabilitation of the damaged psyche, resistance and resilience after experiencing overwhelming events, mental disorders withstanding. One might close the discussion by quoting Dominick LaCapra who ventures with the delicate (re)discovery of both the individual and the nation’s identity from within historical traumas. To him,

all myths of origin include something like a founding trauma, through which the people pass and emerge strengthened; at least they have stood the test of this founding trauma. The Civil War or, more recently, the war in Vietnam for the United States, the French Revolution in France, the battle of Kosovo in Serbia, and certainly the Holocaust in Israel (and for worldwide Jewry, and perhaps even more broadly at the present time) can be seen as in some way indicating that through a trauma one finds an identity that is both personal and collective at the same time. (LaCapra 161-162)

What LaCapra draws upon is the assumption that the collectiveness of trauma is part and parcel of everyone’s life and every nation’s history that damages as much as adjusts the psycho-historical broken skeleton. In short, it is merely but an attempt to show how the constant experience of war which, to an extreme extent, marked the twentieth century implies collective trauma narratives. In the next section, I will examine the twenty-first century where another trauma paradigm emanates from the 9/11 event that transcends the specific collectivism and rather signals a global trauma narrative, notwithstanding the forceful critics and scholars’ consensus view of classifying it within the frame of collective trauma.

⁸A definition of the term imposes itself to avoid confusion. In LaCapra’s terms, a founding trauma is referred to those “traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group rather than events that pose the problematic question of identity” (23).

I.1.3. The Twenty-first Century and the Awakening of Global Trauma Narrative

Although it is too early to provide a definite conclusion and a kind of *procès-verbal* about the contemporary world as the twenty-first century marks less than a quarter century, one might cogently say that it represents an expanding inquiry in trauma studies where the spirit of war looms on the universal horizon. The early years of the present century are remarkably being characterized by growing conflicts; evoking an urgent interest in trauma theory and the equivocal way it manifests itself in literary works and criticism. For instance, a wealth of research focuses on the role of technology in spreading evil forces, ranging from serious concerns with climate change to the experience of pandemics and its impact on individuals and communities, especially with the Covid-19 outbreak. The most literary examples of these calamities would be Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010). On other occasions, it is to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the fear of a third world war that research finds its current fashion. Linked to trauma theory, what these cases suggest is that in order for stability to be maintained, intellectuals need to bear witness to the global trauma politicians are causing, a point that is carefully addressed in the last chapter of the present research work.

So, as illustrated above, the twenty-first century already evidences that advances in technology, namely biological and military, allow the proliferation of historical upheavals, and therefore the propagation of psychological unrests among the people. What makes the very beginning of the century painfully complicated is the 9/11 event and its global aftermaths. The latter resonates broken echoes of human constant sufferings in the world in general, and in the Middle East in particular. The trauma of 9/11 attacks proves one of the most conspicuous phenomena in the research sphere; it brings controversial debates to the attention of international critics, scholars and researchers. Many research projects have contributed to the traumatic outcomes of the event from both the Western and the non-Western perspectives. As a global scare hit humanity, a new

large and diverse approach to the writing of vulnerability is brought to the fore: the narrative of crisis; bringing together innovative readings, artistic pleadings and aesthetic feedings. In short, the first quarter of the twenty first-century can be particularly attributed to the way literary genre is produced and received as an ensemble of political conflicts *par-excellence*, and its capacity of prescribing their manifold effects on both the psyche and history. It is within this context that the authors under study go on with their journey to spotlight the traumatic impact of the post 9/11 attacks on today's most traumatic plight, namely Afghan and Syrian children.

Despite being less highlighted, the experience of Afghan and Middle Eastern children with war trauma in the post 9/11 era has been projected in literature by activist writers who belong to different literary backgrounds, yet meet at forging a trauma narrative that aims to resist historical silencing and alleviate psychic pains. Through adopting a testimony mode of narration, both Ellis and Senzai champion the fictionality of literature which adds meaning to reality, evokes both emotional and cognitive faculties and restores moral values to a broken world lured by imperial and capital spirits. Such a mode, thus, symbolizes a vehicle of bearing witness to the global experience of loss, violence and trauma. Actually, testimonies are argued to operate effectively at the level of ethos, for they represent “an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group of class situation” (Beverley 23). Surprisingly, fewer and often isolated studies focus on taking traumatized children as a case study. Extending the wealth of critical discussions on the post 9/11 era, the present section aspires to reflect on the global chaos the world is up to this time witnessing due to the pain of the attacks. It is to the twenty-first century and the trauma narrative of the Middle East that attention should be paid; targeting the traumatized child figure as a witness in the context of political upheavals.

Albeit the pain remains timelessly alive in the minds of the people, the psychological turmoil of World War I, World War II and Vietnam War seems to be past lessons of dark politics until a global traumatic incident turns the scales

of war neurosis again. The 9/11 event forges hence another trauma narrative that encapsulates so much of pain and functions as a peace-disturbance wherein both historical and psychological crises fall in line with trauma induction. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, the world witnesses a radical change as it turns from a bipolar to a unipolar mode. The twenty-first century espouses the *'laissez-faire'* and *'laissez-passer'* policies⁹ in all domains, especially politico-business, providing that capital is the dominant ideology. The thirst for capital becomes thus an “infectious disease” that falls under the umbrella of globalization. Undoubtedly, a wealth of research has been conducted on the 9/11 event through investigating the bombing of the World Trade Center towers which results in alarming human and material losses.

In the introduction to her pertinent book *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009), Kristiaan Versluys refers to many scholars and critics who show a deep interest in scrutinizing the haziness of understanding 9/11 attacks as a debatable narrative in terms of analysis; yet, it is Dori Laub's definition that attracts her attention. She points out, “September 11 was an encounter with something that makes no sense, an event that fits in nowhere” (2). Such view suffices to understand the transnationality and universality of the traumatic event as its impact travels everywhere and leaves an undesirable stamp on the psyche and on history. Trauma, in this context, “refers not to the injury but to the blow that inflicted it, not to the state of mind but to the event that provoked it” (Erikson 455). Apart from the local damage, the impact of 9/11 attacks extends America's frontiers and expands its geopolitical dimensions; breaking out a universal “war on terror” campaign. At the global scale, thus, the fear of terrorism starts to inflict on the people's mind; engendering a dormant trauma. Even though the domestic situation appears complex as it symbolizes one of the severest terrorist acts in the history of America, providing an exhaustive analysis

⁹ More specifically, by the *'laissez-faire'* and the *'laissez-passer'* policies is meant not only the economic philosophy which entails the 'free-market' strategy as the main principle of capitalism with modicum, if not the total absence, of governmental interference, but also the cultural, social, political and military agendas that tolerate immoral values such as wars and conflicts at the expense of humanity. Hence, both policies signal multidimensional aspects.

of this matter lies outside the boundaries of the research work and demands a separate space of study.

What this section is concerned with is rather the dislocation of 9/11 trauma from the Western context and its location in nowadays' conflict zones, especially in the Middle East. In the light of this challenging decontextualization, one cannot proceed without summoning the enigmatic figure of Osama Bin Laden¹⁰ and bringing it to the fore: the principal suspect of being the mastermind of the attack. Having Yemeni origins, Saudi Arabian citizenship and Al-Qaeda leadership, Osama Bin Laden is subject to trigger a trauma narrative that transcends collectivism and reaches globalism by planning September 11 attacks in the United States of America as well as other attacks worldwide. From a Western perspective, his radicalism aimed at opposing democracy and fighting for the establishment of an Islamic *Umma*¹¹ that equates in translation, yet differs in meaning from the Western notion of state/nation.

Other than that, the ideology-Laden engenders a pre-war tactic against the civilization of the occident, for it does not fit democratic values. Ironically, countries espousing democracy show no respect to its principles; for example America's invasion of Iraq which, according to Iraq Body Count, records between 185.000 and 209.000 civilian deaths by U.S troops, and the statistics shamefully grow to 288.000, if one further includes combatants (Hamourtziadou). Thus, promoting peace evidences the failure of such a utopian idea of democracy that revolves illusionary around achieving global stability. Mohsin Hamid, an esteemed British Pakistani writer, puts his thought on the matter without any political, or whatsoever, alignments. In one of his interviews,

¹⁰ For a critical overview that combines a historical biography with informative world events about Bin Laden family in general, see Steve Coll's relevant book *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (2008).

¹¹ Theologically speaking, the Arabic word 'Ummah' (the world community of Muslims) stands for the concept which unites all Muslim communities under a shared roof with common religious beliefs. As such, it transcends diversity that ranges from national, racial, linguistic and class divisions (al-Faruqi 105). In the context of cultural dynamics, the immigration of Muslims to the West is believed to cause a threat as the idea of Ummah opposes the Western concept of nation-state; hence why political and religious xenophobia towards Muslims is brought to the fore by many scholars and theorists.

he declares that “the political positions of both Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush are founded on failures of empathy, failures of compassion towards people who seem different (...) we need to stop being so confused by the fear we are fed: a shared humanity unites us with people we are encouraged to think of as our enemies” (Hamid)¹². This gives a panoramic glimpse of how the contemporary world is inhabited by human-made evilness. Furthermore, it helps us understand the universality of suffering and the borderless of wars’ impact in evoking traumas.

To what extent can it be argued that Osama Bin Laden is one of the creations of the American mind? Such a disturbing attack has been waged by Dr. Michel Chossudovsky in his book entitled “*America’s War on Terrorism*” (2005). My goal here is not to delve deep into the American political agenda of invasion but rather to question the extent to which democracy proves incompatible with the contemporary crisis wherein America is involved. To be sure, its recent withdrawal from Afghanistan supports the hypothesis behind the illusion of democracy. For a lack of better terms, *on a beau dire qu’il n’y a rien à dire*. Still, the future will tell us. In all cases, the world of the third millennium will no longer be that of the twentieth century as the balance of power tends to change more and more. Woe to those who will not be able to adapt to the new world, remain frozen in time and rely on a history that is already outdated.

In the light of the previous readings of the twentieth century that clearly marks a collective trauma experience, the 9/11 attacks inscribe a transitory experience of trauma at the global level. This results in what would be called: trans-history circulation of global trauma discourse: a worldwide narrative that encapsulates a common experience of war trauma where echoes of the vulnerable’ sufferings resonate everywhere. Erikson, in this regard, reminds us that “traumatic events of local origins can have consequences that reach across huge distances (...) And it is also true in the sense that news of it is broadcast so quickly and so widely that it becomes a moment in everyone’s history, a datum

¹² The quote is retrieved from an e-source; hence why the page number is not provided.

in everyone's store of knowledge" (462). In truth, it is especially not my intention to claim that the trauma narrative of the 9/11 event implies a kind of decontextualization, if not decolonization, from the Occident to the Orient sphere; yet, several elements that are found in the corpus, as it will be revealed in the final chapter, bespeak an avid endeavor to embark on this hypothesis. Apart from, or along with, its traumatization, the incident opens other challenging topics that roam over many interdisciplinary questions.

Expressing a wish to step back from further engagement with such a polyvocal debate because neither the scope nor the focus of this chapter allows for an extended reflection on September 11 attacks, but rather what outcomes emanate out of that event. Yet, I shall simply note that the point of bringing it to the fore is simply to cast light on the geopolitics of the West, its foreign policy and the repercussions of 9/11 in the Middle East and Afghanistan spheres. In that sense, one may consider the event to be the main gateway to creating disequilibrium at many levels, mainly psychological, historical and political, in the modern world. One example of such trauma extension would be the refugee crisis, a sensitive subject that is raised by Ellis and Senzai in the works under scrutiny upon which the last chapter provides a room for examination. As a result, global trauma discourse emerges as a problematic typology for the prospect of trauma theory.

What is meant here by global trauma discourse is plainly a narrative's universalization of the human, both physical and mental, sufferings under the impact of 9/11 attacks, regardless of geographic borders, plurality of cultures, ideologies and political affiliations, to mention but a few elements of diversity. In other words, the expression denotes the borderless experience of the event in the world, that is, the typology of war trauma that has a mass impact of which the discussed novels are perceived. It is worth mentioning that media adds a new paradigm to the elusiveness of trauma, shifting from a classic psychoanalytic approach to contemporary approaches in the post 9/11 era. It represents a double-edged tool with hidden ideologies. On the one hand, media –in all its forms– frames stereotypical images vis-à-vis the association of Muslims with terrorism;

on the other hand, it can go as far as to subside tensions and help promote peace. Indeed, media maneuvers the public opinion either to serve achieve political goals, which is often the case, or to ethically unveil the truth.

What is striking in the post 9/11 novel is the reactionary attitude of the American administration towards the traumatization of war narrative which gets shortly expanded, extended and dislocated- reference is made here to the ‘war on terror’¹³. The latter symbolizes a Western sequel counter-narrative to the event with different contexts, frames, motives and goals. As a result, it opens up a delicate space of conflicting ideas upon fundamentalism that adds a complex understanding of the Muslim identity. Furthermore, the war on terror engenders a global violent atmosphere wherein the waves of trauma disease contaminate many nations, among them Afghanistan and Syria. In this regard, Morey opines that the war on terror is but a cooked scenario, a *mise en scene* that is created by the Western mind so as to leak imperial ideologies. He is of the view that:

It was necessary to create a ‘spectacle of fear’ around Muslims and Islam to bolster support for an illegal imperialist foreign policy. Continuing this mission into the Obama and Trump years, a highly organized network of Islamophobic opinion formers, many with direct links to the corridors of political power, have ensured that an avalanche of suspicion and invective continues to flow. (13)

The quote implicitly signals a multilateral typology of trauma that has deep-rooted stems in political, cultural, economic, social and literary studies, and, much less, in the psychology realm. This many-sided trauma encapsulates so much fear against targeted groups labelled ‘Oriental’ subjects. As it will be showcased in the last chapter, traces of neo-Orientalism are projected in Ellis’ *Mud City* and Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*. This is worth scrutinizing because this research work is an endeavour to be a continuation, among others, to muse upon contemporary humanitarian emergencies which stem from local and international issues such as crossing borders, refugee crisis, asylum seekers,

¹³America’s 43rd president, George Walker Bush, first used this term shortly after the 9/11 attacks. In short, it describes America’s global military campaign against terrorism. The latter initially began fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and shortly after reached the MENA region.

cultural mobility, linguistic interchanges and social integrity in a changing world that is shaped by a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

It is under such wars' cruelties that a new child's psyche grows troubled and unstable, a psyche that is "both psychologically deep and multi-layered, fragmentary, floating on sensation and consciousness, fed by their random thoughts and their half-conscious dream worlds" (Bradbury 159). As a result, rising modes of literary genres are brought to academic fields; stressing the influential role of trauma literature in voicing silent wounds, repairing broken psyches and building a just world collectively, in addition to being a universal tool for vulnerability through promoting human empowerment and solidarity. To reflect on the traumatized subject, both Ellis and Senzai build their narratives from a child perspective. Through Parvana and Nadia, the portagonists, they paint a vivid picture of children's psychological torments in conflict zones, as it will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

Across the vast array of literature on 9/11 narratives, a significant proportion of Western writers catalyzed the birth of a provoking misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims; condemning them for spreading political and religious radicalism and associating them with terrorism. Hence, binary oppositions emanate to constitute opposed genres. The 'other' and the 'self' are two key terms that converge in word classifications as much as they do in cultural ones. They form, not a simple construct, but rather an intimate deconstruct with regard to humans' diverse genealogies. The fact of being different is indeed the underlying impetus to frame racist stereotypes between the orient and the occident. This is mainly because of the lack of information, misunderstanding and non-accepting others' distinct ethnicities, cultures, religions, political and economic systems. To this end, difference always appears to hold a pejorative meaning in that it creates a kind of pandemonium amongst individuals.

With this binary opposition in mind, one might look at some of the literary works that maneuver global discourse by employing trauma as a disingenuous

tool. The latter seems to have a twofold function: on the one hand, it dramatizes the American experience with a traumatic event in order to secure empathy; on the other hand, it builds a negative frame that is replete with *clichés* against Muslim communities to attain a bulk of psychological and political muscles. Light is here being casted on ‘Islamophobia’ which is “the dominant mode of prejudice in contemporary Western societies” (Morey 1). One of the most influential novels in this context is that of John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006). It revolves around Ahmad Ashmawy: a suicide bomber who ironically happens to be an Arab Muslim in America. The latter is spiritually indoctrinated and radicalized by Shaikh Rashid, an imam figure (cleric) who himself comes from a Muslim background –Yemeni origin. Updike, in his novel, goes as far as to refer to some verses from the sacred text: Quran. By endowing his characters with extremist ideologies, Muslims are not only Updike’s focal point for framing misconceptions but also America’s discourse on Islamophobia which, in turn, pivots on political benefits as well as religious motives.

In a corresponding way, other writers focused merely on narrating the white people’s traumas of 9/11 event. To illustrate, DeLillo’s *The Falling Man* (2007) follows the story of the Keith’s family in the wake of 9/11 and over a period of three years thereafter. This, according to Caruth, is because “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4). As such, the novel does not only cajole the reader with evocative memories about traumatic experience but also tolerates an anti-Muslim discourse. What is striking, then, is that DeLillo injects a kind of provoking sub-narrative that implicitly consolidates the view that Islam is a violent religion. And of course, a common key point of critique is the white writers’ heavy reliance on victimization and acquittal modes that are inclined towards Americans by accusing Muslim characters of planning terrorist attacks, Hammad in particular. Through him, DeLillo “tries to present to the readers the workings of the mind of a terrorist. The novel shows terrorists dedicated to God, carrying such an act in his name” (Bounar 69).

Given the Western perspective of both examples, Eikonsalo opines that both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* “emphasize that there is evil walking among us, ready to strike if we do not keep our eyes open” (84). Trauma, in this sense, emerges as a canonical instrument which stigmatizes as much as it denounces immorality and unethicity vis-à-vis vulnerable people, regardless of their backgrounds. It seems likely, I hypothesize, that such narratives only cultivate the public opinion with an emotional aspect rather than trigger a cognitive sense which should, first and foremost, involve questioning the political motives for such an event to mysteriously happen in the soil of a nation that commands the utmost military strength and superiority worldwide, and where ‘Big Brother is watching’ even microscopic intruders. Thus, the fervor of 9/11 incident is manipulative; it reflects how far terrorism connotes to Muslims and Arabs, for they do not fall under the demands of globalization and Western values. In an unexpected, yet moral essay, Susan Sontag appears amongst the fewest intellectuals who dare blame America in general and the Bush administration in particular, for the global calamity the world witnessed. It took her only twelve days after the war on terror broke out in the Middle East to openly denounce the hidden ideologies of trauma discourse. She rhetorically states,

Politics, the politics of democracy –which entails disagreement, which promotes candor- has been replaced by psychotherapy. Let’s by all means grieve together. But let’s not be stupid together. A few shreds of historical awareness might help us to understand what has just happened, and what may continue to happen. "Our country is strong", we are told again and again. I for one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not all America has to be. (Sontag)

The daring message Sontag conveys gives clearly rise to some disturbing questions, mainly: how can trauma be used as a discourse that encapsulates hate speech to achieve political interests? Should trauma, in some cases, be used as a cultural crime to exonerate violence? To what extent did the ‘war on terror’ American campaign contribute to harrowing catastrophes instead of prioritizing the cultivation of safety and security within the noble aspirations of freedom and democracy in the post 9/11 era? Under such an immoral ground, trauma not only

makes the *Self* into a victim but goes as far as to insert dogmatic ideas which attack the *Other*. Thus, the advent of global trauma discourse imposes a counter-narrative, a narrative where Ellis and Senzai equally unravel the Occident complicity and disentangle the Orient from terrorism, as the last chapter will look closely at the traces of neo-orientalism in the selected novels.

So, the post 9/11 event forges a delicate narrative of dehumanization; cultivating the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident sphere. What is more threatening is that a Western narrative of terrorism emerges against the Arab/Muslim community. The latter decenters as much as downgrades the non-Western subject from human to sub-human representation. In this fashion, a myriad of distorted images propagate at odds with Muslim immigrants who were associated with terrorism. These distorted images vouch for the idea that “Islam has become a center of fear (i.e., Islamophobia). Muslims have been debunked and portrayed in much of Western scholarship as the exotic other, the enemy, imagined or real, and the despotic, antidemocratic, and terroristic” (El-Aswad & El-Sayed 41). As a result, discourse on neo-Orientalism received great attention in research, a potent instrument to achieve political, historical, economic and cultural interests, regardless of the democratic ideals which made the West bloc but an ephemeral dream. As it is examined in the last chapter, the selected novels shelter the collapse of democracy in the face of the refugee crisis.

If truth be told, not all western writers have the intention of dying their literary works with *clichés* against the Muslim and Arab communities¹⁴; hence why one of the aims of this thesis centers on exploring how un/faithful *foreign* writers can be towards writing about the orient subject. So, the intention here is not to generalize but rather to correct the myopic image that has been blurred by both the West and the non-West in an intellectual manner through critically reading literature. To be sure, both Ellis and Senzai humanize the ‘oriental’

¹⁴ More to the point, consider Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011) which aesthetically reflects upon the global impact of trauma, regardless of binary oppositions between the center and the periphery. With a significant focus on the influence of globalization, Waldman cogently forges a narrative that provides the reader with an understanding of how the trauma of 9/11 politicized the world with misconceptions and heat up a neo-orientalist discourse.

subject in general and the refugee in particular. Hence, trauma literature revives a neo-Orientalist discourse by transcending the psychological ground and spotlighting the cultural classification of the world. Examples of neo-Orientalist traces that are espoused by the authors under study are critically addressed in the last chapter where the role of the activist intellectual is approached from a universal lens. In short, the 9/11 era marks a different paradigm of trauma literature regarding the dichotomous difference between the West and the non-West. As such, the literary sphere shelters also the cultural and the political aspects, along with the psychic damage trauma evokes, hence revolutionizing social sciences and humanities. The last chapter shows how neo-Orientalist traces are embedded in the selected novels. Both Ellis and Senzai, as I suggest in the analysis, regardless of their affiliation to the occident bloc, are more concerned with universal values to the point where they go as far as to criticize the west for fuelling more traumas to the aura of aura, especially after the 9/11 attacks.

This section has so far proven that trauma theory sprang from the toxic aura of wars during the twentieth-century and got more intense by the horrors of the twenty-first century. More than just highlighting the development of trauma theory and its historical nature, this section serves a larger purpose to critique its inclination towards the western sphere, giving a one-sided contextual face. As delved into the depths of scrutiny, a bulk of theoretical outlooks and literary productions focus on the American and European veterans who return home wounded. Within the framework of these considerations, war trauma is advanced from an adult-oriented perspective. Surprisingly, the child subject occupies no place in the diagnosis of war trauma. Additionally, the voice of the Afghan and Syrian child subject is silenced and under represented. Such paucity necessitates more digging and a more elaborate investigation. It prompts us to pore over, examine, and shelter the figure of the traumatized children in order to get to the bottom of their broken voices, listen to their untold stories, repair their wounds and gain by such a knowledge the world needs to have, a knowledge that requires the decontextualization of trauma theory from the Western to non-Western sphere and from an adult to a children case study.

I.2. Lost Childhood in the Shadow of Cruelty

Following Freud's relevant passage¹⁵, quoted earlier on *The Disillusion of War*, in a 'bellicose age' that is shaped by constant political upheavals and persecutions, traumatized people are affected by overwhelming events commanding them into an inner world of fear. Their psyches appear broken into shattered episodic scenes holding historical lies and echoing disturbing truth from within. Thus, the need to repair the wounded psyche is a pressing action so that the haunting presence of insidious bruises helps alleviate psychological pains. The traumatic experience of war is indeed one reason, amongst many, which embraces fragmented thoughts that are firmly loaded with feelings of terror, anxiety, unfamiliarity and disillusionment. Under such turmoil, traumatized children in conflict zones find themselves in front of the unfamiliar milieu where the 'Powers of Horror', to allude to Kristiva's seminal work, challenge their resilient instinct of survival. They are ruthlessly thrown into the abyss of trauma due to the consecutive traumatic losses they endure: the loss of their relatives, childhood, rights and, above all, existence in the shadow of despotic regimes.

It must be remembered that the thesis at hand explores children's experience of war trauma as well as their construction of resilience¹⁶. No wonder that children, along with women, at war settings are the utmost vulnerable category to develop emotional, psychological and physical complications. This assumption is backed up by the hypothesis that they are innocently used as political tools by autocratic regimes in order to have control over the tugs of war

¹⁵ To avoid repetition and redundancy, the reader is invited to go back to page 19 where Freud's targeted quote is fully stated.

¹⁶ I am not unaware of the psychological nuances between adult and children's responses to trauma. What is interesting in trauma studies is that adults themselves may respond to the traumatic event(s) differently. For example, two adult sisters experience the same trauma: the death of their mother, yet their reactions to, and receptions of, the overwhelming event may be different. The healing process, for its part, may also take dissimilar modes. It is thus challenging to harness trauma because it entails inconsistent case studies. However, applying it on an individual basis that fits children is necessary; that is to say that while the theory is inclusive, its application must be exclusive. Adding to this, I found it necessary to start with a general reflection on trauma theory for two reasons; first, it helps understand how elusive and unsteady working on trauma is; second, it explains the paucity of literature in the category of people I am examining to hopefully fill in the research gap that has been left deficient, as far as I know.

and direct the public opinion towards their interests. The impact of war on children's lives is therefore a matter of grave concern. Although a wealth of research has been documented on the psychological effects of wars, there still is paucity in providing therapeutic practices to help heal the fragile psyche of children from trauma manifestations.

Certainly, the thesis does not perform clinical experiments; yet literature imposes itself as a significant means to project children's experience with war trauma. Furthermore, it promotes the healing of psychological unrests through verbalising as well as voicing the wounds. Literature, I argue, is a potent form of art that may embrace a sensory-based psychotherapeutic approach to impede trauma metamorphosis throughout time and history. Because, under such traumatic circumstances, today's children are tomorrow's leaders, healing them is fundamental to help stop psychological and historical *haemorrhages* and build a just world where moral values are the pillars, regardless of some megalomaniacs, namely politicians, who are lured by dark politics, power abuse and hegemony spirit.

In this section, emphasis is placed on the enterprise of reading fiction as a life writing narrative where an affinity of psychological interiorities for traumatized children flows across realistic and modernist tenets imbued in the war novel, the primary concern of the next section. In this light, trauma theory should not only be applied to literary texts, but should also challenge and question the phenomena that writers address in their narratives, phenomena that voice the traumatized voiceless and add meaning to the eclipsed reality of war. The purpose is also to encourage readers to develop critical thinking skills through their interpretations of these texts. It must be acknowledged that the selected novels are forged from the perspective of children in conflict zones that we, readers and researchers, ponder the horizon of vulnerability that is different from the traumatic experience of both male soldiers and women double oppression in battlefields. More than that, it is through the voice of children that triggers the adult's wisdom. Both Shaushana Felman and Dori Laub argue that "it is in children's stories that we often find the wisdom of the old" (83). If children

literature is teaching us anything, it is that investing in healing the history from the grips of power and hegemony would provoke a paradigm shift in the progress of humanity. Hence, the examination of the child figure deserves much consideration in the cruel context of war trauma.

I.2.1. The Traumatized Child at the Crossroads of War Trauma

Children, who are supposed to be the epitome of hope, innocence and purity, find themselves hurtled into the vortex of war settings, at the heart of a poisonous atmosphere where everything is falling apart except their innocence. Some of them unwillingly, yet forcibly join the army; they are given dangerous weapons and taught how to shoot and kill mercilessly. This is indeed a serious problem that is surfaced as relevant in the war setting. While a plethora of research is conducted on war studies, the sensitive subject of children soldiers continues to be under-researched and untheorized, especially in the MENA region context. Hence, this sub-section endeavours to cast a shining ray of glow over children's engagement with, and recruitment in, wars to join the current growing research by extending the discussions to a delicate category of people in the war novel genre while drawing on existing trauma theory. Within this immoral context, both Ellis and Senzai respond to the horrors of indoctrinating and dragging children into violence. For the sake of illustration, an obvious example is found in *The Breadwinner*, serving the purpose at hand. While witnessing a traumatic scene in one of Kabul' stadium, Parvana "caught a glimpse of a young Talib man, too young to have a beard. He was holding up a rope strung with four severed hands, like beads on a necklace. He was laughing and showing off his booty to the crowd" (Ellis 108). The young Talib man is the kind of a brainwashed child whose innocence is robbed by the Taliban atrocity.

As argued earlier in this chapter, the typology of trauma this thesis is concerned with does not only pivot on its psychological effects but also on other aspects of social sciences and humanities. Because "the widespread use of child fighters is essentially a recent innovation in warfare, much more prominent after World War II" (Erikson 3), it is crucial to theorize their delicate narrative in

research. Figuratively speaking, they are the avatar of an evil game wherein manipulation exerts a power abuse on the future of the world at large. In this sense, the implementation, and the pull, of children in contact zones signals a “tactical innovation”, to employ Tynes’ terminology, which jeopardizes the essence of universal deontology and humanity values. Immersed in the aura of inhumanity, the authors under study respond to horrors facing Afghan and Syrian children. More precisely, they stress how Parvana and Nadia are immune neither to the history they are part of nor to the time they live in.

Moreover, such an inhumane tactic disturbs the universal ethics of psychosocial standards in that it dilates feelings of despair and scepticism over the status of children. On the induction of child soldiers into armed institutions, Tynes argues:

As a subset of the strategy, child soldiers are a high-capacity tool utilized against armed forces that are often technologically superior. The tactic works at ground level and is based on human-to-human contact. When child soldiers enter battlefield, some actors are immobilized while others are more readily mobilized. The effect has at least three significant dimensions: the creation of moral dilemmas, the fortification of troops, and the relocation of fear in the social system. (Tynes)

Tynes goes on to criticize the unethicity behind recruiting children soldiers in battlefields. Her critique touches upon three degenerate forms of civilization: morality failure, power hunger and fear savour; all of which threaten the pregnancy of a sane society. Although Tynes denounces the evilness of the war in shaping the child soldier figure, his critique remains limited in providing conspicuous effects on the sensitive matter while concealed threats remain eclipsed. It would clearly be more accurate to add the psychological pressures which the phenomenon evokes the primal roar of brainwashing an innocent child with war ideologies. By psychological pressures are meant feelings of fear, loss, unfamiliarity and discomfort i.e. uncanny symptoms which feed the trauma extension circle. Such an addition might be best for adopting a typology of moral

trauma¹⁷ that helps beget a healthier generation at both the micro and macro level. By the micro and the macro level, I mean the family and the community stabilities respectively.

Along the same line, traumatized children dream to flee their home countries and run away from what threatens their existence. War forces them to leave the warmth of their homes where they are supposed to be surrounded by their caring parents and supportive siblings. Consequently, they seek refuge in camps; they become refugees in their own countries and experience internal migration and displacement where they are often exploited and mistreated. Under these tyrannical circumstances, they are not only exposed to physical danger; they also endure emotional wounds. One way to look beyond the scope of investigation is to consider the insecurities that surround traumatized children in conflict zones. In an essay entitled “*Individual and Societal Dimensions of Security*”, Pinar Bilgrin touches upon the concept of ‘human security’ and the threat of activating a ‘risk society’¹⁸, wherein children are used and abused. In this light, traumatized children are put in-between the atrocities of local authoritarian regimes and the neglect of international intervention. To such plight of forced displacement and risk investment, echoes of children’s cries will resonate in the last chapter where the sensitive subject of refugee crisis kindles the flame of another blow, a sequel narrative of trauma.

According to Bilgrin, the security of both the individual and the community in the post Cold War era does not only stand in accordance with what the state dictates but also with other factors that affect the social system such as, wars, migration and epidemics (12). Amartya Sen, in this regard, argues that human security is “the keyword to comprehensively seizing all the menaces that

¹⁷ A moral trauma is what I consider the ethical reaction to an overwhelming event that is concerned with principles of rights and wrong behaviors in addition to the goodness and badness of human nature.

¹⁸ In the age of globalization, a risk society emerges under detrimental technological advances and industrial development. It is important to note that the term ‘risk society’ was coined by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck during the 1980s and defined in his book: *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992) as the “systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself” (Beck 21).

threaten the survival, daily life, and dignity of human beings and to strengthening the efforts to confront these threats” (1). Thus, the security of children in warzone areas must be brought to the frontline in order to make the journey less burdensome for future contributions in research enterprise. Highlighting the fangs of insecurity is of pivotal importance for this research construction of children experience with war trauma, as projected in Ellis’ tetralogy and Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*.

It is believed that children, along with women, have the potential to brush violence off the world. This is because the case of children in conflict zones is as delicate and as complicated to be critically examined, for it invites a dive into the fragile psyche of traumatized children. In his influential book: *The Theory of Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith lays out the importance of the child in evoking sympathy and empathy¹⁹. Engaging with moral philosophy and human nature, he stresses the emotional connectedness that we feel with children. Smith argues,

in the eye of nature, it would seem, a child is a more important object than an old man; and excites a much more lively, as well as a much more universal sympathy. It ought to do so. Everything may be expected, or at least hoped, from the child. In ordinary cases, very little can be either expected or hoped from the old man. The weakness of childhood interests the affections of the most brutal and hard-hearted. It is only to the virtuous and humane, that the infirmities of old age are not the objects of contempt and aversion. In ordinary cases, an old man dies without being much regretted by anybody. Scarce a child can die without rending asunder the heart of somebody. (236)

The quote draws our attention to the child figure that is a reflection of, and a mirror for, sympathy. The intention here is not to victimize the child. A child does not have to be viewed as a victim but rather as a hero, whereas the villain is the adult who is lured by the capitalist system to achieve political interests at the expense of human dignity. Both Parvana and Nadia, the main characters of the novels under study, are the epitome of resilience, resistance and persistence. Together, they inhale war trauma and exhale it.

¹⁹ A difference between the terms is highlighted in the last section of the present chapter due to the close attention it requires which would cut the thread and deviate the analysis.

Activist writers engage with reporting not only the appalling repercussions of wars and conflicts but also the moral decline that wrecks humanity; a serious disease which plagues the capitalized world. Ellis Deborah and N.H. Senzai are amongst those committed writers who forge a literary output that aims to narrativise bleeding history, to verbalise silent wounds and to voice children's experience of trauma and construction of resilience in conflict zones. Through bemoaning the evaporation of humanness, they champion the fictionality of literature which fosters global responsibility and awareness. Psychological torments are features that these writers endow their characters with throughout their works. In the process of doing so, they resort to literary devices ranging from thematic to stylistic tools to denounce the prevailing evils, a point on which the last section of the present chapter will launch the aesthetic footings that shape the war novel genre.

II.2.2. The Refugee Child and the Debris of War Trauma

As discussed so far, it must be acknowledged, studies based on trauma theory are constituted on a solid ground even though they are still evolving and expanding from limited fields of research to geopolitics and media studies. Trauma clearly reached its peak in parallel with the consecutive experience of war during the twentieth century as well as the consistent conflicts that marked the twenty-first century. Through the previous cursory overview, the most relevant markers of wars' incidents where the dilemma of trauma deepened were highlighted. In short, the different contextual dimensions seem to be rather centered on a Western context and pretext. This intentional, yet inescapable focus has twofold aims. First, it helps us grasp the over dramatization of the Western sphere juxtaposed to the historical silencing experience of trauma in the non-Western sphere; second, it allows the pretexts in the following chapters to consider different variants of war trauma in non-Western contexts to evidence the betrayal of the West's democratic ideals, namely moral principles of freedom, justice and equality.

So, in this subsection, the intention is made to opine the prospect of trauma theory in studying the child figure from Syrian and Afghan lenses, an attempt to widen the scope of investigation, conquer new horizons and contribute to research flexibility. This move is mainly advanced because the context and the motives change with the changing face of war trauma. In particular, the post 9/11 era gives birth to a global trauma discourse that not only fails to keep pace with democracy but also engenders human catastrophes. Accordingly, supreme powers proved unable to preserve children's rights. The notion of democracy should thus not only be revisited but also demythologized from the illusions.

Over the last few decades, the refugees' crisis has been one of the most conspicuous subjects in research. Its causes and consequences on the sensitive experience of both the displaced people and the host countries are becoming a vehicle for enhancing humanity and encouraging critical engagement with the reading of refugees' narratives by prominent scholars, looking at the psychological diseases, trauma precisely, they develop. Extending the ongoing research on refugee crisis, one shall examine how we might ponder the question of the future of trauma theory and how we might bring into conjecture its long-term aftermaths and metamorphoses. In particular, this raises disturbing questions on a new kind of extended trauma; the trauma of being a refugee subject coming from the Orient, from warzone areas, to an unfamiliar Occident environment. What is more threatening is that a worrying proportion of refugees is occupied by children category, most of whom are either orphans or abandoned. They come with a reservoir of repressed feelings, haunted by traumatic memories and carrying with them a heavy accumulation of internal sufferings.

By escaping the *periphery* and moving to the *center*, traumatized children think that they can move the paradigm of the dolorous atrocities and integrate into a just world wherein their rights are respected. However, a journey towards an extended trauma is what they end up developing. Most of the time, they fall subject to racial discrimination -a controversial debate which we should heed with caution notwithstanding. In this light, the refugee crisis signals the flux of "*Unwanted Invaders*", to allude to the title of an article by Samuel Parker, and

therefore prompt Orientalist and neo-Orientalist readings. Those asylum seekers face other obstacles, such as borders' closures and barriers to entry. Indeed, these are dehumanizing mechanisms Western countries impose which, at the psychological level, fuel the trauma and deepen the wounds. An implicit example of this is found in Ellis' third volume, *Mud City*, through Shauzia who is subject to racial profiling and undergoes disillusionment regarding the West following the 9/11 event.²⁰

Research, so far, neglected a further pathway by which the future of trauma that is experienced by Middle Eastern children in conflict zones could translate into another trauma in their pursuit of fleeing the horrors of their bleeding countries, that is to say, the trauma which encapsulates long-term effects and expands its playfield – reference is here being made to the trauma of the refugee crisis. More precisely, it revolves around identity crisis, racial profiling, nostalgia, exile, classism and other forms of division that can only be understood prospectively; indeed, a sterile subject that has to set the grounds for urgent attention and consideration.

What is argued here, or at least suggested, is that the trauma of those children in conflict zones opens the door to another trauma that is the sequel narrative of them being refugees. The constant conflicts in the Middle East region proved to be the main gateway to the incredible number of displaced people who are seen from different lights. These asylum seekers are going to be referred to as either “postcolonial subjects” or “orient subjects”, expressions which embrace connotations of otherness, racism and xenophobia towards them through media representation and foreign policy. To that deficiency, the present section seeks to broaden the scope of trauma studies in the wider non-western world by including the experience of the Syrian and Afghan refugees. Torn between homesickness and adaptation to a new country, their integration to multicultural host societies would be a complicated process while their

²⁰ More elaboration on this point is thoroughly tackled in Chapter Four.

repatriation would be impossible. As a result, they appear flooded by traumatic memories and a sudden burst of feelings of fear that submerge their minds.

In this context, a growing literature of life writing emerges to construct a reader-engaging witness narrative which portrays the lingering traumatic experience of refugee childhood. The core aim of such a literary genre is to bring Middle East's chaos to the attention of international readers, in addition to cajoling scholars by looking at the subsequent dimensions of war trauma experience. Seized with the fear of not being able to fulfil belongingness, traumatized Middle Eastern children succumb to despondency. This is because the grounds upon which they are welcome in host countries are fuelled by *clichés*. The images the West sphere internalizes and the interpretations it makes are carried along with discriminatory bases which can influence its perceptions of who the other truly is. An appalling and dehumanizing policy against refugees makes the trauma they undergo extend and expand, a never-ending cycle of suffering. Therefore, the nation preaching about building a sense of community and belonging, which must go hand in hand with democratic principles, is often inattentive to the very sense of alienation imposed through several mechanisms, such as borders.

The Syrian refugee crisis, which symbolizes the outcome of a huge disaster moving from a utopian dream of change to a dystopian nightmare of ruin, is the central debate of different political parties among right and left wings, in addition to media representation and public opinion. According to the UNHCR, "Syria is considered as the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time". The late updates in the Eastern Ghouta and the use of chemical weapons as well as the foreign interference have turned it to a ground of conflict. This results in more disasters, including more killed, missing and injured people, and certainly more displaced ones. To illustrate this point, and according to an online article in the "Guardian", "almost 7000.000 people are displaced in 2018". This fragile subject is projected in literature by committed writers who provide a critique of, and a comment on, political violence in bearing witness to the impact

of war trauma on the lives of traumatized children in order to voice what has been muted and to preserve what might be under threat of historical eclipsing.

Under such humanitarian crisis, activist writers engage with the contemporary plight of children's *refugism*, among them Deborah Ellis and N.H. Senzai. Through their works, they paint a vivid picture of humanitarian crisis. For instance, in an interview conducted with Senzai, she declares:

I feel it's my responsibility to bring to light stories from underrepresented voices [refugees] and locations [Orient]. And no matter how different these characters may appear at first, my hope is that my readers connect with them and realize that people, no matter where they live, are intrinsically the same; they have similar hopes, dreams and desire to live a peaceful, meaningful life. (Senzai)²¹

Because seventy percent, if not more, of the present research work is devoted to the holistic analysis of their selected works, it is of pivotal importance to divert the attention to the projection of war trauma, an intertextual aim to reach out new optics and horizons that have not been explored in the literary criticism enterprise.

The first example to be highlighted here is *Azzi in Between* (2013), a graphic narrative of bearing witness to a childhood Syrian refugee in which Sarah Garland graphically conveys both the visual and the textual testimony of a Azzi's traumatic memory of displacement and pinpoints the difficulty of adapting to life in a new country; ranging from cultural, linguistic and religious hurdles. Being the daughter of a publisher and illustrator, Garland cajoles the readers with an evocative narrative of violence, loss, despair and psychic damage of a child-focused witness who is haunted by the atrocities of war and the overwhelming experience of growing up in exile. What adds to the dense fabric of the narrative's aesthetics, in fact, is the writer's direct contact with human vulnerability as she works among refugee families. Such experience allows her to position the testimony of a traumatized refugee subject within the collective

²¹ This is an e-text source, hence the absence of page number. For more details consult <https://edicottonquilt.com/2018/04/02/interview-n-h-senzai/>

experience of exile in an attempt to foster remembrance which, in turn, energizes the healing process.

To briefly review another relevant example, A.M. Dassu's *Boy, Everywhere* (2020) chronicles the everlasting suffering of a 13-year-old boy whose life turns upside down after the war knocks the door of Damascus and brakes violently out the country. Forced to flee war-torn Syria, Sami and his family run desperately from their comfortable life in Damascus, passing by a smuggler's den in Turkey to end up a prison in Manchester. Accurately articulated by the writer herself in the blurb, it is "a story of survival, of family, of bravery ... In a world where we are told to see refugees as the 'other', this story will remind readers that 'they' are also 'us'" (Dassu, back cover). Reflecting on stereotypes that are based on cultural, social and religious thoughts can be regarded as, and suggestive of, Dassu's attempt to underscore the extent to which today's refugees are subject to discrimination, otherness and racial oppression. On the one hand, it highlights the illusion of fulfilling the safety of multicultural England; on the other hand, it renders the trauma more intense. More than that, the narrative mirrors the life-threatening journey Syrian refugees undergo on their way to Europe, stressing the insecure trucks and boats they venture out into the tribulation of taking risks.

Equally important is another context that is not sufficiently articulated and disavowed despite, or because of, the global appeal it recently received on the refugee crisis: Afghanistan. The alarming number of Afghan refugees continues to make human critical conditions even worse. The war in Afghanistan has displaced a millions of children abroad. According to the latest statistics published by UNHCR, at least "777,000 people (57% children and 21% women) brought the total number of people displaced by conflict inside Afghanistan to 3.5 million". Additionally, almost "670,000 Afghans had been internally displaced, adding to some 2.9 million existing IDPs, and thousands had fled into

neighbouring countries” by September 2022²². These are alarming statistics which require urgent approaches of examination.

Like Garland and Dassu, Guwali Passarlay in *The Lightless Sky: My Journey to Safety as a Child Refugee* (2015) follows the story of a twelve-year-old child who struggled to escape war atrocities and poverty in Afghanistan. In his memoir, Passarlay revisits his past traumatic memories in order to resist historical amnesia and stimulate collective remembrance. From the onset of the narrative, he traces the overwhelming experience of displacement as his mother ordered, “however bad it gets, don’t come back” (Passarlay 48) after the death of his father and grandfather in a gun battle with American soldiers. The narrative evokes the persistence of trauma, loss and children sufferings in seeking safety through crossing borders. Writing a memoir which testifies against political violence does not only “duplicate or record events, but [also] makes history available to imaginative acts” (Whitlock 169), hence why the role of an individual testimony in bearing witness to a collective experience of being a refugee helps raise global awareness and underlines the ongoing dilemma of refugee crisis. As such, Passarlay formulates a testimony of a child exiled subject torn between local trauma and global paralysis vis-à-vis political persecution.

What similar interests the above-mentioned literary works express, albeit pertaining to different literary genres, is the idea that the psychological interiorities refugee children carry with them are merely past traumatic memories and what develops in host societies are other traumas. Nothing arises from nothing. Trauma of children mobility as refugees and asylum seekers does not happen simply; rather, it is developed through several stages over time and defined by political agents. What the section tried to cover here indicates that research needs an extended framework of locating trauma if we are to understand how it implies a decontextualizing and decolonizing process. In brief, it is to the

²² Those statistics are retrieved from the UNHCR official website. For further details, consult <https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistansituation>

traumatized children of the Middle East that research finds fresh psychoanalytic playfields.

Acknowledging the recognized, and inevitably unrecognized, limitations of the theoretical framework, the present section brings forth a cardinal question to discuss prospective changes in trauma theory: to what extent should war trauma be decontextualized from adult to child focus and decolonized from the dramatization of the Western to the traumatization of non-Western history. So, it has been left unnoticed in critical engagement that it is to children experience with war trauma that scholars and researchers should get inspired before childhood expires. This discussion is merely an attempt to reflect on the troubled contemporary time that is marked by a flux of refugees, a point which shall be tackled profoundly in the last chapter.

The critical mention of these intertextual resonances, however small and limited, provides radiant spaces for contemporary debates about the refugee crisis in its inter-connection with war trauma. Apart from the holistic analysis of the selected novels, it heats up debates about the possibilities of how we can better understand and approach the investigated topic with its text, context and pretext. So, the aim here is to create a playfield whereby literature researchers are guided with pertinent works when it comes to reading war trauma from the perspective of children. Dealing with war trauma and its insertion in literature, at once theoretical and historical, is deliberately directing the study to touch more closely on trauma language and mystery in the war novel genre, and how it still paves the way for further literary thematic development as well as stylistic efflorescence. More to the point, a significant focus on the way language works to represent trauma shall be advanced to serve the purpose of situating the theory and the case study alike. Because the theme of trauma lies at the heart of the war novel, it is to linguistic and literary shifts that attention should be paid in the next section.

I.3. Trauma Language and Mystery in the War Novel

Over the last century, the proliferation of the war novel genre has been the subject of many authors and critics. The abundance of war narratives is attributed to the way the war novel acts as a site of testimony and archive; in fact, it serves as a historical testament to the realities of war. And so, the genre has become the vehicle of voicing trauma, preserving memory and vitalizing morality. In its simple definition, the war novel is “almost always an ethical forum, expressing outrage or describing a search for meaning in the dilemma of war” (Jones 9). Furthermore, it provides a platform for authors to examine the physical and psychological tolls on individuals, to criticize the immoral dynamics of power and to preserve memory from historical amnesia. As Eleni Coundouriotis argues in his article, ‘*The War Novel and Human Rights*’ (2019), the war novel delves into the complex moral and ethical dilemmas that arise in wartime. More to the point, it advances

complicated historical questions and yields ambitious narratives that seek to render with nuance ethical dilemmas—both in terms of our conduct in war, and in terms of how we recount what happened. The novels draw attention to the complexity of creating an adequate account and push us toward metanarrative considerations that explore storytelling itself. (Coundouriotis 474)

As far as the literary sphere is concerned, several authors engage with the ethics of denouncing the cruelty of wars through forging trauma narratives which, in their turn, are considered as testimonies. As such, the establishment of a humanitarian discourse becomes the dominant technique in the literature of vulnerability. To this end, the concealed scars of psychological wounds have to be open in order to mend the damaged psyche and, at the same time, have access to the buried history. So, literature is the prism through which reality is projected. It is especially not just a plain imagined fiction but also a reflective reality insofar as it reveals buried truths from within imagination through equivocal language and themes.

In trauma fiction, language embraces sensorial stimulations, evoking the reader's emotional and cognitive awareness in order to share the agony of the war through characters and to remain faithful to history. It is characterized by the writer's assemblage of literary devices such as, fragmentation, chronology disorder, symbolism, interior/dramatic monologue, to name but a few, in addition to resorting to evocative themes on despair, fear and chaos. In this context, Granofsky states that "language is in danger of fracturing" (173). This reflects the children's psychological condition of being exposed to wild episodic scenes in warzone areas; commanding them into an inner world of fear. More than that, trauma language operates as a medium through which the transmission of trauma reaches collectiveness. Granofsky further argues that "language, along with other bearers of imagery, is a primary vehicle for the transmission of collective trauma" (Granofsky 170). This being said, the verbalization of trauma in the war novel genre invites curious examination.

In what comes next, the section devotes attention to the politics as well as the aesthetics of the war novel and its peculiarity of espousing trauma language. In fact, the representation of trauma is instrumental in elevating the war novel to a new level of authenticity which, in turn, allows re-create a stable psyche, history and language even if the fragmentation mode, the flashback technique and the stream of consciousness puzzle them; stimulating a dense fabric to literature. Drawing attention to this sensitive facet of literature, behind every war novel, an anti-war message is conveyed. In brief, this is to say that is all about aesthetics, ethics and politics. By examining, mostly but not exclusively, apposite war novels genre, a direct attention is drawn to global relations of interdependence and to the complex networks of actions and inactions that help create the conditions of possibility for oppression. Additionally, literary movements and devices adopted by prominent writers testify the extent to which trauma language in the war novel genre facilitate our critical engagement with forms of violence and injustice that are global in nature and scope. In short, it is crucial to see how literature can bring the notion of global responsibility.

I.3.1. Echoes of Realism and Modernism

Writing on historical events in the war novel has always proved a vexing attempt than expected, for it requires historical authenticity, humanitarian faithfulness and intellectual commitment. More than that, reflecting on the traumatising of vulnerable people and the subversion of countries that are war-torn makes the process of writing even more challenging. It invites touching upon interdisciplinary modes of narration, espousing different literary techniques and employing sophisticated devices. Undoubtedly, a crucial parameter of the war novel is the writer's reliance on realism as the dominant literary movement. This justifies his desire to develop a mirroring style that echoes historical bruises and human sufferings, in addition to bearing witness to the collective experience of war trauma. In this light, Rothberg argues:

The need for a rethinking of realism is signalled by the emergence in the last decades of various new forms of testimonial and documentary art and cultural production. Within cultural studies, this need for further thinking about realism is indicated by the recent obsession with trauma, the body, and extreme historical events and by the impasses of the postmodernism debates. (Rothberg 9)

Because of the prevalence of trauma studies, realism has now gone through major shifts and developments. This is mainly to accommodate both the history and the psyche to cultural change. Furthermore, realism opens up the possibility for the individual to construct resilience and to foster the healing process. It is safe to say that through the return to realism that a psycho-historical infusion is added to such a literary movement. The latter is reshaped, ranging from testimonial to documentary art and embracing trauma language. As tends to be the case with the authors under study, their works follow the journey of traumatized children that is filled with feelings of loss, despair and trauma. Ellis' tetralogy and Ellis' *Escape from Aleppo* are both literary outputs that offer a vivid image of a fractured mind and history; they are imbued with realistic ingredients that reflect the plight of Afghan and Syrian children in conflict zones. Verisimilitude is thus the soul that inhabits the corpus of the present research

work, signalling the creation of a real setting, composite characters²³ and sensitive themes. The authors realise that too much exoticism and embellishment would cause a lack of historical asset and, at the same time, too much fictionality would lead to the writer's unfaithfulness to bear witness to human sufferings; therefore, they resort to a realistic mode of narration.

Of course, neither the psychological fissure nor the historical chasm in which trauma resides can be fully repaired in the sense that remnants of scars would mark a timeless impact. That is why the trauma of war is so opaque to be simply verbalized in books. In this regard, Walt Whitman argues, "the real war will never get in the books". There is a word in the short passage that ought to be stopped at, war. To my sense, war is a chosen act by human beings who are not mindful of the dangers it could cause. For a lack of better terms, it is a mad act that could have been avoided if politicians had humane visions and ambitions by cajoling international relations amicably. In this light, I believe that history is full of those moments which make us question what if at that second that event did not happen; the entire humanity would be different. A very small and minor detail may change the course of history but, alas, at times unavoidable. A basic example imposes itself in this context; the person who shot the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary did not know that, by doing this, a World War I would instigate a revolutionary wave that reverberates across all facets of human existence, dismantling existing frameworks and paving the way for new paradigms. Philosophizing this way seems nerdish; yet it prompts realistic hypothesis. Still, voicing part of war experience is urgent in order for the intellectual to establish a moral code to be respected by politicians.

The language of the war novels is both sensorial and dense as it entails diligent efforts to convey a psychological lexicon which follows the traumatic climate of the war, be it on individuals or countries. This does especially not mean that it is simply based on narration, description and documentation, but provides rather a critical portrait blended with a (re)thinking and a

²³ By 'composite characters' is meant the creation of characters that are made of both fiction and reality.

(re)consideration of the anguished history, in addition to re-invigorating the will to denounce the human-made violence. In so doing, “a variety of [modernist] movement names were found for what was happening –Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Imagism, Vorticism” (Bradbury 146). To show the real effects of the war and the reflection of trauma on the fragmented history and the psyche, Bradbury opines the crucial point as follows:

But war seemed to abstract and empty life itself, creating a landscape of violence and uncertainty in which the human figure was no longer a constant, the individual self no longer connected naturally with the universe, the word no longer attached to the thing. Culture now seemed a bundle of fragments, history no longer moved progressively, but cyclically. (Bradbury 147)

It is within the language of the war novel that modernism finds a convenient literary place to disclose the hollowness of trauma. In short, the sensorial effects of words corporealize the spiritual and spiritualize the corporeal. The response to how literature responds to this violent climate of war is therefore found through the language that is used by writers who further resort to a realistic mode of narration. The essence of war, if there is any, becomes thus dispersed in the body of the text. In brief, as it tends to be the case with the corpus, it symbolizes a text that mirrors a vivid image of bitter disillusionment and hollowness encountered by vulnerable people in contact zones.

In addition to realistic language, the war novel genre allows for the insertion of modernist tenets. Fragile Language, which emanates from war novels, is affected by the fragmentation of the human psyche. It reflects the bleeding of the psyche, and utters the dreadful pains. It is out of these traumatic experiences that a new human psyche emanates from crumbs of destruction. A new human psyche that is puzzlingly depicted “psychologically deep and multi-layered, fragmentary, floating on sensation and consciousness, fed by random thoughts and half-conscious dream of worlds” (Bradbury 159). Besides, trauma language communicates sensorial effects through modernist tenets and devices such as stream of consciousness, flashbacks, interior monologues, allusions, symbols and other techniques of dense language. As it will be illustrated with the

novels under study in the subsequent chapters, these tools help forge an authentic narrative of historical *fissure* and psychological *blessure*. Through them, the reader is pitched into the innermost wounds of Parvana and Nadia. Like a beholder, he witnesses the horrors of war and, at the same time, dives into the broken psyche of the traumatized subject.

So, language behaves in accordance with the theme treated in fiction. In the case of the war novel genre, authors resort to a jumbled mode of narration that mirrors the bleeding of the psyche and the haemorrhage of history. Also, one might not forget that “style is tied to the psyche, and writing has deep psychological roots. The reasons why we express ourselves as we do, or fail to express ourselves because of “writer’s block”, are partly buried in the subconscious mind” (Zinsser 23). That is why Ellis and Senzai’s texts, as it will be stressed in the second chapter, are characterized by a dense and fragmented language. This is also reflected through the characters who find difficulty in verbalizing their pains and exteriorizing their traumatic memories. In short, the language employed in writing about war trauma serves as a means of exploring the psychological impact and documenting historical events that collectively embody a comprehensive representation of reality.

It would appear contradicting to adopt realism while drawing on modernism and postmodernism, both of which emerge as a reaction to the former. In trauma studies, however, joining literary movements together under the umbrella term of interliterary movements proves a potent method to have a rounded portrait of the elusive trauma itself a multifaceted case. It is necessary to emphasise that the war novel genre, because of the writers’ heavy reliance on figures of speech and stylistic techniques, creates realistic beams throughout the narrative. What emerges between fiction and reality strikes a balance between broken history and opaque psyche. More to the point, it is “the specific modes of interaction between realist, modernist, and postmodernist strategies that historical particularity can be grasped” (Rothberg 10). Accordingly, the effects of historical trauma can be better expressed by mixing literary movements, schools and techniques which make the narrative welcome an avant-garde content.

Because war novel writers always infuse a tone of realism with modernist touches, a prototype kind of characters is created that is endowed with voices of the struggles traumatized children in conflict zones internalize. For instance, Parvana is given the ability to exteriorise her trauma through writing letters, and therefore open up to her innermost feelings. Similarly, Nadia is given the power of voice-hearing that drowns the reader into the interior where voices are abruptly thrown at him. As such, it is to the conscious and the subconscious minds that readers are exposed, and have to delve deep into a fussy maze of art. Such an enigmatic, yet revolutionary genre is characterized by the encapsulation of disconnected, opposed and reactionary modernist literary devices such as shifts in narration, non-linearity and broken chronology. All of these devices are used, and sometimes abused, in the corpus of selected novels by the authors under study. An abundance of illustrations and analyses is dispersed throughout the coming chapters to see how war novelists Ellis Deborah and N.H. Senzai are committed to historicity; they are launched into the parable that teaches us about the sterility of morality that is inherited from the war. Thus, both authors have a reverence for the universal values that evaporate in the contemporary world.

What adds to the maturity of the war novel is then the sensorial style as well as the dense language adopted by writers. These provide new avenues of access to a realistic mode, projecting the immoral attitudes towards a broken world in which we are still living desperately. Rothberg introduces the concept of “traumatic realism” which encompasses a diverse array of innovative devices inserted in trauma narratives. These endeavor to make abstract matters optic and manageable (Rothberg 14). This new mode of realism finds its impetus in the war novel genre. According to Whitehead, it emanates from “traumatic texts, including trauma fiction” and signals a “search for a new mode of realism in order to express or articulate a new form of reality” (84). A distinction should be made between traditional realism and traumatic realism in order to remove the myopic vision one might have on the matter. This, again, is highlighted by Anne Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction* (2004) where she argues that “literary fiction offers the flexibility and the freedom to be able to articulate the resistance and

impact of trauma. While traditional literary realism may not be suited for rendering traumatic events [expressive because] more experimental forms emerging out of postmodernist and postcolonial fiction offer the contemporary novelist a promising vehicle for communicating the unreality of trauma, while still remaining faithful to the facts of history” (87). In other words, trauma helps the re-conceptualization of realism anew, with an in-depth understanding of history.

Added to the importance of the fusion of realism and other literary movements such as modernism and postmodernism in the war novel genre, is the historical nature of trauma fiction that has to contribute to the faithfulness of literature which, above all, symbolizes an envelope of intellectual tasks. Such a literary harmony, I argue, results in the advent of a literary work that is at once affective, authentic, accurate and sensitive. In this context, Michael Rothberg vouches for the idea that historical narratives, where traces of trauma resonate across the language, are characterized by embracing plurality of literary movements. He cogently offers a very convincing explanation of such combination, Rothberg says,

reintroducing the problem of realism — for it is not an answer, but a question — has led me to the realization that the categories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism are best thought of not only as styles and periods, as the dominant paradigms would have it. Rather, realism, modernism, and postmodernism can also be understood as persistent responses to the demands of history. Similar the demands themselves, these responses are also social; they provide frameworks for the representation and interpretation of history. In the representation of a historical event, in other words, a text's "realist" component seeks strategies for referring to and documenting the world; its "modernist" side questions its ability to document history transparently; and its "postmodern" moment responds to the economic and political conditions of its emergence and public circulation. (9)

Rothberg is of the opinion that realism burgeons into a focal interest of trauma literature as, metaphorically speaking, a branched plant with flowers. He thus conceives of realism as the engine which produces a literary impulse to resonate across modernism and postmodernism and provide a rounded portrait of the world. Rothberg also puts forward the argument about the social aspect embraced

by the understanding of history by dint of realist ingredients. To him, the modernist mode serves as a potent means to reflect upon historical facts while the postmodernist one assists is more concerned with the economic and political aspects. Together, however, they are not just literary movements or periods which define the context of a given work, they are also tools that serve for providing a faithful mode of expressing the elusive abstract matters that burden both the human psyche and history. In brief, they open windows of landscapes for readers to travel in the hazy world of abstractions.

The section has seen so far how trauma language is predominantly embedded in the war novel genre by reflecting on the espousing of a realistic mode of narration mixed with modern and modes. Under such a package of interliterary movements, it is important to note that the thesis' reading of the war novel genre in the next chapters is limited and selective. It is to realistic and modernist toolkits that the analyses of the selected novels discussed in this research work pivot. In so doing, the destabilized setting, the psychologically disordered characters, and the writer' stylistic reliance on convulsive mode of narration make sense of the mysteries through which war trauma manifests. Another similar point to underscore in the examination of the war trauma is the implicit language of empathy and its many-side function in the construction of the war novel genre. In what comes next, I shall then scrutinise the literary device of empathy and the way it speaks volumes of hypotheses about trauma language.

I.3.2. The Aesthetics of, and Polemics against, Empathy

Indisputably, the portrayal of traumatic experience of war, be it in fiction or non-fiction texts, appeals to the reader' sensibility and paves the way for the arousal of empathy not only with the traumatized subject but also with the destroyed countries and the bleeding streets. There can be no doubt that empathizing with unexpected tragedies as well as psychological crises remains a potent literary tool to help the traumatized cross the deep ocean wherein trauma conquers his soul. Empathy, in fact, serves as a medium through which readers can automatically

experience the haunting feelings and the intensive experience of trauma. It creates both a “cognitive and an emotional understanding of another’s experience, resulting in an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth” (Barnett & Mann 230). What is interesting here is thus the power of empathy that the war novel writers adopt as a literary device in their attempt to sustain strong character-reader connection.

In its simple definition, empathy is “an imaginative reconstruction of another person’s experience, whether that experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral, and whether the imaginer thinks the other person’s situation good, bad, or indifferent” (Nassbaum 302). It is an abstract mechanism that helps echo the different feelings one may have to survive some bitter events and come to terms with inner pains. There can be no doubt that the war novel provokes empathy through implementing trauma language in order to build a narrative of resiliency, in addition to doing justice to humanness which is doomed to fade under the broken roof of immorality. Both Ellis and Senzia, as I recurrently emphasise in the analysis chapters, make the reader accommodate to the needs and cries of traumatized characters by establishing an angle from which empathetic engagement is triggered.

In trauma studies, the structure of the word is also broken into silent voices; in fact, it is seen and heard just like the wound of the psyche is. Indeed, a bleeding word whose voice is hushed by the infliction of trauma drenches both the survivor and the listener into the depth of innermost feelings. Thus, the sensorial effects of words disclose trauma as much as they enclose disturbing feelings. It is through activating empathy that the trauma becomes less intense. In this context, LaCapra reflects on the function of empathy in absorbing the traumatized sores, and therefore stimulates the regeneration of optimistic beams. He argues,

empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims, and it may (I think, should) have stylistic effects in the way one discusses or addresses certain problems. It places in jeopardy fetishized and totalizing narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by prematurely (re)turning to the pleasure principle, harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios. (723)

LaCapra makes it clear that the role of empathy in writing about traumatic events is of a pivotal importance. First, it helps comprehend what was unknown and undemonstrative to the mind. Second, it originates a unique stylistic mode of communication that is marked by emotionalism, and facilitates the circulation of a solid psyche. This is a healthy move, in my view, for it takes as its point of departure self-consciousness vis-à-vis the awakening process that is fundamentally premised on moral and humane values.

Relevant cases in point are probably that of Naheed Hasnat Senzai's works. It must be acknowledged that Senzai is one of the revered literary figures in contemporary war literature. Through her works, which address children readership, she opts for empathy as a war novel parameter that turns on the readers' emotions. In one of the interviews conducted with her with regard to writing about wars and the "heavy issues" that overweight upon the human mind, Senzai declares:

writers have the responsibility of telling their readers the truth, no matter how difficult (...) and no matter how different these characters [children in contact zones] may appear at first, my hope is that my readers connect with them and realize that people, no matter where they live, are intrinsically the same; they have similar hopes, dreams and desire to live a peaceful, meaningful life. (Cotton Quilts)

These fictional characters are the prototype of many traumatized children whose life, existence and rights do not matter amidst autocratic regimes and wrongful international interventions with whom we need to empathise. In this light, Keen argues that, "contemporary novelists frequently connect fiction with empathy in their comments on creativity and the effects of novel reading. Writers themselves may in fact be the primary source of this widespread belief, so often do they repeat it" (121). Senzai, in her literary works, herself appears overwhelmed by

the suffocating aura of wars in Syria and Afghanistan, and this makes her not only empathetic towards traumatized people in conflict zones, but also acts as a conduit for sufferings that flow throughout the world. Indeed, this stands as an intellectual commitment writers are supposed to make in order to denounce injustice and condemn violence, as the analysis shall later demonstrate in the last chapter by discussing the writer's role as an intellectual response to war trauma. Therefore, empathy does not have to be perceived as a literary device which merely serves to subvert the aesthetic –both thematic and stylistic- values of the war novel or to even overshadow the reader with emotional absorption. Rather, it stimulates the cognition faculty by bringing ethicality and morality to the fore, and therefore builds a just world collectively.

No wonder that trauma language shelters empathy as an essential literary device that has its roots well-stretched in the war novel genre. To this end, the reader is, and has to be, implied in the creation of such an evocative literary sphere that brings into being pathos and ethical reconsideration in relation to the traumatic experience of children with wars. Hence, the reader-response theory seems to impose itself on the present research. Yet, readers should be reminded that a limited thesis can especially not perform an exhaustive examination of trauma literature. Being perhaps the most important in terms of the appeal trauma theory generates and the mixed critical appraisals it elicits, noticed attention is thus unavoidable²⁴.

In fact, one might not generalize how fiction drenches the reader into a sensitive world made of empathy. Of course, readers' reception of, and reaction to, war-trauma narratives are different and may not have the same empathy engagement when reading literary texts. On some occasions, they may resist the

²⁴I am aware of not being fair with the reader-response theory in terms of devoting a space to pay much attention and discuss its pertinence to the concept of empathy and, by extension, trauma studies. It is neither my interest nor my aim to go through it here or debate its relevance in detail. This thesis is a contribution, however small and limited, to the reading of trauma theory in literature. Hopefully, this acknowledged limitation will elicit or inspire further debates around or related to this critical concern, which is ultimately and simultaneously about the reader-response theory. For a brief and critical overview on reader-response theory, see Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and Iser Wolfgang's *The Implied Reader* (1974).

dwelling on the fictional haunting of horrors and restrain from being emotionally evoked. This is because empathy resistance is “cultivated by academic modes of analysis that privilege critical distance and observations about style” (Keen 73). In doing so, criticality arises from an avid reader who, instead of reading for pleasure, questions existential abstractions with a heavy reliance on academic sources which help build valid criticism. LaCapra later points out to the possibility of resisting empathy which, in his terms, might “depend both on one’s own potential for traumatization (related to absence and structural trauma) and on one’s recognition that another’s loss is not identical to one’s own loss (723). This resistance, however, threatens the circulation of collective consciousness in that part of history that remains eclipsed. The aim of empathy in fiction is then not to seduce the reader but to make him/her ponder the question of immoral concerns, such as wars. Still, one cannot detach himself/herself from developing jumbled emotions, which technically “are central to the experience of literary narrative fiction” (Mar et al 818). Again, this does not mean that empathy fails to operate; it rather depends on the nature of the reader who may haphazardly empathise with fiction in different ways.

Writers, for their part, make an effort to create a room where they can establish an angle from which readers and narratives are connected through formulating an emotional understanding which, in turn, appeals to one’s sensibility. Therein the power of the war novel, as discussed earlier, embraces different trauma typologies; voicing them is essential for the traumatized to release disturbing feelings from within the damaged subconscious mind. In doing so, an empathetic response emanates spontaneously from the reader’s cognitive and emotional faculties, especially in the context of vulnerability, with the hope of constructing resiliency. Because empathy is an “imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer” (Nassbaum 327), invoking it is necessary to address one’s attention. By appealing to sensibility, readers can glean vicarious trauma from the struggles of imaginary characters that characterize the war novel genre *par-excellence* and stimulate the growth of psychological recovery as well as historical repair.

A reflective example of this idea can be seen in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), one of the most valuable and enduring contributions to the war novel genre at a tragic time when the German city of Dresden was fire-bombarded by the Allied during World War II²⁵. The historical context cajoles the reader with both emotional and cognitive involvements through which the writer conveys a thoroughly anti-war message. Although many critics categorise Vonnegut's work on a science-fiction list of literary genres, it can simultaneously fall in line with the war novel genre. In his critique of Kurt Vonnegut, Tonner points out that the chronological order between past, present and future, for Billy Pilgrim, is out of sequence; abiding by the non-linear technique of modernist narratives. This technique functions as an instrument to empathise with the struggles of the traumatized whose mind appears physically the actor of the present and psychologically the prisoner of the past. Empathy is thus regarded as a leading ingredient in the making of the (anti) war novel genre given that narratives are centred on themes related to trauma, suffering, pain and violence. As a result, the notion of "humanitarian empathy", to borrow Breithaupt's terminology, integrates itself to the course of the war novel. However, it must be admitted that empathy may, to some extent, be an impuissant literary tool which leads to criticism breakdown.

Fritz Breithaupt, in his seminal book *The Dark Sides of Empathy* (2019) believes that the impact of empathy on the readers lasts for only a limited period; it is temporary. Readers "are prepared to step into the shoes of a fictional character for a short time, even if that character undergoes the most terrible suffering. Why is this? Because works of fiction (and narrative in general), have an ending, at which point we can withdraw our empathy" (Breithaupt 92). What might be the ending of a work, however, is the beginning of another work; hence why intertextuality invites itself to refute Breithaupt's perception of the novel's

²⁵For literature based-orientation, see Len Deighton's *Bomber* (1970). A novel that recounts the tragic tale and the horror unleashed by United Kingdom's Royal Air Force (RAF) bombers on a town in Germany during the summer of 1943. In particular, the writer goes as far as to highlight an industrial war crime that mirrors a nuclear strike.

temporary effects on the reader. To my sense, the meaning of any given text is another text, and therefore empathetic responses are cyclic.

Empathy remains therefore a debated and debatable question in narratology. A caveat should be stressed however to avoid any kind of confusion it may further create and stress the validity of the assessment findings. By making the reader empathically involved in fiction, the intention here is not to submerge him/her with sensorial stimulation but with both the critical and the analytical involvements that emerge from within an emotional response. This criticality is triggered because “when texts invite readers to feel (...) they also stimulate readers’ thinking” (Keen 28). This cognitive simulation is what strikes a balance between emotional and intellectual engagement. To put it otherwise, and one shall invite Keen again, a “narrative empathy [that is] invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations. Yet overall, an emotional response to reading is the more neglected aspect of what literary cognitivists refer to under the umbrella term cognition” (28). In brief, it is more about the psychological aspect of the texts wherein rationality lies. The more a text releases feelings, I argue, the more empathy it induces to the reader and the more it alleviates the pain of the traumatized.

Empathy works as a platform through which sharing what the subconscious mind fails to accept, mainly traumatic events, and circulate it in literature at a transnational level. It includes global awareness and excludes diversity. Because mourning the loss only adds misery to one’s life, dismantling it collectively lessens its intensity and, at the same time, normalizes its occurrence. In other words, the more the traumatized shares his/her feelings, the faster the healing process proceeds. To be sure, this is crystal apparent in children literature that is concerned with war trauma in which the child figure is a focal point²⁶. Within this context, “any readers report that novels in which child characters are subjected to cruel or unfair treatment evoke empathy” (Keen 69).

²⁶ Good examples of such authors, to name just a few, are Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Linda Sue Park’s *A Long Walk to Water* (2010) and Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013).

Along the same line, Eze tells us that effective communication between reality and fiction seems bridgeable via linguistic means that revolve largely around triggering a sense of empathy, for literature becomes the “means through which authors interrogate the human condition” (Eze 311). This means that empathy in fiction adds more credibility to real-world events²⁷.

Of similar interest, it should be acknowledged that writers and authors, too, are not excluded from developing empathy engagement if one considers the modern concept of influence. It is their way to verbalize the sufferings of vulnerable individuals, whose voices are insufficiently heard for some reasons, that urge them to forge a literary product, especially when projecting sensitive issues. These are no different from the traumatic experience of children in conflict zones. Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) is one example, amongst many, which releases empathetic waves and humanizes traumatic experience of Afghan children during the war. The author clearly relies on certain terminologies and expressions that are often associated with sensorial effects. The most explicit example is the following excerpt: “[t]here are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood” (Hosseini 318). Here, the author goes to a great depth to illustrate how Afghan children are alienated from their environment. The language embraces an elegiac tone, conveying a sense of sorrow, loss, and nostalgia; besides, it mourns the missed opportunities and the deprivation of a vital phase of life for Afghan children, emphasizing the gravity of the situation. In doing so, the narrative invites the reader to empathically engage with the dreadful atmosphere wherein Afghan children are exposed, used and abused. In *The Kite Runner: Role of Multicultural Fiction in Fostering Cultural Competence*, Tarana Parveen argues that “the narrative is so powerful that readers can breathe the dust, smell the sewers and hear the gunshots and rattle of military trucks. Hosseini engages readers and makes people witness the atrocities of war. This helps in developing and eliciting the empathy of the

²⁷ For more readings about the implicit power of empathy in maintaining a kind of relationship between reality and fiction, consult Lars Ole Sauerberg’s *Fact into Fiction: Documentary Realism in the Contemporary Novel* (1991).

readers” (163). As a result, Husseini’s *The Kite Runner* establishes an angle to voice children’s repressed feelings of trauma in Afghanistan, and further constructs a smooth relationship with a reader that is characterized by an emotional understanding of Afghan children who are torn between local political despotic regimes and international neglect.

Without making misleading arguments, it is believed that writers themselves experience trauma and become wounded, for they are overwhelmed by a certain burst of emotions that nourish their imagination to produce reflective works of art. It is exactly under the contamination of trauma through listening to the traumatized narratives that an ethical responsibility urges them to remedy wounds. Regardless of them being the producers, the way writers locate the pain, however, is different from that of the reader; making them also consumers of empathy mechanisms. As intellectuals, their production and consumption of empathy serve more for inserting an ethico-humanitarian discourse that is based on moral values. The ability to feel the suffering of a person is applicable to how writers dwell on trauma. This is because “to be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from preamble borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways” (Butler xii). This means that an author is dragged to empathize with the wounded in order to achieve what Mar and Oatly suggest “simulative experience”. The latter is part and parcel with the essence of literature enterprise. By doing so, it “facilitate[s] the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy” (173). It, thus, contributes to the development of empathy in fiction which, in turn, is but a smart mirror of portraying reality. Back at war contexts, Dos Passos holds the firm view that “a young man hoping to be a writer... must [first] experience the war in some fashion” (Trott 33). A crucial point is how to verbalize what a man witnesses in war contexts.

For reasons of space and limitations, I shall stop here and close the discussion on ‘The Politics of, and Polemics against, Empathy’ by invoking Keen’s thorough thought on the matter. She cogently sums up,

many novelists call up empathy as a representational goal by mirroring it within their texts: they present empathetic connections between characters or thematize empathy explicitly in fiction meditating on the vagaries of social relations. This ubiquitous form of empathy depends heavily on character identification and on reading habits that emphasize the feeling connection of readers to imagined beings in novels. (Keen 121)

Because trauma fiction invites readers to empathetically participate in acts of bearing witness to broken childhood in conflict zones, this subject is taken up at a greater practical length in the last chapter where the analysis will discuss the implementation of humanitarian discourse as an intellectual response to war trauma. I intentionally had to demarcate and recapitulate it here to show how empathy dominates the novels under study. Furthermore, the attempt was but to trace the theoretical framework upon which the analysis falls and explain how applicable the analysis of the novels under study is.

After inclusively demarcating the theoretical foundations, historical backgrounds and literary attitudes that are relevant to the thesis limitations, I shall embark on exploring the thematization of trauma in the literary enterprise by looking at its applicability in the chapters that follow. Proceeding this way, it is important to note that the corpus with which this thesis is concerned spans largely the contemporary era and signals equally the explosion of modernism and the fusion of realism. The setting, plot and characterization of both narratives are going to be scrutinized side by side; suggesting a comparative nature of study in order to overweight the arguments and see the extent to which trauma transcends geographical borders. Additionally, this alternating method in reading the novels under study aims at discovering “the pleasure of the text”, to use Roland Barthes’ terms, through relating it to other texts. Intertextuality, as a result, suggests an effective method in reading war novels through establishing textual dimensions, dialogical connections and, above all, global awareness. Apart from having a better command of the investigated phenomenon, the point is rather to demonstrate how borderless, timelessness and sameness war settings are unified as the agonized experience of war bears the same trauma, regardless of diversity.

So far, this chapter has explored the rise of trauma theory from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, along with its injection in literature and history. Filled with theoretical and literary guidelines, it traversed the realm where war trauma blooms and swept through the dark corridors that are imbued with psychological interiorities and historical atrocities. The following chapter will unfurl the wings of “Trauma Inception in Ellis’ tetralogy and Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*”, and therefore lay the first stone of the analytical trajectory of the present research work.

CHAPTER TWO

Trauma Inception in Ellis' Tetralogy and
Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*

*There are wounds that never show
on the body that are deeper and
more hurtful than anything that
bleeds (Laurell K. Hamilton).*

The second chapter sketches out the literary ingredients that make the theme of trauma inhabit the novels under study. Starting with the examination of the setting in Ellis' tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, the chapter argues that realism has well-stretched arms in the war novel genre. Both authors feel a historical responsibility to bring order back to a broken world that is replete with violence, injustice and dark politics. Elaborating on the way children in conflict zones are annihilated by psychological attacks, the present chapter steps in the characters' unconscious mind, an attempt to examine the responses to, and the reactions against, the haunting of trauma inception. In order to paint the most vivid picture of trauma manifestations, both authors further resort to modernist style and techniques such as flashbacks and stream of consciousness; hence why they gamble with the notion of time so to correspond to the non-linearity of trauma narrative wherein the mind shatters and chronology collapses. At last, the chapter has for a task to provide an alternative reading of a sensitive facet of post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide. This serves as a transitive point which highlights the crisis of exteriorizing traumatic memories, the concern of the subsequent chapter.

II.1. Sirens of War and Psychic Gore

In order to better understand what makes the war novel genre embrace subverted features, an examination of the setting of the novels under study imposes itself to bring to the light time and space references that are chaotically present within their pages. Starting with Afghanistan, Ellis makes Kabul the main setting of her tetralogy. However, she destabilizes this main setting by focusing more on smaller spots; creating sub settings from within the main one. What is more, in the third volume of the tetralogy, she takes us to Pakistan, a point which I shall examine in the last chapter. It is not for nothing that the setting is dislocated in the war novel, for it symbolizes the geostrategic nature of the war and the way it goes beyond boundaries. Likewise, Senzai makes Syria the focal point of her novel. From the title of the novel, one might already have a flavor of how faithfully the narrative is going to deal with the city of Aleppo and its historic

streets. Yet, she also dismantles the main setting by infusing it with another setting that completely puts Syria from afar, namely Tunisia, as it will be shown in the next chapter. Similar to Ellis, such a strategy denotes the geostrategic dimension of the war.

All the vague points regarding the choice of the novels heat up confusion, and probably give the impression to embrace fallacy. At first glance, the least that can be said of this comparison is that it gives the impression that the novels are incompatible. Yet, a thorough examination of the setting in both narratives proves the contrary. Reflecting on the war novel genre, the setting within which the novels under study fall emerges as an essential factor of comparison. It is true that the corpus ranges from Afghanistan to Syria, two different spaces at all levels; yet the experience of war trauma makes them integrate. They diverge in context as much as converge in trauma dwelling. Space, where war's tension and fear take place, is then a unifying element that transcends diversity, regardless of geographic, political, cultural and linguistic boundaries. The literary parameter of space, therefore, in the war novel should not be confused with the common idea of it being a territory which separates the two countries. Although separate, space in such context denotes the nuanced psychological environment of traumatic experience. In *Authoring War* (2011), Kate McLoughlin accurately explained the relationship between the space and the war in the making of the war novel. She opines,

War is fought over and in space, it alters irrevocably the space on and within which it occurs. But it also brings into being a unique situation, unclassifiable as either neutral 'space' or significant 'place', vital and intense yet temporary (lasting 'moments') and arbitrary, as much a product of experience as of geographical factors, transformative, requiring special consciousness ('singular vividness and happy distinctness of impression') from those within it. This is the war zone. (83)

What McLoughlin draws upon in this quote is the idea that the war zone is the main setting that all war novels pivot on. We are introduced to a dichotomous tenet that oscillates between war and peace, and which creates a matrix of human suffering. She further casts light on the division of the setting into two types: the

battleground and the pastoral i.e. war and peace, which together deconstruct as much as construct the setting element. While the former is related to the violent atmosphere that depicts the characters' traumatic experience of war on the battlefield, the latter embraces the notion of home which stands for safety, peace, warmth and tranquillity. This binary opposition functions as an important tool for the war novel genre, indicating a photographic asset in the depiction of reality.

The plot of the selected novels stretches over a certain period in the twenty-first century, a period that covers major contemporary issues. In particular, it focuses on the psychological wounds and the historical frames of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and Syria. In order to establish an atmosphere of human intense suffering and remarkable survival, both Ellis and Senzai resort to a miscellaneous mode of writing. In doing so, traces of literary heterogeneity which thrives upon realistic and modernist techniques and styles are inserted against the conventions of traditional narrative that we are accustomed to consuming at one time. Such a jumbled narrative prose is adopted in order to give the reader a rounded picture of war trauma, and a deep insight into the war novel genre.

Furthermore, the unorthodox form blurs the distinction between fiction and reality, and allows the narration to alternate freely between many voices, including the omniscient narrator, first person narrator, soliloquy and interior monologue. As such, the novels under study are imbued with a variety of literary traditions because of the sensitive theme they address, that is, the child's traumatic experience of war. Before delving deep into the study of the fragile mind, the setting is what prepares the ground for trauma inception. In brief, the heavy atmosphere that strangles the vitality of the characters reflects the inner condition of children in contact zones. Thus, the setting is a crucial element in the war novel enterprise, a point which the present section endeavors to examine.

II.1.1. Afghanistan and Syria: War Torn Countries

Throughout the development of *The Breadwinner* tetralogy and *Escape from Aleppo*, both Ellis and Senzai dislocate the plot of their novels in different spaces

in Kabul and Syria. These places are always portrayed as subverted spots where gallows of fear loom over the characters, suggesting an immediate arousal of uncomfortable feelings. It is customary for the war novelist to take the reader into smaller locations, to consider every detail of the country under war atrocities where a dread atmosphere offers an accurate depiction of reality to the reader. This detailed description aims at giving the novel some verisimilitude which clearly corresponds to realism. Furthermore, it creates global awareness, evokes deep empathy, and therefore facilitates the understanding of human sufferings.

So, what bridges Ellis' *The Breadwinner tetralogy* and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* is the dreadful environment of the war and the way it shapes the character's mental and psychological state. Indeed, such a bridge solidifies literary rapprochement and strengthens textual harmonization between the two authors. In both narratives, the setting offers nothing to the characters but a sense of fear, loss and despair. Within this chaos, there is little about which to romanticize and more about to realize; hence traces of realism. On the whole, constant bombing, collapsing buildings and rubble's remnants are what characterizes the novels under study. Furthermore, as it be shown in this subsection, images of terror are equally used by Ellis and Senzai to help create a gloomy atmosphere and show the traumatic effects of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and Syria.

To begin with, the authors provide a comment on, and a critique of, the arbitrary despotism that is exerted by megalomaniac rulers on Afghan people. On the one hand, the Taliban regime drowns Afghanistan in a sanguinary ocean; on the other hand, Bashar al-Assad regime turns Syria into a ghost country. *The Breadwinner*, Ellis' first volume of the tetralogy, shows us how the word Taliban, along with the policy upon it, embraces wickedness that collides with religious and moral values. She writes,

[m]ost of the country was controlled by the Taliban. The word Taliban meant religious scholars, but Parvana's father told her religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder. "The Taliban are not making Afghanistan a kinder place to live!" he said. (*The Breadwinner* 21)

Through this representation, one might already have a bitter flavor of how deceitful the Taliban regime is. To give an instance, here is one of the oppressive dictatorships: “the Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school” (The Breadwinner 15). Such a restrictive regulation on Afghan women suffices to understand the Taliban’s mindset that is doomed to sink the country in the deep end of darkness and ignorance. From a feminist reading of the quote, it accentuates the oppressive condition and the inferior position of Afghan women whose existence symbolizes a taboo under the patriarchy of the Taliban regime. Afghan women are not only obliged to confine to the domestic sphere and perform the traditional roles, but also to be invisible and isolated from the outside world. Such a feminist perspective -it must be admitted- is not tackled in Senzai’s novel. While the Taliban regime leans on religious beliefs, al-Assad regime centers on political grounds. Albeit this remarkable difference, both regimes converge with the immoral attitude they adopt towards their people.

In parallel, *Escape from Aleppo* reveals the evilness of Bashar al-Assad regime that shatters both the country’s history and the people’s life. It shows how Syria, once the cradle of civilization, is being plagued with terror and vulnerability. Senzai, too, casts light on the coercive measures that are imposed on Syrian people. Through an omniscient narrator, she records:

[n]ews had come of president Bashar al-Assad’s desire to crush the strengthening opposition in the city. The number of barmeela had doubled, even tripled, as the Syrian army reinforced its position. As a result, the city was split, with the government in control of the northwest while rebels maintained position in the southeast. (Senzai 31-32)

Accordingly, the critical situation in which Syria finds itself drenched bespeaks a myriad of insecurities. The home of *Bilad al-Sham* and Islamic civilization is now torn down by the war; causing so much physical, and more importantly psychological hurt to innocent people. What is more threatening is the inhumane treatment al-Assad chooses to inflict on his people; he goes as far as to deprive them of basic rights, such as food. This is apparent when Nadia, a fourteen year

old Syrian girl, and her family “found out later that Assad’s regime was bombing bakeries . . . to starve and kill his own people” (Senzai 141). Just like the Taliban in Afghanistan, Bashar al-Assad regime sets rules that go against moral codes in order to impose secularism on the one hand and circulate Western ideologies on the other. Himself coming from an Alawite²⁸ background, he follows a policy of inclusion through which different religious communities are harmonized; threatening the solidification of Islam. How could such a minority defeat a majority? Indeed, such a question is unavoidable. The answer, however, invites another approach that does not serve the thesis’s gist which, as stated in the introduction, leans largely on a psychoanalysis frame of reference.²⁹

What adds to the despotic regimes of the two countries is the use of destructive weapons, namely an abrupt throwing of bombs and a planting of hidden mines all over the streets of Kabul and Aleppo. Metaphorically, the sun does not rise in the sky of Afghanistan and Syria as darkness prevails because of the constant bombing and the consequent heavy smoke which suffocates the air. Equally true, flowers no longer blossom in Afghanistan and Syria because of the land that is imbued with mines and stained with the blood of innocent people, “Kabul has more land mines than flowers” (The Breadwinner 98). Under such hazardous conditions, Ellis and Senzai reflect on the insecurities Parvana and Nadia, the main characters, are exposed to. On the one hand,

bombs had been part of Parvana’s whole life. Every day, every night, rockets would fall out of the sky, and someone’s house would explode. When the bombs fell, people ran. First they ran one way, then they ran another, trying to find a place where the bombs wouldn’t find them. (The Breadwinner 20-21)

²⁸ According to Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, Alawis is defined as « a largely secular community that has survived in the Middle East for over a millenium, religion represents the most salient cultural marker differentiating it from Syria’s Sunni Muslim majority » (3).

²⁹ For further details and in-depth analysis on the power of al-Alawite minority in Syria, see Farouk Alli Aslam’s *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant* (2015), Friedman Yaron’s *The Nusayrī-‘Alawīs: An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (2010), Gubser Peter’s *Minorities in Power: The Alawites of Syria* (1979) and Seale Patrick’s *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (1988), to mention but a few relevant references.

On the other hand, *barmeelas* dominate Syria, intensifying terror among the people and causing destruction to the country. A barmeela, Nadia tells us is “a merciless barrel bomb packed with shrapnel, dumped from helicopters onto the rebel-held areas. It was a favorite of the Syrian army” (Senzai 3). Indeed, all these juxtaposed images strengthen the similarity between the two narratives. At this early phase of comparison, one might begin to digest how the delineation of the setting –albeit the different contexts and motives- bears some resemblance; making the novels meet at the crossroads of the war atmosphere. Through this non-fictionalized depiction, both Ellis and Senzai rely on realism in their attempt to paint the most vivid picture of war and how the dreadful environment invites trauma inception.

The setting, in both novels, provides us with a sort of flux -one that makes our imagination go in parallel with reality. In order to portray the cruel life in Afghanistan and Syria as it truly is, Ellis and Senzai press hard on realistic fiction in the way they tackle the internal chaos. Many examples in the novels under study pinpoint the vulnerable position in which characters find themselves, preparing them to ingest oodles of trauma. Yet, due to space limits, the focus is put on two locations from *The Breadwinner* and two others from *Escape from Aleppo*. These include the ghastly cemetery and the appalling stadium, and Kharab Shams and the Old City respectively. On the one hand, this limitation will supply us with a thorough examination of the setting; on the other hand, it will favor the comparative nature of the study to accomplish intertextual fertility and dialogical affinity.

Starting with *The Breadwinner*, in chapter ten, from the very first page we read, we find ourselves somewhere in Kabul; in a place that feels not only dreadful, but also impenetrable: a cemetery. Prior to the cemetery, Ellis first describes the bad weather on the day Parvana and Shauzia went for “Bones. They were going to dig up bones” (Ellis 94). It is impossible to make sense of what the eye reads, because there is an intense traumatic incident that is thrown at the reader and which pushes the limits of imagination to the extreme. The girls are not only placed in a cruel milieu which gives rise to psychological unrest, but

also allocated with an inhuman task: bone digging. What adds to the shocking scene is the sensitive way in which the author delves deep into the demolished city where scattered bones forge Kabul's infrastructure. The following imagery used by Ellis holds a panoramic picture of demolished buildings in Afghanistan and are beyond ordinary. It suggests the oddity of the place which, in its turn, awakens dormant feelings of fear. For a better illustration, here is how the chapter begins:

The sky was dark with clouds. They [Parvana and Shauzia] walked for almost an hour, down streets. Parvana didn't recognize, until they came to one of the areas of Kabul most heavily destroyed by rockets. There wasn't a single intact building in the whole area, just piles of bricks, dust and rubble. Bombs had fallen on the cemetery, too. The explosions had shaken up the graves in the ground. Here and there, white bones of the long-dead stuck up out of the rusty-brown earth. (Ellis 94-95)

From the point of view of the reader, the author's description of the weather is symbolic. It invites fear and signals the coming of a frightening incident. Parvana and Shauzia appear to take a perilous road which leads to a cemetery where horror awaits them. Metaphorically, wandering children in Afghanistan are the incarnation of blind migrant birds; they nest where there is neither warmth nor safety but coldness and terror. By adding a dense atmosphere to the setting, Ellis seems to remind the readers of how Afghans are at the heart of a fatal atmosphere due to the constant conflict.

Within the image of the unpleasant weather, Ellis now locates Parvana and Shauzia in a more specific place which invites more discomfort and fear; "the slight breeze carried a rotting stench to where Parvana and Shauzia were standing, on the edge of the cemetery's older section" (The Breadwinner 95). Indeed, a journey into trauma inception is what the girls embark on; it leads out to the verge of a place that would elicit uncomfortable feelings: a cemetery. Besides, the moment they step in there, an unpleasant perfume catches their breath: the smell of corpses. Within this traumatic scene, a disturbing question arises: why would children excavate bones from the depth of the soil? This is indeed a fundamental question which requires an urgent answer. Simply, yet

shockingly, the retrieved bones are commercialized in Afghanistan; they are sold and used for profit-oriented business. For instance, they can be grinded with other items to feed animals, an essential substance in the process of soap-making and cooking oil, to mention but a few consumptions³⁰. Such improbable assumptions are evidenced by the author in the following dialogue where the girls converse about the bone broker. Parvana first asks,

Who's that?

That's the bone broker. He buys the bones from us.

What does he do with them?

He sells them to someone else. (The Breadwinner 94)

The dialogue stresses the misdeeds of the Taliban regime guilty of impoverishing Afghan people, and consequently causing children's involvement in cemeteries, children who are the breadwinners of their vulnerable families; they become bone dealers. There is a sense in which dehumanization hits hard –one that makes children go through traumatic experiences and annihilate their innocence. Here, Ellis holds everyone in Afghanistan responsible for this dire atmosphere; she devotes a whole chapter, chapter 10, just to document on the immorality behind bone digging.

More than a realistic fiction and/or a fictionalized reality, the cemetery's immoral incident suggests a twofold allegory. First, it reveals the evilness of the Taliban regime; second, it symbolizes the failure of supreme powers that, in lieu of helping cease war atrocities, prefer to turn a blind eye on the tragic situation and ignite the fire of war. Despite their military presence, they intervene whenever and wherever unnecessary. The allegory is intentionally tackled by the writer to denounce two facts. The first one concerns the violation of children's rights in Afghanistan. According to articles 31, 32 and 38 from the Universal Declaration of Children's rights, children have the right to relax, play and join in a wide range of leisure activities. In addition, the government should protect them from work that is dangerous or that might harm their physical and

³⁰ For an extensive reading of the reasons behind digging up graves and pulling out bones in Afghanistan, and how Afghan children are involved in this inhuman task, see *Asian Recorder* (volume 43) published by K. K. Thomas at Recorder Press in 1997.

psychological health (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Children in war zones should then receive special protection, which is clearly not the case in Afghanistan. The second fact suggests the utmost dehumanization of Afghan people, their bones being sold and children being illegally hired in the field. To this end, basic rights are stripped from traumatized children, intensifying their psychological wounds and multiplying their physical bruises.

There is a semblance of a cemetery-like spot in *Escape from Aleppo* which makes it bear some resemblance to *The Breadwinner*, notwithstanding the different reading it stresses. This is projected in one of the incidents where Nadia is depicted lost, perplexed and melancholic, following the bombing of her home. Upon her long journey across the streets of Aleppo, she finds herself in a 'strange' impasse which leads to "a sprawling park where a dozen rowdy kids roamed with joyful abandon" (Senzai 39). Nadia approaches a boy whom she converses with about the reason behind pouring water over the ground. The conversation goes as follows:

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm watering Mommy," he replied.

Nadia frowned. "Watering your mother?"

He looked at her like that was the kind of idiotic question only outsiders asked. "If I water her, then something will grow for sure, to give her shade."

His mother's grave. "I –I'm sorry," she stammered, eyeing the rows of mounds hugging the playground on all sides.

The boy shrugged. "It was her heart. We wanted to take her to the hospital but it was gone. Destroyed by bombs. We couldn't find anyone to help her in time."

"Hey," cried out a girl in long pigtails, pointing to a fresh mound.

"Splash some on the martyrs too."

The boy nodded and poured water on the other graves. (Senzai 40)

Just like Kabul, Aleppo's parks become cemeteries, and orphan children roam across the graves, water them and hope their loved ones rise from the ground. Such an overwhelming innocent scene is tormenting. In other words, it symbolizes the atrocity of al-Assad juxtaposed with the purity of children. In a country like Syria, children are not only orphaned but also pushed to bear the

weight of physical and psychological pains. Swallowed by war atrocities and intense traumas, they have no alternative to survive but to adapt their fragile minds to a reality that goes beyond acceptance. And so, Syrian children create an atmosphere of joy in the midst of a war zone, in the middle of graves. After all, they are the epitome of hope. What Senzai tries to convey through this incident is the idea that loss can beget the construction of resilience. Contrary to Ellis who goes as far as to immerse the reader in the horrors of Afghan cemeteries, Senzai forges a different narrative from within a Syrian cemetery that stands for hope. In both cases, however, chaos and insecurity dominate both the country and the people.

The cemetery is but a succinct sample of the main setting that is replete with an aura of traumatic scenes and immoral acts, jeopardizing the life of Afghan and Syrian children. Parvana, unlike Nadia, is lost in a daydream, “finally, she stuck her whole head under the tap, hoping the cold water would wash the images of what she had done all day out of her head. But every time she closed her eyes, she saw Mr, Skull and his companions lined up on the gravestones, grinning at her” (The Breadwinner 101). The emergence of daydreams is common in trauma studies: a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In this vein, daydreams are post-effects of unresolved trauma which emerge not from Parvana’s imagination but rather from her unconscious mind. In other words, they are an uncanny creation. A mysterious seal is stamped on her mind, always recalling uncomfortable memories. Hence, the experience of trauma employs traumatic memory of a repetitive past.

So far, one can only praise the faithfulness of authors who champion the essence of the war novel genre by conjuring realistic images to the reader’s mind. In this respect, Ellis and Senzai give the setting its due importance in the depiction of the matters that burden vulnerable children in Afghanistan and Syria; matters that are often neglected in favor of a shallow descriptive narration. On the one hand, Ellis boldly writes about the illegal, unethical and inhuman policy of recruiting Afghan children in cemeteries to dig up bones when this fact is barely documented for some political reasons; on the other hand, Senzai finds

a way to orchestrate resistance despite the lethal atmosphere Syrian children are exposed to and the insecurities that are set around them.

Following the cemetery's inhumane incident, Ellis presses hard on the reader's faculty of empathy. Once again, she takes us to another location where trauma is dense and empathy gets intense: a stadium, not a usual one. In Kabul, it must be known, stadiums are no longer used as a place for leisure activities such as sports, concerts and other entertaining events; rather, they represent a site for crime and punishment. Disguised as boys, both Parvana and Shauzia follow a crowd of people that were heading to the stadium in order to have capital by selling some cigarettes and chewing gum. They are expecting a soccer game; yet it turns to something terrifying. In a relevant article entitled '*Memory between Nostalgia and Madness: the Legacy of War in Yasmina Khadra's the Swallows of Kabul*', Assia Kaced examines how stadiums become places of terror and punishment in Kabul. She points out, "the only place where people gather in big numbers is Kabul Stadium, where 'sinners' are watched being executed or punished for acts of disobedience or insubordination" (192). The following dialogue is a representation of how the stadium releases uncanny feelings and greases traumatic bleeding:

"It's awfully quiet for a soccer game," Shauzia said.
"The game hasn't started yet. Maybe the cheering will start when the players come on the field." Parvana had seen sport events on television, and people in the stands always cheered.
No one was cheering. The man did not look at all happy to be there.
"This is very strange," Parvana whispered into Shauzia's ear.
"Look out!" A large group of Taliban soldiers walked onto the field close to them. The girls ducked down low so they could see the field but the Taliban couldn't see them. (The Breadwinner 106-107)

Upon initial representation, the scene suffices to prepare both the characters and the readers for an alarming experience; it sets the floor to a realistic asset. Shortly after the unusual vibes and "all of a sudden one of the soldiers took out a sword, raised it above the prisoner's head and brought it down on the man's arm. Blood flew in every direction. The man cried out in pain" (The Breadwinner 107). The amputation of hands for theft is actually part of the major penalties, in Islamic

law, yet it is rarely practiced in Muslim countries. The problem is neither with the practice nor with religion, but rather with the circumstances under which it is done in front of children. It is shocking for children to be in a such exotic place and to witness such a traumatic scene; they are too young to understand religious beliefs. Even at home, a place which is supposed to appease war pressures, Parvana could not forget what happened; the image of cutting hands was still engraved in her mind, stimulating the feeling of the uncanny, “I need a break, she told her mother, I don’t want to see anything ugly for a little while” (The Breadwinner 109). Accordingly, the stadium is but a tiny segment of what constitutes Kabul, a trauma dwelling that shelters children.

The same realistic asset of the war, which inhabits the cruel environment and subverted setting, can be found in Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*. Senzai illustrates in brutal detail the untenable position in which Syrian children are placed. Like Parvana, Nadia is thrown in uncanny locations wherein freak waves of fear sweep out the stability of Syria in general, and that of Aleppo in particular. This is evident in the following excerpt where Senzai endows Nadia with a thirst for knowledge to ponder the question of war in Syria:

On the streets, in the shops, mosques, churches, salons and universities, the *mukhabarat* and their informants were everywhere, listening and reporting back what they learned, making people who disagreed or dissented with the Assad regime disappear into the night ... *They fit the definition of ‘authoritarian regime’: a ruler or government willing to do anything to keep their power*, thought Nadia with a sinking feeling in her stomach. (Senzai 60)

From the onset of the novel, Senzai highlights the deep malaise from which Syria is suffering, a political malaise that absorbs safety and unleashes anxiety. By making Nadia familiar with the definition of ‘authoritarian regime’, she highlights the roots of the conflict that identifies Syria. Furthermore, Senzai denounces the culprits of ‘mukhabarat’ and al-Assad; both are sentenced guilty of brutally executing anyone who goes against the imposed regime. This atrocity reminds us of the Taliban penalizing Afghan people who are accused of insubordination and do not submit to the imposed code of conduct. By painting vivid images of chaos and war atmosphere, both Ellis and Senzai focus on

cultivating the psychological realism of their protagonists: Parvana and Nadia, as it will be shown in the subsequent sections.

What adds to the chaos in Syria is the thirst for power which results in a split among internal and external institutions; each seeks to violently quench the flames of war by imposing its ideology. And so, with the famous slogan in the Arab world: '*Alshaab yurid isqat alnizam*', English for "The people want to bring down the regime", scrawled across a schoolyard in Deraa, the Arab Spring flared to life in Syria" (Senzai 102). Indeed, such a slogan rings a bell in the Arab world and has a well stretched notion in the narrative of the Jasmine Revolution. Senzai goes as far as to provide a critique of how complicated the situation in Syria is. With the interference of supreme powers and the expansion of Al Qaeda, war sirens start resonating across the world; finding a cosy nest in Syria. Through an omniscient narrator, she writes:

Nadia realized that the war had changed. She'd seen video clips of horrendous battles where rebels from the Free Syrian Army and the al-Tawhid Brigade, with its many subgroups, fought Assad's forces. Newer clips showed young men with long beards and strange clothes, speaking Arabic in unfamiliar accents, as well as English, French, and Farsi. These were foreigners, flooding into the country, many with extremist religious beliefs, linked with groups such as Al Qaeda and those who called themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, and carried a black flag. As if that weren't complicated enough, money and arms were flooding in from Europe, America, and rich Gulf Arab states to aid Syrian rebels, who were mainly Sunni Muslims. Meanwhile, Iran and Hezbollah forces from Lebanon, who were Shia, flocked to support Assad, as did Russia, which sent military aid. Christians and other minorities were caught in the middle. (Senzai 176)

Here, Senzai offers a rounded picture of the complex nature of war in Syria. On account of that, the perennial conflict between the Occident and the Orient is what leads Syria to further fall down into the dark abyss of fierce struggle for power. While the West sphere takes side with Syrian rebels, Russia and its partners assist al-Assad. Under this political crisis, Nadia highlights the futility of the quest for power at the expense of humanity. Both description and analysis reflect the depth of an author who manages to denounce and criticize an

ensemble of inhuman acts that are adopted by many politicians through a novel that erodes moral values in a soulless Syria.

In brief, throughout the development of the novels, Ellis and Senzai dislocate the setting of their narratives in different spaces in Kabul and Aleppo. These are often depicted as destabilized, destroyed and haunted spots where gallows of fear loom over the characters, suggesting an unconscious awakening of uncanny feelings. In fact, the “endless proliferation of images of wounded bodies, minds, cities, and states” are what characterises the war novel genre (Stonebridge 194). To this end, it is customary for war novelists to take the reader into a psychological voyage that is close to reality where unpleasant emotions are elicited. On the one hand, Ellis seems to offer a vivid image where trauma inception implicitly occupies a fundamental discussion part; on the other hand, Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo* provides a unique insight into the bleeding Syria that is imbued with architectural and spiritual metamorphoses. The title itself is symbolic; Aleppo is not safe; hence why one should escape, and therefore survive. As examined so far, the setting echoes the wounding and the bleeding city of Kabul and Aleppo. Furthermore, it brings a sensorial effect of human suffering and vulnerability.

Accordingly, the deadly atmosphere wherein Afghan and Syrian children are exposed stands for a country of chaos and insecurity. One shall also ponder over this image of the bleeding city that seems to be personified in the novel: what matters here is not the portrayal of the city metamorphosis itself, but how the sensory language discloses what the city bears in hard times which, in turn, determines the characters’ emotional outbursts. The essence of home, if there is any left home, becomes a dystopia. To illustrate, here are two twin-passages that portray the bleakness of war: first, “Kabul was a dark city at night. It had been under curfew for more than twenty years. Many of the street lights had been knocked out by bombs, and many of those still standing out did not work” (Ellis 129). Second, the “beloved Haleb, Aloppe, home . . . Without power, the city was dark except for a few pinpricks of light, indicating the lucky neighbourhood with generators. What had taken five thousand years to build had taken less than

two to ravage” (Senzai 289). Through these images, the authors help the reader visualise how dreadful the setting is; images that evoke the reader’s faculty of imagination and engage the senses to deepen his/her comprehension of what is going on in conflict zones. Additionally, the darkness which Kabul and Aleppo are swallowed by paints a psycho-historical picture of the emotional moment.

Given the highlighted examples, what further unites the selected novels is the sensorial language that is used by Ellis and Senzai in their potent description of Afghanistan and Syria, respectively. This language aesthetically helps corporealize the spiritual and spiritualize the corporeal cities in conflict zones: a vivid imagery is artistically painted where the corporeal and the spiritual at once coincide and harmonize. In other words, the wound of these cities is heard and seen, cities whose histories are brutally raped by the fangs of local regimes and international schemes. Thus, the authors engage the reader with a supra-sensory language. The latter is embodied in the novels by means of an excess of figures of speech, mainly images, metaphors, allusions and allegories. Thus conceived, the novel is the product of imagination and sentiments; it adds meaning to reality and fuels reality with cognition.

There are certain thematic scopes that seem to be identified as common to the novels under study, and which, to a great extent, influence the image of the destroyed country. These do not only include the architectural representation but also emphasise the spiritual metamorphosis of bleeding cities. Similar to individuals, the city has a soul which, during war time, can experience trauma. It is safe to argue that the war often strengthens, or fails to strengthen, the relationship between characters and their home countries. In conflict zones, the wound is not related to the human body/mind only, but to the country, too, that bleeds from both the inside and the outside –reference is here made to the wounds that inflict on the architecture and the soul. A country is hence traumatized by the war atrocities, just like the mind and history.

II.1.2. Parvana and Nadia: Recipients of War Trauma

As an outcome of, and a sequel to, the dreadful atmosphere and war atrocities which Kabul and Aleppo are haunted by, children's reception of war trauma is an inevitable result and deserves thorough examination. In Ellis' tetralogy, Parvana, herself the breadwinner, takes cumulative risks, sacrifices her life and challenges the Taliban oppression to provide her family with necessary needs. To her, family comes as a priority. Just like Parvana, Nadia's world, too, rested on the cornerstone of family spirit and stability. Albeit the war's psychic pressures, family is the unit that helps maintain psychological balance amongst the members. In conflict zones, however, the essence of family is shattered by the consecutive traumatic events. What makes Parvana and Nadia compatible for a comparative analysis is their overwhelming experience of family separation amidst the war. Not knowing which safer road it takes to arrive, what perils to circumvent and how to resist emotional outbursts, they embark on a journey into the unknown. So, they share the same trauma and seek the same irresistible desire, which is finding their families.

Before addressing children's reaction to the trauma inception, it is preferable to examine how Parvana and Nadia are constantly put in vulnerable positions; they are depicted lonely and alone, journeying across Kabul and Aleppo after they got separated from their families. To begin with, Ellis' *The Breadwinner* highlights the danger of being a child raised in an intellectual milieu through Parvana's family background. Parvana is the daughter of a respected father who happens to be a history teacher and a mother who is a writer for Kabul radio station. Actually, Parvana's family represents a threat to the Taliban regime, simply and expectedly, because both her parents are intellectuals and, more precisely, her father received education in the United Kingdom; so he is lured by the Western standards which, in the Taliban mindset, go against the Taliban's imposed code of conduct. Ellis goes as far as to provide a comment on how children are traumatized by denouncing the cruel behavior the Taliban soldiers treat educated Afghans. This is apparent in the novel, "the whole family

was laughing when four Taliban soldiers burst through the door” (The Breadwinner 34). To dig deep into the overwhelming experience, one might further attend to the traumatic incident where Parvana’s father is ruthlessly beaten and taken by the Taliban:

Two of the soldiers grabbed her father. The other two began searching the apartment, kicking the remains of dinner all over the mat.

“Leave him alone!” Mother screamed. “He has done nothing wrong!”

“Why did you go to England for your education?” the soldiers yelled at father. “Afghanistan doesn’t need your foreign ideas!” They yanked him toward the door.

“Afghanistan needs more illiterate thugs like you,” Father said. One of the soldiers hit him in the face. Blood from his nose dripped onto his white shalwaz kameez. (The Breadwinner 34-35)

Accordingly, this tragic scene puts flesh on the bones of a central question regarding trauma inception. This is where the trauma gets intense. Moreover, one’s faculty of imagination cannot help but tremble with empathetic engagement. Witnessing the horrors of the Taliban exposes Parvana and her family to psychological anguish and physical pain. Stuck in an infernal world, their unconscious mind is a conduit of haunting wounds. Thus, Ellis paints a vivid picture of trauma inception by injecting pathos to the narrative.

Interestingly, the same traumatic incident of family shattering is found in Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*. Again, one might wonder why Nadia’s family would represent a threat to al-Assad regime. To anticipate the reason, the question has a twofold answer: first, they are members of the Suni sect; second, they are involved in a sensitive industry which makes them enter into the thorned garden of politics. Under this delicate condition, they either submit to what the regime dictates or receive severe punishment for insubordination. Accordingly, Senzai seems to intentionally create the character of Nadia from such a targeted background that has stretched arms in business and politics. So, she is the granddaughter of Jandali family, a wealthy family that runs the chemical industries in Syria. Nadia tells us, “My grandfather started the business, but my father and uncles help him run it” (Senzai 72). Along similar lines, she adds: “Sunni businessmen, like her grandfather, had worked with the Alawite

government to secure their own financial success” (Senzai 78). These reasons suffice to understand the risk the family takes to survive in a war-torn country.

On many occasions, Nadia’s grandfather would “puff out his chest and tell them that his sons had all gone on to college, including Nadia’s father, a chemical engineer, who now helped run the business (Senzai 24). It goes without saying that in a country where political upheavals increase, learned men are neither safe from the war ramifications nor are they treated as politically committed social reformists. As in the case of the Jandali family, it is impossible not to predict the calamity that makes them sink in the sunless pitfall of either submission or disobedience. In both cases, hard times are inescapable.

On the function of the intellectual in society, it should be mentioned that Antonio Gramsci categorizes two types of intellectuals: ‘traditional’ and ‘organic’. On the one hand, Parvana’s family suggests the traditional type as both her father and mother belong to a group that is characterized by the image of “the man of letters, [such as] the philosopher, the artist, [the teacher and the writer]” (Gramsci 141). On the other hand, the Jendali family conforms to the organic category of intellectual; Nadia’s father and uncles “are defined on the one hand by their role in production and in the organisation of work and on the other by their “directive” political role, focused on the Party” (Gramsci 132). In this light, Edward Said joins Gramsci’s thoughts and adapts his concept that fits the categorization of the characters’ family background. A traditional intellectual, on the one hand, could be a teacher, a priest or an administrator “who continue[s] to do the same thing from generation to generation” (Said 4). Here, parallel perspective can be clearly applied to Parvana's family. An organic intellectual, on the other hand, stands for “the capitalist entrepreneur who creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc” (Said 4). Thus, Nadia’s family falls in line with such a politically-engaged type of intellectual. Though fleetingly stressed, it was necessary to pause for a quick note on the different

positions of the intellectual, a hint which served the analysis of the characters' background³¹.

Prior to the war, life has been perfect. The Jandali family was the epitome of patriotism; it used to help maintain social harmony, contribute to Syria's economic growth and support intellectual engagement that overall transcend cultural and religious diversity in Syria. And then, the war breaks out in Aleppo; puzzling social hierarchy and life stability. If there is one policy anyone cannot abide by, severe punishment awaits -notwithstanding the religion you worship or the class you belong to. This is projected through Nadia's uncle who ends up executed by the military intelligence service of Syria, for he refused to adhere to al-Assad's malicious policy. In the voice of an omniscient narrator, Senzai narrates:

To be taken by the *mukhabarat* meant a visit to the government's prisons to be interrogated, tortured . . . killed [...] The day they found him, hands and feet bound, a single bullet in his head, was the day Jiddo had the stroke that took his life. It was the day her grandmother's hair turned white and Khala Shakira stopped talking. (Senzai 261-262)

This traumatic incident reminds us of Parvana's father who got arrested by the Taliban soldiers. As an intellectual, Nadia's uncle refuses to have his clean hands stained with the dirt of a tyrannical regime. And so, his tragic death is foreseeable. This distressing tragedy is the blow that opens a deep wound; leaving the family in unspeakable torment. To reflect on the inception of trauma, Senzai, too, injects pathos into her narrative.

Under such traumatic events, Parvana and Nadia are haunted by feelings of fear, loss and despair. What adds to the intense trauma is the moment they find themselves left alone. Desperately roaming over the demolished streets of Kabul and Aleppo where they are trapped in rubbles, the girls embark on a distressing journey into the unknown. In brief, their fragile minds are a mass of bruises without the presence and the support, of the family. The only companions they have are patience and resistance, in addition to passing people who had a great

³¹ More on the role of the intellectual is thoroughly examined in the last chapter.

impact on their construction of resilience and marked a potent presence in the trauma narrative. These minor characters, with whom Parvana and Nadia share their journey of search for their families, have mysterious stories; each wounded in different ways. These include Asif, Leila and Mrs. Weera in the case of Parvana, and Basif and Ammo Mazen in the case of Nadia, a point to which I shall gradually cast light in the subsequent sections and chapters.

So to keep pace with trauma inception, both Ellis and Senzai dig deep in ingesting constant pains to the character's fragile psyches. They throw their protagonists in the deep end of suffering where trauma manifestations haunt their unconscious minds; tearing up any shred of hope and innocence that can ever be left still. This is projected in Ellis' tetralogy through Parvana who fights psychological unrests that disturb her instinct of survival. After being released from prison, Parvana's father passed away. What adds to Parvana's pain is the unbearable circumstances which she has to bear alone; she has to bury her father, go through the grieving process and look for shelter. With a low voice full of pity, Parvana manages to say 'I am alone'; realizing her mother and siblings are somewhere in Mazar. Mourning the loss of her father, she succumbs to the vacuum of self and futility of life; "small, sharp stones dug into Parvana's knees as she knelt at the edge of the grave and placed the large stones she had gathered around it. She put each one down slowly. There was no reason to hurry. She had nowhere else to go (Parvana's Journey 9). There is a deep notion of trauma and a profound sense of psychic damage in Parvana; yet an irresistible impulse to fight inner fiends. And so, surmounting the trammels of Taliban, she embarks on a bumpy journey to reunite with her family.

For her part, Nadia is put in the same critical situation: her life is disturbed by traumatic experiences. After the tragic death of her uncle, the Jandali family takes the firm decision to flee Aleppo, trespass checkpoints and borders, and make it safely to Turkey. Upon the initial plan of escape, a barmeela falls on their home, leaving Nadia faint in the rubbles. In her late awakening to the traumatic incident, she "thought back to the moment the bomb stuck, sending her tumbling down the steps. Malik [her cousin] had been looking for her, but she'd crawled

under the car. They thought I was hit . . . that I was dead. Her fury deflated like a punctured balloon. She took a ragged breath, trying to sort her jumbled thoughts” (Senzai 28-29). And so, the girl joins Parvana’s long journey which centers on her search for her family; both protagonists carry a thick bundle of dormant feelings that exhaust their broken minds and fatigue their fragile bodies.

Indeed, the examination of the setting and characterization require much research, considerable time, and an abundant space which I am unreservedly not at liberty to take advantage of in this humble thesis. Thus, this section is meant to sketch out the atmosphere wherein war breaks out so as to immerse the reader with a flavor of what the fragile mind is prey to receive: random emotional outbursts. Thus, one might conclude the section by acknowledging the differences and the similarities between the two authors in dealing with the depiction of the war. Distinguishing between the two settings allows the analysis to build arguments with more accuracy to the different contexts of Afghanistan and Syria within their proper mold of conflict. As examined above, there is a significant difference, for instance, between the war’s motives and the readings of contexts. While the Taliban regime is more religious and patriarchal oriented, al-Assad regime has to do with political dogma. Yet, this considerable difference falls apart when one ceases to look at it separately, that is, geographically. As such, the authors manage to remain faithful to the war novel genre by giving the setting its due importance in the portrayal of Kabul and Aleppo. And so, they create round fictional characters and make them recipients of trauma.

So, the present subsection serves its purpose of dismantling the forces of realism in the novels under study. And so, a contextual reading of the war novel always traces a well-trodden path to the same premise: it opens an appetite for realism and asserts the writer’s commitment to historicity, that is, historical authenticity. More than that, Ellis’s boldness and Senzai’s maturity in dealing with matters that weigh so heavily upon the human mind are an attempt to reflect on the borderlessness of war trauma and the psychological pressure it puts on vulnerable people, regardless of their diversity in all its forms. Within this

universal view, a shift from local to global lens bridges the novels under study. In this respect, McLoughlin argues:

[c]onflict might be global, but those who have personally witnessed the body of a person killed in war are in the minority and even television does not afford numerous opportunities for western non-combatant to view war-dead directly. But the surviving body tells a story, too. Wounds report wars. Some are endowed with voice, like those of the Sergeant in Macbeth whose gashes cry for help. (McLoughlin 23-24)

Faced with the uncanniness of the extreme horrors of war, the setting in both narratives determines the characters' emotional shell. One thing is sure, they are not safe from the chaos around them; they are recipients of traumatic experiences and percipients of historical accidents. In what follows, attention will be focused on the psychological chaos that characterizes the characters. Because they are recipients of trauma, Parvana and Nadia confront the cruel atmosphere of war with heavy hearts and broken minds. In order to survive, they have to resort to therapeutic facilities. These include evoking memories of happier times, listening to inner voices inside their heads and adjusting their minds to a bitter reality, to mention but only these. In what follows, attention is put on the analysis of those abstract matters that weigh so heavily upon the characters' fractured minds.

II.2. A Dive into the Unconscious Mind of the Traumatized Child

It would be safer to stay far from meddling with the riddles of the human mind. And yet to do so would be to bypass how inner voices are produced, and therefore miss the chance to arrange psychological anarchies. It is needless to say how trauma becomes a nest for scholarly interest, for it intrudes everywhere and nowhere. In other words, it haunts the mind and hides in the curving layers of history. Even the most sophisticated of trauma critics acknowledge its paradoxes, convoluted inception and mysteries towards the study of the unconscious mind. Still, one must take a deep dive into the ocean of the vague psyche in an attempt to reveal relics of trauma manifestations and heal them. In this manner, the psyche's production of intermittent and laconic responses reaches a stratospheric rise wherein broken voices lie, saluting insidious monsters and invigorating the

survivor's resilience. Such a sensitive mind mechanism begs the following question: is it safe to listen to the noise that exists inside the fractured mind? As it will be demonstrated in this section, listening to inner voices helps the survivor resist madness, and therefore build resilience.

As previously tackled in the first chapter, the war novel focuses on the traumatic experiences of vulnerable people during times of conflicts, including the physical and psychological effects of the war on individuals. To reiterate, the war novel presents a realistic depiction of the war that is fused with modernist tenets. All in all, this genre is meant to carefully accompany the reader to the labyrinth of the war in order to bear witness to a lost childhood in the shadow of despotic regimes that resists potential historical erasure. Imbued with the theme of loss, despair, violence, survival and death, the novels under scrutiny fall in line with the literary genre of the war novel. Moreover, they are condensed with intense interior monologues which make the narrative adopt a fragile language that shakes the grimmest souls. Such a potent literary tool prompts the study to ask: why would Ellis and Senzai submerge the reader in the depths of the character's stream of mind? And how does this literary strategy signal the explosion of realism and modernism in the war novel genre? By comparing the technique of interior monologue that is equally, yet differently, used by the two authors under study, in addition to the stream of consciousness and the experience of voice-hearing, the answers to these questions are cogently found in the coming two subsections.

The novels under study are replete with interior monologues through the insertion of random inner voices, coming from either known or unknown sources. The latter make the characters confused, and sometimes abused by disturbing psychological parasites, because of the hectic mind's process which requires recording their uncanny feelings; themselves unfamiliar to them. An inner noise emerges from within their fragmented minds, pressing hard on the reader's irresistible impulse to decode the enigma in it. Undoubtedly, there is a deep notion of trauma that alienates them from the external world, subordinates them to their emotions and makes them at odds with themselves. The authors

plunge us into that interior world where there is no clear device, but a hidden voice, to help us decipher what is being exposed to us, where it comes from, whose voice it is and who is making that noise inside the character's brain. These assaulting recurrent inner voices exhaust our minds with roaring echoes that distract us and make us liable to the bout of melancholy; yet help us understand the sufferings of those traumatized children. Thus, there is a profound sense of invisible wound that is inflicted on the damaged psyche. There is even a vivid description swirling in our mind, like snapshots of how they are leading very sheltered lives despite being absorbed by external and internal monsters. It is to the inner shell of the psyche that this section breaks in.

Before moving in the analysis of the novels under study, it is worthwhile to pause for a fleeting glimpse on the experience of voice-hearing and its usage in literature. As much as confusion emanates from the mysterious voices, it must be admitted, it also functions as a sign of trauma acknowledgment and self consciousness. In other words, this paradoxical process ensures that the traumatized is ready to grasp whatever intruder comes from his/her infected mind without falling into the pitfall of mental instability. Hence, those self-produced voices are what qualifies the survivor to develop post-traumatic stress disorder and simultaneously catalyze the interiorisation of innermost thoughts and feelings. Simon McCarthy-Jones touches upon the therapeutic impact that the hearing voices can have on the traumatized subjects. To him, hearing interior voices is instrumental in developing signs of therapy; they are "helpful manifestations of unresolved pain" (309). This would lead the traumatized to digest the ghostly voices, to produce an avatar for self-realization, and therefore to substantialise them into remedial facilities. In doing so, an impulse to resist the hidden demons of trauma inception is honed by the emergence of an alien voice from within the fractured mind.

Does listening to inner voices purge the traumatized of his pains and does it initiate the healing process? This question advances the hypothesis that hearing inner voices helps the survivor make his/her way through life. Now that the hypothesis is begged and the theoretical arguments are concisely identified, there

is a need to see how authors insert intermittent voices to their narratives through endowing the characters with a voice-hearing pathology, a point which the present section endeavors to examine in the coming paragraphs.

More than that, there can be no doubt that voice-hearing is one of the controversial questions in the literature domain, along with other domains which deal with the study of the mind. Because literature has its unique methods to reflect on the abstract mysteries of the human mind, it also finds other ways to reveal the enigmas ascribed to it. In the modern view of literature, which abandons the single voice of the omniscient narrator and welcomes the emergence of different viewpoints, the creation of a literary work is itself built out of multiple voices. This claim is brought to the fore by some novelists, among them David Mitchell for whom the process of writing a novel involves a sort of “controlled personality disorder ... to make it work you have to concentrate on the voices in your head and get them talking to each other”³². What Mitchell points out is clearly the difficulties any novelist can go through in the hectic process of producing a novel. Out of those disturbing voices comes the creation of characters that immerse us with a cluster of meaningful, and inevitably meaningless, perspectives and plunge us in a world that goes beyond what can neither be spoken nor seen, a world of abstractions and encapsulations.

Patricia Waugh draws attention to the changing premises on voice-hearing throughout centuries. She further highlights some of the psychological possibilities which justify the germination of inner voices from underground to surface. In her seminal article entitled ‘*The Art of Medicine: the Novelist as a voice Healer*’ (2015), she argues:

the assumption that voice-hearing is inevitably a feature of psychiatric disorders, notably schizophrenia, is now changing; voice-hearing can be a feature of grief, spiritual insight, and voluntarily dissociated states such as meditation; it might follow traumatic events, disrupted processes of memory, abusive experiences, prolonged stress, or sensory deprivation. Persecutory voices might arise out of conditions

³² This quote is retrieved from an electronic source, hence why the page number is missing. For further details, see Charles Fernyhough's *The Voices within: the History and Science of How We Talk to Ourselves* (2016).

of anxiety or hypervigilance or out of ruminative or obsessional thinking. During transitional life experiences, the inner dialogue orienting the self might break up into punitive or admonishing, as well as comforting and conciliatory voices. (Waugh 45)

Accordingly, the idea upon which Waugh builds up her assumption revolves around the volatility of voice-hearing and the vexing way it manifests itself as an uncontrolled activity of the mind; provoking various psychological disorders. Among the important ingredients of voice-hearing, she tells us, is trauma, the core theme of this thesis. Furthermore, Waugh highlights the dynamism of inner dialogue in triggering responses to the fragmented self at times of distressing experiences.

Again, before delving deep into the analysis of the novels under study, a distinction between interior monologue, stream of consciousness and voice-hearing should be made in order to avoid the ambiguity that might arise -an aim to acquit the section of fallacious assumptions. Despite their overlap in manifestation as they both meet at embracing an inner voice, a slight difference is still quite important to highlight. While the interior monologue signals one's own voice which could be identified and located, voice-hearing is more concerned with the plurality of voices one may hear, including his/hers, that are sourceless. In both cases, however, the mind is disturbed by the creation of a shadowy figure and ghostly sounds.

Because theme and style are impossible to dissociate in a literary analysis, the focus is now put on the interior monologue, the stream of consciousness and voice-hearing to see to what extent they serve the theme of trauma, and by extension post-traumatic stress disorder. Such literary tools allow the reader to dive deep into the broken psyche of traumatized children, to hone the interiorisation of psychological wounds, and therefore comprehend the inception of trauma. In short, the following subsections embark on an examination of the fragile membrane of the unconscious mind wherein broken voices reside mysteriously.

II.2.1. Parvana and the Internalization of self-Created Voices

In *Parvana's Journey*, the technique of the interior monologue is indirectly tackled by Ellis through endowing the protagonist with the power of writing using first person narrative. Although the omniscient narrator takes control of the whole narrative, the floor is always given to Parvana when it comes to narrating her daily life's sufferings. This intentional shift in narration, I argue, is reinforced by Ellis' attempt to make the reader get a deeper understanding of Parvana's thoughts, feelings and desires. In other words, the author draws a thin line between the character and the reader; making them so close. And so, the reader enters her mind through the unsent letters she continuously writes to her friend Shauzia. For a better illustration, one might have a close look at one of these letters:

Dear Shauzia:

It's getting harder and harder to remember what you look like. Sometimes when I think of you, I can only picture you in your blue school uniform with the white chador, back when we were students in Kabul. You had long hair then. So did I. (Ellis 60)

In the first paragraph of the letter, Parvana appears in a vulnerable mental position as her mind recollects moments of the past and rejects the bitterness of her present. Abused by the war ramifications, the absence of her best friend, Shauzia, makes Parvana almost forget her physical appearance. This is so evocative in that it provides the reader with an insight into the chaos trauma begets to the psyche. Clearly, there is an inner voice which reveals how terribly traumatized by the cruel world around her she is. In the same letter, Parvana adds:

It's hard to remember that I used to sleep in a bed and had to do my homework before I could watch television and play with my friends. It's hard to remember that we used to have ice cream and cakes to eat. Was that really me? Did I really leave a big piece of cake on my plate one day because I didn't feel like eating it? That must have been a dream. That couldn't have been my life. (Ellis 61)

Again, Parvana drowns us into the stream of her foggy consciousness. Overwhelmed by the good memories of the past when Kabul was in peace, she doubts their truthiness. By recalling the old days, Parvana is then nostalgic –an ambivalent dynamism which the next chapter carefully covers. In the end of the letter, Parvana declares, “My life is dust and rocks and rude boys and skinny babies, and long days of searching for my mother when I don’t have the faintest idea where she might be” (Ellis 61). This closing excerpt throws light on the external world and how it determines the interior reflection on it. In other words, it is the ongoing war that is the decisive factor in evoking random emotional outbursts.

This is only one letter among many others and the author succeeds in making the reader share some of the war’s horrors. As such, the inner pains are now revealed to help Parvana move forward in her journey to find her family. By injecting letters to the narrative, the reader is able to have a panoptic view of Parvana’s inner thoughts and feelings. In fact, it is the internal voice that is concealed in the subconscious mind that polishes the fragmentation in her trauma narrative. As such, Ellis appears faithful to literature in general, and to the war novel in particular, in dealing with psycho-historical events. More than that, letters are a mere reflection of one’s inability to articulate his/her thoughts on something that goes beyond expression. To be sure, it is usually when pathos of communication hits that we resort to writing letters and messages. And so, Parvana invests in materializing her feelings and thoughts through writing them in the form of letters. In doing so, she discloses her inner voices, hence why one might look at them as interior monologues rather than simple diaries. Proceeded in this way, the focus is put on the soul rather than on the body of the letter – word and structure. These swirling inner voices echo in the very single word of each letter. Their resonance even shakes the grimmest soul. This literary strategy, by far, attunes to the reader’s concern as much as it hones his/her sense of empathy.

To have a more in-depth look at the cries of inner voices, the coming paragraphs provide other vivid examples of how the interior monologue is manifested in the letters Parvana writes to Shauzia. Following the repetitive exposure to episodic traumatic events, Parvana makes it to a camp for internal refugees where life, if there is any, becomes bleak and tasteless. Almost sobbing, she writes:

Dear Shauzia

I can't sleep at night. I doze off for a bit, then Asif coughs, or Leila coughs, or they cry out in nightmares, or the neighbors yell, and I wake up again. I can't sleep during the day because I have to spend my time standing in lines.

Often my time in lines is wasted. Three times I've lined up for bread only to have the bakery run out before I got there

Two days ago there was a rumor that someone was in the camp to choose people to go to Canada. I stood in that line all day, but nothing happened. (Parvana's Journey 176-177)

In this letter, Parvana's writing style is characterized by a psychological depth that invites the reader to engage empathically, yet critically, with how life treats her and, by extension, afghan children. The style is imbued with stirring effects that immerse the reader in that cruel Kabul. There are broken voices in Parvana's head that disturb her just the way echoes of trauma are resonating inside her mind. Parvana, in this letter, voices her inward feelings and thoughts. She tells us about the daily hurdles facing those internal refugees such as, queuing for bread. Other than that, she is lured by the West, Canada in particular, which provides better life conditions. The aim is then to secure the readerly impulse, to listen to Parvana and make her inner voices heard. Furthermore, the letter showcases some of the upsetting mental health symptoms, namely the inability to sleep, recurrent nightmares and loud yells. These are symptoms that qualify a person to develop post-traumatic stress disorders. At this level, it is possible to diagnose Parvana, and the people around her, with the weighty manifestations of trauma. More on this sensitive point will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Further to what has been reflected on revealing the inner voice, Parvana articulates, "everywhere I go, I look for my mother. I should do a proper search, tent to tent, but I spend all my time standing in lines. I'm not even going to hope

that I'll find her. Hope is a waste of time" (Parvana's journey 178). There are days, Ellis reminds readers, that darkness is there to swallow us whole. Here, Parvana succumbs to it because she is exhausted and tripped over the edge until everything spilled out. Those days, it must be noted, show Parvana that pain does not just disappear. Sometimes it is not about fighting that pain but rather becoming stronger in front of it. And it is at that moment of self-realization and self-awareness that Parvana cultivates her resistance against the expansion of what might damage her feeble mind.

In the last letter, Ellis goes as far as to exhaust the reader's mind with thought-provoking questions that come from the depth of Parvana's mind. Perhaps this would be the very opportune moment to sense the flow, albeit sorrowful, of thoughts wherein a reservoir of feelings stream down her feeble psyche. Looking at life from a gloomy lens, Parvana questions:

It's been a long journey, and it's not over yet. I know I won't be living in this camp for the rest of my life, but where will I go? I don't know. What will happen to us now? Will we be hit by a bomb? Will the Taliban come here and kill us because they are angry at being made to leave Kabul? Will we be buried under the snow when it comes and disappear forever? These are all worries for tomorrow. (Parvana's Journey 193-194)

Here, Ellis projects a tiny part of what it resembles to live in Afghanistan, if living could even hold its true meaning in this context of vulnerability. She goes as far as to insert Parvana's disturbing questions, which come from the depth of her unconscious, to stress the struggle for survival. A moment of awareness steps into Parvana's mind; switching backwards and forwards, and oscillating between the haunting powers of the traumatic past and the fearful future. Indeed, a future that is hardly imagined where she can free herself from the fiends of trauma, yet determined by psychological strength. Clearly, there is an inner voice in Parvana's head that helps her construct resilience from within remnants of traumatic experiences.

So far, in the three examined letters, the narrator is clearly non-existent while the character's inner voice is provided in details through the letters. By using the first person narration, Ellis deactivates the role of the omniscient narrator in recording the entire story and activates the voice of the protagonist. This method hones the reader's faculty of empathy and widens his sympathetic imagination. Parvana is now the heroine of her own plot, and therefore interiorized voices are exteriorized albeit in a written form. In brief, the letters carry Parvana's silent cries.

One might find it absurd to deal with interior monologues through analyzing letters that are already addressed to someone while it has to be more of an internal conversation with one's self. It should be remembered, however, that Parvana herself is aware that those letters might never reach Shauzia. In fact, she keeps writing them to reconnect with the broken voice inside her head, and therefore fuel her resistance to trauma manifestations. Thus, writing letters helps Parvana accommodate her mind to sudden emotional outbursts. More than that, they also help the reader have a pass to travel in the psyche of the protagonist. In brief, Shauzia functions as a conduit for Parvana's inner voice. In all cases, Parvana takes the role of both the sender and the receiver, hence why considering interior monologue when dealing with letters.

Parvana's Journey is replete with those letters which came together in a neat way to give us a dive into the protagonist's unconscious. A contextual reading of all letters leads to the same premise: they represent the mind's hectic process of internalizing psychological wounds in which self-made voices are exteriorized, a therapeutic attempt to help Parvana shove fiends of trauma, and therefore move forward in her long journey into the unknown. Likewise, *Escape from Aleppo* casts light on the inner voices inside Nadia's head and the way they push the limits of interiorization.

II.2.2. Nadia and the Power of Voice Hearing

In a manner similar to Parvana whose letters reveal inner thoughts and repressed feelings, Nadia is also interrupted by ingesting ghostly voices. It is not for nothing

that Senzai puts some of the expressions in italics, for she emphasizes on the technique of interior monologue as well as the experience of voice-hearing. Senzai's polyphonic prose is such that it pops straightforwardly up in the traumatized fragmented psyche. To be sure, taking *Escape from Aleppo* as a whole, it reminds us how the self is interwoven with an inner and outer flow across the delicate tissue of the psyche. One might notice, for example, how the novel's fourth chapter is the one which is characterized by relentless voices coming from different sources. With abrupt dense voices and recurrent interior monologue manifested in the diction of that chapter, Senzai pushes the shift of focalization to its very limits. In fact, this density can be justified by the painful traumatic experience the chapter addresses: the intense trauma of being a lone child in a deadly atmosphere. And so, the climax of the novel reaches its peak.

In the lowest moment of one's suffering, the mind requires a self-construction of resistance. The latter could take various forms such as, producing appeasing voices. This idea is apparent in *Escape from Aleppo* through Nadia who, whether consciously or unconsciously, develops the experience of voice-hearing for the sake of stimulating her quest for finding her family. The following passages, in which the author mingles interior monologues with ghostly voices, make the point clearer:

Tears slipped down Nadia's cheeks. *It's all gone.* Anguish morphed into rage. *And my family is gone. How could they?* An unforgiving hardness settled like a jagged stone near her heart.
Get ahold of yourself, said a voice inside her head. This is no time to fall apart. You must find the others. (Senzai 28)

Here, the reader gets confused as the voice inside Nadia's head is thrown at him abruptly. As a result, disturbing questions arise from splinters of an unknown voice, namely is she hallucinating? Whose voice is speaking to her? Is it her mother's voice? Is it a self-construct voice? Is it another character's voice? The answers to these questions lie at the basis of understanding what the traumatized goes through, in that vacuum where a shift in focalization is provoked. What is certain is that neither the speaker nor the listener can locate the voice. In short,

the questions provide a void to be filled in by Nadia herself. In all cases, there is a shadowy figure behind that voice.

In another episode which follows Nadia's desperate search for her family in the rubble of Aleppo's bombed streets, the traumatized girl is again disrupted by an inner voice that comes from within her head, yet its echo transcends interiorisation. Moreover, the incident is marked by Senzai's resort to the technique of interior monologue, making the reader indulge in the internalized polyphony of the protagonist's unconscious mind. The scene goes as follows,

Old fears came rushing back. *No ... no ... I can't go out there.*
You can and you will, came a voice from deep inside, now sounding remarkably like Ms. Darwish.
Okay, I can do this, she repeated over and over again in her head.
(Senzai 29-30)

Contrary to the first passage, Senzai locates the source and the origin of the voice Nadia receives inside her head. In other words, the voice is neither disembodied nor perplexing as it comes from Ms. Darwish's lips, her algebra teacher who happens to be a childhood friend of her mother. By identifying the voice in its original source, Nadia summons the presence of her teacher. Although Nadia is aware of herself being alone, she is overwhelmed by the haunting of inner voices. To make sense of Ms. Darwish imagined appearance, there might be a need to have a look at the way she had an influence on Nadia's life. In her birthday, Nadia receives a special gift from Ms. Darwish; a silver pin which takes the form of infinity symbol. She says, "In algebra it's called the lemniscates, the symbol for infinity. It's a never-ending loop that conveys unlimited possibilities. I have high expectations for you, Nadia, my dear, that you can accomplish great things if you put your mind to it" (Senzai 24-25). Ms. Darwish's voice cajoles Nadia with an optimistic view of life. Furthermore, it reduces the feelings of loss, uncertainty and fear regarding the overwhelming experience she endures. After all, Nadia is only a lonely girl and a victim of the civil war in Syria. Thus, the gift symbolizes Nadia's growth and stands as a catalyst for resistance in dealing with, and healing from, whatever life throws one's way. In reality, as in algebra, life is

congested with infinite difficulties, yet with limitless possibilities to surmount them.

In another incident, Senzai inserts another voice inside Nadia's head to propel the journey forward: that of Khala Lina, her uncle's wife. After Nadia realizes that she lost her way to the clinic where the family agrees to meet, she feels a deep sense of despair, followed by a familiar voice that says: "*We need to go slow, be careful and stay out of sight from both rebels and government forces. It might take two hours to reach the clinic.* Khala Lina's words rang in her ears" (Senzai 31). Again, the voice Nadia hears is no longer unknown. Now she summons up the presence of Khala Lina and brings her voice to the present.

Senzai further underlines the role of voice-hearing in serving the purpose of shoving the chains of trauma. She goes as far as to make the protagonist imbibe various voices to adjust her mind from falling into the horror of the past. As Nadia engages in an internal conversation with herself, "*You need to find shelter,* warned a voice inside her head as she pushed away the memory. *You're already lost –it's dark ... dangerous.... Once the rain stops, find someone to give you directions to the clinic*" (Senzai 51). This time, it is a voice with a firm tone that channels into Nadia's mind. More than an interior monologue, it reflects how she is endowed with self-awareness. She feels a responsibility to bring order to the disorder that occurred in her current life. In short, there is an urge to find a safe way in order to reunite with her family. And so, Nadia creates agents to her consciousness by producing internal voices which, in turn, help her trigger the process of introspection.

More than just literary techniques, interior monologue and voice-hearing demonstrate a state of hyper-consciousness and hyper-reflexivity which Nadia develops shortly after trauma inception. Such tools are what enable Senzai to dig deep into the inner reception of uncanny effects. As such, Nadia is the incarnation of a radio receiver as voices randomly transmit through her head. All voices come together to give her a glimpse of how inner and outer voices are interwoven across the membrane of her unconscious mind. And so, she receives

them, listens to them and speaks to them so that she can dissipate mental breakdown. To this end, it is her way to resist trauma manifestations, and therefore embrace resilience. Caught between two opposing paths, to fall or to stand up, Nadia chooses survival.

Compared to Ellis who indirectly guides the reader into the mind of her traumatized character, Senzai is more direct in the way she attunes to the subtle inception of inner voices in Nadia's consciousness. Through voice-hearing and interior monologue, both authors cast light on the traumatic experience of children whose lives are meant to be hollow and uncompassionate. All these self-produced voices of shadowy figures and ghostly sounds are an indication of the convoluted narrative that is filled with the haunting power of random voices. Moreover, they are tenets of what could signal a modernist style, for they correspond to the inner bubble in which they are produced, and later consumed. Hence, tenets of modernism are present in both Ellis and Senzai's works.

At some point in one's life, the human mind is prone to the strange experience of voice-hearing that may take various manifestations, such as name-hearing. The catalyst for this could simply be the sound of the wind which blows through a passage. Even if such voices imply the existence of a body, they usually come from an inhuman source; that is because of the random emotional outbursts the mind is prey to. What is more striking is that we always feel insecure at voices whose sources are not locatable. And so, we shove their existence. In a trauma context, the mind symbolizes an antenna that transmits and receives haphazard voices. It is only by listening to these voices, locating their sources and responding to them that the traumatized fetches order to the mind's disorder. In other words, they function as a therapeutic instrument which makes one's way through life. Both Ellis and Senzai, through the use of interior monologue, first person narrator and voice-hearing, reflect on the sounds inside Parvana's and Nadia's heads. In doing so, they immerse us in the depth of the broken mind and into that schism trauma creates.

This section strove for bringing an answer to the question it previously advanced on why the novels under study are polished with modernist techniques. In short, it is because they address the malleability and fluidity of the human mind amidst the war. By inserting forms of interior monologues in the novels under study, the authors gamble with the eerie structure of the human mind. So, they abruptly throw random voices and plunge the reader in the depth of the characters' feelings. Such innermost modes of writing are but an attempt to help us pinpoint trauma inception as well as explore the interiorization of traumatic experiences. In brief, Ellis and Senzai remind us that life does not always welcome gentle voices, that other voices knock the doors of our broken soul just like "guests who refuse to leave, who take over and threaten the host" (Waugh 55). So, to live, even for a moment, is a traumatic experience yet an introspective journey to build resilience and develop psychological strength. As the trauma proceeds apace, chronology gets chaotic by the backward glances the survivor takes in order to make his/her way through life. The latter, as will be shown in the next section, is regarded as an interesting factor in both the war novel enterprise and trauma theory.

II.3. Trauma Voyages amidst the Mosaics of Broken Chronology

The central question on the mosaics of chronology revolves around the idea that psychological time betrays linearity. There is a sense in which connecting different moments of one's consciousness into one single entity when looking at distressing experiences is where rationality emerges from within shambles of time disruption. It is not for nothing that Nietzsche views life as a never ending *cycle*, for it has something of 'reccurrence' and 'cyclic' patterns, and we are not always supposed to move onward. Rather, we are meant to experience traumas, to dive into the pain, to take a backward route, and therefore to respond to the effects it causes. It is, first and foremost, a revolutionary critique and refutation of the mathematical idea that the notion of time envelopes measured and gradual units such as, seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades and centuries, to mention but the conventions we are accustomed to in life as in

fiction. Instead, the mechanism of time functions in a non-linear, yet relative way. While the past has an impact on the present, the present affects the future. In brief, everything is at once relative and chaotic.

One might come to terms with the fact that very often a person is thrown at an overwhelmed experience where everything is endowed with non-linear patterns and nothing is neat. This approach to break chronology into unsystematic pieces falls in line with modern thought, particularly that of Nietzsche who believes in the eternal recurrence of events. According to him, life moves in circles; shaping repetitive sequences. It signals a universe that expands and then collapses in a cyclic process. And so, history repeats itself endlessly (qtd in Kein 53). As such, historical events, which encapsulate traumatic images, are better understood in their after occurrence. That is exactly what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* (English for ‘afterwardness’ and/or ‘deferred action’), a terminology that is further refashioned by Cathy Caruth and has given the ‘trauma belatedness’ (Caruth 6). So, there is a psychic process by which certain experiences, impressions, and memories, which may have been overlooked or not fully processed at the time of occurrence, resurface later in time. This resurfacing happens as a result of connecting these past experiences with new ones that elicit a powerful emotional crisis. Such an emotional crisis is what serves as a catalyst, bringing these previously overlooked experiences to the forefront of one’s consciousness and cursing the time fabric.

Interestingly, one may also think of Albert Einstein’s reflective idea on the notion of time. He states, “people like us who believe in physics know that the distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (qtd in Hoye187). In fact, Einstein does not reject the labels of time; rather, he debunks the distinction between past, present and future. His critical vision vis-à-vis time, of which this section’s is concerned, triggers the broken chronology questioning in the sense that past, present and future are but illusionary segments. What interests me then is not the study of memory *per se*, nor its focal induction into trauma theory through embracing glimmers of traumatic events which metamorphose into traumatic memories, but rather its

inclination towards time that renders the traumatized travels mentally through time and space. No wonder that travelling through time is deemed by the majority of scientists, if not all, as a fancy belief. To question such mechanism seems even to bespeak but an absurd attempt as it, up to the present time, may engender misleading datum loaded with blunders. Yet, one cannot deny the fact that in trauma studies, chronology gets chaotic.

Because traumatic memories are timeless, and so trauma's captivation obviously is, one should pay a much-focus attention to the conception of time in trauma and memory studies. To my sense, without memories in general and traumatic memories in particular, the notion of time is useless in the sense that the dualism between synchrony and diachrony is shaped resulting in what is called 'the broken chronology'. Time has been a controversy amongst thinkers since the crisis of modernism where global wars loomed in the horizon, drenching the human mind in a deep ocean of mental disorders such as trauma, paranoia, schizophrenia and madness, to name but a few. It begins to create an incentive scientific milieu for prominent theorists from different, yet akin disciplines since the twentieth century. Its conception, in fact, ranges from scientific to philosophical and psychological dimensions, from Albert Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* (1916) to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and Frederick Nietzsche's concept of Eternal return, to name but the most *magnum opuses* in academia. Literature illuminates a plethora of philosophies upon the elusive concept of time which feeds social sciences and humanities despite, or because of, the equivocal nature of abstractions it harnesses.

The time machine questioning is evidently an Einsteinian concern, and has its echoes in science-fiction, be it in literature or in film studies. What is peculiar about Albert Einstein's approach to time is that he went beyond the confines of what is known as the 'tick-tock' system. It is, in other words, a revolutionist understanding of time-space convergence in which he appended his "fourth dimension" idea. For him, time is especially not a 'constant' but an 'illusion' fabric, and therefore past, present and future are just 'persistent illusions' rejecting any distinction between them. It must be remembered that Einstein's

encounter with time-space theory emanates from philosophical views which, in their turn, are inspired from the nature of the course of events and the way they affect the cryptic activity of the human mind. To him, “the rate of time and the measure of space (...) are affected by the force of gravity. Thus, each observer has his own time measure” (Meissner 6). In the context of trauma, there is another dimension of time that is related to the psyche. Similar to Einstein’s idea, the psychological passage of time in a linear way is useless, for it is affected by the power of trauma, hence why the survivor keeps moving back and forth, from the present to the past and vice-versa, not knowing where the truth is hiding.

Despite being a question of contention amongst philosophers since the enlightenment and the renaissance eras, where reason becomes prevalent, there is no consensus about the possibility or the impossibility to travel through time and space. Those free thinkers, in the modern context, exposed equivocal questionings that remain open to multiple interpretations. Even the most sophisticated of its critics acknowledge its paradoxical nature. It would be less complex to remain vague about time. And yet to be so would be to miss the understanding of existence, history and human mind. Rhetorically speaking, what I meant by ‘the possibility of travelling through space and time’ is the traumatic recall which can be viewed as a type of psychological time travel. To believe one is actually travelling through space and time is certainly a large leap from traditional trauma theory, and not evident in the novels under study.

This type of psychological time, which leads to broken chronology, is multidimensional and part of the resilience process. It involves self-discovery, self-reconnection and self-awareness through which the survivor develops in his/her attempt to search for truth, a truth that resists political silencing, historical erasure and psychological collapse. Both Ellis and Senzai, in their narratives, gamble with the mosaics of chronology. Moving abruptly from past to present and *vice-versa*, readers are dropped into a flux full of doubt and confusion. Such a hectic mode of narration does exhaust our minds at first glance, because there is no linear sequence of events to help us follow a chronological plot and decipher what is being thrown at us. That being said, the reader is neither prepared nor

expecting to see how elliptic and discursive the writing of these narratives is going to be. The key to read the narratives that lack linearity is to fall sick with the characters in order to explore the harm inflicted on their minds and on their bodies. In other words, this technique allows the reader to plunge into the traumatized subconscious mind, and have a vivid image of a damaged psyche and a fractured history.

Arguably, history is part and parcel of trauma, memory and time studies. It is not just past but a living present, for it continues to make the traumatized vulnerable to dwell in his/her traumatic past and to (re)live throughout the development of life. More than that, the wounds that are the outcome of the cruel despotism of some regimes, at certain times, persist in their affection at people's psyches for decades which, in the end, create a certain traumatic memory for future generations who are caught in their bygone days of trauma inception and are experiencing time and space disruption. Hence, they are psychologically the prisoners of the past and physically the actors of the present. Expressed differently, the traumatized vainly acts to live in the present but his/her subconscious is possessed by an overwhelming past event. Can we change the course of events? While any scientist would negate this, causal determinism would forbid such a dangerous question. It is human nature, however, to believe that we, more or less, play a role in our own lives and destiny, and therefore our decisions and actions can somehow change things. Existence should neither remain stuck to the past nor cling to the uncertain tomorrow. Rather, it should be lived here and now in the present. And this is precisely what the authors under study try to highlight to their readers. In the light of this quantum interest in trauma, memory and time-space convergence with no clear consensus view but conflicting views, I find it crucial to explore the non-linearity nature of the plot of the novels under study.

II.3.1. The Injection of the Flashback Technique

Both Senzai and Ellis introduce us to the factors that construct the mosaics of chronology in conflict zones, reflecting on the issue of trauma timelessness as an

outcome of memory. They suggest that time has a jumbled and flexible nature. In particular, they drench us into an unsettled world where time fails chronology order. As such, readers are drowned into the depth of the traumatized psyche wherein everything gets chaotic. Characters are mentally detached from their present and attached to moments back to their past. On the one hand, they go through re-experiencing moments of trauma; on the other hand, they build resilience as moments of revelation about their life haunt their fragile minds. So, by presenting chronology to us without linear patterns, those authors draw a psychological picture of the abstract matters that overweight so heavily upon the human mind. Through leaning on a convulsive mode of writing, the same picture reflects how chaotic and jumbled the children's psyche is.

In this sub-section, the analysis proceeds to examine how memory embraces that peculiar psychological feature of time travelling when imbued with trauma. More to the point, it makes children in conflict zones shift in their focalization. And so, a shift in time takes both Parvana and Nadia, along with other characters, on a journey of introspection. Sometimes, they succumb to the haunting power of traumatic memories; other times, they resist mental pain and rebel against its ramifications. By submerging us with repressed traumatic memories in a retrospective flow, Ellis shows how panoptic trauma is. As such, she stresses the wholeness of trauma in its timeless manifestations, breaking the chronology order. Senzai, on the other hand, does trace the timeline of her narrative by referring to the specific date and hour in the beginning of each chapter. Nevertheless, she relies on a disjointed mode of writing in that she abruptly jumps from an event to another with a disturbing cut in-between. This mode of writing cuts the narrative's nucleus, and therefore the reader's sequential faculty of reading. Both *Escape from Aleppo* and *My Name Is Parvana* are filled with fragmentary narration, abrupt back and forth between past and present, intense interior monologues and jumbled chronology. The question that bedevils is: why would these writers rely on a disunited prose to constitute a narrative of bearing witness? Accordingly, the answer to this question is thoroughly addressed in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter.

Ellis' last volume of The Breadwinner tetralogy, *My Name Is Parvana* in particular, breaks the traditional conventions of neat narrative we are accustomed to prior to the birth of modernism. The plot does not follow a chronological order. It is through the flashback technique, interior monologue and stream of consciousness mode that a memory narrative is constructed. The reader is thus thrown in the unsettled psyche of Parvana where the trauma resides. Ellis' reliance on such convoluted literary devices bespeaks a trove of interpretations. She paints an abstract picture through a palette of fluid, malleable and shapeless colours which all come together to give us a glance at the unspeakable just as repressed feelings are scattered in the subconscious mind, because the traumatized does not follow a linear sequence. The flashback technique thus helps the reader understand the complicated process which the traumatized child undergoes, ranging from the mental reception of the traumatic event to its induction into memory.

More than a literary technique, the flashback recounts the bumpy journey the survivor undertakes and how s/he struggles to have an understanding of trauma inception, reception, and beyond. This is apparent in the novel through Parvana who interjects past events in order to make the present understandable. She takes us in a dark, impenetrable voyage of memory in which there is an abrupt back and forth between the past and the present. Cathy Caruth tells us that a flashback is in fact what "provides a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thoughts" (152). Based on this definition, the condition of Parvana can fall in line with Caruth's argument.

My Name Is Parvana opens with a scene around a sort of jail where Parvana is detained for unknown reasons. We have no clue when, why and how she was taken there. In one instant, we are following a certain female Corporal, asking Parvana "Is your name Parvana?" (*My Name Is Parvana* 1), and the next one, we find ourselves taken to the past. There is a deep sense of confusion which makes the reader strive to collect the missing pieces of the puzzle and have a complete narrative. The setting presented to us in the first three chapters of the narrative implies unfamiliarity to the reader. It is only later on, in the

development of the narrative, that we get a slight hint on some of the ambiguities. In a significant incident, the Corporal informs her superior how very little information they have about Parvana. She reports,

She [Parvana] was picked up in an abandoned ruin that used to be a school. We suspect that it is now being used as a staging area for the Taliban to launch attacks against us, and our intelligence gathering among the villagers seems to confirm that, although no one will speak openly. This girl was the only one there. And she had a tattered bag were some papers that had the name Parvana on them. That's why we think that might be her name. (My Name Is Parvana 5-6)

The people with whom Parvana is under arrest are themselves confused. They are clearly not Afghans but foreigners who caught Parvana in a demolished school, and suspect her to be one of the Taliban attacking them. Then, in the fourth chapter precisely, the incident gets abruptly cut. The writer takes us to a different setting in time. We are now attending the “the opening day of a new school” (My Name Is Parvana 29), the omniscient narrator tells us about. That is exactly where the plot should begin, if one were to follow a series of sequential events. Yet, the writer breaks the chronology order in order to show us how Parvana is out of synchronology with herself. She is overwhelmed by the war in Afghanistan. Through the flashback technique, Ellis builds a jumbled narrative because the traumatized mind rarely follows a linear sequence. And so, the incidents presented to us are put in a disarray on the pages, just like Parvana's damaged psyche is.

The intriguing questions any reader would raise as a response to such a disjointed mode of narration are: what was Parvana doing in that ‘abandoned ruin’ which turns to be a school? Who are those people arresting her for terrorist suspicion? What is the link between the school in ruin and the one where Parvana attended its opening ceremony? Is the latter the same school in ruin where Parvana was caught? If yes, who is behind its destruction? Does Parvana really become a Talib fellow? All these disturbing questions come to our mind because there is no chronological identification regarding the sequence of events, and therefore the plot does not go forward. Hence, the reader is already given a flavour of how the fragmentary narrative is going to exhaust his mind. In chapter

eleven, and without warning the reader, Ellis deactivates the flashback device. In a radical fashion, the reader finds himself taken back to the present time, the prison setting where Parvana is now detained. She “had to stand and listen to her life being spouted back at her, and she had to pretend that she didn’t understand a word” (My Name Is Parvana 107). Again, a deep sense of confusion dominates the unsteady plot. In the following chapter, the flashback technique is re-inserted as if chronology is but an elastic fabric that is able to stretch and resume its normal shape after distortion. Readers are now taken back to the past where Parvana and her mother are in the market to buy a sewing machine. Stuck to the wall of a bedding and blanket shop, Parvana descends a frightening warning. The omniscient narrator infused the incident with a threatening note written by the Taliban. In bold, it says:

To the parents who send their daughters to the Leila school: this school is run by evil people. if you let your daughters go, then you are evil, too. Evil must be destroyed. You have been warned.
(My Name Is Parvana 113)

Here, Ellis presses us hard to think deeper as to what would happen to Parvana and her mother after receiving a threat from a Talib fellow who not only does not tolerate women accessibility to education, but also considers them as sinners deserving punishment, if not death. Shortly after the incident, Parvana’s mother received an invitation to attend the college planning committee meeting. The meeting turns to be but a trick the Taliban invents in order to plan her assassination. As expected, one day after her disappearance ‘a fast-moving car’ stops by the school’s main entry and throws the corpse of Parvana’s mother. Pinned to her clothes is a note that says “this woman ran a school for evil girls. Now she is dead. Her school will be closed” (My Name Is Parvana 189). Soon after the tragic event, the school was attacked and bombarded. This is how Parvana is caught in the ruin as a suspect of bombarding it. It is only by resorting to the flashback technique that readers get answers to those disturbing questions on what, how and why was Parvana detained. Ellis makes readers share the character’s pain by endowing Parvana with a flashback incident, making her translate her trauma into a memory narrative. To do so, the writer helps her by

injecting the flashback technique into her narrative. In brief, the key to understand *My Name Is Parvana* is to roll with the flashback technique, to read the story as it is: jumbled with restless back and forth.

By the same token, Senzai resorts to a disjointed mode of narration. She constitutes a chaotic plot narrative out of detached events, avoiding any linear pattern. The only difference Senzai makes is that, unlike Ellis' novel, there is time indication on almost every first page of each chapter. In other words, the beginning of all chapters is marked by a specific date, including day and time. Even though there is time indication in *Escape from Aleppo*, the abrupt insertion of the flashbacks into the narrative defeats linear sequence. And so, the plot gets suddenly chaotic. In doing so, the writer brings past memories and abruptly throws them in the middle of ongoing present events. As such, she surprises the reader with unexpected and unknown events. This non-linear feature is meant to add meaning to the cruel present. It is not for nothing that her novel is entitled *Escape from Aleppo*, for it represents escaping the traumatic past which never ceases to march in the course of the present. In other words, it symbolizes the timelessness of trauma, and therefore breaks chronology order. More than that, it signals the escape from traumatic memories characterising the voyages of memory and the mosaics of chronology.

Indeed, fragmented events are observed in *Escape from Aleppo*. More specifically, they are interwoven and jumbled on the pages with no chronological order. Senzai constructs her novel in a way to make it as historically and politically relevant to the collective Arab Spring traumatic experience. In doing so, she jumps from the description of Tunisia in the end of 2010, from where the flames of sedition spread, to Syria in 2013; passing through other countries, such as Egypt. The narrative's plotline might be too complex for a Western audience to follow, for it traces the wave of uprisings that spread across much of the Arab world in a confusing way. Needless to say that Arab readers, being part of a bleeding history, are more or less familiar with the context. Still, such a discursive mode of writing comes with its challenges; disrupting the reading impulse.

The author's reliance on references to many countries from the MENA region converge the ensemble of historical revisions regarding the Arab Spring. The text reflects the geopolitical conditions surrounding Syria as well as the cultural context around which the testimony is produced. It illustrates a chronicle of Syrian history through the intersection of the local and the international, the private and the collective, and the individual and the community. While, throughout the narrative, a large part of the story revolves around Nadia's journey to meet her family in order to flee Syria, a disruption of episodes in which there is an abrupt back and forth directs the making of the plot. Indeed, the narrative is not devoid of coherence; it just finds meaning in disorder. In other words, the present finds answers in the past. For instance, looming images of Mohamed Bouazizi often unexpectedly intervene throughout the narrative to disrupt the linear sequence. Those images, which come in the form of memories, are thrown at us through the flashback technique the writer adopts densely in her narrative.

From the onset of *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai highlights distressing episodes from political upheavals and human crises characterising the present history of Syria. Forced to flee their home, Nadia and her family trespass the Turkish borders, leaving everything behind them. While it casts light on the Syrian context amidst the war, the narrative simultaneously revisits significant historical moments that characterise the Arab countries. Chapter one opens with a dreadful night where the extended family is planning to leave the warmth of home and cross the borders. It is October 9, 2013 at 4:37 a.m., the dreadful sound of Barmeela causes "a deep boom in the distance" (Senzai 2), and anticipates the family's leaving plan. Then, in chapter three, the scene gets cut radically to a different setting in time. The time now indicates December 17, 2010, a day which witnessed one of the tragic events in the history of Tunisia. Here, Senzai injects the tragic story of Mohamed Bouazizi disrupting the gaiety of Nadia's birthday. Additionally, the chapter evokes Nadia's birthday party in the presence of her family, friends and teacher. "They were ready to sing "Happy birthday," when Ammo Zayn, Razan's father, called from the living room. "Baba, brothers,

you need to see this.” Nadia frowned, wondering what in the world was so important that it had to interrupt this critical part of her special day” (Senzai 20-21). An aura of doubt, fear and anxiety dominate Nadia’s mind. Besides, a curious sensation overwhelms her and makes her sneak to the living room where “the men and Khala Lina riveted to the television”. Sara Aloush reports, I’m standing in front of the provincial headquarters of a small town called Sidi Bouzid, in Tunisia, in North Africa,” said the reported. “At this site, a young man, Mohamed Bouazizi, poured gasoline over his body and set himself on fire,” (Senzai 21). The author dislocates us out of the present story to an earlier time period in Nadia’s life. By reviving the past, the writer unveils a historical facade that testifies to the collective experience of the Arab Spring. In doing so, she resorts to the flashback technique by interrupting the chronological sequence of events to interject an event of earlier occurrence. From Syria to Tunisia, she bridges the testimony production of a shared history with the aim of bearing witness to a collective experience of turmoil. In chapter four, we find ourselves brought from the past back to the present.

In fact, the flux in which there is an abrupt back and forth in time is a recurrent element throughout both narratives under study. Such a puzzling mode of writing corresponds to the convulsive plot in which the settings are fragmentarily composed. Through the flashback technique, the reader is invited to witness what the Arab world went through, to dig deep into the hidden past and entombed history, and hence to be part of the collective consciousness. Unlike Ellis who shows no time indication, Senzai directs the reader on every chapter by specifying the exact time. The degree of complexity in *Escape from Aleppo* is thus lessening, compared to that of *My Name Is Parvana*. Still, such a literary technique convulses the reader’s mind; hence why a dive into the character’s innermost thoughts is needed to make sense of non-linearity.

II.3.2. The Injection of the Stream of Consciousness Style

Along with the flashback technique, both Ellis and Senzai inject the stream of consciousness as a narrative style which immerses us hard in the hidden thoughts

and repressed feelings of their protagonists. In brief, the key to read *My Name Is Parvana* and *Escape from Aleppo* is to roll into the psyche of Parvana and Nadia wherein voyages of memory come randomly forth and chronology collapses. For instance Parvana was seeking solace in the roof close to the stars while a sudden rise of thoughts captured her mind, giving us an insight into her psychological state. here is an incident where the omniscient narrator voices the internal feelings Parvana develops following the killing of her mother:

She wished her mother had liked her more. She wished she hadn't given her mother such a hard time. They always seemed to be fighting. They fought when times were good, when they lived in a fancy house and Parvana was in school, before the Taliban. They fought when times were hard, when they lived in one room in Kabul, her mother trapped there by the Taliban while Parvana went out to work. They fought in the refugee camp, as Mother tried to get Parvana to obey her when Parvana had been running her own life quite well for a long time. And they fought in the school, when they were finally living the dream they had worked so hard for. But I loved her, Parvana thought. Did she love me? There were times when her mother was kind to Parvana without expecting anything in return. She had taken care of Parvana in the refugee camp, when Parvana was so sad over little Leila's death. And she had praised Parvana when her class performed well at the festival. Yes, Parvana thought, her mother had loved her. But she hadn't always liked her. And when Parvana really thought about it, she had to admit that she hadn't really liked her mother, either. Not all the time, anyway. But she had loved her very, very much. And she was going to miss her. She was so caught up in her thoughts. (My Name Is Parvana 203-204)

The lines reveal Parvana's conflicting thoughts and feelings towards her mother. The writer gives her protagonist the freedom to travel back and forth in time; to track those memories of good times juxtaposed with those of hard times in the presence of her mother whose love is questionable. A flux of emotions throws the reader into the abyss of confusion, uncertainty and loss. At a stylistic level, the excerpt is marked by sensory language, jumbled syntax and long-winded internal monologue. Additionally, there is a repetitive induction of the reporting verb 'thought' (think) which strengthens not only Parvana's thoughts, but also the inner working of her mind. To this end, those entire rambling lines make the narrative embrace the stream of consciousness style which signals a "flow of sense, perception, thoughts, feelings and memories in the human mind" (Baldick

212). Thus, it is the result of the human mind's fluid nature. And so, the way the traumatized consciousness absorbs different moods, which lack neatness, makes Parvana prey to experience random emotional outbursts. This is because thoughts are interrupted by, and fuelled with, excessive repressed feelings.

In the same line with the above-mentioned quote, all Parvana knows as a child is her mother being negligent and always absent to dry her eyes from scalding tears. In the most tragic moments of her life, Parvana is always depicted as a loner child, a breadwinner who bears the many traumas alone. She never shares her feelings and/or experiences with her mother, for she knows it would change nothing but add misery to her existence. That is how and why Parvana found solace in writing letters to her friend Shauzia. Although she was not sure if these letters are ever going to be read, it still appeases her. At least, she finds a therapeutic way through which she narrates the traumas she endures.

With all the circumstances aside, Parvana, as a child, needed to feel warmth and tenderness from her mother; she needed to be saved from the assaults Afghan children are subject to. There is a little girl inside Parvana who longs to be saved, and that is exactly what Ellis is projecting through the stream of consciousness. Parvana records the multiple thoughts that keep looming within her mind, in addition to the conflicting feelings that exhaust her mind. Imbued with memories, interior monologue and introspective thinking, Parvana reaches a self-awareness moment where a certain truth emerges, notwithstanding its bitterness. She struggles with the thoughts of the past; yet this makes her work-through and act-out, to borrow LaCapra's concepts, the urges of the subconscious. In finding the light of meaning in darkness, Jung argues:

The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves. (Jung 71)

Accordingly, the hurting absence of the mother is a minor part of Parvana that she kept hidden, repressed and forgotten. She is afraid to admit that her relationship with her mother is more complicated and less tender. As a result, she

succumbs to the pain and calls it “fate”. And so, the more Parvana becomes conscious of what was unconscious in her, regarding the eventual death of her mother whose love is superficial, the less she is subject to the effects of what lies in the shadow of her consciousness. Once Parvana accepts the back-side of the mind, she allows the conscious to be her fate, and therefore creates fate with present time actions. That is how she constructs resilience from within self-confession, self-discovery and self-awareness. In brief, the passing away of Parvana’s mother makes her sad, yet clear with her conscience.

Just like Parvana, Nadia develops disturbing feelings towards her family. This is apparent in one of the poignant scenes that is similarly projected through the stream of consciousness technique. Happy to finally find Asbahi’s dental clinic, where her family is supposed to meet her father and uncles, Nadia is now standing on the edge in-between two opposite possibilities: gaiety or sorrow. Upon her coming in, a flavor of happiness mixed with disappointment captures the atmosphere. “Mama, are you here?” (Senzai 90), she apprehensively asked. A message, scrawled across the white from Nadia’s mother elegant hand, caught Nadia’s tearful eyes.

Nadia, my love, we pray that you are safe and find this message. We sent Malik back to the house to find you, as we hoped that you’d survived the bombing. When he returned with news that there was no trace of you, we knew that you had survived. We waited for a day, hoping you would find your way to us. But with news of another battle approaching, we had no choice but to leave. Nadia, read this carefully: Make your way along the same route we journeyed on our way to Kharab Shams, our old picnic spot. The Turkish border is not far from there. Your father will wait for you at Oncupinar border crossing, which faces Bab al-Salama on the Syrian side. Darling, may Allah protect you and keep you safe. (Senzai 91)

From a stylistic view point, the message is characterized by emotional outbursts gathered in the form of an apology letter. The soft language used by Nadia’s mother is meant to console her daughter and stimulate her resistance. Words like “love”, “safe”, “hope” and “darling” are used to pave the way for Nadia to surmount the temporary trauma of loneliness and family separation. More than that, there is a deep sense of hope through which a worried mother weaves her

letter. The message was so evocative in that it elicits happiness as much as melancholy. On the one hand, there is hope for Nadia to make her way through life and reunite with her family; on the other hand, there is still another way for her to never meet them again. As a reaction, Nadia could not help but sink in the depth of pain and therefore fall into a moment of weakness. One might attend to the incident which illustrates how lost in thoughts Nadia is after reading that letter left to her at Asbahi's dental clinic.

They left me! She howled, her body triggered into action. Ammo Mazen stood back, allowing her space. "How could they do that. Again? She paced, glaring at the message. She lunged at a wooden chair and threw it against the wall, where it shattered with a satisfactory crack. And so quickly as it had blazed, her anger receded, replaced by a shuddering, overwhelming sense of loss. "How could they?" she whispered.

Ammo Mazen shook his head sadly. "I'm certain they waited as long as they could."

"I know that!" Nadia growled, cheeks hot, her anger unmerciful. "I hate them ... and I hate Assad ... and this war ... everything".
(Senzai 92)

The quote conveys Nadia's thoughts and feelings that are expressed in an evocative incident. Additionally, it engages the reader with the potent tool of empathy by the sensory effect the quote releases. In doing so, the writer resorts to the stream of consciousness technique by plunging the reader into Nadia's psyche, in addition to projecting her physical response through the feeling of anger. This is reinforced by the technique of self-confession. The latter helps the reader better know the traumatized Nadia and have access to her subconscious mind, to translate what she feels and thinks into a vivid image. The fragmentary language used in the last sentence of the quote mirrors Nadia's fragmented psyche and mental condition. Unusual syntax, incomplete sentences, interrupted by ellipsis and separate words signal the free association of a chaotic style that together define the stream of consciousness. Fascinatingly, written words can be heard inside our minds because they too create a sound through which feelings and thoughts flow as into a stream of consciousness. It is that sound which exists in the words that allows us to listen to Nadia's inner sores. As such, Senzai plunges us into the depth of her character's mental state.

In brief, all these complex literary devices used by the authors under study signal the explosion of modernism and modernist techniques in the corpus of selected novels. They help the writers smoothly produce narratives of bearing witness to the atrocities of the war, and therefore contribute in the literary development of trauma and memory. By gambling with the notion of time, both writers show how chronology embraces mosaics of non-linear patterns and jumbled sequences of events. Hence, this section steps in this peculiarity of examining voyages of memory and mosaics of chronology. To this end, it brings an answer to the question it previously advanced on: why would these authors rely on a disjointed mode of writing to constitute a narrative of bearing witness? It is because the human mind in conflict zones is just as fragmented and disjointed as the narrative is. Equally true, such a mode of narration teaches us that life does not consist of coherent motions, that sometimes insurmountable hurdles require deep introspection and detours. And so, one should always take a backward glance at the moment of pain infliction through extracting those traumatic memories, even if abruptly, and translate them into memory narratives. Only then, the survivor normalizes what used to arouse uncanny feelings, and therefore reach a certain truth that resists madness. Reference is being made here to the healthy and intellectual construction of resilience, a point to which the subsequent chapter turns its attention.

Inside the brain and deep in the subconscious mind, memories are restored in different areas. Yet, they are somehow connected to each other through neural pathways. That is why when we smell a certain scent; we might be flooded by an influx of memories that are tied to that smell. When we hear a certain sound; we might be overwhelmed by past images related to that sound. And so, the process of repetition goes endlessly. In trauma studies, the subconscious mind often creates a simulation, an alternative reality where the past haunts the present, and inevitably the future. All these simulations the mind creates come together to give the traumatized subject a jumbled reality wherein chronology collapses into broken mosaics. And so, our senses react to the sudden triggers of memories. Indeed, memory is such a complicated construct that never ceases to be a subject

of obsession amongst theorists and researchers from different disciplines. As much as we force ourselves to forget the experiences we do not want to remember, we will never be able to delete them entirely. They are part of who we are; part of our identity, our history. Through looking at *Escape from Aleppo* and Ellis' *Tetralogy*, the writers seem to highlight the modern fascination of time and memory in trauma context. In doing so, they equip their narratives with modernist techniques in order to respond to the fundamental premise upon which modern narratives incorporate: inner and outer chaos, a chaos that sometimes ends up with the development of suicidal thoughts, attempts and acts.

II.4. Suicide as an Attempt to Liberate Leila from the Fiends of Loss

As stressed earlier, the traumatized inevitably develops Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder where the manifestations of psychological unrests further inflict on the traumatized mind. Sometimes, this sequel phase invites more suicidal thoughts and less recovery phases. While the former comes as a response to PTSD despite, or perhaps because of, the traumatized inner struggle to cope with the painful traumatic memories, the latter is achieved by the acknowledgment of the past through narration. This important facet of the aftermath of trauma in general requires a detailed critical examination. Hence, it is necessary to pause for a quick reflection on the trauma complications. A thematic study is then warranted in this section by raising the question of suicidality in the context of trauma.

Since the nineteenth century, the theme of suicide has been a subject of fascination amongst writers and scholars. It is no surprise that suicide becomes a literary concern because it comes, first and foremost, as a response to war trauma with the return of wounded soldiers from battlefields. Unable to translate their pains into narratives, haunted by mixed feelings of regret and guilt and ushered by the evilness of science as a designer of mass destruction weaponry, they take their own life; each differently. Another reason has to do with the *Zeitgeist* of the century where the fear of another global war looms over the horizon. Within this context, the theme of suicide has been constantly altered in ways that would fit the trademark of modernity. The ramifications of wars, the spread of decadence

and the evil side of technology are the fuel of suicide, and the motives which make some people prompt their deaths at the expense of what they treasure most in life (Condorelli 2).

Probably, the most daring author who casts light on the theme of death – both as a natural tragic event and a voluntary act of suicide- when it was barely in the cradle of its existence is Ernest Hemingway whose works are inhabited by absurd matters that are pertinent to the theme of death. Hemingway, himself committed suicide and took his fate into his own hands by a headshot, becoming thus one of the boldly writers who ventures in giving the subject of suicide changing faces and multifaceted interpretations. This corresponds to the philosophy of death upon which he sees triumph in conquering the fear that is associated with death. For instance, *For whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) is nested within a myriad of characters contemplating suicide. These are Karkov, Maria, Robert Jordan and his father; each traumatized in a different way.

Another good illustration of the genre is Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which follows the psychological growth of its focal character Antoinette Cosway who is best known as 'the mad woman in the attic' (Bertha) in the Western context, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). What is at strike is that the novel dwells on suicide as a germ that does not make its way towards the chaotic circles of the diseased psyche. To Rhys, by setting fire to Thornfield Hall and jumping from its roof, Bertha's suicide does not symbolize a mad act. Instead, it denotes a heroic accomplishment that liberates the colonized female from the chains of colonialism on the one hand and those of patriarchy, on the other. And so, Rhys crowns Antoinette with the emblem of martyr rather than dooming her with the Western *cliché* of madness, as conveyed in Bronte's novel. There can be no doubt that the theme of suicide inhabits countless works of art; yet, for space limits, I shall stop here and better illustrate with the corpus under study. This quick look is meant to show how such a sensitive theme encapsulates an equivocal nature of perceptions that go beyond symbols of cowardice, immorality and sinfulness. In brief, suicide may also represent a narrative of resistance and liberation.

Although the theme of suicide is not directly tackled in the corpus under study, it is implicitly, yet potently, projected through minor characters, among them Leila; a young girl who joins *Parvana's Journey* and discharges rays of hope to both Parvana's and Asif's bitter journey into the unknown. In her philosophy, as it will be shown, if death brings relief from suffering, then suicide is an option. Starting with the development of a self-destructive behaviour, Leila is a paradigm of suicidal persons. Be it consciously or unconsciously, she always succumbs to self-harm; feeding her desire to die. In what comes next, an in-depth analysis is devoted to Leila's development of suicidal thoughts and attempts, an element that makes the difference between the two narratives under study discernible. While Ellis dares gamble with the sensitive theme of suicide in *Parvana's Journey*, Senzai appears to distance herself from it.

From the onset of her appearance, Ellis positions Leila in a place that feels alarming and detrimental: a minefield. Upon their search for shelter and food in the middle of nowhere, Parvana and Asif notice the unhealthy mental traits in Leila, even before her trauma complication took a drastic change, to reach the point of annihilating her existence. The following is an excerpt which portrays Leila's sudden admission to the plot of the narrative:

“Someone's coming,” she [Parvana] said, “across the mine field.”
Asif turned and looked where she was pointing.
“I think it's a girl,” he said.
“I think you're right,” Parvana said, seeing the chador flow out from the girl's head as she ran toward them.
“Do you think she's real? Asif asked. (Parvana's Journey 102)

The advent of Leila to *Parvana's Journey* happens to emanate from the minefields. In fact, it is not a coincidence that Ellis makes this character first appear running across minefields. This image is meant to testify to the deadly atmosphere in which characters are placed; namely, the fact that Afghan children are not safe, and that they face the risk of being blown up by mines. Furthermore, the location Leila stems from denotes an adequate and truthful setting. Once again, a tenet of what is called realism is evidenced in the war novel genre. If we are to give a title to Leila's story, it would be '*The Girl of Minefields*'. In brief,

she belongs to the minefields; she loves minefields, which makes her the girl of minefields.

In another conversation children engage in to familiarize with themselves, Leila shockingly declares that minefields cause no harm, but rather provide living conveniences. And so, she enjoys roaming over most of the minefields. Touching on this matter, Ellis ponders the serious question of how trauma can put the survivor's existence in danger and bring forth the development of suicidal thoughts, attempts and the act of suicide itself. From the onset of her insertion to *Parvana's Journey*, Leila's perception is taken to extremes in the thought of deliberate death which acts as a conscious denial. This could be pictured in the following dialogue:

“A peddler got blown in the mine field. That was a really good day. We got all these things. I made myself this dress from some of the cloth.”

Parvana struggled to understand. “You mean you go out into the mine field when you hear an explosion?”

“Of course. That's how I found you”.

“What happened to the peddler?”

“Oh, he was blown up. His cart and clothes were all blown up, too. Nothing there we could use. I had to make a lot of trips to carry all these things back”.

Parvana had an image of Leila as a spider, waiting for a fly to become trapped in her web.

Asif joined them in time to hear the last part. “You actually go into the minefield? That's stupid.”

Parvana frowned at him.

“He means it's dangerous.”

“Not for me,” Leila said, the ground likes me. (*Parvana's Journey* 114-115)

This passage shows Leila's perception of minefields. To her, instead of their fatal dangerousness, they still symbolize a nest for food and other needs of survival. Nevertheless, one might not fall into Leila's defensible space. No matter what life throws at someone, minefields are neither a solution nor a means of survival. Hence, Leila's normalization of them is viewed as an act of suicide. With a new and different way to look at such a sensitive dilemma, Ellis puts a greater emphasis on Leila's psychological state which she deems worthier of mention. In doing so, she shapes an even more realistic crafting of human psychology where

“there is an empathic tendency to focus on the destructive repetition of the trauma that governs a person’s life” during hard times such as war (Caruth 63). Within this context, Leila is placed. More on suicide, a number of studies have suggested that a likely cause of being unconsciously absorbed by suicidal attempts is the aftermaths of trauma and its accumulating manifestations. One might, of course, not exclude other mental disorders which reinforce suicidal thoughts such as, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteria and split, to mention but a few (Bradvik 1).

Before digging deeply into the performance of suicide and deciphering the possible causes of such tragedy -not just the triggers but also the roots- one might first get acquainted with the character of Leila. It is not for nothing that Leila makes an end to her life, for it represents another way of resistance. More to the point, she bears a profound understanding of life that puts her face to face with the void ensuing from traumatic circumstances of loss. No wonder this may convey the impression that one here tolerates suicide. The tragedy, to Leila, is that she is no longer fit for a traumatic past, a dreadful present and an uncertain future than a mad individual is. She fights against the demons not of the war but those against trauma, a fight that leaves her with two options: either to purify herself from the fiends of trauma or to inhabit in its insidious torment. More than a form of resistance, in one word, suicide is a remedy when life becomes completely meaningless.

Prior to the performance of suicide, Leila’s fascination with minefields symbolizes the philosophy of the ‘survival of the fittest’: compelling situations in which mechanisms to survive are produced. In a different reading, however, it is necessary to point out that minefields symbolize a source of living. In truth, Leila’s fascination with minefields is, to some extent, sparked by the cruel circumstances her country goes through, among them is famine. Afghan people, it must be remembered, live in abject poverty because of the war. Whenever Leila hears the sound of explosions, she spontaneously, yet reluctantly, and unconsciously, yet intentionally, runs to collect whatever fruit is left. Heedless of corpses and relics, she normalizes overwhelming scenes. In her mind, mines

make it easier for her to survive. Just like a spider, Leila catches her prey from minefields' remnants. Although this daring act does not exclude the possibility of her being blown up if she accidentally steps on a hidden mine, Leila ventures with her life.

Clearly, there is an irresistible impulse that makes her turn a blind eye on everything that threatens life, a bleeding wound that needs to be exteriorised. By entering mined areas, it is neither courage nor unawareness that makes the girl jeopardize her life. Rather, it is the accumulation of traumatic incidents that reinforces the normalization of suicidal thoughts at the expense of the unbearable present. More than that, it is the fixed idea that death embraces relief and sweeps pain that culminates the development of suicidal attempts, as if she will accomplish a significant task: trauma liberation. So, the hypothesis is that suicide could be regarded as a way of victorious liberation and purgation: liberation from the Taliban regime and purgation from trauma parasites. To better understand the development of suicidal thoughts and their consequences on Leila's mental health, a retrospective analytical view imposes itself.

The minefields point not only to self-destruction, but also to the fluctuating states of mind of which trauma heat up are additional signals. This view is shared by Caruth who writes, "[o]ther traumatized persons may initially respond with suicide attempts or other self-destructive behaviour" (Caruth 176). By entering in areas that are fully covered with fatal mines, Leila falls in this line of self-destruction which later begets suicide. Among the reasons behind Leila's irregular conduct, there is a wish of the traumatized survivor to escape from the dreary realities of life. Caruth further tells us that, in almost all cases, suicide is committed "for a very simple reason: they [suicidal persons] just wanted to *escape* (...) to escape the truth, and to escape history (Caruth 208) which both correspond to Leila's case. On the one hand, Leila fails to accept the truth of losing her family; on the other hand, she no longer considers herself part of a history that is marked by loss and violence. As a result, she rushes her death. Prior to the act, the idea of self-destruction is already dominant within her

psychology. As highlighted above, her first meeting with Parvana, Asif and Hassan is marked by ambivalent feelings.

In trauma studies, it must be understood, suicide is viewed as an attempt of trauma liberation rather than an immoral act. Suicide, in this context, can be interpreted as a final stage of trauma liberation despite, or because of, the nihilism it embraces. More than that, in conflict zones specifically, it is considered as a sacrifice; to die so that other people may live. And so, suicide is nothing less than an epithet of trauma triumphs, signalling the survivor's failure to develop antibodies against psychological viruses. True to its credos, suicide is, in Edwin Shneidman's words, "a conscious act of self-induced annihilation, best understood as a multidimensional malaise in a needful individual who defines an issue for which suicide is perceived as the best solution" (20). It is a condition in which an individual experiences an inner fit of tremendous rage that usually culminates in the development of suicidal thoughts. In a further explanation of this mental tragedy, David Emile Durkheim believes that "suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself which he knows will produce this result" (44). What unites both definitions, in fact, is the consciousness of the person who commits suicide. In other words, the traumatized might reach a phase wherein suicide becomes a refuge that has nothing to do with immorality; indicating a redeemed state of mind albeit jeopardizing the unity of the self. Not only that, it also explains the self dissociative construct after the violent outburst echoing an escape from trauma threats.

Leila's psychological havoc constitutes a fragile texture of pain juxtaposed with a dense fabric of happiness. Throughout *Parvana's Journey*, she salutes death as she puts her life in danger, and hence culminates the idea of suicide. Many are the instances, in the novel, where she is depicted as a devotee of minefields. The first of such occasions is related to the advantage they provide. The following is a relevant incident that gives an insight into Leila's eerie perception of minefields:

“We’re running out of food,” Parvana said, then wished she could snatch the words back. It wasn’t right to worry the little girl. But she would have to know soon, wouldn’t she?
“Don’t worry,” Leila said. “The mine field will take care of us.”
“I hope it happens soon”. (Parvana’s Journey 140)

Such a deficit in consciousness is, in one way or another, nothing but the beginning of the germination of self-destructive thoughts; very often it leads to suicide. In the course of time, death for Leila surges into its blossom as the only motive for which she can find stability and reunite with her family cocooned in the Green Valley. And yet, to cling ever so tightly to such a perilous act (death) as that of entering into minefields must undoubtedly require moral and/or immoral strength. In *‘For love of life’*, Friedrich Nietzsche tells us, “one ought to want death to be different, free, conscious, no accident, no ambush” (61). Given this premise, the desire to die is seen as a possible choice -though not a necessary one- for the meaningless life that is replete with pains and sufferings. Along similar lines, Arthur Schopenhauer asserts that "the person who commits suicide wills life, and is only unsatisfied with the conditions under which life has been given to him" (462). Within this view, Leila appears to push the will of life to its limits, to a degree wherein utopia comes to the fore, that is, to the afterlife. Thus, we reach the conclusion that she constructs a solid ground that does not deny life, but rather refuses a cruel life that is bleak and devoid of colors. What makes Leila reach this absolute conclusion about life and death and reverse their narrative is thoroughly addressed in the remaining paragraphs of this section.

What is interesting, or perhaps controversial, about Leila is her firm conviction for, and acute awareness of, the venture it takes to step deliberately in areas that are dotted with mines. One example of such consciousness is apparent in the novel when the little baby Hassan sneaks out the house and reaches the edge of a minefield. The scene goes as follows:

Then one morning, the children couldn’t find Hassan. He wasn’t at the pigeon cage or inside the house. Parvana got a cold feeling in her stomach (...) Leila was faster, Hassan had crawled through the little canyon and was right on the edge of the mine field. Leila snatched him up.
“You can’t go there”, she said. (Parvana’s Journey 125)

If minefields are safe and cause no harm, one might wonder, why Leila would hurry in panic to rescue Hassan from the mines. This questioning invites a myriad of readings and interpretations. Nevertheless, it allows one to place with more accuracy the clutter in Leila's mind into order. Although Leila is diagnosed with suicidal thoughts and attempts, her behavior vis-à-vis Hassan remains meritorious and free from the bias of suicide. Besides, this accident ruffles Leila's beliefs in immorality and sinfulness. Thus, by saving Hassan from death, she consciously acknowledges the dire consequences of minefields. Metaphorically, she puts into motion the wheels of death as a tragic event. The problem with Leila is whether this death can be regarded as tragically evil or naturally tragic; indeed, a sensitive question that touches upon existential dimensions.

Under the eternal battle between psychic order and chaos, it is needless to say the self shatters when trauma manifests. The human mind is, in many aspects, a delicate interplay between these two forces. While order makes life events understandable, chaos shapes the aspects of life among which one fails to navigate his/her way. Trauma plays on this element of chaos, making one's existence meaningless and valueless. What is chaotic is when trauma triumphs over healing. Only within this context can we understand death desire. Sometimes people are convinced that a sense that goes on with a life of suffering and despair will not end, and therefore dying is the only alternative left.

Both Leila's attitude and thoughts emphasize in their mainstream the absurdity of life, which required of children at wars nothing more than faithfulness to the bearing of the proverbial "time heals all wounds". In truth, Leila's fascination with minefields is, to some extent, sparked by feelings of loneliness. Up to a specific point in the novel, Leila finally talks about her family. It is important to remember that she is left alone with a paralyzed grandmother, herself deeply traumatized.

My mother wandered off.

“Mothers don’t just wander off,” Asif said.

“Well, really she went looking for my brother and father. Someone came by and told us they were killed in the fighting, but she didn’t believe them and went off to look for herself. She hasn’t come back yet. I sit up on the hill every day and watch for her, but she hasn’t come back yet.”

(...) That was months and months ago. (Parvana’s Journey 110-111)

This passage calls attention to the traumas Leila endured. In fact, the plot regarding her story sprang from her implication in the event that preceded her mother’s disappearance: the death of her father and brother. As for what comes after, it is a sequel trauma narrative that further heightens her troubled unconscious mind, and therefore dwells on the death of her mother, and late her grandmother. In a psychoanalytic reading of the plot, these events are significant in the shaping of Leila’s conscious and unconscious thoughts. In other words, many hidden feelings in regard to the loss of her family contribute to the non-immunity of Leila to the curse of the past as much as the infection of the present. After all, she is only a child who lacks home, protection, care and love. The dialogue then mirrors how and why Leila is unaware of her mental state, which normalizes self-harm and induces indirect suicidal thoughts. Metaphorically, her mind is itself a minefield of explosive traumas. As for expressing no feelings in regard to the death of her family, Leila fails to work through such a loss. And so, her silence hides the loudest of pain.

What adds to Leila’s psychological torment, one must consider, is the passing of her grandmother, the only family member left who makes her cling to life and hope after the death of her father, brother and mother. During the bombing of Green Valley, Leila goes through another trauma of loss- one that makes her surrender to life. Since then, she suffers from mixed feelings of guilt and regret. The following is the incident which portrays the tragic event:

Then a bomb fell right outside Green Valley. The earth shook violently. The noise sounded right through the hands they clamped over their ears. Hassan screamed (...)

“Grandmother! Come over here!” Leila yelled.

But grandmother had rolled back up into a ball and covered her head.

Leila tried to go her but Parvana wouldn’t let her. With one hand she

held onto Leila. With the other hand she held onto Asif, who shielded Hassan with his body.

Parvana held on tightly as the earth shook more and more. She held on even though Leila writhed and screamed to get to her grandmother.

She was holding on when a bomb fell directly on Green Valley.

Grandmother was gone. The house was gone.

Green Valley was gone. (Parvana's Journey 146-147)

Indeed, the scene releases a reservoir of feelings. It further provides a *façade* of an inner world that is disturbed by constant traumas. The wound of loss is still bleeding when another blow falls upon Leila. While her grandmother's death immerses her in the self-created pain, her unconscious mind is shattered by the feeling of guilt. Furthermore, the tragic episode reflects the schism that lay obstinately between Leila's ardent hope and the cruel reality which crushed it mercilessly under the jaws of the Taliban regime. To this end, one can but applaud to the genius of an author who manages to evoke the reader's feelings of empathy and who champions the inner condition of humanness both emotionally and cognitively. Interestingly, the literary potent strategy of empathy blurs the distinction between reality and fiction and allows the narration to fluidly alternate between readers and characters, following the traumatic experiences of Afghan children. Ellis gives the war novel genre its due merit in the portrayal of psychological wounds that weigh so heavily upon the innocent child in conflict zones. In order to accomplish this feat, she inserts in her plot the character of Leila who polishes the narrative with a dichotomous view of the world.

On the days that follow the death of her father and brother, and the disappearance of her mother, Leila neither acts-out nor works-through the trauma of loss. Instead, she "creates a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma" (LaCapra 23). What is more striking, she seeks solace in minefields: a playground-like area. This inability to mourn the loss of her family makes her succumb to trauma haunting, and therefore deepens the internalization of bleeding wounds. The innocent girl who once appears *bonne vivante* is in fact deeply *melancholic*. Often, the happiness that is shown on her face hides buried pain on the inside. In instances such as this, LaCapra sees that Leila resists the process of working through "because of what might almost be termed a fidelity

to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it” (22). This psychological complication is also contested with another point of view that advances another diagnosis of Leila’s character. LaCapra further explains that the inception of trauma may engender feelings of elation and ecstasy. In his terms,

On a somewhat different level, there has been an important tendency in modern culture and thought to convert trauma into the occasion for sublimity, to transvalue it into a test of the self or the group and an entry into the extraordinary. In the sublime, the excess of trauma becomes an uncanny source of elation or ecstasy. (LaCapra 23)

Reaching such features, Leila bears the weight of trauma and shoves the sob of pain it embraces by translating the pain into ‘an occasion for sublimity’. Of course, there is an extreme puzzle of emotions which allows the development of a dysfunctional emotional state. That is why Leila is hyper-excited, and always in favor of euphoria over mourning and melancholy even when everything falls apart.

What is more interesting about Leila’s case, in fact, is that she is endowed with mood swings and unexpected alterations that together confuse the reader. At times she appears excited and talkative, at others she would just shut herself in the tent and sink in the deep end of silence. Equally important is the duality between elation and sorrow which contributes to Leila’s classification as a traumatized child. All this psychological oscillation reflects the severe changes in mood, energy and behaviour that are caused by trauma, for it is not only a psychological wound that is inflicted on the unconscious mind; this also gives rise to negative changes in thinking and emotions, among them is a denial of the past. The latter is visible in Leila. For instance, in one of the incidents, the girl declares “I don’t like it here (...) It’s noisy and crowded and it smells bad. Can’t we go back to Green Valley? Maybe Grandmother is all right now. Maybe she’s sitting on top of the hill waiting for us to come home” (Parvana’s Journey 175). Leila’s declaration gestures towards the persistence of melancholia which, in turn, monitors the refusal of accepting traumatic events. The haunting power of the past, LaCapra tells us, “may never be fully overcome or transcended, and

working through may at best enable some distance” which clearly is the case with Leila.

What makes trauma hard to diagnose and confirm is the fact that it includes a wide range of ambivalent responses. Its diagnostic criteria include abnormal beliefs and thinkings that are associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Leila’s mood, and accordingly her behaviour, is subject to a sudden change from amused to gloomy and marked by shifts in focalization that prove nothing but an early warning and indicators of the instability of her mental state. In other words, under the influence of traumatic experiences, Leila is not in full control of her faculties, and at times, can be unaware of her doings. In the long run, the same feelings of exhilaration contribute to the traumatized denial of suicidal thoughts to which Leila is pulled. In one of the incidents, Leila unleashes the feeling of fear; denying all the intense feelings of euphoria she cultivates. One might attend to the scene which portrays such a psychological ambivalence:

“It’s going to bomb us!” Leila cried, hiding herself under a blanket.
“It doesn’t sound like a bombing plane,” Asif said. “Let’s go and see.”
He and Parvana left the lean-to. A lot of little yellow things were falling from the sky.
“Leila, come out and see”, Parvana called, as one fell not far from where they were standing. “It’s all right. There’s no bomb.”
(Parvana’s Journey 183-184)

With all the loss Leila witnessed, she now feels the dreadful emptiness in her life. Prior to the bombing of Green Valley, she was a *garde-malade* with her grandmother. It is difficult to keep fighting when guilt and regret haunt her mind for not saving her grandmother from death. The perennial conflict between life and death is bound to end in a set of existential and psychological complications that are noted in the behavior of Leila. The purpose in her life is rooted in her determination to resist the fear of death. Thus, this makes her estranged and unappatized to guarantee her survival.

At a later period of her life, Leila becomes haunted by the idea of death in a way that appeals to the reader's sensibility. Her clinging attitudes towards life change with the haunting power of an insidious disease: trauma manifestations. Her existence is now seen meaningless, pointless and no longer needed in a soulless Afghanistan, hence her contentment in death. She symbolically ends up free from the dream of home, for home is just a myth in a devastated country that is led by monsters. So far, it suffices to see how and why Leila develops suicidal thoughts at an early age in her life. Although she is aware of the harm she may cause to herself, she still enters into mined areas as if psychological pain defeats the physical one. She is convinced that the fear of death is the force that keeps her at bay for making her way through life. By and by, she takes her own life and embraces the warmth of death through plunging into a minefield, just like a baby who safely throws himself into his mother's arms.

Keeping in mind what threatens mental health, one might not forget those who fail to accept the painful reality and to cope with the traumas they endured. They often end up by either committing suicide or having suicidal thoughts. That is evidenced in *Parvana's Journey*, which I am having a close look at in this section. Suicide signals no surprise, in the war novel genre, as its risks are highly likely to happen. A good example of suicide as a thematic representation is Septimus Warren Smith, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, who ends up committing suicide because of the haunting fiends of war trauma. Within this delicate condition, Ellis appears to carefully broach such a sensitive subject in a fictionalized way. Under the power of empathy and lack for words, one might witness the painful incident:

She [Parvana] finally reached the little girl. Leila was covered with blood. The mine had damaged her belly as well as her legs. She looked up at Parvana and whimpered. Parvana knelt down beside her and stroked her hair. "Don't be afraid, little sister," Parvana said. Then she gathered Leila up in her arms and walked back across the mine field to the camp. The nurse friend was waiting for them at the barrier. People helped Parvana put Leila gently on the ground. Parvana sat down and held Leila's head in her lap. (Parvana's Journey 187)

This scene is tragic and, at the same time, symbolic. There is a deep sense of trauma in Leila's death, a deep sense on how the accumulation of traumatic events constitutes a bulk of psychological fragility, jeopardizing existence. It is important to recall that suicidal thoughts often come imbued with alluring impulses, and are in the form of either escapism or redemption. In both cases, the dying girl finds her way to liberate herself from the unbearable. Interestingly, the tragic scene leaves us with moral questions: "Another dead child! A woman cried out. How many dead Afghan children does the world need? Why is the world so hungry for the lives of our children?" (Parvana's Journey 188). Stupefied with the tragedy, one's faculty of empathy might be evoked by a deep sense of grief, guilt and responsibility.

Of similar interest, some acts of suicide, in other novels, are seen as chivalrous and as heroic as Leila's, especially when one sacrifices himself for the better in the war context. In fact, this is customary at times of distress. A good example of this is Dounia Bouhlassa: a young Algerian woman who heroically saved the life of 13 kids from the deadly wildfires ravaging El Kala back in August 2022. Having suffered from serious injuries, following the forest fires, Dounia passed away. Here, the narrative of suicide should be changed from *committing* to *achieving*. While the former implies a crime, the latter embraces an accomplishment. Again, it is needed to reiterate that suicide is not being normalized; it is rather an attempt of reading its psychology and mindset in Leila's case to remove the myopic vision one might have on the matter. Hence, it should not be understood as an invitation to committing the act. By running into the minefield, Leila makes it easier for the starving people in the refugee camp to secure the packages of food that are randomly dropped there. Unable to bear the wages of starvation which cause the death of many Afghans, Leila sacrifices herself and traces a safer path towards the food packages for her people to satisfy their needs. With desperate voices such as "We need that food" and "my family is starving" (Parvana's Journey 185), Leila has one foot in the grave and another one in the minefield.

In fact, one of the psychologies and the mindsets of suicide is to remedy the self on both the psychological and the existential spheres. This analysis allows the reader to place Leila within the proper mold of resistance and liberation. In brief, notwithstanding its inclination to nihilism, there is a considerable reason behind her tragic death. It should therefore not surprise us that Leila sees in death a counter movement of trauma and a much stronger opposition to its captivity than in a bleak life. Additionally, it is widely believed that suicide rates are highest among soldiers and people in conflict zones. When people fight for survival, instinct for life preservation supersedes reasons to forsake life. In this way, Leila makes herself so safe from the perils of the land mines that eventually her mind starts killing her.

As examined above, *Parvana's Journey* is fraught with the recurring images of minefields- a kind of metaphorisation for the hidden dangers that characterize Leila's mental health- that inevitably pave the way to her death. Leila's tragedy, albeit the empathetic waves it stretches, is not an event that surprises us or leaves us stupefied. With all the psychological fluctuations she endures, the reader expects such a tragic ending since her early appearance in the story which, as examined, releases a blow of abnormal conducts. What is surprising, however, is the fact that, to her last breath, Leila shows neither fear of death nor guilt of causing self-harm. She satisfactorily salutes the afterlife with joy and pride. No description could speak louder than the incident of her last breath: "Leila was trying to say something. Parvana leaned down so she could hear. The little girl's voice was thin with pain. 'They were so pretty,' she said. And then she died" (Parvana's Journey 187-188). The mines, in the eye of Leila, "look like flowers"; they are beautifully planted on the ground. Such a metaphor betokens a potent aesthetic and stylistic literary convention. It appeals to the reader's sensibility in the sense that it arouses empathy and broadens sympathy. As such, the reader is immersed in the text and in the tragedy.

To briefly summarize the present section, what is deemed surprising in Leila's case, at a certain time, is her clinging to happiness, hope and above all life. Except for the minefields, which are the only source of self-destruction, at

any moment does she appear absurdist towards life or existence! This ambivalence, by all means, is astounding. And so, her tragic death remains open to a plurality of interpretations. What is stressed, however, is her contentment in death over life. Thus, the present section serves the purpose of tracing the forces of suicide to its genesis, and probing the incentives of voluntary death as a form of liberation from the fiends of trauma. It is not for nothing that in the last sequel volume *My Name Is Parvana*, Ellis purposely chooses the name of a school which Parvana and her mother open after Leila's name: 'Leila's Academy of Hope'. For, Leila is the incarnation of hope, resistance and liberation.

Given all these points, suicide no longer shrouds immorality and sinfulness. Instead, it stands before us clearer and attunes to the needs and requirements of trauma liberation. In some cases, as it is with Leila, trauma is at stake and suicide is the most likely end result. The analysis makes it clear that Leila harbors a great terror of death not because she fears death itself, but because she loathes life under war ramifications on the one hand, and without the presence of her family on the other. Paradoxically enough, she translates an unconscious wish of death to her conscious mind. Needless to say, Leila is only a fictional character: a figment of imagination. Through her, Ellis sews a consciousness of the history that is doomed to bleed endlessly; she also provides us with a deep insight into the psychological realm by making the sensitive topic of suicide readable when it is still in the cradle of theorisation. In order to avoid falling into the pitfall of sentimentalism, Ellis fictionalizes reality by adding an artistic flavor to her novel. After all, fiction is used to serve reality. And so, Afghanistan is peopled with thousands of Leilas.

As we reach the end of this chapter, one conclusion is brought ahead, regarding the inception of trauma and the psychological interiorities it inflicts on both the conscious and unconscious mind. Needless to say that trauma comes with its challenges in the war novel genre. As early as the first analysis chapter, one might already sense the elusiveness of how it touches upon delicate matters that belong to the human mind. More than that, its inception gives a flavor of how the unity of the narrative and the self is at a convoluted mode of

representation. With a difficulty of determining the defiance of distressing experiences, one might dare and say war trauma is a versatile concept, and it defies psychoanalysis. This realization is actually the fruit of a long journey of which this chapter, along with its precedent and subsequent, is the stepping stone. In its initial phase, an attempt to cast light on the various insecurities children are absorbed by in conflict zones was made.

The setting, as examined in both novels, is a crucial parameter of the war novel genre that invites the thematization of trauma, and later sets the floor to stylistic devices. So, the chapter at hand examined the haunting power of interior feelings through wiping the clouds of dust on inner voices, and therefore extracting those oodles of ghosts from the damaged psyche. Furthermore, it gambles with the theme of suicide which comes with its challenging and daring perceptions. In the thesis' context, the survivor happens to fight the odds not against the war but against trauma; a fight that can be won, and there lies the answer to the puzzle: suicide symbolizes neither deviance nor disease; it is rather a form of resistance.

In recapitulation, I have so far explored children's responses to, and reactions against, war trauma inception. The interiorization of psychological wounds into the fragile unconscious mind bespeaks a myriad of mysteries, victories, miseries, contradictories and histories. For a lack of better words, it simply stirs feelings of uncanniness through a set of convoluted moods, behaviors and thoughts which require a deep dive into the invisible wound and the abstract bounds. The authors under study managed to paint a vivid picture of traumatized children in conflict zones by voicing their mental and psychological disturbances. By extension, both Ellis and Senzai succeed in forging a war novel genre by giving the psychological, along with the physical, aspect its due importance in the portrayal of war trauma and its lingering impact on children. Hence, they equally resort to realism and modernism, indeed tenets of what could produce a new blend of fiction and reality. The rampant mode of this fusion, I argue, pushes the boundaries of the war novel towards the infinite; it also

explores the power of fiction in smoothing the understanding of vulnerable people, in addition to facilitating the understanding of their sufferings.

Will such authors further succeed in their attempt to write about the exteriorization of trauma? With this inevitable question in mind, the next chapter will be dedicated to the examination of the materialization of trauma into a memory narrative, in addition to the externalization of traumatic memories from depth to surface, from inner to outer and from the self to history, that is, from individuality to collectivity.

CHAPTER THREE

The Nausea of Traumatic Memories in Ellis' Tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*

Some memories never heal. Rather than fading with the passage of time, those memories become the only things that are left behind when all else is abraded. The world darkens, like electric bulbs going out one by one. I am aware that I am not a safe person (Han Kang).

This third chapter pays attention to the complex nature of psychological interiorities that traumatized children carry within. The analysis proceeds as follows: first, it reflects on the nausea of traumatic memories and the malaise they inflict on the unconscious mind. Second, it touches upon the crisis of exteriorising those traumatic memories through examining the mind's creation of alternative realities and imaginary scenarios that stem from the hazy past, the myopic present and the uncertain future. Third, the analysis probes the ambivalent dynamism of nostalgia and how it creates a fancy reality of an expired past, triggering conflicting feelings that oscillate at once between intense euphoria and sudden melancholia. In this light, the Freudian idea that trauma is all about *repressive* wounds will be refuted; the aim pursued is to prove that it is *productive* in the sense that it produces blurred images and inner voices which pop abruptly up in the traumatized psyche. Overall, the chapter argues that these psychic products trauma cause either build resilience and develop psychological strength or make the survivor sink in the dark abyss of delusion and hinder the healing process. In both cases, the influx of traumatic memories comes with its challenges.

III.1. Memory and the Dilation of Trauma

Memory is presumed to have originated from the Latin word 'momor' and/or 'memoria' which, according to etymology, is equivalent to either 'mindful' or 'remembering' in the English language. This dualistic meaning stresses the elusive interchangeability between memory and remembrance. Although the interchangeability between remembrance and memory can be made in the process of recalling memories, it still holds a subtle nuance. The ability to memorize is indeed nourished by the process of remembering and *vice-versa*. One may consider Gabriel Garcia Marquez's pertinent quote about the philosophy of questioning the remembrance of an overwhelming event rather than simply focusing on its momentary occurrence. He argues that "life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it" (Living to Tell the Tale). Here, Marquez invites us to consider the

implicit convergence between remembrance and memory as the connection between them is striking. Accordingly, remembrance can be interchangeable with memory, albeit the different meaning of the two words is lucid. Caruth, too, draws on this inextricable relationship between memory and remembrance. She emphasizes that “memory is an active and constructive process and that remembering depends on existing mental schemas” (170). Both terms signal the mechanism of recollecting the images that the human mind stores through extracting those oodles of memories.

In any case, it is problematic to sort out a unanimous definition of memory, for it still signals a narrow angle of interest due to its unceasing flourishing enquiry. However, sticking to one elucidation is fundamental in order to mark out the boundary of the research stance. At its most basic understanding, memory is both a philosophy of and an approach to trauma theory that is drawn from the psychoanalysis realm. It is especially not an independent theory; it rather operates as an addendum to trauma studies -a conceptualized framework that, too, is concerned with the peculiarity of the mind. Memory, in its simple definition, is “the process or faculty whereby events or impressions from the past are recollected and preserved” (Duncan Bell 2). As such, it embraces a delicate mechanism that helps narrate what a person experienced and witnessed. What is at stake here is not simply the image we draw to verbalize any given event but rather how we remember it. This is especially not a biographical nor a personal question but one which enquires into the opacity of the subconscious mind.

In the same way, Mieke Bal further views memory as a “traveling concept” that touches more closely on interdisciplinary approaches and the way academic disciplines are connected. It then suggests a bridge “between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during, and after each trip” (Bal 24). This makes the concept of memory more inclusive. Furthermore, it is in Janet Pierre’s perception that Caruth considers memory as an “action of telling a story” (175). There must be a

reaction, however, to every action. This being said, trauma propagates memory; hence why the memory of trauma symbolizes a cyclic psychic malaise. As the present thesis is concerned with literature on trauma in conflict zones, the connection between trauma and memory is one that obfuscates what lies beneath and beyond the historicity of morality. The essential question, therefore, is not the elusive connection between the two concepts *per se* but rather to whom the traumatized provides access to history and how s/he will materialize it in the form of a narrative that bears witness to human constant sufferings. In other words, memory is the medium through which trauma is narrated as well as located.

Over the few last decades, trauma has been one of the most conspicuous phenomena in memory studies in that both concepts are deftly overlapped. Because trauma shatters memory, it is important to combine them under the term ‘traumatic memory’. With the vicissitudes of trauma manifestations, as tackled in the first chapter, memory requires a deep delving into, not only the unconscious mind, but also the blurred layers of history. Considering the exquisite intricacy of trauma and memory assemblage, misleading data loaded with blunders may render the understanding more convoluted. For this perplexity, one may find it crucial to examine memory as an extension to trauma rather than a separate concept, hence why the present chapter propounds the dilation of trauma through the nausea of traumatic memory.

In the coming subsections, attention is directed towards exploring the journey into the unknown both Parvana and Nadia endure in their search for home. In particular, the analysis will touch thoroughly upon the convoluted way they are caught up in the hollowness of traumatic memories. In doing so, the aim pursued is to demonstrate how the theme of memory dominates both narratives. As an ‘Unclaimed Experience,’ Cathy Caruth reminds us that any given traumatic event can never be experienced as such. Rather, it must always be re-constructed, re-articulated and re-remembered as a fact either shortly or lately after the occurrence. To qualify as a trauma, the event has to be subjectivized. In doing so, a voice of bearing witness must retroactively be inserted into a

narrative and fuelled with a reflective representational and affective character. As such, a traumatic event is better understood in its 'post-traumatic' narration.

What is more at stake here, and this is the gist of trauma complexity, is the mechanism that triggers the uncontrollable return of repressed feelings – reference is made here to memory. Actually, it is not the experience of the event which makes the individual traumatized but rather its remembrance. That is the reason why memory is viewed as a vehicle of remembrance, archive and witnessing. Hence, the ending of an overwhelming event is the beginning of trauma. More precisely, it is when the survivor develops a pathology known as post-traumatic stress disorder that trauma gets more chaotic. Drawing on Caruth's interpretation, "the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested [as] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behavior stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience" (4). Human history is deeply sustained by endless atrocities, leaving timeless memories.

Indeed, it should not come as new that traumatic memories of these atrocities come back in the form of various catalysts: dream, nightmare, déjà vu, and hallucination, to name but a few. Such a hectic process creates the very same emotional intensity that was previously evoked at the moment of trauma, and therefore assaults the present in the sense that the overwhelmed past gets dilated and extended. More than that, the proliferation of trauma through the narration of memories often leads to the constitution of a shared history and collective identity as part of a wider social, cultural and political movement towards liberation. One could only think of the Middle East -a bleeding region that is torn by constant conflicts-to reflect on the aftermaths of trauma and the timelessness of memory. For example, after seven decades of occurrence, the Nakba³³

³³ Linguistically speaking, the word 'Nakba' is derived from the Arabic language and stands for 'catastrophe', 'disaster' or 'cataclysm'. In a historical context, the term stands for 'the Palestinian Catastrophe' and refers to the establishment of a Jewish state and the displacement of a great proportion of the Palestinian people following the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1948.

represents not only a past event, but also a collective memory which continues into the present and has its arms well-stretched in the future of Palestine³⁴.

III.1.1. The Erosion of History from the Fever of the Past

Both Deborah Ellis and N.H. Senzai, are authors whose works and intellectual enterprises are woven with a sensory language to describe the traumatic atmosphere of war in Afghanistan and Syria, respectively. It must be remembered that they are activists, and by extension reformers, writers who denounce moral degeneration, defend vulnerable people in conflict zones and defy authoritarian regimes. In their duty to uphold humanness, they both awaken the readers to the pivotal role of literalizing and narrativizing events of trauma in order to foster resistance and build resilience. Beloved by many canonical trauma writers, Ellis and Senzai forge literary works that fall under the war novel genre *par-excellence* with a salient leaning on realistic tenets and modernist techniques such as flashbacks, stream of consciousness and time disrupt. To this end, memory plays an important role in their works at both the thematic and the stylistic levels although, or because of, the intricately nature of plotted-novel it creates.

From the onset of *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai traces the protagonist family's unstable life, a life characterised by fear, doubt, loss and despair through recalling memories. In fact, Senzai's fractured narrative makes use of the flashback technique, along with other forms of haunting. The story oscillates between past events and present catastrophes in the Arab World. Specifically, it alternates from December 17, 2010 to October 13, 2013, stressing the Jasmine Revolution era which gives rise to a series of anti-government protests across the MENA region. The question on the persistence of memory is interesting in the study of trauma in that it formulates a testimony to the collective experience of human suffering that resists historical erasure and political manipulation. As a

³⁴ For more details on the inseparability of the past and present actions in trauma studies and a better illustration from literary works see Ezzine and Ait Ammour's article entitled Trauma, Memory And Broken Chronology In Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* and published on <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/523/6/2/214419>

result, a collective ethos emerges at the national and the international levels, an ethos which aims to bear witness to war atrocities, and therefore condemns violence.

Through *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai revisits the constant bleeding wound surrounding the MENA region by bringing back the memory of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who “poured gasoline over his body and set himself on fire (Senzai 21). In fact, Mohammed Bouazizi is believed to be the catalyst of the Arab revolution. While the tragic event highlights a historic episode in Tunisia, the narrative further arouses the persistence of the traumatic memory and underlines the ongoing question of what is called in the West “the Jasmine Revolution”. The latter has historical roots which date back to a decisive era starting from the late of 2010s ever since Bouazizi’s incident to nowadays. Actually, it is not for nothing that Senzai evokes the memory of Mohamed Bouazizi. Rather, this has a social, historical, economic and political significance. In short, it symbolizes a contagious wave of pro-democratic upheavals that pertain to the Arab World, namely Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. The author argues,

[h]is death brought to boil the long-simmering anger burning within Tunisians. They took to the streets in what became known as the Jasmine Revolution. Furious about the level of corruption within the government, they demanded jobs, food, and better living conditions, while pushing for freedom and political reforms. Dozens died in clashes of the vegetable vendor and a small town in Tunisia soon evaporated. (Senzai 25)

Indeed, the death of Mohamed Bouazizi marked a turning point in the modern history of Tunisia. The event constitutes a collective trauma narrative wherein echoes of freedom and dignity loom over the Arab world. If freedom has a price, sacrifice would be the cost. Hence, the young man turns into an ‘icon’, a ‘martyr’ and a ‘hero’ in a world that is shaped by political corruption, social inequality and power abuse. He becomes a memory of the past and part of the history that witnessed violence. In *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai illustrates the lingering effects of the tragic event on the lives of Tunisians. What is threatening is that the narrative of trauma went beyond the domestic sphere, reaching transnational

dimensions. To the MENA region, this is where it steps comfortably in and finds a convenient space and time to bring more chaos, and therefore more pain. This is because of the long establishment of authoritarian regimes with the complicity of supreme powers. Nadia's father knows that "this young man's death may have opened an old wound that has been festering for a long time" (24). As a result, fear increased among the people, especially after the Tunisian ex-president, Zin El Abidine Ben Ali, stepped down on January 14th, 2011 and fled to Saudi Arabia. This does neither end with Bouazizi's death and public demonstrations nor with the president's resignation. Rather, its impact continues to shape the national and collective memory of the atrocities. Additionally, it seeks to bring radical reforms in many Arab countries. In Senzai's terms, "Soon after Ben Ali fled Tunisia, Egyptians took to the streets and camped out on Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo. Within days their president, Hosni Mubarak, tumbled from his dictatorship. Then came Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and Lybia" (Senzai 58). In her novel, Senzai evokes a collective desire for remembrance. She revives a past memory which acts as a historical guideline for those who either unintentionally forget or intentionally seek to erase that dark part in history. Throughout her narrative, being historically grounded, she is bearing witness to inhumane outcomes of violence, trauma and war. As such, *Escape from Aleppo* is not only a witnessing story, but also a testimonial literary production.

Following the successive chaos invading the Middle East and North Africa, Nadia's father expects Syrians to go through hard times, if not the toughest and most traumatic experiences await them, which recently prove the case. With Bashar al-Assad's tyrannical system, Syria is clearly not safe. It has the predisposition to join the Arab Spring's trend. In a retrospective incident where Nadia's curiosity led her to search for what an authoritarian regime is, her father's strict reaction justifies the pressure Syria is put under. She remembers him telling her "These are uneasy times (...) A search like this might be noticed by someone . . . Erase your search history and never do a search like this again" (Senzai 59). Even when Nadia is celebrating her birthday, her mind appears caught between safety and danger. This is apparent when "she sucked on a pink

sugar rose, she thought of the young man who'd killed himself, and the sweetness turned bitter" (Senzai 25). As a child figure who witnessed the traumatic event on media, Nadia is haunted by the atrocities of political upheavals in Tunisia, which also speaks to Arab counties, including her own. The memory of Mohamed Bouazizi, for its crucial part, functions as psychic nausea in the sense that it testifies to the collective experience of the post- Jasmine Revolution which generates an expected traumatic experience in Syria, and by extension in the Arab World.

Based on Felman and Laub's contributions to the theorization of memory in trauma studies, it has been paraphrased by Gunter Thomas (2009) that "the act of witnessing contributes to the '*construction*' of history and the preservation as well as an accumulation of collective memory" (98). Through recalling Bouazizi's memory, Senzai endows Nadia with a resonant voice by making her embody the voice of a collective memory that is doomed to historical amnesia. In doing so, the reader is invited to consider the role of children as active agents during political crises. As opposed to what is taken for granted regarding the solely association of children with naivety, passivity and fragility, they are also storytellers and partners *vis-à-vis* politics of resistance. Gubar Marah rejects the traditional perception of the inability of children to have the potential to appeal to adults' sensibility. Rather, he believes in their effective engagement with the establishment of moral dynamics as far as literature is concerned. According to him, the child-focused narratives are "problematic for children, because they attempt to seduce young people into identifying with them – and conforming to - a static, anti-intellectual ideal of naïve simplicity" (04). Accordingly, the child figure proves to have the agency to testify to traumatic experiences in conflict zones, and therefore to grow awareness through the immoralities he witnessed. Just like a sane adult, a child also observes, participates, reflects on, and resists despotism. To this end, the nonfictional touch of *Escape from Aleppo*, its historical backbone, the attentiveness of the protagonist as a child witness and the sentimental language all help forge a narrative of bearing witness to a collective experience of trauma. Thus, memory emerges as a national and transnational

duty to remember the collective human aggression that is still persistent in the twenty-first century despite, or because of, technological advances.

In the same way, Ellis revives a past event relevant to the Afghan collective experience of colonialism as a way to evoke the link between trauma, memory and history. In her tetralogy, she repeatedly brings the spirit of Malali to the attention of the readers by endowing Parvana with some of her moral traits and values, namely bravery. Just like Mohamed Bouazizi, Malali is regarded as a heroine who marked the history of Afghanistan during the Battle of Maiwand in 1880³⁵. It must be acknowledged that there are conflicting views over the story of Malalai to the point where scholars and critics themselves are up to now debating the ever existence of her narrative. While some consider Malalai as a national folk i.e. a legend, others believe that she did exist and was intentionally fictionalized because of the Western supremacy following the shameful defeat of Britain in the Battle of Maiwand. In his article entitled: '*The Forgotten Malalai of Maiwand*', Hamza publically declares that "Malalai of Maiwand did not get the recognition she deserved because her melodious voice caused the defeat of the colonial army of Britain" (Hamza). Whatever belief one may incline towards, the story behind Malali remains more than just a historical legacy, be it fictional or real.

Because folklore itself transcends the confines of fiction as it adds timeless meaning to reality, the figure of Malali appears to blur the line between the fictional and the real, stressing a kind of traumatic condition. Parvana often appears sceptical about herself and Malali, and therefore about the real and the fictional. Such disturbing condition floods Parvana in the deep end of trauma where uncertainties lurk around the edge of her subconscious. And because the trauma must be transformed into a narrative, the act of storytelling may take various modes, including folklore. The latter embodies cultural assets and

³⁵ Historically speaking, the Battle of Maiwand is one of the principle battles during the second Anglo-Afghan War. It was fought on the 27th of July 1880, where British and Indian troops were defeated by Afghan soldiers, tribesmen precisely. For more reading about the battle, consult the following references: Hodges's *Encyclopedia of the Age of Imperialism 1800-1914*, Holt's *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan*, Hisk's *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* and Yorke's *Maiwand 1880: Battle Story*.

morals. In this context, Zora Neale Hurston defines folklore as “the boiled-down juice of human living. It does not belong to any special time, place, or people. No country is so primitive that it has not lore, and no country has yet become so civilized that no folklore is being made within its boundaries” (Bradshaw & Dettmar 381).

Considering the puzzling way Malalai renders reality and fiction indistinguishable, Ellis appears estranged from the literary fictional enterprise; she steps into a reality eclipse. In other words, she is the representative of a bleeding history that is fuelled with ideological justifications *vis-à-vis* colonial domination. Such a literary view reflects the Afghan’s trauma experience of colonialism which, on the one hand serves to protect history from falsification, and, on the other, enriches the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. Hence, the relationship between literature and folklore embraces the artistic, coloring and structuring effects our mental frames and lenses have upon our thoughts and perceptions. V. Kubilius explains the potent bond between literature and folklore as follows: “when literature undertakes obligations to protect folklore treasures, it becomes exemplary. The more it is developed, the more it is mature, the bravely Folklore is redefined in it in terms of objectives of artistic problematics of its time” (Kubilius 24). What we can grasp from the event is that history encapsulates so much of hidden facts. In both cases, be it a real person or a national folk, Malalai is the medium through which the battle is still remembered by the Afghans, challenging the historical erasure the British may, or may alternatively not, achieve.

In *The Breadwinner*, a narration of the past is conducted through the act of storytelling that entails folklore. This makes the latter stand for a medium of expression that aspires towards healing the broken psyche and sewing the shredded history. One might attend to the incident where the author summons Malalai to the core of the narrative through Parvana’s father. He tells his daughters,

It was 1880. In the dust around the city of Kandahar, the Afghans were fighting the British. It was a terrible battle. Many were dead. The British were wining, and the Afghans were ready to give up. Their spirits were low, they had no strength to keep fighting. Surrender and capture were starting to look good to them. At least they could rest and maybe save their lives.

“Suddenly a tiny girl, younger than Nooria, burst out from one of the village houses. She ran to the front of the battle and turned to face the Afghan troops. She ripped the veil off her head, and with the hot sun streaming down on her face and her bare head, she called to the troops.”

“We can win this battle!” she cried. ‘Don’t give up hope! Pick yourselves up! Let’s go!’ Waving her veil in the air like a battle flag, she led the troops into a final rush at the British. The British had no chance. The Afghan won the battle. (The Breadwinner 32-33)

By reviving the story of Malali, the trauma of colonialism persists timelessly in the form of a traumatic memory. In this context, folklore is the means which keeps the trauma persistent, notwithstanding verbally. Accordingly, Ellis highlights the inheritance of trauma, and therefore its transgenerational transmission through the power of narration. Nadia’s father is aware that by narrating, a sense of resilience stimulates amongst his daughters. In doing so, the voice of history accelerates the process of healing while silencing history hinders it. Parvana’s father, being himself a history teacher, is teaching his daughters how to overcome hard times because he knows that they will probably witness what the mind can never forget. He insists, “Afghanistan has always been the home of the bravest women in the world. You are all brave women. You are all inheritors of the courage of Malali” (The Breadwinner 33). In fact, this quote suggests a strategy to resist the reoccurrence of the traumatic event to his daughters. Even though the folkloric figure of Malali holds trauma, it serves to bear witness to a collective experience of colonialism and thus cry out the trauma into a narrative speech which, in one way or another, ushers in the contamination of the listener. By contaminating the listener is meant not the legacy of trauma of colonialism *per se* but the inheritance of Malali’s courage and bravery. To support this argument, Caruth explains that the materialization of trauma into a narrative memory provides the empathetic listener with a sort of cure. She states, “the transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be

verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own and other's knowledge of the past may lose both the precision and the force that characterized traumatic recall" (Caruth 153). In this sense, the folkloric narrative upon Malali's memory provides Parvana and her sister with relief and assistance. As such, the reconstruction of history is sustained by listening to folklore as far as the translation of trauma into a narrative is concerned.

Because of its evocative foundation, folklore embraces empathetic engagement. It often suggests a need for survival, resistance, and resilience in traumatic experiences. Parvana, being a listener, appears to assimilate so much of Malali's idiosyncrasies. The latter provide her with a kind of relief and satisfaction. This is apparent in a touching scene when Parvana accompanies her mother to Pul-i-Charkhi prison, looking for her detained father. The narrator tells us how safe Parvana feels when she recalls Malali, "Hold steady, my little Malali," she [Parvana] heard her father say in her mind. Suddenly, she felt very calm" (The Breadwinner 43). Furthermore, the folkloric story of Malali endows Parvana with the strength to deal with the trammels of the Taliban's oppression later in the development of her life. By resorting to the interior monologue as a potent literary device, Ellis exhibits the flow of thoughts and emotions going through Parvana. In doing so, the author evokes the reader's empathy and makes him hear the voice of the character which, in turn, represents the voice of the whole Afghan women. Parvana compares, "Malali was a girl in Afghan history, famous for leading troops into battle against the British. And now Parvana was doing the same, rallying people not to war, but to education" (My Name is Parvana 115). The quote denotes a *mélange* of the protagonist's interior reflexion and the female community's exterior situation over the consciousness to survive in a country, one might remember, that is ruled by an extreme patriarchal regime. Thus, what Afghanistan is enduring determines the consciousness of the protagonist in particular and Afghan girls in general, regarding the noble right to education. In other words, the interior wound symbolizes a metaphor for the external chaos in Afghanistan. It is for the memory of Malali that Parvana constructs resilience and leads many girls to get education. And that is how the

characters, along with other elements, mirror the context of the novel. What is between fiction and reality is simply a reflection of the human mind.

Likewise, in instances where the interpretation of trauma into a narrative speech is advanced, a certain risk of contamination between the listener and the narrator is unavoidable. We have seen how lured Parvana is by the personality of Malali. She seems to embody her traits and to possess her memory. In other words, Parvana hailed from the legacy of Malali. Such a bond of experiencing overwhelming events between them makes the trauma not only transmissible but also contagious. In Caruth's terms,

It is possible to read the address of the voice..., not as the story of an individual in relation to the events of his past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another... through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound. (The Wound and the Voice 8)

Accordingly, Parvana's encounter with the trauma of colonialism through the folkloric story of Malali results in her double trauma: the trauma of the past and the trauma of the present. I personally hold the firm conviction that the past does not have to be a place of living, but rather a place of learning. Thus, it is from the trauma of the past that Parvana finds a way to deal with the dreadful present, regardless of the different traumas which characterise the periods.

If one were to hide psychic wounds, it is surely not possible to deal with the complications of trauma at a later stage. Rather, it would be to seek comprehension of the trauma affect, transmission and contamination that the healing precedes smoothly. Hence, reaching collectiveness is what lessens the density of individualistic suffering. Narration, in one term, is the key to recovery. Ellis makes good use of folklore, which is considered as a mode of narration to reflect upon the puzzling influence of trauma. She injects a past trauma in a folkloric story through the power of memory. That is how Parvana starts to construct her resilience in parallel with Malali's trauma. She realized, "Malali wouldn't be afraid, Parvana knew. Malali would form an army and lead it in a storming of the prison. Malali would lick her lips at such a challenge. Her knees wouldn't be shaking as Parvana's were" (The Breadwinner 42). In this reflective

quote, one can grasp the parallelism Parvana sewed between her and Malali. It is at this myopic nexus of being and not being that trauma affect comes to the surface. The latter is defined as:

the mode, substance and dynamics of relation through which trauma is experienced, transmitted, conveyed, and represented. Traumatic affect crosses boundaries, between personal and political, text and body, screen and audience, philosophy and culture. It is not a prescriptive and contained concept, but an open one. (Atkinson & Richardson 12)

What Atkinson and Richardson draw upon in this quote is the idea that trauma affect has an equivocal nature of manifestation. It spawns a trove of perceptions, interpretations and explanations. As soon as we admit that there are numerous - perhaps even innumerable- levels of understanding, we begin to see just how elusive -if not illusive- a complete understanding of trauma affect is. Our minds are not mere blank slates that passively register and record, more or less, reliable facts given to us from the outside, out of which we judiciously construct an objective mental representation of the world, of the people and of ourselves. Therefore, trauma affect embraces this plural-nature of perceptions. Perspectivism is thus what makes us avoid the pitfalls that less versatile and many-eyed minds suffer from. It must be acknowledged that the above-mentioned quote pivots on a Nietzschean ground, for it suits the polyvocal nature of examining trauma. Himself unable to build a rational frame of thinking from which to regard some phenomena that are co-created by us, such as emotions, Nietzsche proposed 'perspectivism' as a remedy against fallacious singleness visions. And so, to better understand the flexibility of trauma and its elusive manifestation, one should take a broad variety of angles to circle around truth and understand traumatic events.

So far, we have seen how both Senzai's and Ellis' mode of narration pivots on making significant reference to historical heroes. These are Mohamed Bouazizi and Malali, respectively. Such a documentary mode of writing raises questions regarding the role authors play in examining past events and the way history influences the present and the future. Despite their non-belongingness to the targeted context, both authors are equally concerned with the comprehension

of history to decipher riddles of the present. Indeed, a hectic task they engage themselves with in the elusive study of abstract matters. In doing so, they aesthetically produce a work of testimony for a non- Middle Eastern readership. Written in English, their narratives seek to persuade the readers of the challenges of life under the Taliban and Bashar Al-Assad oppressive regimes. As intellectuals, they felt the need to denounce the torments children are enduring in conflict zones, namely Afghanistan and Syria. At the heart of their works lies the voice of the traumatized. This peculiarity is what triggers the curiosity to look for answers on whether authors are the voice of the community they belong to or the voice of a universal plea for peace, regardless of their different backgrounds and affiliations. The answers to this disturbing question are scattered throughout the thesis and summed up in the conclusion. What follows is an attempt to deepen the analysis on how memories of traumatic incidents affect the psyche of both Nadia and Parvana, provoking an unconscious search for a clear truth. Under such psychic damage, they are wretchedly turned into powerless and disoriented individuals.

III.1.2. Resisting the Malaise of Traumatic Memories

When a person goes through distressing events, s/he is unavoidably not safe from feeling overwhelmed, and therefore developing disturbing psychosis. As a result, the brain does not only fail to process what happened but also to store it like a normal memory. That is exactly how the faculty of memory becomes frozen at the neurological level. When that person recalls the distressing memory, s/he can re-experience the trauma he went through. This fragile mental health makes the traumatic condition more intense and less understandable. Sometimes memories are distressing to the point where the traumatized person tries to avoid thinking about the event, so he ditches himself from evoking ineffable feelings. Yet, memories pop into the human mind in an uncontrollable way. Amongst the many symptoms which intensify the breakdown of memory are insomnia, language breakdown, and the fear of being alone and silence, to name but a few. These are dominant themes in the novels under study.

A traumatized person with frozen memories will probably become weak and disoriented. In other words, he is either absent from the past or defined out of the present. Such a delicate move the traumatized goes through matters in the construction of resilience from within psychic anarchy. Traumatic memories are a double-edged mental fabric, which is to say that they disturb the traumatized as much as trigger his resistant mechanisms to foster the healing phase. Now something of the vagueness of memory becomes clearer. In this regard, Caruth casts light on the function of traumatic memories in providing access to inner sufferings. She argues,

Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it. (Caruth 176)

Here Caruth points to a twofold understanding of traumatic memories. On the one hand, those memories have to be taken into careful consideration within a mental framework; on the other hand, they have to be translated into a narrative. Actually, what Caruth seems to arrive at is a kind of rehabilitation: the translation of traumatic memories, in her assumption, helps mend the wounded psyche. Despite the existence of therapeutic facilities, healing is hardly –if not never-fully achieved in trauma diagnosis. It frequently happens to face a mental paralysis that hinders the extraction of those traumatic memories. This is because of the failure to understand the trauma and to articulate the traumatic memories. As a result, narration gets paralytic, and therefore incommunicability is inevitable. In order to better understand the disturbing condition traumatic memories provoke, the following paragraphs trace their vexing effects which qualify Ellis' *The Breadwinner tetralogy* and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* as trauma narratives that are imbued with a wave of psychological nausea which is, in its turn, engulfed in traumatic memories.

To begin with, the theme of traumatic memory in *Escape from Aleppo* lies in the vivid way Senzai makes the reader plunge into the fragmented psyche of the protagonist. Through an abrupt flash of remembrance, Nadia is drawn in the

depth of memory oscillation. Images of the past time, where she was left alone after a falling barmeela hit her home, haunt her mind; making her present more unbearable than it actually is because of the ongoing war. Through fractured and incomplete language, Senzai reflects on the unbearable trauma Nadia not only witnessed but also experienced, a trauma that represents a record of the past that is still in the process of cognition. The narrator says,

Pain. Deep throbbing pain rippled from Nadia's toes to her head, where a pounding headache raged, radiating from a lump on her forehead. Her eyelids, caked with dust, ached as they flickered open. For a moment, she thought she was back in her room, cocooned beneath her bed. Then the memories flooded back: exiting the apartment . . . the helicopter . . . barmeela falling from the sky . . . the explosions and fire . . . Her vision sharpened and she took in the metal guts of her uncle's old Jeep. It had saved her life. Panic blossomed in her heart and she froze, her ears probing for sounds. (Senzai 27)

In this convoluted moment of confusion between the past and the present, Nadia is lost in a non-linear course of event. This confusion is the product of a traumatic memory that does not follow a linear course. Rather, it is interrupted by spontaneous memories. The girl is possessed by the images of helicopter, barmeela, explosion and fire. Confusion reigns as past and present intertwine, creating heterogeneous feelings. We have examined in the second chapter how the pathology of post-traumatic stress disorder signals belated symptoms of trauma, including flashbacks. A compulsive repetition emerges as a response to what Nadia fails to register during the time of the occurrence. The scene of the traumatic event she went through pushes her to re-feel the pain at a later stage. Indeed, an uncontrollable return of trauma that engenders broken chronology is triggered by her mind. As such, Nadia is the incarnation of trauma survivors who mentally travel back in time looking for comprehensibility and clearness.

Moreover, at a linguistic level, a limitation and shortage of words makes the above-mentioned quote and the narrative at large, disclose not only a fractured mode of narration but also draw a picture of the fractured mind and history. The language, when fragmented by a finite amount of expressions, denotes a difficulty in articulating traumatic memories. If we consider the

following sentence: “exiting the apartment . . . the helicopter . . . barmeela falling from the sky . . . the explosions and fire . . .” (Senzai 27), we realise how the author throws an outburst of emotions that delve us into the trauma the character witnessed, felt and experienced. Through this technique, Senzai seems to immerse us in the dense effects of trauma and its impact on language.

In fact, there is a deep notion of trauma in breaking the structure of sentences and in using a troubled punctuation. This language breakdown symbolizes the fragmentary past scene that is still not understood to be well registered by the mind. In other words, those images are blurred and not yet part of the memory record that makes the event fully lucid. In this regard, Dori Laub deduces that “there are never enough words or right words to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory and speech” (63). This justifies Senzai’s intentional incapability to resort to the technique of a proper language for narration. Just like the survivor’s mind is broken, so broken is the language he uses. Thinking she is safe in her room, Nadia appears alienated out of her mind and body. She is out of synchrony with the cruel environment around her.

Similarly, Ellis highlights the state of paralysis both the mind and the language endure in distressing events. She reinforces the idea that language breakdown is the outcome of trauma. As Atkinson and Richardson argue,

When trauma emerges it does so violently, not just on the body but in and on language. Just as the traumatic event is a schism within narrative and a denial of language, so too its return. There is a tension here between the return of the event and the capacity of language to express it, since trauma is exactly that which refuses language in its occurrence. (Traumatic Affect 163)

In fact, the idea upon which the quote resonates is projected in *My Name Is Parvana*. The following passage comprises the many times Parvana vainly attempts to write a letter to her sister in order to tell her about the assassination of their mother by the Taliban. The scene goes in a repetitive endeavor, demonstrating Parvana’s inability to transform her trauma into a narrative memory. The mental and linguistic paralysis is portrayed as follows:

Dear Nooria:

I am writing this instead of Mother because . . .

Parvana scratched that out.

She tried again.

Dear Nooria:

Please come home right away. When you get here, I will have some news for you that I would rather not have to tell you.

That didn't seem right, either.

Dear Nooria:

Yesterday, before the sun set, we laid Mother to rest in the most beautiful place on the school grounds . . .

Dear Nooria:

Mother asked me to write to you because she is very busy trying to set up a new college for women. She says she misses you and is very proud of you, but to please stay in New York for your vacation. She also wants to know if there is any way you can take care of Maryam if we can find a way to send her to you. She says Maryam is getting to be even more trouble than me!

Your sister, Parvana. (My Name is Parvana 190-191)

Clearly, there is a deep sense of trauma in Parvana's attempt to verbalize the loss of her mother. The scratched letters are characterised by a limited usage of linguistic expressions and a narrow vocabulary building. Parvana used incomplete, short and incoherent sentences to testify the death of her mother. More than that, it signals a kind of pathos of communication that shatters the structure of verbalization, be it in written or oral form, and deconstructs the narration. Parvana fails to interpret her trauma into a narrative, and therefore she can not detach herself from sequential traumatic memories. Taking into consideration her age, the event appears more powerful than what Parvana can carry. Of course, under such kind of trauma, no one is sufficiently equipped to make his way through life. In the end, her will to speak had been overborne by a psychic nausea. That is why, in her last letter, she ends up lying about what happened, rejecting reality. And because her narration is not faithful to the overwhelming event, Parvana refuses to share her pain with other characters. Actually, such an elusive act of refusal is "not a denial of a knowledge of the past, but rather a way of gaining access to a knowledge that has not yet attained the form of 'narrative memory' " (Caruth 155). Thus, Parvana appears to create

an alternative reality, a simulation. Parvana is trapped in this simulation to re-create a reality which takes the form of what Caruth calls a 'narrative memory'.

By refusing to articulate the trauma around the brutal passing of her mother, Parvana further hinders the search for, and the engagement of, an empathetic listening in her sister who would, in turn, occupy a secondary witness rank and lessen trauma intensity. As a result, this would hinder the healing process. The traumatic memory, if not narrated, heats up the disorientation of history and deprives it from taking a clear shape. With that being said, both Senzai and Ellis succeeded to demonstrate how the language, just like the psyche, is so shaken and broken because of the survivor's inability to communicate that is caused by the nausea of traumatic memories.

As a side effect, trauma language embraces incommunicability and unsharability of the pain which Parvana arrives at. In this context, Bessel van der Kol touches upon the subtle ways of traumatic memories' impact on the materialization of the pain into a narrative memory. To him, traumatic memory has an undemonstrative attitude that transcends verbalization. He argues, "traumatic memory is of a 'non-declarative' type, involving bodily responses that lie outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation" (Atkinson & Richardson 90). Thus, Parvana's language paralysis is the reflection of her mental paralysis.

On an extreme level, the broad array of difficulties in exteriorising trauma memories may be more problematic, and in need of exploring. It can go as far as to impede the healing process and push the limits of trauma manifestations. On account of that, the next section is devoted to an investigation of the crisis of exteriorization in an attempt to determine what exactly makes children freeze their traumatic memories.

III.2. Delusion and the Crisis of Exteriorising Past Images

What further unites Senzai and Ellis is their gamble with the unspeakable and the un-narratable pain – reference is being made here to the development of delusion and the way the traumatized escapes from what triggers his/her verbalization of

the pain by either diverting the subject or inventing an alternative reality. These psychic powers of producing delusions are frequent patterns of post-traumatic stress disorder that are justified by the survivor's refusal to release those traumatic memories which are inflicted on his/her mind. Delusions, as Sass Louis sees them, are usually thought of as being some sort of "false beliefs about external reality" (17). Furthermore, they represent a sudden breakdown and involve 'reality testing' (Sass 153) that occurs due to so many abstractions, and triggering factors such as, memories.

This approach of drawing upon the interplay between those frozen memories of trauma and the inability to verbalize the trauma raises questions regarding children's reaction to, and reception of, trauma. Indeed, perplexing questions emerge on how frozen memory becomes a hurdle in front of the development of the survivor's life; why trauma sometimes engenders delusional disorder and creates alternative reality, and what is behind reality that cannot be put into an expressive narrative. In searching for answers to these disturbing questions, I will equally juxtapose the behaviour of two characters which happen to qualify as compatible comparative elements as far as characterization is concerned with the subject of delusion and the crisis of exteriorising traumatic memories.

Sometimes, if not always, language cannot do justice to the traumatic experiences we went through; there remains a widening schism between what we witness and what the words fail to express. Through Asif and Basel, both Ellis and Senzai tell us that acting-out and working-through trauma, to borrow LaCapra's concepts, may sometimes lead to an undesirable premise: failure. In short, they correspond to the shield the mind creates, and the wall it builds against accepting reality.

III.2.1. The Creation of an Alternative Reality through Asif and Basel

The subject of the nausea of traumatic memories further dominates the novels under study as it convulses all characters, each with a different degree. The two authors with whom the thesis is concerned stress hard on the issue of the crisis of

exteriorisation by endowing the male characters with disabilities towards verbalizing the traumas they underwent. These are Asif, a kid whom Parvana befriends in her long search for her family, and Basel, another kid who makes Nadia's journey to Turkish borders and keeps her company.

What connects these two characters is actually the fact that at no time did they resort to what Freud insists on, the 'talking cure', for the healing to proceed. In other words, they are the incarnation of stoic traumatized children who fail to work-out and work-through their inner pains. They have neither a complete vision to comprehend the repression they endured nor a tabula rasa from which to express the psychological interiorities they carry within; hence why they prefer silence. Because of the survivor's refusal to verbalize the psychological pains, particular attention will be paid to the way a simulation of reality is created in the mind of Asif and Basel. Moreover, they create a persona that is different from theirs to repress their feelings of trauma, and therefore protect themselves from the unbearable awakening of pain.

All along the narrative, Asif appears mentally unstable and suffers from delusional disorder. A constant change in his perception of external reality is actually what he is diagnosed with. There is an unwanted compulsion to hide his suffering that encapsulates an excessive fear of re-experiencing trauma through bringing back memories and narrating them. And so, Asif always goes as far as to invent a story in order to escape the traumatic experience of the past that he continues to live with in the present, notwithstanding his denial of traumatic memories. This is plainly apparent in *Parvana's Journey* when the protagonist is depicted journeying in the middle of nowhere; across Afghanistan mountains, carrying a baby and looking for a rest site and protection. Of Parvana's utter hopelessness, she spotted a cave and decided to take it as a shelter. Inside, Parvana finds Asif in a miserable condition, "dirt covered every inch of him". This is how and when Ellis introduces Asif to us: a skinny nine or ten year old boy hiding wretchedly in a cave. Upon their unexpected encounter, Asif tells Parvana: "I was chased into the cave by a monster (...) I mean, I was chasing a monster. It disappeared into a hole in the cave" (*Parvana's Journey* 53). Here, the

monster Asif is referring to symbolizes the Taliban. Additionally, it is fantasised into the form of a classical story where evil and good are confronted to each other. In other words, the monster is an allegory of the Taliban Ellis uses to reveal the wickedness of the Taliban regime towards innocent children in particular and Afghan people in general. In this context, Vex King tells us that trauma “might have created a void that you’re constantly trying to fill, or fabricated an intangible monster that you’re always trying to run from” (King 116). And so, Asif tries to liberate himself from the return of the trauma. In brief, he is not ready to verbalize the pain he witnessed, and therefore his memories of trauma are tightly concealed at the level of the subconscious mind.

Ellis endows Asif with the crisis of exteriorisation, for he fails to uncover the dark secrets of his repressed feelings, and therefore unleash the pain he carries. Rather, he prefers to keep them frozen in the form of traumatic memories. More than that, he goes as far to develop a delusional disorder through creating a simulation that is itself a construct of alternative reality. In this sense, Asif is the author of his own creation, his own world and his own fantasy. The majority of Asif’s answers centre upon himself being a hero, if not a super hero. His claims to chase a monster and to eat a wolf are indicative of a psychological breakdown, dragging him to develop a sort of ‘grandiose delusion’. One might question such a grandiosity which ironically makes him so miserable and prey to death. Beneath this grandiose, then, lies a fragile boy who is the prisoner of the past within his own simulation. Asif, in fact, protects himself from the nausea traumatic memories may cause to him. In doing so, he escaped reality.

Unable to verbalise the trauma he endures, Asif falls in the pitfall of delusion. With the alternate reality he created, he further develops an exaggerated sense of self. The latter is a common symptom among traumatized patients who not only reject the occurrence of distressing events but also wipe their memories in the process. This being said, reliving awful moments from Asif’s past is determined by his capacity to divulge the unsayable of personal trauma and violence. That is how and why he considers himself to be strong to the point that even monsters and wolves (references to Taliban companions) cannot defeat him.

He is trapped inside a simulation which allows him to produce an “illness narrative”, as Frank calls it, that functions as a “form of self-story” taking different forms such as “survivor stories of inflicted traumas such as war, captivity, incest, and abuse” (69). What is striking about such a narrative is that it “refuses the narrative of surrender” (Furedi 16). And so, Asif constitutes a delusional world where he occupies the position of the winner. In short, all beliefs fit the grandiose type of delusional disorder. Additionally, there is a combination of two realities: one is the external world where reality is neglected and the other one is internal where simulation is created as a product of the consciousness; hence why Asif oscillates between the two worlds by bringing facts and fiction together.

With Asif’s stoic personality, the reader is left confused and might wonder what is that monstrous creature he is hiding from in a deserted cave. It is only through Parvana that the reader can understand why and from whom Asif was taking refuge. It turns out that the Taliban regime is expanding its territory and power by recruiting children as soldiers³⁶. This is apparent in *Parvana’s Journey* when the protagonist is depicted grieving her father’s death. After Parvana buried her father somewhere far from Kabul, a man who was passing by sympathized with her. Thinking she is a homeless orphan boy, he invites Parvana home. As the family run out of food, however, the man decides to secretly sell Parvana to the Taliban³⁷. Parvana is warned by the man’s daughter, “You must leave now,” (...) “I heard the old men talking. They are going to turn you over to the Taliban. Some soldiers are coming by here any day, and the men think the Taliban will pay them money for you” (*Parvana’s Journey* 20). Unlike Parvana’s story that is deciphered through an omniscient narrator, neither Asif shows a will to converse nor does the narrator give information about what makes him run away in the

³⁶ It must be remembered that this point has thoroughly been discussed in the previous chapter. To avoid repetition and redundancy, have a look at the second section from the first chapter entitled : ‘The Child Soldier at the Crossroad of Trauma’, page 39.

³⁷ This point has been elaborated in the second chapter. Consult the first section of the second chapter entitled: ‘Communicating the Violation of Children’s Rights in Contact Zones’, which highlights the issue of making profit out of children by selling them to the Taliban.

wilderness. This puts Asif in a position of threat, and therefore explains his escape from the monster and from reality.

As for his missing leg, Ellis explores how it feels to be an amputee traumatized child in Afghanistan. Here, violence is played out in an extreme form as many characters have one leg only, including Asif and Parvana's father. In a poignant note written in *Parvana's Journey*, the author declares, "Afghanistan is full of children and others who have one leg or one arm or are blind because of land mines" (Author's Note). Even though Ellis casts light on the danger landmines brought to Afghan people, she did not endow Asif with the courage to narrate the traumatic incident in which he lost his leg. Rather, just like the monster he previously built a fictional narrative on, Asif's delusional disorder gets more complicated as he creates another simulation on the matter. In his alternative world, he fantasises, "No, it wasn't a land mine," he said, glaring at her [Parvana]. "It was ... a wolf who ate my leg, but I ate the wolf, so I won the battle." (Parvana's Journey 127). Again, the belief upon which Asif grounds his narrative revolves around producing a fake reality. More than that, the stylistic level of his claim reinforces his detachment from the external world and attachment to the internal one. The ellipsis between the verb "was" and the noun "wolf" set in the beginning of the quote is put on purpose. In brief, it indicates Asif's omission of reality, or at least part of it. Therefore, delusion is reinforced by the author's style in using ellipsis.

Another point that is worth mentioning is the physical harm Asif is subject to endure –reference is made to the visible wound of trauma. What is important about the scars left on the body does not have to be taken for granted; for they too function as a reminder of distressing events, and therefore may bring back memories at any time. The pain the soul hides, I argue, the body can partially reveal. Ellis touches further upon the issue of physical wounds through Asif, apart from his missing leg, by painting a vivid picture of the horrors and tortures of the Taliban regime.

She [Parvana] gasped when she saw the scars that criss-crossed his back. Some were old and were now a permanent part of his body. Some were fresh, still scabby and infected. He really was being chased by a monster, Parvana thought. (Parvana's Journey 60)

Clearly, Asif underwent a series of psychological and physical torments. The latter seems to toughen his stoicism in that whatever pain he endures, he accepts it without displaying any feeling and without complaint. Just like the permanent scars on his back, his mind is infected by the oodles of un-narrated traumatic memories. This image disturbs Parvana and makes her wonder how child can a child go through all that obscenity and still remain emotionally distant and untouched. In short, Asif is in a denial mode of assimilating bitter reality.

Interestingly, the very same idea that revolves around delusion and the crisis of exteriorisation is found in *Escape from Aleppo*. Senzai addresses the issue of delusional disorder in her narrative, in the same way Ellis does, by creating a stoic character. Through Basil, Senzai explores what it means to be a traumatized orphan in a bleak and soulless Syria. In a literary way but with a critical purpose, Senzai seems to carefully choose such a symbolic name to this frail character. In doing so, she endows him with the quality of being strong. It should be remembered that the name 'Basel' is derived from the noun 'al-Basala' (Arabic for brave and bravery, respectively). It thus embraces the meaning of a form of resistance that is based on one's courage, bravery and resilience.

Just like Asif, Basel is another mysterious character who joins the plot of the narrative unnoticeably, yet marks a powerful presence. Himself having a stoic personality, the reader is avid and curious to know more about the overwhelming story he hides. Through an omniscient narrator, Senzai introduces Basel as an eight year old child "and on his way to a rebel battalion on the eastern front to join his grandfather (Senzai 126). Throughout the narrative, Basel makes us believe that he is looking for his grandfather who belongs to the Freedom Army rebel group. "Can I go with you to the Old City?" asked Basel. "The rebel group my grandfather joined, the Freedom Army, is there" (Senzai 133). Here, what is given to us is a simple detail that circles around the character's truth. In short, it

makes sense and appeals to the reader's sensibility. At no level does Senzai give a hint about the pain Basel covers up. She just drenches us into his world without giving a sign that makes us question his mental instability. And so, we trust his story and follow his journey of finding his grandfather.

Later on, readers learn that all Basel said regarding his search for his grandfather is just a full belief he constructed as a result of reality rejection. In order to avoid mental deception that might be triggered by traumatic memories, the boy builds a delusional world where he glosses the reality with a simulation. It turns out that neither the Freedom Army rebel group exists nor his grandfather is alive. In particular, readers only get aware of this much later in chapter twenty-five. One might witness the scene which portrays the moment of truth through the following dialogue initiated by Ammo Mazen:

“Basel, what is your grandfather's battalion called?”

“I made it up, sir,” he whispered, so softly they had to lean in to hear.

“What?” cried Tarek.

Everyone looked baffled, except Ammo Mazen.

“Were both of your grandparents in the building when it was bombed?”

Basel nodded.

Nadia felt as someone had punched her in the stomach. He has no family at all. She lay her arm across the boy's rigid shoulders and held him close without saying a word. (Senzai 235)

When brutal internalized voices refuse to be exteriorized, Basel resorts to the creation of a simulation that is the product of his own consciousness. Drowned by the terrible haunting of the past and the death of his family, he invented an alternative reality. Like Asif, Basel is unable to come to terms with his wounds and is thus diagnosed with delusional disorder. Herein lies the writer's ability in reflecting on how memories of past traumas advance delusion and the crisis of exteriorization. The incident is so heartbreaking in that it elicits Nadia's empathy. Undoubtedly, a reservoir of frozen traumatic memories convulses Basel's psychological condition; hence why he fails to adapt to reality and accept being an orphan.

As it has been stressed so far, both Asif and Basel live inside a simulation to which they must escape before the loop of delusion starts all over again, wiping their repressed memories in the process. Because they originate from their own consciousness rather than from the external reality, characters are able to make a distinction between the simulation and the real. On this distinction, Sass argues that “rather than mistaking the imaginary for the real, they often seem to live in two parallel but separate worlds: consensual reality and the realm of their hallucinations and delusions” (21). Sass makes it clear that the delusional disorder does not entail a loss of rationality. Instead, it represents a world that is created within the realm of reality. In other words, it is a projection of reality in a fictionalised way to help the traumatized melt those frozen (traumatic) memories which are beyond narration.

At this level, it is worth deducing that both Asif and Basel appear mentally paralysed and unable to confront their memories, their histories, and therefore release the haunting ghosts from their past. As such, they are so deeply affected by what happened to them that they keep buried. In brief, they are unfitted neither to the past nor the present. This striking similarity between Asif and Basel indicates how close Ellis and Senzai are to each other in their attempt to cast light on the crises of exteriorising traumatic memories. The inability to speak the unspeakable, I should reiterate, suggests how terribly possessed by the past Basel and Asif are. While the cycle of their traumas is simply not complete for them to transform their experiences into a trauma narrative, the survival from whatever fatal episodes they went through is itself an ongoing struggle. The power of the traumatic past is thus stronger than that of the present. In this context of vulnerability, a more theorized reading could interestingly be made by referring to LaCapra’s twin concepts of Acting-out and Working-through.³⁸ While the former signals a ‘compulsive repetition’ of the distressing event with its emotional flux, the latter has to do with the ability to distinguish between past,

³⁸ It must be remembered that LaCapra’s twin concepts of Acting-out and Working-through are inspired from, and synonymous to, Freud’s notions of Melancholia and Mourning respectively. For more on these concepts, consider Dominick LaCapra’s book entitled *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014).

present and future. In either phase, however, both characters show no sign for the healing to take steps. The haunting powers of their past defeat their existence in the present. Thus, every now and then, they appear devoid of, and detached from, the external world.

Put succinctly, what happens to both Asif and Basel represents an example of resilience defeat that is determined by the shield the mind creates in order to protect the survivor from emotional outbursts, and therefore prevent the return of the trauma. In other words, their refusal to verbalize their repressed traumatic memories, and denial to translate them into a narrative memory, depends on their ability to speak the unspeakable and exteriorise those repressed memories. Under this delicate condition, a simulation of false reality emerges from within Basel's and Asif's consciousness. They both appear captured by the past, and therefore succumb to life tragedies by inventing a simulative reality. And so, the trauma goes on timelessly unhealed.

In fact, the characters' refusal to narrate what happened to them reveals not only how wounded they are but also how captured by the traumatic event their mind is. They fail to go back to the site of trauma; refusing any catalyst they might be triggered with, such as Parvana's and Nadia's questions. And so, unreleased traumatic memories betray exteriorisation. More to the point, they remain repressed in the unconscious mind because of the crises of representation and that of witnessing Asif and Basel suffer from. Unlike Parvana and Nadia who are open to different voices that speak of their sufferings, as tackled in the previous chapter, they fail to develop those voices. They are the epitome of what it could be called *trauma servants* who are controlled by the haunting power of frozen memories and are also unable to enter their unconsciousness to repair the psychic anarchy trauma caused. Absorbed by the demons of the past and the ghosts of the present, both Tarik and Basel succumb to creating an alternative reality to shield their fragile psyche from the glare of traumatic memories as well as from the trauma return.

Without falling into sensationalism, both Ellis and Senzai remain faithful to the role of fiction in smoothing the way for the understanding of the suffering of vulnerable people in conflict zones. They cajole us with an outburst of conflicting feelings and we, as readers, respond to their feelings of pain emotionally and cognitively. That is how and why we find ourselves empathising with Asif and Basel; because they make us understand the pain of the voiceless and their predicaments. More than that, they allow us to enter their minds, read their muted stories and reveal the war atrocities. Thus, the selected novels approach the aesthetic and the ethical responsibility of the author which is to improve the faculty of empathy –a necessary humane requirement in this world that is marked by constant violence and oppression. Authorship, in this context, “requires going beyond our personhood to think, feel and write in others’ minds, without falling into either sentimentalism, or an excess of scepticism which would deprive us of our empathetic feelings” (Aryan 206). Hence, empathy established a close link between the author and the reader as well as a thin line between fiction and reality.³⁹

So far, both Ellis and Senzai choose to incorporate elements of empathy engagement in fiction as in reality. In doing so, they seem to push the limits of the war novel by examining the extent to which readers can empathise with the traumatized voiceless and understand their crises of exteriorising, and therefore connect to a wider community. They carry the voice of the delusional traumatized (and the mentally ill by large) whose exteriorising factors are broken down by the haunting of traumatic memories. That is what makes the novel in particular, and fiction in general, “existential (as it writes and constructs a self), political (as it lays bare the oppressing laws and norms such as that of patriarchy) and social (as it aims to connect and empathise with other fellow humans)” (Aryan 220). That is to say, the condition of the novel deconstructs trauma as much as it constructs recovery.

³⁹ For more details, see the last section of chapter one where the concept of empathy was carefully tackled as a literary tool which helps stimulate the reader’s emotional and cognitive faculties.

By lumping the novelist, the novel and the reader together, fiction is the medium through which empathetic creation pushes the limits of imagination. It goes beyond the bubble wherein reality is limited to what is visual, and therefore transcends abstractions. A novelist's role and responsibility is thus to create a society where the traumatized voices are heard, sufferings are understood and repressed feelings are released. Whether the writers under study accomplish this moral mission remains a question only the reader can answer. With empathy engagement, no wonder a kind of sentimentalism emerges as a conduit to smooth the path of therapeutic vehicles in an age of trauma.

Contrary to Ellis who ends her tetralogy without making Asif openly voice the wounds that are inflicted on his broken mind, Senzai goes as far as to make Basel open to communicate the pains he secretly carries. In the end, Basel triumphs in his psychological mission to extract those repressed memories and translate them into a memory narrative. This psychological success reflects the construction of resilience. In one of the empathetic incidents, Nadia watches Basel draw a picture which helps exteriorise the trauma he underwent, and therefore alleviate the pain engraved in his subconscious mind. To well illustrate, here is the scene through which the explosion of traumatic memories is unveiled by a deep sense of empathy through drawing. In the narrator's interior monologue,

It was the picture he was currently drawing that caught her [Nadia] breath. In black, grey, and red, a little boy stood huddled next to an old woman, a basket of lemons in her hand. A helicopter flew above, spraying bullets over a collapsed apartment building. Bodies lay on the grass, blood seeping into the dirt. Her heart constricted. All this time, he hadn't said a word about what he'd been through, but here it was, in picture form. (273-274)

Indeed, the picture Basel draws speaks thousands words. In the end, he finds a way to convert his trauma into a memory narrative; he therefore shares the pain his fragmented mind carries. Narrating trauma may take various forms, among them drawing. The latter, just like novels, is a narrative that can be read as a therapeutic attempt to create fictional reality. It is only when Nadia insists to listen and talk to Basel that he recalls his wounded past and thus manages to

finally purify himself of all the fiends of traumatic memories. Added to this, is an essential view of the process of storytelling through the art of drawing. In this sense, a picture too enacts a therapeutic process that is explored through the articulation of turning traumatic experiences into a narrative which takes the form of a reminiscent drawing. And so, Basel rids himself of all the insidious bruises.

In many occasions, trauma can be neither spoken nor written. It remains in the form of distorted memory – a parasite that stems from within psychic anarchy. Hence, “the imperative to tell” a story, Laub informs us, is abruptly followed by “the impossibility of telling”, creating clashing mental responses between surrendering to silence and resorting to narration, because “there is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself” (Felman & Laub 78). Laub further adds, “one has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life.” What helps the construction of resilience begin is in fact Basel’s acceptance to turn his trauma into a narrative, a phase that Asif could not reach.

The materialization of trauma into a narrative is fundamental so that the process of healing can flow in a neat fashion. Such a process, in fact, helps the traumatized alleviate the pains. In fact, without narration, trauma can never come out. To achieve this, it requires a listener who, apart from empathizing with the survivor, would testify against the complex conditions of trauma. There can be no doubt that expressing one’s trauma could take various forms of art, such as music, painting, writing and sculpture, to name but a few. It does not matter which mode is potent; trauma must be disentrall from the chains of whatever keeps it frozen. As Cathy Caruth suggests, “it is essential for this [trauma] narrative that could not be articulated, to be told, to be transmitted, to be heard” (69). By the same token and extension, Butler argues that “as soon as trauma can be put into memory; that is, as soon as trauma can be seen as being only a memory of trauma rather than a present state of being inhabiting the subject, the

subject can effect a break from that loss” (117). Within these views, trauma has to be translated into a memory narrative.

In drawing to a close, the creation of Asif and Basel as stoic characters warrants a deep affinity between Ellis and Senzai. Equally examined, they both create a persona and build their pain around that persona. Through them, put together, Ellis and Senzai make us understand the crisis of representation children may go through in conflict zones. More than that, they provide a comment on how the shield the mind creates to protect itself from the demons of trauma adds an extra psychological burden to the development of the traumatized life. By making Basel overcome the crisis of exteriorisation, however, Senzai appears more mature in dealing with the delicate subconscious mind. Furthermore, she invests in suggesting a therapeutic model of which the fractured mind- once ingested by the hollowness of the war- finds a way to heal. Hence, she seeks remedy in art which could redeem the infected psyche and history. Ellis, on the other hand, leaves Asif in an absolute stillness vis-à-vis the inability of exteriorising his traumatic memories. This, too, suggests one of the trauma premises. While sometimes the process of healing takes long, other times it fails to even proceed. And so, trauma is cyclic.

III.2.2. The Return of/to the Trauma

As previously highlighted in the second chapter, the digging up of bones’ scene represents a shocking degree of trauma that any sane mind can never fully comprehend. The following passage traces the nausea of traumatic memory Parvana developed shortly after digging up bones. The omniscient narrator describes the scene as follows, “She stuck her whole head under the tap, hoping the cold water would wash the images of what she had done all day out of her head. But every time she closed her eyes, she saw Mr. Skull and his companions lined up on the gravestones, grinning at her” (The Breadwinner 101). Clearly, upon her arrival home, Parvana seeks to liberate her mind from the digging-up bones images and the cemetery atmosphere she dwells on all day long. However, compulsive repetitions of the skulls haunt her, suggesting an uncontrollable

return of the uncanny. The latter evokes the feeling of experiencing familiarity and unfamiliarity at the same time- as an outcome of trauma manifestation. In this context, Cathy Caruth deduces that “the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images [hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares] and thoughts, the one who has lived through them” (151). In this sense, it is possible to argue that Parvana’s troubled psychology entails the haunting power of the past in its memory fragmentation. The latter unsettles the traumatized and compels him to re-undergo the distressing experience. Because of such a mental instability, Parvana could not sleep; she now suffers from sleep disturbance.

Following the digging-up incident, Ellis again places Parvana in a cemetery where she had to bury her father alone. The evocative scene is described by the narrator as follows, “Parvana remembered digging up bones in a graveyard in Kabul with her friend, Shauzia, to earn money. I don’t want anyone digging up my father, she thought, and she resolved to pile so many rocks on his grave that no one could bother him” (Parvana’s Journey). Remembering the graveyard in Kabul suffices Parvana to reach a significant level of knowledge which, in return, facilitates the circulation of overwhelm. To be sure, Caruth asserts: “memory, that is, in its very capacity to repeat an event that lies outside or beyond the subjects own control, names the place where the subject of knowledge and experience is always susceptible to being overcome and transformed by the disruptive force of shock” (238). It is possible in this regard to argue that the traumatic memory of digging up bones is a spot of knowledge and experience which makes Parvana resist the nausea of the past, and therefore construct resilience from within its intensity.

More recent thinking on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder has turned attention to the several unpredictable consequences on the mind of a traumatized subject, amongst them insomnia or chronic sleep disturbance. The latter is believed to be caused by the haunting of traumatic memories, aggravating memory damage. In 2016, Kelly, Kilgore and Haynes conducted clinical research on the profound affinity between insomnia and trauma. Their findings suggest, “Sleep difficulties [...] play a significant role in trauma-related

symptom development and resiliency” (229). Additionally, they argue that ‘working memory’ and ‘declarative memory’ are constructs of sleep loss in the development of PTSD (224). To this pattern of post-traumatic stress disorder, the writers under study project the issue of insomnia and sleep disturbance.

The same logic is apparent in the selected novels. Both Parvana and Nadia suffer from the lack of sleep because of the haunting episodic scenes their memories constantly recall at night. Parvana declares, “I can’t sleep at night. I doze off for a bit, then Asif coughs, or Leila coughs, or they cry in nightmares, or the neighbors yell, and I wake up again” (Parvana’s Journey 177). Here, Parvana’s incapability to sleep warrants a mental disorder. Her subconscious mind is captured by blurry images that are inserted in the faculty of memory, yet not readable. Those images are intruders to the mind and disturbers to the remembering process. That is how and why insomnia has well-stretched arms in the haziness of the human psyche in general, and the faculty of memory in particular. Similarly, Senzai endows Nadia with the inability to sleep. This is apparent when she shelters from the cold wind and the heavy rain in an abandoned butcher shop. The narrator says, “For the third time in the past twenty-four hours, Nadia awoke with a start, muscles sore, brain befuddled, not quite certain where she was. Then it all came rushing back” (Senzai 61). Add to this, not recognizing where she is, Nadia’s memory betrays her. In psychoanalysis parlance, most of the health issues are psychosomatic in the sense that the physical symptoms are caused by mental factors. Therefore, the sores Nadia feels in her muscles justify the psychological impact on her body; they are aggravated by trauma-induced elements.

Furthermore, the examination of the way in which the traumatized remembers past cataclysm, where memory still harbours glimmers of trauma, provokes a re-living of ineffable scenes and conflicting feelings. Parvana is helpless in front of the cruel life she is living. She wishes to liberate herself from the act of remembering, for it makes her plunge into an endless cycle of inner torture where the powers of horror challenge her resilient instinct of survival. In one of the letters she wrote to Shauzia, Parvana confesses, “I’m tired of having to

remember things. I want someone else to do the remembering” (Parvana’ Journey 94). The quote accurately reflects the nausea that traumatic memory may engender to the traumatized. Parvana appears vulnerable and frail because the more her mind exhausts her with the act of remembrance the more traumatic memories come flooding back and forth constantly reminding her of the stressors of life in Afghanistan. This is, of course, not a sign of succumbing to trauma, but rather a symbol of introspection through which the survivor constructs resilience.

Albeit the pain it embraces, suffering is necessary for a healthy development, one of the regulators of life. In fact, it is essential for the emanation of empathy -unless we suffer how can we know what others are going through in times of hardship-, and therefore the maturity of the mind. Great suffering, as Nietzsche sees it, is “the ultimate liberator of the mind, it alone constrains us to plunge into our innermost depths” (qtd in Zweig 463). Hence, there are values to sufferings that are intrinsic to the traumatic experiences, such as resilience and resistance. Through her tetralogy, Ellis tells us that if it were not for the hard times, Parvana would not come far in her quest for survival.

Of interest is the manifestation of memory lapses, defence mechanisms that the traumatized mentally develops to protect himself from extreme psychic damages. Ellis, unlike Senzai, goes as far as to gamble with temporary memory loss. The latter represents a common symptom in trauma diagnosis. Often, Parvana vaguely remembers where she is. This is due to the memory lapses the traumatized develops as a side effect to an overwhelming experience. Parvana constantly “woke up in the middle of the night. Everything was dark, and for a moment she couldn’t remember where she was. She began to panic.” (Parvan’s Journey 40) Parvana’s futile effort to refresh her memory suggests a kind of psychological nausea that deprives her from the gift of remembering. The narrator reminds us, “During the heavy bombing of Kabul, they changed homes many times to try to find a safe place. Parvana would wake up in the middle of the night and not remember where she was” (The Breadwinner 37).

What is even more deceptive is that Parvana's memory damage goes as far as to forget how her best friend Shauzia looks like. In a poignant letter, she writes: "It is getting harder and harder to remember what you look like. Sometimes when I think of you, I can only picture you in your blue school uniform with the white chador, back when we were students in Kabul. You had long hair then" (Parvana's Journey 60). This explains her post-traumatic pathology as far as the temporarily memory lapse is concerned. Additionally, the quote casts light on how Parvana is captured by the past. Her memory is frozen in the sense that she denies the existence of a past life that is prior to the present one when the war flares Afghanistan; rejecting the unbearable present. While writing a letter to Shauzia, she confesses:

It's hard to remember that I used to sleep in a bed and had to do my homework before I could watch television and play with my friends. It's hard to remember that we used to have ice cream and cakes to eat. Was that really me? Did I really leave a big piece of cake on my plate one day because I didn't feel like eating it? That must have been a dream. That couldn't have been my life. (Parvana's Journey 61)

In an extensive reading, Parvana shoves her memories away. She pretends to be unable to remember the joyful past she used to have because she knows this would take her nowhere but immerse her with feelings of remorse. Encircled by ghosts of a traumatic atmosphere, both authors bring collective memories of past events.

With continuing horror, Senzai revisits Syria's tragic past by recalling one of the significant historical moments characterizing the chemical attacks launched by Al-Assad regime. According to the U.S. Department of State statistics, "More than 1.400 people –many of them children"⁴⁰ were killed under such a terrorist attack -known to Syrians as Ghouta attacks. The narrative evokes the persistence of the national memory of Ghouta and stresses the ongoing question of Bashar al-Assad extermination regime whose historical roots go to 2013. Through the creation of a passing old character, Senzai illustrates the

⁴⁰Statistics are retrieved from an online source which justifies the absence of in-text citation. For further details, I invite the reader to consult <https://www.state.gov/ninth-anniversary-of-the-ghouta-syria-chemical-weapons-attack/>

lingering effects of Ghouta on the lives of Syrians who have been subject to a violent, military and psychological pressures. Indeed, Ghouta attacks marked a turning point in the modern history of Syria. Furthermore, the overwhelming event constitutes a national memory and a collective identity that work against historical amnesia and resist the burial of the past. Senzai, in her novel, tells us that Ghouta did not end. Two months after, its impact continues to haunt Syrians' lives. In other words, Ghouta is not simply a past event but rather a collective trauma that continues into the present. One might attend to the incident which depicts the haunting of Ghouta. Nadia narrates,

“What’s happening, brother?” asked a woman Nana’s age.
“A battle is stirring in the west,” he explained. “Army and rebels are at each other’s throats”
It’s not like Ghouta, is it?” asked the old woman, her face creased with fear. “How can Bashar be so unmerciful and cruel?”
Nadia froze. Two months ago, a sarin gas attack had killed over a thousand civilians in a rebel stronghold outside Damascus, called Ghouta. (Senzai 116)

Here Senzai testifies to the collective experience of genocide endured by the people of Ghouta surrounding the city of Damascus, and by extension Syrians. Memories are made of testimonies and rooted in collective ethos. As John Beverley points out, “*Testimony* represents an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle” (23). Through engaging with the reading of collective history, Senzai formulates a testimony to the Syrians’ experience with chemical attacks, as lived by the frightened old woman. She further condemns the atrocity of Bashar al-Assad for the fatality he brought to Syria and Syrians. The prevalence of constant fear amongst vulnerable people, for its part, denotes the perpetual continuity of the trauma. In brief, the past is marching in the course of the present.

Coincidentally, the same dreadful atmosphere of Ghouta is found in Ellis’ *Mud City*. The writer brings the memory of acid attacks through a nameless character with whom Shauzia spent the night in the clinic. In the bed next to her, Shauzia pitifully spotted a woman who “was more bandages than she was

woman. They covered all of her face except for one eye. Her voice was old and raspy” (Mud City 134). In Afghanistan, as in Syria, the use of chemical products, mainly acid and sarin gas, is a prevalent act for those who do not abide by the laws set by authoritarian regimes. As tackled in the previous chapter, women are deprived of basic rights, namely education. Through a dialogue between Shauzia and a sixteen years old girl, Ellis denounces the cruelty and inhumanity of the Taliban regime under which women are subject to sexual profiling. The dialogue goes as follows:

For a long while, Shauzia didn't speak. Then she asked, “What happened to you?”

“A man threw acid in my face.”

“Why did he do that?”

“He didn't like what I was doing. I thought I would be safe in a refugee camp, but I don't think there is a safe place for me anywhere.”

“What were you doing that he didn't like?”

“I was teaching his daughter how to read”. (Mud City 135)

Indeed, the acid attack the teenager went through is appalling and dehumanizing. Ellis deliberately places Shauzia amidst such a shocking milieu which she is part of. In the morning, Shauzia is poignantly aware of the passing of the girl. This adds misery to her life, and therefore provokes the reader to empathise with Afghan women who underwent acid attacks. As such, the writer makes use of empathy as a literary device which implies the emotional as well as the cognitive engagements of the reader. In doing so, she sets the floor for a feminist critique in order to denounce the crimes committed by the Taliban towards women, regardless of their age. Succumbing to despair, “Shauzia turned her head away. She didn't want to look at the empty bed” (Mud City 137). Here again, the writer projects how hard it is to live under an authoritarian regime. According to Whitlock, testifying to the collective experience of violence –in all its forms– necessitates giving access to an armoured history. Here, Ellis does not only “duplicate or record events, but [also] make [collective] history available to imaginative acts” (169). As such, Ellis stresses the significance of an individual testimony in bearing witness to a collective experience of acid attacks that resists potential international intervention and neglect in Afghanistan.

Scrutinising the theme of memory in Senzai's and Ellis' novels from a psycho-historical lens demonstrates how the narrative style they both adopt showcases the dark abyss wherein trauma resides timelessly. Trauma does not leave the human mind. Rather, like a tattoo, it becomes part of it. Both writers resort to the flashback technique in order to offer a palette of life as it is i.e. a realistic depiction. More than a simple literary device, extracting traumatic memories is what enables the writer to provide a vivid image of the broken psyche and the disjointed history. In short, it mirrors the atmosphere of war. Indeed, the human malleable mind never ceases to amaze scientists, for it is prone to different ideas, thoughts and imaginations which, in their turn, release repressed feelings, stressing the equivocal nature of telling a story.

Accordingly, children in conflict zones are prey to suffering, pain, chaos and other forms of violence. All they carry are memories that are torn between a nostalgic past, a traumatic present and a fearful future. As such, these children are drenched into a misty world of emotional outbursts. A contextual reading of most war novels often, if not always, leads to the same premise: they correspond to the traumatic time in which the plot is fragmented, nonlinear and characterised by unresolved endings. That is how and why characters are endowed with disorder and psychological unrests. In brief, it is because their life is devoid of clarity, linearity and familiarity. And the catalysts for these, as examined in this chapter, could take the form of minor details, such as sound, scent, place, noise, taste and word, to mention only these.

III.3. The Ambivalence of Nostalgia in the Overwhelming Process of Recalling Memories

Nostalgia, by and large, has its branches well-stretched in the fascinating mind-mechanism of memory. Unlike traumatic memories, the latter encapsulates a sentimental longing for a happy and safe past, and therefore evokes fond memories which, at a certain time, release an ecstasy-like effect to the traumatized subject. Such a puzzling human mode of perception drives us to

think deeper as to what we are supposed to remember amidst tragic times and how recalling good memories fosters the healing process.

In times of trauma, it is axiomatic to feel nostalgic and pine for the days where there was a sparkling flow of life in order to sense a semblance of normalcy. This would provide the creation, albeit imaginary, of a society and a context where the traumatized individual is not exposed to all the insecurities. In this counter-section, the analysis is particularly interested in examining the role of nostalgia in the study of memory. If the return to happy times is considered a potent strategy through which the traumatized develops resiliency and absorbs rays of hope, one would analyse and discuss the dimensions of nostalgia in memory studies. The main questions which the present section addresses here are: Why does being nostalgic to the past while everything is falling apart in the present help construct resilience? How can nostalgia elicit positive effects to the traumatized by defeating traumatic memories? And to what extent does nostalgia offer a fertile ground on which to examine the tenets of trauma? Before delving into practice, it is important to fleetingly reflect upon the notion of nostalgia and its injection in academia.

Filled with trauma experiences and jumbled chronology order, memories are simultaneously images of growth, resistance and introspection. As such, it happens to be captured by the past and therefore flee the present time, just like being on a psychedelic trip. This is a type of psychological journey in which one yearns to return to good days. To this end, nostalgia functions at once as a captive and a fugitive. In other words, it captures the past and escapes the present. The word nostalgia is etymologically derived from the Greek words *nostos* and *algos*. While the former means homecoming, the latter stands for pain in meaning. Combined together, it signals a psychological melancholy in which one craves for the good bygone days.

It is the Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer, who coined the word ‘nostalgia’ in 1688. Back at that time, its demarcation arose from a neurological milieu by relating it to the disease that troubled the mercenaries who were fighting and

plundering properties in foreign lands; a disease accompanied by intense symptoms of mental discomfort, such as anxiety, homesickness, melancholy, insomnia and loss of appetite (McCann)⁴¹. In the twentieth century, the notion of nostalgia steps smoothly in the psychology domain. It becomes more inclined towards the study of the subconscious mind, just like depression and other psychological disorders (Rosen)⁴². As such, a plethora of literature emerges to engage with the study of such an equivocal nature of nostalgia.

As of late, however, it is theorized as a minefield concept of conflicting ideas; hence why it appears to describe ambivalent emotions. First, it signals an ineffable joy, richly sown with safety and beauty; second, it has to do with the “overwhelmingly negative experience afflicting a subset of the population, with overtones of homesickness and a sense of being ‘uprooted’” (Osborn 11). Nostalgia, in the case of traumatized children in conflict zones, represents a potent strategy to overcome the ramifications of constant displacement and family separation by mourning the absence of home. This is where this section steps in. It aims to show the ambivalent way nostalgic memories operate; they evoke not only joy but sadness as well.

III.3.1. Prisoners of Bygone Days

The novels under examination shelter the theme of memory in relation to the notion of nostalgia that is imbued with a relentless back and forth between the past and the present as well as an intense interior reflexion of the course of events. The plot of both narratives never goes forward. It always breaks the chronology order, fluctuating the sequential system through the writer’s use of the flashback technique and other forms of haunting. Ironically, this oscillation in time and space makes the reader sense neither a deep confusion nor a flux of disorder, as it seems to be the case with the modernist conventions that we are accustomed to in the twentieth century. Rather, it is through recalling memories

⁴¹ This source from where I paraphrased the quote does not use page number. In brief, it is an electronic source that takes the format of epub version only.

⁴² Again, the source from where I paraphrased the quote does not use page number. In brief, it is an electronic source that takes the format of epub version only.

that we can have a panoptic view of abstract notions, such as emotions, thoughts and ideas, to name but a few. In brief, one has to go back in time and decipher what was being thrown at him/her if s/he has to make sense of current psychological unrests and other so-called abstract matters that pertain to the human psyche. Only then, may we come out of the dark pitfall of trauma and adapt our mind to pain, accept it and live with it. This does especially not mean surrender to trauma, but rather deciphering what triggers it so that the traumatized can cope with it and therefore control its sudden catalysts.

Both writers under study effectively attain mastery in making audible the traumatized repressed memories of the ongoing suffering endured in silence by children who appear ill-equipped, paralyzed and helpless to voice their traumas. They silently, but inwardly loud, cling to their memories either to escape the tormenting present or to revive the nostalgic past. In both cases, their desires to suppress the pain and repress traumatic memories fail, for they cannot liberate themselves from eternal servitude to their disturbing feelings. Thus, time is driven by a flux of fluctuated memories, making its course nonlinear. While memory is the trauma's vessel, I argue, time is its compass. Memories are haphazardly constructed in the strange human's mind, and by the mind is meant *imagination*. To this end, traumatized children seem to create their own truth through recalling fond memories in order to appease themselves because it is easier than accepting reality. In short, it is a basic defence mechanism. Despite being illusive, nostalgic memories help traumatized children construct resilience from within psychic malaises.

Such nostalgic memories beg the following question: how did memories of life before the war broke out help both Parvana and Nadia persevere in their quest to build resilience, search for home and find their families? Their childhood during the pre-war time witnessed a euphoria of serenity framed in kaleidoscopic patterns that were woven with innocence and purity. Those were the days of sheer epic grandeur, and those were akin to the scenes of a fairy-tale. In short, those were bygone days that Parvana and Nadia are still craving. When they recall those moments, they feel a wave of nostalgia coming over them which

places them in a happier and safer home. Such burst of emotions is indeed bewitching. However horrifying the present time is, they are enchanted by the unstoppable flow of unforgettable images of bygone days.

A commonality between the narratives lies in the way the setting is highlighted. The writers show a deep interest in describing the cities' physical and spiritual transformation, following the war. In doing so, they resort to the technique of juxtaposition which, due to the nature of the study, encapsulates a fair comparison. In the previous chapter, we have seen how dreadful the cities of Kabul and Aleppo became after the war. They, too, went through tragic transformations and experienced trauma. Just like the broken psyches, buildings are wounded, streets cry and houses bleed in silent. And so, the infrastructure and architecture witnessed destruction and demolition. Here is, for instance, how Ellis portrays the city's metamorphosis before and after the Taliban's seizure of Kabul, along with other cities in Afghanistan,

Kabul was a dark city at night. It had been under curfew for more than twenty years. Many of the street lights had been knocked out by bombs, and many of those still standing did not work. "Kabul was the hot spot of central Asia," Parvana's mother and father used to say. "We used to walk down the streets at midnights, eating ice cream. Earlier in the evening, we would browse of lights, progress and excitement. (Ellis 129-130)

These are only a few lines of remembrance and one can already sense a deep sorrow resulting from the repercussions of the war. Actually, the quote starts with the impact of the war on the city. Darkness and a dusk-to-dawn curfew is what make Kabul a dead city. Bombs are what makes it even deadly. Then, it ends with recalling the peaceful life Afghan people had before the war; happy and safe, they were. In one instance, we mourn the loss of a lively city amidst the war, and in the next one, we find ourselves craving for Kabul that is prior to war. Through the characters' memories and sensory language, we grasp the writer's implicit appealing to nostalgia as a literary device which evokes good memories and suppresses traumatic ones. Characters clearly longed for a life in a city where one is blinded by the 'lights', immersed with 'progress' and plagued by

‘excitement’. The quote thus triggers acute nostalgia for a desired past that is lived, yet faded. In other words, it signals a desire of a nostalgic past in disguise.

Similarly, Senzai casts light on the changes Aleppo, and Syria by extension, underwent due to the war. Syria, the cradle of Arab civilization and Arab *Nahda*⁴³ (Arabic term for Enlightenment if put in the Western context), is now torn between national betrayal and international negligence. It had tragically become the place of aching hearts and bleeding souls. It should be remembered that Syria symbolizes the seed of *Bilad al-Sham* (Lands of Levant) gathering Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, in addition to parts of Iraq, Turkey and Cyprus. Aleppo, for its part, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It embraces the medieval Islamic architecture. For those seeking wealth and prosperity, Aleppo had once been a better option to fulfil the dream. In this context, Nadia draws a comparison on the life in Aleppo before and after president Bashar al-Assad’s despotic regime drenched the country into horror and despair. She describes,

Aleppo had been a big, bustling city, but ever since the conflict began, those who could afford to had left. And in the last few weeks, news had come of President Basha al-Assad’s desire to crush the strengthening opposition in the city. The number of bermeela had doubled, even tripled, as the Syrian army reinforced its position. As a result the city was split. (Senzai 31)

Just like the falling bombs on Kabul, Aleppo melted in the burning ashes of the falling bermeelas. The melancholic comparison Nadia makes tells the story of how the war drowns the city in the deep end of destruction. And just like the Taliban regime, Bashar al-Assad sets fire to the country, resulting in the division of Syria into wounded cities. Aleppo bitterly tastes the varieties of torment and endures total destruction. Through this saddening description, Senzai remains nostalgic about the ‘big’ and ‘bustling’ city which is now thrown by dust and blast. A feeling of nostalgia is implicitly evoked through recalling memories of the past.

⁴³ More on the history of *Nahda*, see Peter Hill's seminal book entitled *Utopia and Civilization in the Arab Nahda* (2020).

In other significant incidents, Ellis and Senzai go as far as to gamble with the notion of nostalgia. Apart from its inclination towards emitting positive waves, it has always been a subject of controversial debates for both writers and critics. As such, nostalgia represents a palette subject to different currents and vantage points. In his article entitled *Normal and Pathological Nostalgia* (1977), Davis Werman states that nostalgia is seen as a “wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness” (393). Accordingly, it is a miscellaneous collection of conflicting emotions that are made up of joy as much as sadness. For the same reason, Johnson-Laird and Keith Oatley view nostalgia as a complex emotion with mixed catharsis. In their terms, it involves the individual “to feel mildly sad as a result of remembering one's happiness in past situation” (117). That is exactly how nostalgic memories embrace ambivalent emotions, having simultaneously a positive and a negative impact.

One might find it crucial to examine how this ambivalence coming from nostalgic memories is projected in *The Breadwinner*. It is through Nooria, Parvana's eldest sister, that we remember Kabul as a place where life was normal and people were safe. She reminds us, “Kabul had once been beautiful.” Nooria remembered whole sidewalks, traffic lights that changed color, evening trips to restaurants and cinemas, browsing in fine shops for clothes and books” (Ellis 22). Such description shows how nostalgic reverie towards a euphoric past collides with an irrevocable present wherein feelings of loss, despair and grief emerge inevitably. As for Parvana, being nostalgic is something she does not tolerate, for it makes her create an elusive image of an unrealizable dream. Her reaction explains the refusal to imagine Kabul in the past that would only add misery to her life. In other words, it is hard to accept the passage of time when the past is better than the present. Ellis writes, “it hurt her [Parvana] to hear stories of old Kabul before the bombing (...) it made her angry, and since she could do nothing with her anger, it made her sad” (Ellis 23). This demonstrates that nostalgia does not always have positive effects. To some, it may be viewed as an envelope which encapsulates elements of sadness, and therefore influences their mood.

Likewise, Senzai brings back the memory of Syrian classics that is imbued with a wistful longing for art and aesthetics. In short, she summons the return to humanities. In terms of literary outputs, Aleppo is believed to beget the very early pioneers of modern art; ranging from poetry, prose, music to painting and others. It embraces a major source for philosophy, history, literature, drama and publishing houses. Needless to say that the Arabic novel is born in Aleppo and one can think of the contribution of Francis Marrash's *Ghabat al-haqq* (1865) in the wider *Nahda* (Hill 73). The writer herself reminds us of such a forgotten figure and value. In a reflective dialogue between Rasheed and a young bearded man, Nadia attentively ponders the question of how Syrians feel a yearning for the past and its nobilities through their fruitful discussion some of which she attended. They bemoan,

“It breaks my heart, said Rasheed, caressing the cover of a faded volume. “For centuries Aleppo was a centre for literature—the first Arabic novel was printed here: *Ghabat al-haqq*, ‘The Forest of Truth’”.

“Now, that is an irony,” the bearded young man laughed, without humor. “The author, Francis Marrash, wrote about liberty and freedom—both of which Syria lacks.”

“Well, does it matter?” muttered Rasheed. “No one reads anymore. All they do is watch those silly soap operas and play games on their phones.” Nadia blushed and ducked her head. “Once there was a bookstore on every street, offering the latest books from Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus.”

“And now they’ve been converted into mobile-phone shops,” said the bearded young man, earning a grimace from Rasheed. (Senzai 171)

Apart from the impact of the war, what is furthermore interesting in the dialogue is that Senzai highlights the feeling of nostalgia for a past, not only peaceful but also free from technology and technological gadgets and devices, such as mobile phones. In a world that is obsessed with constant advances of scientific knowledge and where technology invades the human mind at the expense of moral values, the aesthetics of literature, and art by extension, finds no place to foster serenity and appease psychological pressures. Sadly, the screen replaces the paper, video games replace reading and mobile-phone shops replace bookstores. To such old days, the writer is expressing nostalgia and a strong desire to wish for a time rewind, a time where a book could be smelled and

touched. That is how the feeling of loss towards a bleak present defeats those nostalgic memories of a better past. Being herself an intellectual, Senzai insists on reviving the buried past with all its simplistic features. In all cases, technology proved temporary, and one can just think of any technological device; it does not work without battery, a battery itself disposable and prone to dying. A book, however, can timelessly be saved and serve future generations. It must be acknowledged that the intention is not to fully blame technology for the disasters the world is going through. Notwithstanding its primordial impact, technology indeed helps in many aspects of our life. If truth be told, however, the damages it is bringing overweight the benefits.

Another point which equally underlines one of the similarities between both narratives as far as the concept of nostalgia is concerned revolves around the theme of education; indeed, a noble activity and a basic right that is inhumanly violated in conflict zones. Given the fact that the characters have intellectual backgrounds, both writers highlight the theme of education which sadly gets lost amidst the war atmosphere. Through recalling old memories of school days, they have an irresistible impulse to be at school, surrounded by their classmates and teachers. Despite the hectic homeworks they had to do, school is where they want to be. In their way back home from a long day working at the market place, Parvana and Shauzia drown in memories. They confabulate,

Do you miss school?

The girls talked about their old classmates until they turned down's Parvana's street (...) it was almost like the old days, when Parvana and her friends would walk home from school together, complaining about teachers and homework assignments. (Ellis 89-90)

What Ellis invokes here is the children's wish to escape a present neither safe nor anymore full of life. A present no longer inspirational but doomed to reach the nadir of ignorance. They suffocate in a country that is abruptly ruled by radical people where education becomes a taboo. In this context, one should not forget that since the Taliban had taken control of Kabul, both the city and the people underwent drastic changes. They first "forbade girls to go to school" (Ellis 15) and then "closed the schools" once for all (Ellis 71). This nostalgia for being at

school Afghan children have a yen for is further tackled in *The Breadwinner*. The writer endows Parvana with a pensive mood as she tries to fathom what was happening and how the present lacks so much of good memories that were once recorded in the past. Ellis writes,

Parvana frowned. It wasn't her fault she wasn't in school! She would rather be there, too, instead of sitting on this uncomfortable blanket, her back and bottom getting sore. She missed her friends, her blue-and-white school uniform, and doing new things each day. History was her favourite subject, especially Afghan history. Everybody had come to Afghanistan. The Persians came four thousand years ago. Alexander the Great came, too, followed by the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, British, and finally the Soviets. (18)

Through this reflective scene, Parvana laments the absence of education and knowledge-sharing activities in her empty life. She feels so wretched for the wasted time she spends silently and invisibly underneath her chador and under an uncomfortable blanket in the Kabul market. In lieu, she would rather love to be at school, wearing a school uniform and attending classes. Those were memories of bygone days that she still craves for. Thus, she would have been indebted to the time. But, alas and alack, those wishes are never to be fulfilled, for time can never be rewound. As yet, they are etched on both the hearts and the minds. Her inclination towards preferring the subject of history, for its pivotal part, stands for the glorification of her beloved country which entices many colonizers for centuries.

History is the vector through which a country addresses its essence and organizes its virtue by re-imagining idealized pasts, better futures, or even unexpected destinies of the harsh present. Ellis approaches history in its broadest sense here: from constant colonial occupation and collective identities, to subjects and texts in their reception. In doing so, she revisits history through restoring those memories during the colonial period. What Ellis tries to imply is that Parvana, and Afghan children in general, seek connection to the past that transported their nostalgic soul to where their culture and identity hailed from.

In parallel, Senzai deals with the theme of education through endowing the protagonist with nostalgic memories of school days in order to show how Syrian children are out of synchrony with the cruel environment, with themselves and with their basic rights. While the ongoing war generates a sense of educational alienation, images of the past flash onto their fragile and incapacitated psyches. There is a deep notion of trauma in that children are traumatized by the experience of being out of school. Like Deborah Ellis, her style mirrors a sentimental language that is loaded with an outburst of mixed emotions, giving the impression of disorder. She thus resorts to the theme of nostalgia to capture the zeitgeist of a peaceful Syria in order to help the reader understand the present reality. In a reflective incident where Nadia fell in the deep stream of memories and got drenched into nostalgic feelings, she takes us in retrospective album spanning the entertaining and, at once, the informative vibes the school adds to her life,

Nadia pulled the blanket over her head, wanting to burrow back in time and magically emerge at school, even if it was algebra class. Huddled in the back row with her best friends, they could joke about the rumors of how Ms. Darwish has spurned marriage in order to dedicate her life to teaching her beloved algebra. The passion for her subject, they firmly believed, extended to the man who'd invented it, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, whose soulful portrait hung in the classroom. (Senzai 3)

There is, in *Escape from Aleppo*, an abrupt moving from the past to the present and *vice-versa*. Nadia finds herself daydreaming and mentally travelling back to the past. At the same time, she is escaping the present and therefore creating a false reality. The catalyst for this disturbing condition is the nostalgic feeling oozing from traumatic memories. At a stylistic level, Senzai adopts an interior reflexion technique as a means to interpret the present time. Such quote is also a good example of the stream of consciousness narrative technique: it embraces associative thoughts, disjointed syntax and sensory details. In short, it mirrors the disassembled way Nadia's thoughts flow i.e. her inner state. In doing so, the writer highlights the incarnation of the outside world, which is in a constant disarray, through the consciousness of the individual that is itself jumbled.

So, the characters' fervent desire to go back to school is so striking that nostalgic reverie reveals, or conceals, repressed pain. On the one hand, it intensifies the deep despondency of the present; on the other hand, it extensities the ecstasy of the past. In both cases, however, resilience emerges from within this anarchic condition of the psyche. . Both Nadia and Parvana were exhilarated by a sense of purpose: a search for their families and home.

What I find alarming is that nostalgia, to some extent, covers the mind with a false reality, a lie. In George Ball's terms, it is "a seductive liar". To forget the cruelty of the present, the traumatized starts to create illusionary images of forgetting, not thinking of what happened, in order to appease himself because it is easier than accepting reality. This is often presented through restoring memories of the past. It is a basic defence mechanism. In so doing, he creates an alternative reality in order to smooth the rough edges. Pretending to forget is always an option, yet it only adds fuel to the fire and hinders the healing process which requires acceptance of, and coping with, the trauma. In short, such process appears as a refusal of reality. Once children understand this about themselves, they start filtering traumatic memories from nostalgic ones; hence, they stop daydreaming and see the world in its objective form, without filters of the past.

Taking different incidents alongside, albeit different contexts, they suffice to spot the commonalities which unite both narratives under the same traumatic experience. Indeed, if we were to ask children in conflict zones about their lives, we would receive conflicting life-stories, ranging from witnessing the horror of the present juxtaposed with remembering the happiness they found before hard times. In fact, this is what life is all about: going through different experiences, all of which trigger certain emotions, and each one exhausts our mind. Memory has something which embraces that perspectival variety. At times, it positions us in the seventh heaven; at other times, it submerges us in the deep end of pain.

On the examination of perspectivism, a question imposes itself: is life shaped by dualism? Not necessarily- reference is made here to the *triquetra* notion where nothing can be complete without a third dimension. Our way of

thinking is believed to be shaped by dualistic perceptions: black/white, good/evil and dark/light, to name a few. Everything appears juxtaposed to something else. Yet, in the context of trauma, this thinking leads to fallacy. Nothing can be fully understood without a third dimension. To illustrate, there is not only *up* and *down*, but also a centre which helps maintain equilibrium; hence why the in-between space children at wars occupy is what makes opposing spheres not diverge but rather converge. All experiences come together to remind them of an existing past, to give them a meaning to the present and to help them build up the future. According to Adam Muller, nostalgia “belongs neither to the present, the past, nor to the future, and yet it remains in some way attached to all three of these temporal zones (739). Thus, the surfaces of memories ahead appear rippled in the chronology mirages.

In nostalgia studies, food is also an important element that makes people connect with their self, culture, identity, history and religion, to mention only these. One basic example of such a healthy connection would be the case of immigrants who come to live in foreign countries. Through food and culinary practices, they reminisce about their past, a past that triggers nostalgia for home and revive their memories of family. It is in this context that food acts as a catalyst that brings one’s memories back. In the case of *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai injects food to the flow of memories; a catalyst that helps Nadia persevere in her quest and makes her journey to reconnect with her family less burdened.

III.3.2. Food as a Catalyst for Memories Influx

To further stress Nadia’s nostalgia for her family and her country before the war broke out, Senzai resorts to the theme of food, a potent element that is missing in Ellis’ narrative. In fact, food and culinary practice have recently become a flourishing field of enquiry in research. They are aesthetically evoked through various forms of art, including literature, music, painting and cinema. As far as the representation of food is concerned, these multiple fields of study embrace psychological responses and reactions to the way people express a sense of nostalgia towards the past, and therefore trigger memory. It is in a war context

that food functions as an essential factor to reconnect with origins, to refresh feelings of home, to rediscover identity and to preserve cultural heritage. Thus, it symbolizes an edifice of belonging to one's culture, history and identity. According to Balakian, food represents "a complex cultural emblem, an encoded script that embodied the long history and collective memory of our Near Eastern culture" (52). In brief, food serves the preservation of history and the circulation of collective memory. In an interview with the author, Senzai comments on the influence of Syrian food and culinary practice. She asserts:

Syrian food is fantastic, many would argue some of the best in the Middle East! You should have a cup of Qahwah (Arabic coffee with cardamom) and enjoy Borak (filo pastries stuffed with cheese), Kibbeh (bulgular balls stuffed with ground lamb and spices), Hummus (chickpea dip) with pita bread, Yalanji (stuffed grape leaves), and for desert Halawet el Jibn (Cheese filled with cream drenched in rose scented syrup) or Maamoul (cookies stuffed with nuts or dates). (Senzai)⁴⁴

In a roundabout way, food can also be regarded as a catalyst for resilience which helps remedy trauma during war times. This is reflected in *Escape from Aleppo* through Senzai's use of the flashback technique which allows the reader to plunge, not only into the past, but also into the psyche of characters. She retrospectively takes us to December 17, 2010, a date that marked Nadia's birthday. To be more explicit, the following excerpt serves as an illustration:

Light blazed from a dozen white candles atop a towering chocolate cake. Adorned with pink sugar roses, the cake was from Nadia's favourite bakery, Palmyra Boulangerie (...) Even though she was stuffed from the feast that Nana and her mother had prepared, including her favourite, *kababkaraz*, grilled lamb meatballs prepared with cherries and pine nuts, she'd saved room for a slice, maybe even two. This is definitely one of the best days of my life, she thought happily. Her family and friends from school, along with her parents' friends and neighbors, gathered in her grandparents' elegant dining room. (Senzai 19)

Accordingly, the scene shows the role food and feast play in reviving the past in the present, and hence emits nostalgic waves. It also denotes how memory functions as a means of commemoration and remembering through culinary

⁴⁴ This interview is retrieved from an e-source; therefore, page number is not provided. For more details, consult <https://edicottonquilt.com/2018/04/02/interview-n-h-senzai/>

practice. Nadia clearly has nostalgia for the past when her friends and family used to round up in her grandparents' home and enjoy preparing delicious food, especially her favourite "*Kabab Karaz*" - a popular dish in Syria that is made with lamb and cherry. In this context, food cultivates nostalgic memories. Recalling memories of the past surrounding food work to remind Nadia of her family, and therefore stimulates her resilience which, in turn, actualises her search for home.

Furthermore, food and culinary practice helps keep the bond between people unbreakable and smoothes the family spirit. Drawing on Arab culture, family is the seed of the society, if not the society itself. Unlike the Western family typology that is based on individual relationships i.e. nuclear family, the Arab family consists of, at least, three generations and is built on an extended family system. The latter includes grandparents, parents and children living together under one roof within the same household. Senzai herself, in a reflective incident where the family was leaving home and escaping Aleppo, casts some light on the aspect of familial structure and the role food plays in maintaining domestic codes. She remembers,

They [Nadia's grandmother, mother, and three aunts and their children] hurried down the dark hall of the spacious apartment that had been Nadia's home her entire life. It was identical to the other three apartments in the building, built by her grandparents thirty-five years ago. Each son had been given the key to his own flat, while they occupied the top floor. Mostly, they'd all lived happily together in the rambling space as part of a large extended family. (Senzai 6-7)

Here, Senzai plainly advances the notion of extended family into sight; indeed, a solid hierarchal system in nature that is predicated on the asset of sharing. Out of it, comes a plethora of values, among which are care giving, close support shell, the preservation of the family culture and tradition, love and companionship and children care. During weekends and festivals, Nadia enjoys "being in Nana's kitchen, helping her prepare magnificent feasts" (Senzai 128). Besides, "The grown-ups huddled over tea at her grandparents', having one of their important discussions" (Senzai 99). Food is, in a word, identity. In other words, it positions

itself within the identity scope in that it provides the individual with a cultural background.

In her influential article, *Culinary Diasporas: Identity and the Language of Food in Gisèle Pineau's Un papillon dans la cite and L'exile selon Julia* (2005), Brinda Mehta argues that "food becomes an important marker of identity and cultural difference" (26). So, Senzai understands food as a social and cultural marker. To be sure, it gives Nadia the ability to restore her identity as well as her belonging. As such, food refreshes Nadia's mental stability as much as it reconstitutes her resilience in the face of the war's ramifications. This includes trauma, memories, nostalgia, and mourning the absence of home and family separation.

Another way to think about food and culinary practice is thus to consider its inclination towards nostalgic memories. One can sense how delicious Arab cuisine tastes, how good Indian cuisine smells or even how pleasant preparing for Thanksgiving Dinner is through recalling memories, and thus craving for the past. No wonder how food is part and parcel in memory studies. For instance, it could be the memory of a certain traditional meal that evokes feelings of homesickness and belonging to immigrants. In fact, food draws for children in conflict zones an image of affection and protection; it also strengthens the family spirit. As such, it situates them as typical nostalgic figures who, on the one hand, lament the loss of their families and, on the other hand, develop mental resistance to pain. This falls within Turkon and Weller's opinion on the function food performs on triggering nostalgic memories. They write,

The acts of preparing, cooking and experiencing certain foods can enable individuals to recall long-past memories. The choice to eat, share and prepare specific foods can be acts of nostalgia that allow consumers to recall family, friends and places left behind. By consuming foods associated with their homeland, individuals can maintain connections despite physical and temporal separation. (Turkon & Weller 58)

Accordingly, Senzai seems to provide a relevant incident with which Turkon and Weller's arguments fall in line with the notion of memory and nostalgia. This is apparent in the novel through a dialogue between Ammo Mazen and the children while they were making food. The following excerpt stresses the incident which elicits nostalgic memories,

“When steam rose from the pin pot's depths, Ammo Mazen added a bouillon cube and the pigeon pieces, vegetables, and dried beans. Then he opened the small leather pouch and pulled out a bottle. As he unscrewed the lid, Nadia felt the breath leave her chest. She grabbed the edge of the table, overwhelmed by the memory of being in Nana's kitchen, helping her prepare magnificent feasts. She inhaled the familiar mixture of allspice, cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon, coriander, and cumin rising from the bottle.

“My personal combination of *baharat*,” Ammo Mazen said, adding a heaping teaspoon to the pot.

“That sure does smell good,” said Basel, rocking back and forth on his heels as he and Tarek stared intently. “My nana was the best cook in the world,” he added wistfully, a faraway look in his eyes.

“Mine too,” said Nadia, giving him a smile. (Senzai 128-129)

The scent of allspice Ammo Mazen uses in the preparation of pigeon broth speaks pertinent questions of the way culinary practice evokes past memories. In particular, it acts as a catalyst and makes Nadia feel as if she were in her Grandmother's kitchen cooking and learning recipes. In Timothy's terms “The smell or taste of certain dishes can educe the memory of a particular person (...) Mothers and grandmothers are the commonest family members associated with one's comestible past” (67). This suffices to understand Nadia's overwhelming feeling of nostalgia. More than that, the process of being involved in culinary practice feeds the cultural aspect of a given nation in that it stands for the inheritance of cooking from one generation to another. The latter symbolizes the preservation of not only culinary heritage, but also identity. As such, Nadia's interest in helping Nana and learning from her situates her as a wise child figure who shows compassion for the tradition of food preparation. Again, in Timothy's own view, “culinary heritage also involves the ways in which families pass gastronomic knowledge from generation to generation” (68). The children's praise for their *Nanas* as “the best cook in the world, in the end of the quote,

denotes how much wistful they are feeling and how much sorrowfully they are thinking about a time in the past where they were happy with the presence of their families.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the human mind, by and large, evidences a malleable fabric in that it is prey to various psychological unrests and emotional outbursts. As a result, we are prone to the weaving of an imaginary grid of unsettled scenarios from the incomprehensible past, the myopic present or even the uncertain future. The images our mind produce may not always follow a clear and neat pattern. Rather, they are fragmentary and imbued with conflicting memories and jumbled chronology. That is exactly when we indulge in daydreams, nightmares and go astray back and forth in time, to mention but a few trauma manifestations. The stimuli for such inner turmoil could be numerous, depending on the intensity of how much it appeals to one's sensibility. It should be remembered that food functions as a vehicle by which various senses are aroused. These are taste, smell and sight.

In memory studies, not only does food work as an effective mechanism to restore memories of home and family; it also unleashes repressed melancholy and deep sorrow. Memories can vibrate; they can trigger happiness and sadness at the same time. It is not surprising that resilience may be assaulted in a way that memories bring trauma back. Notably, reference is made here to what LaCapra calls "the afterlife of trauma": a phase in which the traumatized develops trauma manifestations. Nevertheless, it is at this nexus between recalling fond memories and nostalgic ones that the traumatized builds resilience from within conflicting feelings. Just as traumatic memories are timeless, beautiful memories also remain alive in our memory. That is what makes the creation of therapeutic conditions even complex, for healing itself is not linear. As a result, resistance to trauma emerges from within the wounded psychological schism giving a frame for resilience. Resistance, to my sense, encapsulates a demonstration of a certain need to survive. Nadia's need of survival is heightened by the presence of nostalgic memories which, in turn, have elongated branches in food and culinary practice. Therefore, the definite conclusion would be to state that food is

interwoven with the faculty of memory. Unlike Ellis who shows no indication of Afghan food and culinary practice except for a recurrent mention of Naan and rice, which may explain either the poverty in which Afghanistan undergoes or the writer's lack of expertise in the country's culture, Senzai enriches her narrative with the theme of food in order to show how tied it is to nostalgia and memory, and how acquainted she is with Syrian traditions and lifestyle.

As this chapter nears its end, the alternating method used for the comparison makes not only Ellis and Senzai confronted to each other, it also makes Nadia and Parvana, and Asif and Basel meet at the crossroads of trauma where nothing comes in a neat fashion. With the passage of time, everything is connected and everywhere is chaotic. This chaos simply serves to connect past, present and future. One can again think about Nietzsche's concept of 'eternal recurrence' which tackles the idea of an unstable universe that expands, then collapses and repeats itself endlessly. That is how both Ellis and Senzai cajole us with jumbled feelings just as events get chronologically chaotic on the pages by making use of nostalgic memories. On the one hand, they provoke a sort of nausea that disturbs the traumatized; on the other hand, they evoke nostalgia which creates a fancy reality of an expired past. Again, that is because the human mind, by nature, does not follow a linear sequence of event, let alone a traumatized one. Indeed, it is through mourning the human loss and the falling apart of Kabul and Aleppo that the authors under study bear witness to a collective experience of trauma. More than that, they vocalize the pain the traumatized failed to express. This makes them not only reminders of history but also active agents to resist silencing history.

So, it is out of recalling good memories that one can seek solace and find strength to move forward. This comparison is meant to show how both authors approach nostalgia as a means to paint the most vivid picture of a fractured mind and a fractured world in fiction as in reality. There is not only a past to long for and/or a present to worry about but also a future to build up. In order to draw a colourful portrait out of human suffering, Ellis and Senzai attune their works with nostalgic memories of happiness, resistance and triumph. These images help

Parvana and Nadia to find their way through life, and therefore flavor their journey into the unknown with determination and persistence.

By and large, this chapter attempted to answer the question it previously advanced: how did the authors under study reach success in writing about the exteriorization of traumatic memories? In brief, they endowed their characters with psychic fluctuations, ranging from historical resistance, pain persistence, therapeutic assistance and survival insistence. With a critical intention, the chapter strove to offer a rounded picture of memory elusiveness; in fact, it has always been a subject of fascination amongst writers through the literary use of psychoanalytical theories. So, the key to understand war trauma is to roll with the influx of memories, to fall into the dark abyss of history and to break the delicate shell of the traumatized psyche. Only then, shall we reach a conclusion, but we have first to take a backward glance and then a forward step towards life, just the way Parvana and Nadia did. Whatever how far they go and how strong they become, however, those children must be guided by an adult who culminates Nadia's journey at the Turkish border and alleviates Parvana's pains. With this ambiguity, the following chapter looks at whether the night shines brightly to those traumatized children and whether their countries are rescued from the fangs of despotism with the help of the intellectual.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of the Intellectual in Sewing the
Psycho-Historical Chasm in Ellis' Tetralogy
and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*

The author is now viewed to have a therapeutic function in an age of globalised risk and trauma: the author becomes a kind of therapist for the present and a curator of the past (...) This new author is both healer and wounded figure, committed to pushing the boundaries of the novel (towards the infinite) and to exploring the power of fiction in connecting to the globalised world, facilitating our understanding of the suffering of others on a more global scale (Aryan 225).

In a bellicose world that is prone to constant political evils and cultural upheavals, the author's mission in denouncing the atrocities of wars and conflicts becomes urgent. In more accurate terms, the basic duty of war novelists lies in adopting a therapeutic attitude towards the psycho-historical wounds authoritarian regimes provoke and international teams evoke. Within this context of immorality, this last chapter steps in the psychology and the mindset of the intellectual, as projected in reality and fiction. In particular, it endeavours to understand the binary opposition between the occident and the orient that is imbued with an inflammatory discourse on Islamophobia following the 9/11 event. Unlike the previous chapters, this one is much concerned with the role the author/intellectual played in (re)establishing the moral codes that were lost after the 9/11 attacks. To back up this argument, the first section provides a neo-Orientalist reading of Ellis' third volume, *Mud City*, and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* from the standpoint of a universal intellectual. Moreover, the analysis deals with the creation of intellectual characters and the mission they are entrusted with in sewing the psycho-historical chasm. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the refugee crisis, a humanitarian crisis wherein a sequel narrative to trauma pervades the aura of war.

IV.1. The Birth of the Activist Intellectual in the post 9/11 Era

Throughout centuries, the definition, the classification and the role of the intellectual have been subject to a rhizomatic mode of readings, interpretations and valorizations that are perplexing and at times disturbing. The wide range of categorization to which the concept of the intellectual is put means that a single definition is hard to come by. Still, it is well established that a myriad of conceptual frameworks has been brought to the fore on the role of the intellectual in the post-postmodern era, an era that is characterized by high risks and intense traumas, especially in the context of post 9/11 event; hence why the birth of the author as a politically committed, historically reformist and psychologically therapist becomes urgent. Within this context, activist authors such as Deborah Ellis and Naheed Senzai take the floor and reveal the buried truth through forging

narratives of resistance wherein moral values are questioned and brought to the fore.

On the the function of the author in this contemporary world that is haunted and daunted by international lobbies and megalomaniac regimes, “the concept of the author has shifted from the age of the Death of the Author to that of the post-theory era with its reinvigorated moral concepts. This author-function is shifting once again and it is now situated in a world landscape as much as a national one” (Aryan 186). Cautious authors such as Ellis and Senzai, as we shall see in the coming subsections, provide an arena in which universal values confront political abuse and historical bruise. This is the function of the activist war novelist in today’s dire atmosphere: to voice the traumatized voiceless and to defy violent authority.

One the intellectual’s engagement with political issues, it is useful to ponder the question of why should the process of writing a novel include political stance? The answer to this question finds solid grounds in Salman Rushdie’s collection of essays and criticism entitled ‘*Imaginary Homelands*’. He asserts, “It is particularly at times when the state takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, that the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized” (14). Within this paradigm, Ellis and Senzai push the limits of the war novel to a more politicized genre. Furthermore, they indulge in a misty world of abstractions to shape a more realistic crafting of psychological maturation and historical evaluation. Albeit relying on a convoluted mode of narration that speculates between dense literary techniques and stylistic tactics, these authors create order amidst chaos by adding an intellectual touch to their works. In other words, they mend the backbone of their novels with the help of intellectual figures such as, Ammo Mazen in Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo* and Mrs. Weera and Fatana in Ellis’ *The Breadwinner* tetralogy, characters upon which the following section occupies an in-depth analysis.

While the traditional approaches consider the intellectual as a ‘clean’ man who should embrace spiritual values and not mingle in the corrupted world of politics, the modern view of its philosophy insists on the integration of the intellectual in the political arena in order to break the chains of neutrality and impartiality which proved no efficacy in this deeply wounded *zeitgeist* of the contemporary world. Nonetheless, there are common characteristics that are more, or less, relevant to what makes a person incorporate intellectual qualities, a point which the present section strives to discuss. For reasons of space, the present section discusses the role of the intellectual in Syria and Afghanistan as projected in the novels under study. This limitation is necessitated by the comparative nature of the study and the kind of close reading I attempt to perform in this humble thesis.

A contextual examination of the role of the intellectual in the history of war often leads to the same premise: it corresponds to embracing the moral values that help sew the psycho-historical chasm. Indeed, yesterday's intellectual is neither today's nor tomorrow's intellectual, the modernist intellectual is not the postmodernist intellectual and the occidental intellectual is certainly not the oriental intellectual. While the war motives change with the advance of technology and global crises, the intellectual has to adapt to these changes in a way that facilitates examining the paranoia of war and provides a cure to the diseased mind and history.

When approaching September 9 attacks, disturbing questions arise: what is the relation between the 9/11 event and the Middle East? Why does the event align with terrorism? How will the event be narrated by Western writers? And where should trauma be located? The answers to these polemical questions have their echoes well-heard in the Middle East, to which the thesis' primary concern pivots, in a world of constant unrests and enormous promises and threats. The aftermath of post 9/11 is argued to give rise to the proliferation of terrorism, Al-Qaeda in particular, and thus war expansion. With a unipolar entity, the balance is especially not maintained as it lacks a scale (a threat) to compete for maintaining supremacy, especially with the emerging rivals such as China. My

point is that historical events are connected and relative; hence why the traumatic experience of war invasion in Iraq, Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern countries falls in line with comparison: countries that are de facto separated geographically yet united in trauma experience. In all cases, the context encapsulates the loss of thousands people and the displacement of millions refugees, in addition to countless mentally and physically wounded subjects.

IV.1.1. The post 9/11 Event and the Growth of Islamophobic Discourse: An Intertextual Reading of Global Trauma

The counterpoint to the Western trauma discourse of 9/11, which leans on a racist narrative towards Muslims and Arabs, follows shortly after Bush's campaign of global 'War on Terror'. A number of intellectuals undertake initiatives to counteract the alleged association of terrorism with Islam. Through literature, being the core medium through which impartial reality is unfold, targeted writers reflect cogently upon the discriminatory images that seem to be standardized as commonsensical assumptions by the West. They offer a critique of, and a comment on, the sufferings vulnerable people endure to bring trauma to trial and to release traumatic memories from the Western prison. In doing so, literature helps accelerate the healing of both the psyche and the culture so that future generations find solace in remembering and reading historical legacies of a distorted past.

A good example of the post 9/11 literature is Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a work which engages with the aftermaths of the tragic event from an oriental perspective. Through Changez, the protagonist, the writer forges a narrative that provides the reader with a rounded picture of how the "Western gaze", which embeds civilization, itself pivots on violent and immoral attitudes towards some countries, including his own, Pakistan. More than that, the writer endows his character with trauma manifestations and the feeling of loss that together shape the psychological unrests some immigrants undergo after the tragic event. To quickly summarize the arguments and by pointing out to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Leila Halaby argues that "extreme

times call for extreme reactions, extreme writing” (Washingtonpost). That is how the twofold attempt of *‘Moving the Centre’* and *‘Decolonizing the Mind’*, to use Ngugi Wa Thiong’o formulas, from the confines of the occident’s prejudices starts to orchestrate an intertextual dialogue over the biased perception of Muslims. Based on this dominant prejudice, it is certainly difficult, yet not impossible, to end the Western demonization of Muslims and refute the utopia it highlights upon the application of democracy. To achieve such a delicate goal, trauma appears a potent literary theme to not only mend the broken psyche but also assess the entombed history and sew the different chasms it creates.

One can also add that historical trauma triggers what LaCapra calls an ‘agonistic component’ in the context of conflicts. He further explains that “dialogic relations are agonistic and non-authoritarian in that an argument is always subject to a response or counterargument” (LaCapra 709). This falls in perfect line with the post 9/11 context where an intellectual wave of denunciation starts to loom over academia. Reference is here made not only to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism but also to that of neo-Orientalism which puts flesh on the bones of central questions regarding binary oppositions between the West and the non-West worlds. In short, orientalism supplements neo-orientalism in that both concepts critique the occident stereotyped representation of the orient; the latter is specifically a reaction to post 9/11 islamophobic misconceptions upon Islam and Muslims. Whatever case, history proved to be distorted again and manipulated by the West, and therefore displays an aura of trauma narratives that aim at testifying against eclipsed realities as well as voicing buried archives.

In accordance with the comparative nature and its intertextual relation, the out-group writers then sought to liberate the Western dyed portrayal of their culture from the falsified literary stereotypes that often dehumanize, downgrade and decenter their existence. In so doing, Middle Eastern writers/intellectuals rewrite their version of the broken psyche and history that are mainly linked to political repression. To achieve this, they resort to testimony in order to denounce, to remember, to heal, to construct and to unmask buried layers of

mutated history. That is how discourses of trauma become common in the MENA literature and are indivisible from the psychological, political, economic, historical and social situation of the unstable region.

Apart from neo-Oriental reading, it is important to note that studies on trauma narratives have well-stretched arms in postcolonial studies. This is mainly because historical accidents –colonialism and imperialism- are what makes trauma plague vulnerability by psychological unrests. In the case of postcolonial Algeria, for example, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) theorizes the psychological relation between the colonizer and the colonized that is based on a system of domination and a violent traumatic experience. It is within one's crisis that Fanon believes in the construction of resistance and resilience. He states that colonialism "dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, turns him into an animal, and it is precisely at the moment he realizes [his] humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure his victory" (36). What Fanon draws upon is the idea that trauma, if identified by the victim, heats up the value of self-discovery and eradicates the illusion of binary opposition between the colonized and the colonizer.

Under these circumstances, Fanon further introduces the persona of a 'revolutionary' intellectual –the one who has an independent spirit and a decolonial thinking. He argues, "the combined effort of the masses led by a party and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle class, [the national bourgeoisie]" (Fanon 175). By "useless and harmful middle class", it must be stressed, Fanon addresses the black intellectual who wears a white mask and takes power after independence. In other words, the African politician who, according to Fanon, is a product of colonial education due to the influence he inherited from the colonizer and the ideological assimilation he underwent. Under such a toxic influence, the educated African leader oppresses his people and goes as far as to plunder the wealths of his country, just the way the colonizer previously did. To better understand Fanon's philosophy upon the

revolutionary intellectual, a good example would be Ngugi's *Petals of blood* (1977). Set in post-independent Kenya, the novel highlights the poisonous alliance between Western educated local leaders and foreign traitors, stressing the exploitation of the peasants and their lands. Under such oppressive conditions, villagers go on strike and revolt against the treason of capitalist African leaders with the assistance of revolutionary intellectuals, namely Karega. It is to this neo-colonial monster, which adopts Western attitudes and betrays moral values, that Ngugi embraces a Fanonian trajectory and launches a call for action, a call for revolution that could only be achieved by the *grinta* of "Matigari" against the "Devil on the Cross".

A more interesting, and a more theorized, examination of Ellis and Senzai's novels could be made by espousing Fanon's concept of 'revolutionary' intellectual. They, too, respond to the call for action and join the intellectual revolution Fanon launches, yet in a different way and in a different context. In the post 9/11 era, these authors are decolonized from the Western immoral plan of the war on terror. In fact, the revolutionary intellectual in them revolves around the universal attitudes they embrace; they denounce the evil that is caused by both local assaults and Western faults. Although Fanon deals with a different context than that of the post 9/11, his arguments on the concept of revolutionary intellectual are applicable on the authors under study. As the curtain shall lift in the coming subsection, Ellis and Senzai's call for action is responded to by espousing tenets of neo-orientalism, just the way Fanon begets the revolutionary intellectual like a phoenix rising from the ashes of neo-colonialism.

What might be striking is also the psychological impact of colonialism on the colonized people which triggers a will to fight insidious wounds. In other words, trauma implies the process of decolonization in the sense that the psyche releases remnants of disturbing memories and copes with the past traumatic experience⁴⁵. This does especially not mean the end of the suffering, for the legacy of colonialism remains timelessly vivid in the form of an invisible, yet

⁴⁵ On these issues, see Visser, I. (2011). *Trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47(3), 270–282.

existing ghost that unexpectedly visits the traumatized back and forth. Here comes the importance of narration which, in all its forms, fosters the healing process. It must be stressed that literature is the potent vehicle which transforms the wounds into words and brings redemption to the broken world. Thus, the pivotal role of literature and writers in narrating, representing and dramatizing historical trauma, opens up therapeutic facilities. One might not shallowly anticipate the complex process in order to avoid confusions and illusions. To better understand how trauma changes its psychological face by taking geo-political dimensions, another context must be addressed critically, that of Iraq. The latter serves the purpose of advancing an orientalist reading of the post 9/11 event and setting the floor for a fuller and larger picture of hostility to see how the event entails a split in opinions. This, it should be remembered, has already been hinted to⁴⁶, and that is the way some western authors, including the authors under study, respond to it in a universal way and without bias.

There can be no doubt that the Iraqi case occupies the headlines of 9/11 aftermaths' narratives. In fact, the situation in Iraq has its political particularity wherein a major reason is concerned with natural resources, oil in particular, and much less with its geographical position. Being located at the heart of the MENA region, it should be emphasized, makes supreme powers scurry for securing dominance there. To blur both the capital thirst and the imperialist strategy, however, America forges an Iraqi narrative that revolves around either being engaged with the production of mass destruction weapons or having relations with Al-Qaeda. Such a narrative renders Iraq a threat to the West which, in turn, warrants international interference. Interviewed by Geov Parrish, Chomsky asserts that America's invasion of Iraq transcends terrorism threat. In his terms,

the U.S. invaded Iraq because it has enormous oil resources, mostly untapped, and it's right in the heart of the world's energy system. Which means that if the U.S. manages to control Iraq, it extends enormously its strategic power, what Zbigniew Brzezinski calls its "critical leverage" over Europe and Asia. Yeah, that's a major reason for controlling the oil resources — it gives you strategic power. Even

⁴⁶ For a cursory view, see page 42. Besides, further elaboration will follow in the next subsection.

if you're on renewable energy you want to do that. So that's the reason for invading Iraq, the fundamental reason.⁴⁷

Furthermore, in his thought-provoking book entitled *Hegemony of Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Noam Chomsky believes that the invasion of Iraq has no relation with the 9/11 incident nor with terrorism -albeit it superficially seems to be the case. Rather, "the basic principle is that hegemony is more important than survival" (83). This suffices to understand how the politics of democracy is merely used as a justification of violence. Moreover, it evidences America's imperialist encroachment. This is metaphorically projected in Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) with the fictive creation of a monstrous project that personifies Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime. He declares, "the monster itself was their project. It was the Americans who were behind this monster"⁴⁸. Again, Chomsky criticizes America's (im)moral values towards humanity, values based on freedom, equality and peaceful stability, yet not always applicable to the non-Western world. In one of his interviews with Iran's Press TV, he blatantly states that Bush administration on the launching of the 'war on terror' campaign is fuelled with "criminal" and "illegal" attitudes. What is even more striking is that he goes as far as to impeach the American mind over the terrorist narrative of 9/11 event, in addition to the way military actions on the Gulf countries were legitimized so as to facilitate imperialist ideologies. He declares that "there is a lot of fairy tales (...) we later discovered one of the reasons why they could not present evidence: they did not have any". This makes Iraq a focal point vis-à-vis "securing US hegemony in the Middle East, hence why "the world oil reserve" is subject to dominance (Hinnebusch 220).

⁴⁷This quote is taken from an e-book version, hence why one shall digest the absence of the page number in the in-text citation.

⁴⁸This quote, along with the next one that is similarly extracted from the same novel, is taken from an e-book version, hence why one shall digest the absence of the page number in the in-text citation.

Uncertain of a bright future in Iraq due to the constant violence, occupation and corruption, Saadawi pessimistically deduces that there is no remedy for his country to be healed and his people to overcome the intense trauma of war. Through the ambitious journalist, Mahmoud, an intellectual, the writer stresses how deep feelings of despair and loss reside in the subconscious mind of Iraqi intellectuals who appear lost between war and national struggles. He writes, “Mahmoud thought back to his theory about the three kinds of justice, but he wasn’t convinced it was valid. It was anarchy out there; there is no logic behind what was happening” (Saadawi), a language that indeed holds the bitter truth from within a surrealist mode of narration. Faced with the spectre of constant war, psychological unrests is no less staggering.

Accordingly, the Iraqi case helps better understand how trauma embraces a changing face by inviting the intellectual and entrusting him with the task of denouncing. It is not only the psyche that needs to be repaired but also the history, the culture, the identity, the society and all that comes within the making of the nation at large. This fleeting glimpse of post 9/11 attacks might lead us to the conclusion that, albeit its occurrence on the American soil, the aftermaths of the 9/11 event explode dramatically in the Middle East, Afghanistan and, much less, elsewhere. Furthermore, it symbolizes the failure of democracy as well as the hidden face of capitalism that appears embedded with an imperial evil spirit. So, the underlying assumption of this sub-section is that the post 9/11 attacks reinforce the binary opposition between Muslims and non-Muslims; hence why violence intensifies and trauma follows up.

It must be acknowledged that one is neither normalizing nor minimizing the damage that left Americans themselves in a vulnerable condition⁴⁹. Rather, the aim is to simply underscore the anxieties of conflicts in the Middle East as an

⁴⁹ On this matter, a selective reading-list that includes, but is not limited to, voices of 9/11 from an American, Western by extension, perspective is provided. See: Welsh David Llewellyn's *Eleven* (2006), Alex Berenson's *The Faithful Spy* (2006), Andre Dubus' *The Garden of Last Days* (2008), Jay McInerney 's *The Good Life* (2006), Ian McEwan' *Saturday* (2005), Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2003), John Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *The Falling Man* (2007).

outcome of 9/11 narrative wherein democracy appears but an illusionary dogma that is imposed by the West in the form of a poisoned gift. Although democracy as an idea suggests, in one way or another, harmonious virtues and essential decency to the 'common man' as well as the construction of a sane nation, its applicability on the orient bloc evidences failure in achieving freedom, equality and stability. Hence, the philosophy upon democracy should not only be revisited but also demythologized.

More than that, one of the objectives of the present chapter is to determine to what extent a Western author can be faithful to the Orient's historicity and more universal to humanitarian crises in the post 9/11 era. More to the point, it consists in the contention that testifying to the collective experience of war breaks the conventions of diversity in its various forms, including gender, cultural, political and religious affiliations. In other words, the testimonial asset of the war novel consists of universal quality; as such, the genre allows the writer to testify, to accuse and to archive the horrors of war. So, the present analysis, it should be reiterated, endeavors to understand the psychology and the mindset of the intellectual in conflict zones that is highlighted by activist writers, regardless of their non-belongingness to the context of their narratives, they still contribute in the collective building of a world of justice. Although Senzai and Ellis are just foreign spectators, they contribute to the literary enterprise of the war novel genre and craft their narratives with a sensational language that voices the traumatized voiceless and defies the traditional conventions of the author-based experience. Within this universal context, the following subsection touches upon the traces of neo-Orientalism that are adopted by the authors under scrutiny.

IV.1.2. Traces of neo-Orientalism in Ellis' *Mud City* and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*

As examined previously, the twenty-first century is marked by a global chaos and immorality, betraying the ideals of democracy. More precisely, the 9/11 event encourages the growth of a literary output that bears witness to the global

experience of war, despair and loss. This literature of human crisis and vulnerability, in fact, is imbued with a global discourse on trauma, ranging from Western victimization to non-Western aggravation. While occidental writers build a stereotyped narrative towards the Muslim community, oriental writers feel the need to write back to them in order to acquit Islam from the *clichés* associated to it. Apart from the local damage, the trauma of 9/11 attacks extends America's frontiers and expands its geopolitical dimensions; breaking out a global 'War on Terror' campaign. At the global scale, the fear of terrorism, thus, starts to inflict tension on the people's minds, engendering internal and external chaos in Afghanistan and the MENA region.

The binary opposition between the occident and the orient, however, gives also birth to some activist writers who belong to the Western sphere and oppose the inflammatory discourse on Islamophobia. Within this context, both Ellis and Senzai deliberately attack Bush's campaign on 'War on Terror' by infusing their works with a neo-oriental flavor and blaming the West for being a common cause of conflict in Afghanistan and Syria. In doing so, they counteract the alleged association of terrorism with Islam and exonerate both Afghans and Syrians from religious extremism and fundamentalism. Their neo-orientalist visions, as will be shown in this subsection, permeate the illusionary facets of democracy and demythologize its moral principles. Subsequently, the authors problematize how 9/11 attacks maneuver a Western discourse that does not only fuels the orient's war trauma, but also creates a sequel narrative to it.

Senzai, herself considered as an American author despite the Pakistani roots she holds, never passes the ideological litmus test in the biased way the occident wants her to show faithfulness to democracy. Just like Noam Chomsky who openly attacks America's unjustified reason of breaking out a war on terror in Iraq, she comments on the involvement of the western sphere in causing discord through fictionalizing the ramifications of the 9/11 event towards Muslims. In this light, it is possible to argue that the post-war novelists are more concerned with voicing vulnerable people's silent wounds, regardless of the

religion they worship or the nationality they hold. For instance, in an interview, Senzai is given a question on the difficulty and challenges she faces to write about Islam in the post 9/11 era. She replies:

I don't find it difficult to write about faith, in particular Islam, however the challenge comes from having the responsibility to show that Muslims are not illustrative of the stereotypes that dominate the standard narrative. In the West, Islam is constantly portrayed as a violent religion that promotes terrorism, denies human rights and oppresses women. Islamophobia rose drastically after 9/11 and has worsened since the election of President Trump, with his "Muslim Ban" and rhetoric against Islam. (Senzai)⁵⁰

In this case, Senzai adopts a universal attitude in the literary enterprise of the post-war novel genre. It suffices to have a look at the literary output she produces in order to understand the values she cherishes most. Needless to say that Senzai, being a western author, might support islamophobic tenets. She will not, in other words, tolerate the political force that embraces a prejudice against Islam. Her literary works assert the historicity of Middle Eastern countries where Muslims are merely but victims of the racist framed-image of terrorism, namely Afghanistan, India and Syria.

Before addressing the traces of neo-orientalism in the selected novels, it is preferable to succinctly reflect on the concept of Orientalism. The latter, it should be stressed, is difficult to put into a specific theory because it has inconsistent definitions that touch upon interdisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, research on neo-orientalism remains opaque with a plethora of assumptions, especially at the political level which never ceases to bring to the fore versatile questions on power, identity, race and religion, to name but a few key terms. Albeit its versatile nature, one might still need to sharpen an overview on the elusiveness of neo-orientalism.

⁵⁰ This is an e-source; therefore, page number is not provided.

Actually, the term springs from Edward Said's concept of Orientalism⁵¹ and finds contextual meaning in the post 9/11 era where the focus it put on *facts* rather than on *arts* (Rahman 23). In other words, neo-orientalism is further concerned with the binary opposition between the occident and the orient, yet in a more contextual perspective that stresses the discourse on Islamophobia and the western narrative of war on terror following the twin towers attacks. Is it a humanitarian startle, a media maneuver or an irrefutable emergence of a feeling of guilt that gnaws at the dark depths of international consciousness? To such a sensitive question, neo-orientalism strives for eroding the emeralds on the Western product of 9/11 event and examines how it is orchestrated by a camouflage operation, a war on terror, that is guided by the west international alliance.

Along similar lines, the concept of neo-orientalism is adopted by Dag Tuastad in order to "criticize the American neo-colonial and neo-liberal agenda in the Middle East and the superiority of the American values" (Altwaiji 316). So, the peculiarity of neo-orientalism lies in the fact that it "is more tied to the post 9/11 American cultural changes and the retaliation that took place after the attack" (Altwaiji 314). In this context, an intellectual commitment to historicity imposes itself in the contemporary globalized world that is shattered by an ongoing clash and resentment, a world where anyone can start a war but no one knows how to stop it. Accordingly, the present analysis departs from reading Ellis' *Mud City* and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* in these terms, in that it places the authors in the frame of neo-orientalism.

Indeed, the world would function better if the ethics of knowledge production involved the equal recognition of diversity. That is how and why the

⁵¹ In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said claims that it is a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident. Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on (2-3)".

Muslim community appears subject to oppression –a controversial debate which we should heed with caution notwithstanding. In the introduction to her pertinent book *‘Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel’* (2009), Kristiaan Versluys refers to many scholars and critics who show a deep interest in scrutinizing the haziness of understanding 9/11 attacks as a debatable narrative in terms of analysis; yet, it is Dori Laub’s definition that attracts her attention. She points out, “September 11 was an encounter with something that makes no sense, an event that fits in nowhere” (2). Such a definition explains the transnationality and universality of the overwhelming event as its impact travels everywhere, leaving an undesirable stamp on both the psyche and the history.

Within this universal view, the authors under study appear to build their narratives upon the tenets of neo-orientalist philosophy. Before doing so, they supplement their literary agenda with a thorough understanding of political realities, historical verities and people miseries. In brief, they show a deep interest in the critical condition of Afghanistan and Syria, along with other countries that are torn by war atrocities. If one were to ponder the question of what makes a western author blame the occident for causing strife in some countries, as tends to be the case with Ellis and Senzai, he would deduce that it does not have to be a Syrian or an Afghan to be in pain; in fact, it just needs to be an intellectual humane and defend the oppressed, no matter what cultural affiliation you belong. And so, they cogently dwell in the world of neo-orientalism.

For example, in an interview conducted by Jacqueline Houtman, Senzai is asked what kind of meticulous research she went through to get the details right and whether she had concerns over writing about Aleppo, Syria and telling the story of another country that is different from hers. She replies,

This [Escape from Aleppo], as with most of my books, was very research intensive, and I spend months absorbing and cataloging information! I’m lucky that I’ve lived and travelled in the Middle East for fifteen years, and have many friends in the region. It also helps that my husband teaches Middle East politics at Santa Clara University and he helped in putting the history and politics of the

region in perspective. I spoke to many journalists and Syrians who shared first-hand accounts of the terrible conflict. (Senzai)⁵²

In acknowledging her non-belonging to the Syrian culture and the Arab community, Senzai espouses Benda's concept of 'humanism' which is defined as "a pure passion of the intelligence, implying no terrestrial love" (Benda 80). By 'terrestrial love' is meant all that nourishes the evils of classism among people, such as nationality, race, culture, ethnicity and religion. These determinants are parasites of diversity; they are, in Wilkinson's terms, "corrupters of the soul, enemies of the moral primacy accorded to spiritual matters and to the perception of universals" (Wilkinson 1). In another interview she adds, "once I had a draft of the novel I had Syrian readers review it to make sure I was not missing or misrepresenting things, though I'm sure I've made mistakes!" This suffices to place Senzai in the orient. Likewise, when Ellis is interviewed on what makes her write *The Breadwinner* and how the writing process achieves historical authenticity despite her non-affiliation to Afghanistan, she reveals that being an activist woman, helps her engage with vulnerable subjects, Afghans in particular. In her words,

I traveled alone, but when you travel as a woman, you get to go into the world of women and children. I would meet another woman and she would introduce me to her friends. I was very lucky in that I met women who were very well connected into the camps, and they knew a lot of people. They had all been kicked out of Afghanistan together, and so that's kind of how I moved through the area. I did interviews for an [adult] book called *Women of the Afghan War*, so that was the initial project. Then when I heard the stories of kids, I decided to do *The Breadwinner*. (Ellis)⁵³

Accordingly, both Senzai and Ellis equip themselves with vivid testimonies in order to properly voice Afghans' muted sores and Syrians' silent gores. More than that, they supply their narratives with adequate literary techniques to draw a faithful image of human vulnerability, to construct a clear vision on the historical crisis and to frame a dark silhouette of political evilness. Nevertheless some

⁵² This interview is retrieved from an e-source; therefore, page number is not provided.

⁵³ Again, this interview is retrieved from an e-source; therefore, page number is not provided.

critics might find them somewhat shallow and might even take them as unfaithful westernized writers whose literary output is merely but an attempt to dye a fake image of sympathy and implicitly declare the occident innocent. In my opinion, there seems to be no doubt that Ellis and Senzai are Machiavellian in taking side with the orient subject. Their humanist takes on the war that strikes Afghanistan and Syria say otherwise. Apart from criticizing local regimes, they also object the west's involvement in the orient, for it heats up political upheavals and humanitarian crises. This is apparent in their novels through espousing neo-orientalist tenets, as it will be shown in the remaining paragraphs of this subsection.

To begin with, Senzai provides a critique of, and a comment on, America's intentional blindness vis-à-vis the crisis in Syria. What is more threatening is then America, the supreme power, the decision making nation in critical conditions and the champion of both humans' rights and children's rights, proves incapable to maintain global welfare, to anticipate peace' solutions and to protect vulnerable people. This is projected in one of the incidents where Nadia and Ammo Mazen are interrupted by a passing woman who appears extremely anxious about the critical conditions in Syria regarding the illegal use of chemical weapons,

The old woman's face tightened in disgust. "That American president, what did he say? If the devil Assad uses chemical weapons, that would cross a red line and would have consequences! Ha, the line has been crossed, but he and the west do nothing but watch us die". (Senzai 117)

This critique orients the debate towards the US foreign policy in Syria, and by extension in the Middle East, and probes its geopolitical strategy. Contrary to the occident sphere where international empathy and intervention precedes further human damage, as it can be evidenced in the recent case of Ukraine and the evacuation of the white skin from Russia's deadly forces, the orient remains often –if not always- ignored in the context of wars. Despite, or because of, the military presence of America near Syria's borders, in an area between Jordan and

Iraq, it does neither take action in appeasing political tensions nor prevents human loss, such as the Ghouta catastrophe, as examined in the previous chapter, which deepens the violence and extends the trauma. Hence, it is to this non-interference that the author shows disappointment towards the position of America vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. Furthermore, Senzai's critique of the West non-alignment symbolizes, on the one side, the West's tolerance of conflict and, on the other, the failure of democracy, which supposedly embraces principles that protect the world from harm.

Along similar lines, Senzai goes as far as to criticize both the local damage and the international poisoned package which Syria is immersed in. Moreover, she even blames the United Nations for turning a blind eye on what is happening in Syria. To illustrate, she draws a daring image of political evils, signaling the depiction of the occident's neglect through the insertion of an American journalist character whose name happens to be Aymen, for he has Egyptian origins. The latter enters the narrative when Ammo Mazen and the children caught the attention of "a pack of men in civilian clothes" (Senzai 228), providing them with some details about the safest roads. For a better understanding, one might attend to Aymen's report on the situation of Syria from the lens of the west,

"There are rumors that Assad plans to encircle Aleppo and cut rebel supply lines into the city. But it's not just the government," he added, voice falling an octave as he eyes his companions. "Rebel groups, including foreign fighters, are carrying out atrocities against civilians. There are bombings, executions, kidnappings, and torture".

"What is the outside world doing?" asked Tarek, aghast.

Ayman's nostrils flared. "The Americans, Europeans, and others sit at the United Nations bickering, while the Syrian foreign minister pompously tells them that Syria is not engaged in a civil war but a war on terror.

"War on terror," muted the man who'd made their tea [another American journalist]. He had an ugly gash across his forehead. "The only terrorist is Assad!"

A boy, barely in his teens, rose in the back and kicked a metal can, muttering, "No one cares if we die". (Senzai 230-231)

Although briefly mentioned, the author refers to the war on terror and the way it implicitly paves the way for the framing of a narrative known as the Arab Spring, causing a split in opinions. On the one hand, the man's monocular eye view on the terrorization of al-Assad serves for the west *camouflage*; on the other hand, Ayman's blaming of supreme powers for not considering the Syrian's foreign minister possible reasoning signals the west's confidentiality and non-disclosure of dark politics in the post 9/11 era. In the end, the boy's innocent take on the situation debunks both the occident and the orient of irresponsibility and strips them equally from morality.

Of similar interest, Ellis openly alludes to the 9/11 event and casts light on how its aftermaths further beget turmoil in Afghanistan. As highlighted in the first chapter, it is important to reiterate that in the wake of the hit, America inserts the profiles of Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban regime to its domestic agenda as the masterminds of the assault. As a result, the justification of a military intervention paves the way for America, along with its allies, to stretch its arms in Afghanistan. More precisely, "On 7 October [2011] US attacks began, with British participation, using cruise missiles and aircraft", resulting in a global war trauma. (Buckley, Fawn 15). As *Mud City* unfolds, Shauzia appears worried about a huge crowd gathered in the borders of Afghanistan, willing to escape their country before America avenges the human loss of the twin towers attacks. She curiously inquires,

"Who are they?" Shauzia asked.

"They've just left Afghanistan," the aid worker told her. "People are rushing to get across the border before the Americans attack."

"The Americans are going to attack?"

"They're angry about what happened in New York City."

"What happened?"

The aid worker kept one hand on the steering wheel while he fished around on the floor with his other.

"Here it is." He handed Shauzia a piece of newspaper he had found.

Shauzia looked at the photograph. Smoke poured out of the mangled remains of a building.

"Looks like Kabul," she said, letting the paper drop back to the floor.

She leaned her head against the window. The people they drove past did not look strong enough to blow up anything. (*Mud City* 145-146)

So, the passage has to be read in its proper historical context, that of the post 9/11 attacks and, more precisely, during America's invasion of Afghanistan. In fact, Ellis resorts to such a historical allusion in order to bring to the attention the infliction of another trauma from the other's perspective. In an interesting representation of the war, Shauzia makes a comparison between New York and Kabul where she normalizes the bombing of the twin towers. To the reader, this comparison bespeaks conflicting narratives coming out at odds with each other. While the occident justifies Bush's administration of the war on terror, the orient condemns it. As for the author's position, the passage ends with a neo-orientalist frame. By putting Afghan people in a vulnerable position and highlighting America's potential attack, Ellis appears to write back to America, and therefore exonerates Afghans from the 9/11 crimes.

In another striking scene, Ellis ventures in revealing America's internalization of discriminatory images towards Afghans. This is projected in *Mud City*, as will be shown thoroughly in the last section, where Shauzia is put in the care of an American family in Pakistan. Barbara, the wife of an American engineer, declares: "I'd love to take the boys swimming this afternoon. We go to the American Club. I wish I could take you, but it's only for ex-patriots. You know, foreigners (Mud City 105). This suffices to understand the racist profiling Americans frame towards Afghans. Clearly, Shauzia does not meet Americanness' requirements. Instead, she is ideologically constructed as a threat. This incident strengthens the in-depth reflection on the way the Orient is colored by a western image, an image framed by clichés which propagate not only otherness and foreignness but also terrorism.

In this sense, the 9/11 event forges a delicate narrative of dehumanization, cultivating the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident bloc. What is more threatening is that a Western narrative of terrorism emerges towards the Arab/Muslim community. The latter decenters as much as downgrades the labelled oriental subject from a human to a sub-human representation. In this fashion, a myriad of distorted images circulate at odds with Muslim immigrants

who were associated with terrorism. These distorted images vouch for the idea that “Islam has become a center of fear (i.e., Islamophobia). Muslims have been debunked and portrayed in much of Western scholarship as the exotic other, the enemy imagined or real, and the despotic, antidemocratic, and terroristic” (El-Aswad & El-Sayed 41). There are some words in the passage that need to be stopped at, namely ‘American Club’, ‘ex-patriots’ and ‘foreigners’. By using such words, Ellis highlights a tiny part of the differential treatment that Afghans are subject to. Additionally, the image she draws is carried along with discriminatory bases which can influence the perception of who the other really is: is it the non-western individual who is home or the westerner who not only comes to the orient and takes advantage of its wealth, but also mistreats its people and subverts its history.

Ultimately, Ellis and Senzai reliance on a neo-orientalist ground in the selected novels functions as a criticism against the occident’s interference in Afghanistan and Syria. Similar to the Taliban and al-Assad regimes, America and its allies, too, provoke sedition in the region. Moreover, neo-Orientalism serves the purpose of projecting the meaninglessness of the war on terror and the suspicious fabrication of 9/11 attacks. Actually, the traces of neo-orientalist tenets in Ellis’ *Mud City* and Senzai’s *Escape from Aleppo*, it should be stressed, do not make the authors anti-occidental. Rather, they place them in the category of universal intellectuals, which is merely but an attempt to raise the orient out of the discriminatory frame and to counteract the alleged association of terrorism with the orient subject after the twin towers attacks. And so, both the occident and the orient are described evil, enemy and treacherous. This presentation is meant to convey the ultimate truth behind human nature as well as politics; namely, the fact that evil is present in all of us and in every political doctrine, including democracy, and that the contemporary world is inhabited by insidious traits. To defend the oppressed and to defy the oppressive, regardless of one’s belongingness, are some of the duties of the writer/intellectual in this soulless world.

The author is indeed an intellectual. It takes a daring attitude for a western author to sometimes take side with the orient and oppose the occident, but this is his function as an intellectual to dismantle the ideologies of Western politics by denouncing the evil they embrace and by laying bare the hidden discourse they frame towards the orient subject. Neither a disinterest in the noble causes nor a fear of being penalized, nothing could explain the immoral intervention of the west in Afghanistan and Syria; hence why the western writer should be universal and showcase the bias the occident circulates regarding the 9/11 assault. To better understand the psychology and mindset of the intellectual, a shift from the author-based approach to the thematic study imposes itself. In what follows, attention will be focused on the intellectual's role in war torn countries and the duties he is entrusted with, as proposed by Ellis and Senzai in their novels. More precisely, the next section is devoted to the analysis of domestic errands and sacrifices the intellectual, himself traumatized, makes in his pursuit of sewing the psycho-historical chasm.

IV.2. The Intellectual's Errands and Sacrifices amidst the War

In its essence, literature embraces the triumph of moral values despite the prevalence of evil in the contemporary world. To be sure, there is a tendency in the war novel genre to restore ethics by appealing for the participation of the intellectual in redeeming the world from corruption. To reflect on the concept of the intellectual in general, and the role of the intellectual in conflict zones in particular, the authors under study insert anxious characters who risk their lives in a dauntless display of purging both the history and the mind from the fiends of war trauma. Charged with accomplishing noble errands, these characters are also the epitome of wounded healers.

In an attempt to unleash the nauseous psyche from the fiends of war trauma, as previously pinpointed in chapter two and three, both Ellis and Senzai endow their protagonists with the healthy construction of a resistant mind and a resilient soul. Yet, these seem not sufficient, as Parvana and Nadia's journey into the unknown lacks essential ingredients of survival. They need a helping hand to

lift them up whenever inner pains drag them down, and a guiding star to bring them out of the dark atmosphere they are thrown in. More than that, the bleeding history, too, needs protection and assistance: protection from the fierce fangs of despotic regimes and assistance in bearing witness to human sufferings. Hence, they create intellectual characters to help children as well as history partially heal from war atrocities and endow them with different missions.

As examined in the two previous chapters, immersed in a reservoir of conflicting feelings and random emotional outbursts, both Parvana and Nadia spin in the dark void of trauma; not knowing what is going on and how to handle the overwhelming situation in which they are victims of an evil political game. And in order to fill in that void of inner pains, as will be shown in this section, they are put in the care of adult intellectuals; guided by their moral principles and reminded of their humane qualities. Indeed, an engagement with this healthy relationship would complete the missing piece of what is left out of the picture—a distorted one that stems from the inner to outer struggle. In the following two subsections, the focus is put on the examination of the anxious characters who are created by Ellis and Senzai and who take the role of intellectuals. These are Ammo Mazen in *Escape from Aleppo*, and Mrs. Wera and Fatana in Ellis' tetralogy.

IV.2.1. The Incarnation of a Syrian Male Intellectual through Ammo Mazen

Since its instant enrollment in *Escape from Aleppo*, the character of Ammo Mazen adds wisdom and resistance to trauma narrative. He is depicted as an old man who engages in accomplishing various errands and “devotes himself to saving artifacts, finding medicine, locating family members taken by the Mukhabarat, and helping some children to safety” (Nocholls 14). With a charismatic entrance and a sedative presence, he helps Nadia and other traumatized children make their ways through life, despite the psychological unrests that haunt their fragile minds. So, Ammo Mazen incarnates the role of a father and the healer. He takes them in a spiritual journey where he teaches them

universal values that stem from religion. These include faith, patience, tolerance, respect and sharing, to name but a few. Furthermore, he embarks on a moral journey towards healing the body, the mind and the ills of history.

For instance, when Nadia is depicted at her lowest time after her family left her behind, she could not help but succumb to the power of anger. This appears in one of her desperate declarations, “I hate them ... and I hate Assad ... and this war ... everything” (Senzai 92). Such a moment of weakness appeals to Ammo Mazen’s sensibility; he responds: “I understand your anger, but have mercy on them, my child. It must have torn their hearts in half to leave. In these trying times it is easy to be poisoned by anger” (Senzai 92). This suffices to qualify Ammo Mazen as someone who, instead of being triggered by impulsive anger outbursts and aggression, prioritizes those spiritual values that appease inner pressures. And so, his reaction is a projection of wisdom and faith in morality.

In another striking incident, Nadia’s anguish induces her not only to lose faith in life but also to question divine matters. In a lengthy discussion on looking for spiritual meaning, she learns how the tragic trials life brings are viewed as not only reminders of suffering, but as of wellspring. In another shocking declaration, Nadia asks:

“Why does Allah hate us? Tarek stared at her, horrified.

“Nadia,” Ammo Mazen said, voice soft. “Allah does not hate us. He does not hate anyone.”

“Then why is this happening to us?” She waved her arms at the destruction around them.

Ammo Mazen smiled. “We have been given free will to make choices on how we live our lives, and how we use the blessings given to us.”

“Nadia, my child,” said Ammo Mazen, muffling his coughs.

“Despite Allah’s magnificence and majesty, the two qualities most attributed to him are compassion and mercy. And just because those around us are not merciful and compassionate, we should not turn away from following his example.”

“It’s in our hands, my dear,” said Ammo Mazen. “Always in our hands . . . to choose mercy and compassion, or be lost in a sea of inhumanity”. (Senzai 241-242)

Accordingly, there is a spiritual malaise which inhabits Nadia's mind. It is necessary here to draw attention to Julien Benda's contribution on the concept of the intellectual. Benda suggests the premise that the intellectual, the *clerc*, should be above political passions and never engage in the political aspect of the country so as not to jeopardize the moral values. In his seminal book *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927) -English for *The Treason of the Intellectuals*- he argues that pacifism is of cardinal significance in the qualification of the intellectual. In his terms,

It is the moral view that makes the intellectual – the cleric – embrace peace as the supreme value and essentially condemns any use of power. We, however, reject this view from all angles and believe that the clergyman is perfectly within his role by admitting the use of power, even calling for it, as long as it serves only justice, provided that he does not forget that it is only a temporary necessity and never a value in itself. (Translation mine)⁵⁴

The intellectual, to Benda, is someone who believes that violence –including war- is unjustifiable and should be settled by peaceful means. Like a clerk and a chosen prophet, Senzai endows Ammo Mazen with ethical rules and values that are incumbent upon him to use them for the benefit of humanity. Starting as a 'rare' intellectual, he invests his life in helping people restore hope, planting faith in their barren souls and detaching himself from political affiliations that corrupt both the nation and the individual. Hence, Senzai uses the persona of the intellectual and endows him with spirituality as an indispensable means to humanness. In brief, she is preoccupied with ethical concerns in a soulless world. And so, she succeeds in fictionalizing and personifying Benda's clerk, also known as a 'rare' intellectual, through the creation of a male character.

⁵⁴ This is to inform the reader that despite the existing of the translated version of the book, it does not perform the retrieved quote; hence, the need to translate it myself. The following is the original quote: "c'est la thèse qui veut que l'homme moral – le cleric – tienne pour valeur suprême la paix et condamne par essence tout usage de la force. Nous la rejetons de tous points et estimons que le cleric est parfaitement dans son rôle en admettant l'emploi de la force, voire en l'appelant, dès qu'elle n'agit qu'au service de la justice, à condition qu'il n'oublie pas qu'elle n'est qu'une nécessité temporaire et jamais une valeur en soi" (Benda 32).

In one of his accomplished errands, probably the noblest one, Ammo Mazen takes Nadia and Basel to a dark building where cries of wounded history are heard; signaling a window to the ethos of Syria. By humanizing history, Senzai presses on the reader's faculty of empathy. Furthermore, such a literary tool adds reality to fiction. And so, the reader cannot help but get goose bumps when attending the scene. The spot happens to be run by Leila Safi, a professor who used to administer "the archaeology department at the university and is now leading a heroic effort to preserve our history (Senzai 163), and her husband Rasheed who used to be "the proprietor of the most successful bookstore in the city [Aleppo]" (Senzai 164). Through these two characters, Senzai presses hard on the role of the intellectual in conflict zones. There, Nadia stares at "a group of dusty statues with missing heads, arms, and legs stood in one section, paintings in another, stacked carefully" (Senzai 161). Indeed, these visual objects that embrace cultural and historical heritage give the vibes that one is visiting a museum.

More than a book repairer, Ammo Mazen's circle of connection goes beyond books collection. He has an intellectual network that stretches the boundaries of art and literature, and pushes the limits of humanities. Upon their entrance inside the building, the children are fascinated by the evocative smell, taste and touch that emanate from the surface of each object. Leila explains, "This is a place where we are fighting a great battle. Our network of helpers collects historical treasures so that we can protect them before they can be destroyed, stolen, or carted off to be sold on the black market (Senzai 163). With this moral duty, Senzai broaches a sensitive subject regarding the protection of history from evil forces. Indeed, an archeologist is committed to healing history from the inflammatory cells caused by war trauma, and therefore falls in line with the incarnation of the intellectual. In this way, Leila is classified within the category of what Foucault names a 'specific' intellectual. The latter, according to Foucault, "ha[s] a direct and localized relation with scientific knowledge and institutions" (12). And so, Laila's knowledge and expertise in the field of

archeology is what prompts her to engage in collecting valuable objects that are pertinent to Syria's history.

In a country that is torn between local stab and international trap, as in the case of Syria, historical heritage is not safe from destruction, theft or crafting. And one can only think of the British Museum to see how a plethora of valuable treasures that belong to the Pharaonic civilization are taken from their home (Egypt) under colonial domination and imperial equation. More than just a typical British Museum, it is one of the museums which hold the largest collection of Egyptian historical treasures. The intention here is far from attacking British imperialism but, if truth be told, the seizure of such a heritage bespeaks the violation of a rich culture, a glorious history and a great civilization. Thus, Laila's fear of historical loss reflects Senzai's boldness to highlight a sensitive subject when it is barely tackled in an age of risks. After all, both embark on an intellectual journey towards sewing the psycho-historical chasms.

Another important image that is drawn by the author is that of museums which are, too, in pain because of the violent war. This time, Senzai goes as far as to provide a vivid splash of devotion to duty regarding the harmful impact of the war on history. Through Professor Laila Safi, she stresses the intellectual's massive efforts in making sure historical artifacts are not destroyed. The following excerpt touches upon the matter:

"I've heard news that forty percent of the city's ancient landmarks have been damaged or destroyed since the war began."

Forty percent? thought Nadia, shocked. That's nearly half!

Most of the museum in the country, and all six of Syria's World Heritage sites, have been affected in one way or another," she continued. "It makes the work we are doing all the more important."

"The one blessing in this catastrophe is that the mutual love for our history and art has both sides of the war working together," said Rasheed. "We just learned that rebel-friendly archaeologists and the locals of Idlib brokered an agreement with the army to put valuable artifacts behind a thick layer of concrete in the local museum, sealing it off."

"Good news indeed," Ammo Mazen said, nodding. (Senzai 164)

What the incident draws upon is the idea that, in war zones, all that is related to history should be kept afar; for, the body of a country risks losing some of its noble organs. In this context, it goes without saying that museums play an important role in the making of a nation's history. If we were to imagine ourselves roaming in a country which does not have museums, we would sink in the emptiness of loss; not having the necessary map of finding our way through the anonymous world. No hint of identity, no signs of history and no marks of culture are there to help us decipher what county we are thrown in. In brief, museums are the facet of identity, the edifice of history and the window into the nation's culture. Syrian museums, where a great civilization's archives and heritages are collected, are prone to evaporation. Thus, it is the intellectual's mission to respond to the cries of history, to react against the fiends of war and to save the country from historical erosion.

Senzai's approach to the cries of history drives us to probe deeper into the mindset of the intellectual, and to ponder the question of how Ammo Mazen, the "ever-resourceful" man, could succeed in saving Syria's past from the evil of the present. So, he forms healthy bonds with different people in Aleppo, regardless of their different currents and vantage points, for one reason: to collect the historical items that bear witness to Syria's glorious past. In a cart that is pulled by a donkey, Ammo Mazen leaves no place in Aleppo where a tangible trace of history is found. With his intellectual asset, he attunes to the needs and expectations of the audience; an audience that revered the Syrian loyalty and devotion to history. One might attend to the dialogue between Laila and Ammo Mazen to imagine, feel and empathize with the ills of history:

"Were you able to get the items we were after?" Laila asked.

"Yes, my contact in the Syrian army told me where to recover most of them," replied Ammo Mazen.

"Except for the Aramaic scrolls. They were taken by thieves before I could get ahold of them."

Nadia stared at him in surprise. Contact in the Syrian army?

"That is too bad," sighed Laila.

"Everything else is in the cart. With some help, I can fetch them," said Ammo Mazen. (Senzai 165)

Accordingly, the duty of Ammo Mazen towards his country transcends the essence of nationalism and pushes the limits of patriotism. In fact, it arises from an intellectual frustration that the ancient civilization, which sprang out Syria and paved its way to embrace the Arab *Nahda*, is on the verge of expiring. Subsequently, what Ammo Mazen accomplishes is a proof of intellectual devotion and ethical responsibility.

Indeed, very *rare* are those who think of rescuing history in conflict zones. And so *false* are those who pretend patriotism, yet flee from their countries at the first chance they have when their presence is more than needed. More than a 'rare' intellectual, Ammo Mazen is also a 'true' intellectual who, according to Jean Paul Sartre, "becomes aware of the opposition, both within himself and within society, between a search for practical truth (with all the norms it implies) and a ruling ideology (with its system of traditional values)" (246). The definition embodied in this passage applies to Ammo Mazen's case as a man who has a moral awareness vis-à-vis the war in Syria; he fights against the dominant ideologies, takes side with the masses and implements his knowledge for saving history from insidious power. What goes against the title of intellectual, however, is Ammo Mazen's contact with the Syrian army. With this revelation about his involvement in the institution that brought chaos to the country, a sort of sneaking suspicion emerges from Nadia's curiosity and the reader's astucity.

As the novel progresses, and in a plot twist technique, Senzai ventures in convoluting her narrative with a major detail around Ammo Mazen, which makes sense in retrospect. Throughout the novel, Nadia is deeply skeptical about him; "Who is this man, really?", "should I trust him" and "who is looking for him and why?" These are recurring questions which hit Nadia's mind repeatedly. In an endmost instant, the author abruptly reveals the identity of Ammo Mazen who surprisingly happens to have an Alawite background. More than that, he is a former mukhabarat commander. Such a literary technique shocks the storyline, the characters and the readers. In an overwhelming incident, Nadia's curiosity

leads her to open a velvet bag that is hidden in the depth of Ammo Mazen's cart.

To her surprise, a dozen of miscellaneous cards and badges fall down:

They all had pictures of Ammo Mazen at various ages. But the names . . . they're different, she thought. She picked up an old, faded card. A smiling teenager stared back at her, familiar eyes sparkling with amber flecks. The name on the card was Ahmed Mazen Makhlouf. Ahmed. That's what Sulaiman called him. Her eyes fell on the *qayd*, his father or grandfather's village or neighborhood of origin. Qardaha. Ya Allah, she thought, eyes fixed in disbelief. It was the ancestral village of the Assad family, where Hafez and his eldest son were buried. But Ammo Mazen said he was from Aleppo. . . . Her memory sorted through their conversation over the past few days. He said he was from a mountain village . . . but there are no mountains in Aleppo. He had been lying. With shaking fingers, she lifted up an official-looking badge with a middle-aged Ahmed Mazen Makhlouf, face stern, hair dark and wavy. Over a white collared shirt, he wore a black leather jacket. His job, listed on the badge, was that of a commander of the mukhabarat. (Senzai 275)

Through this unexpected and deceitful incident, everyone is left stupefied. Neither Nadia nor the reader is prepared to receive such a bitter truth. As a result, Nadia "felt dizzy with the agony of betrayal, anger, and fear swirling inside her" (Senzai 277). Unable to bear the weight of perfidy, she could not pretend but reveal his secret. In fact, Ammo Mazen joined the mukhabarat because he had good intentions back then. It was a golden opportunity for him to serve his country and contribute to its prosperity. As an Alawite, Ammo Mazen declared, "I was granted many privileges when Hafez came to power (...) I was a young man, hoping to help build a bright new Syria" (Senzai 309). Once a member of the army institution that is ruled by Alawite, the clean vision and the caring attitude he has towards politics in Syria change. He no longer believes in a bright future, for megalomania steps in Syria; causing lingering pain to the people and the country. Disillusioned by the unrealistic dream, Ammo Mazen quits the utopian world and seeks solace in repairing books, clearing his conscience from guilt and regret. He confesses,

“I left the mukhabarat nearly forty years ago,” he said.

“Trained by their terrible work, I pretended I was ill and retreated into books, where there existed new worlds, people, and ideas.”

“Soon after, I stumbled upon a path that led me to become a book repairer. And with my cart, I traveled to every corner of Haleb, meeting historians, bishops, professors, shopkeepers, beggars, archaeologists, and common folk. And as I grew to know them better, they shared their worries with me: a doctor couldn’t find foreign-made medicines he desperately needed, a journalist required a reliable source for story on government corruption, a taxi driver’s son had been taken by the mukhabarat and he couldn’t find which prison he was in. Whenever I could, I used my network of contacts within the secret police, government, and army to help such people find the goods or information they needed. (Senzai 310)

Here, part of the story makes Ammo Mazen incarnate what Michel Foucault calls ‘specific’ intellectual. The latter, as defined previously, raises the people’s consciousness. Metaphorically, he is like a professional choreographer who dances upon the shores of collective awakening where ripples of consciousness embrace the masses. With his reservoir of wisdom and honed skills, he aspires to channel his knowledge and expertise towards the upliftment and welfare of the people. To quote Edward Said, Foucault’s ‘specific’ intellectual is “someone who works inside a discipline but who is able to use his expertise anyway” (Said 10). Although Ammo Mazen seems to fall in line with this definition, he transcends it the moment he pulls himself out of the mukhabarat institution. His expertise in the discipline, however, does not prevent him from using it as a moral pass for helping vulnerable people. And this is what gives his relentless valor the qualities of a rebel intellectual.

Ammo Mazen realizes that Alawites are haunted by intense feelings of revenge –not avenge. In chapter two, the question of how such a minority could defeat the majority was raised. The answer to this question finds its echoes in *Escape from Aleppo*. There is a political awareness that emerges from Ammo Mazen’s cognition, regarding the political upheavals in which Syria is torn. He ascribes the problem to the traumatic history of Alawite, “long ago, under Ottoman rule, they were abused and reviled. Alawite women and children were sold into slavery” (Senzai 77). He adds, “Once Alawites were oppressed, but

when they took power, they used it to oppress others” (Senzai 77). Thus, the oppression which Alawites went through is the source from which their evil springs up. Prompt by a needy urge and a blind obsession to have their power, the Alawites are consumed by a strong desire for revenge; becoming themselves oppressors. In brief, they are worse than what Ammo Mazen imagined. And so, there is a deep sense of guilt and regret in Ammo Mazen that haunts his mind; hence why part of his life is kept concealed. Contrary to Nadia’s prejudices, however, Ammo Mazen is just a victim of his ethnic affiliation.

In a world that is shaped by an eternal battle between good and evil, one does not choose what cultural, social or religious orientation to embrace; yet, becomes a purveyor of moral values. Ammo Mazen’s Alawite background and mukhabarat involvement does not make him a traitor and an oppressor. Rather, these ennoble him with the crown of what I call a *rebel* intellectual: someone who can be neither neutral nor impartial vis-à-vis political dogmas. More precisely, a rebel intellectual sets himself free from the politicized institution under the influence of which he used to be and puts his knowledge at the service of the oppressed, in addition to unveiling the truth of how corrupted the institutions are. This might give the impression that he is a traitor, yet an advocate of morality. In conflict zones, as tends to be the case with Ammo Mazen, the intellectual is seen to have an ethical responsibility to heal the people from psychological *blessures*, to protect the culture from historical *fissures* and to wipe the country from political *salissures*; a kind of “shaman in this new globalised world who attempts to bring about change for good and heal the world” (Aryan 207).

It should be highlighted in passing that, on account of such an evil revenge the Alawites are blindly swallowed by, one can but predict the downfall of an authoritarian regime. After all, a struggle between morality and immorality is what determines the globalized world that is marked by wickedness at the expense of humanness. Yet, the triumph of morality is what heals the ills of the world. Literature has always taught us how the eternal battle between good and evil forces shapes our life. To be sure, one can only think of Captain Ahab, the

protagonist of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), whose desire for revenge leads to his downfall. Just like the Alawite, Ahab, too, is subject to a traumatic event; he lost one of his legs while hunting a white whale named Moby Dick. Chased by feelings of revenge, Ahab declares a war against Moby Dick in which he loses and ends up with a tragic death. Such an intertextual reference is meant to provide a comment on the dark aspect of human nature which is revealed through revenge.

Time finally comes to reach the end of a long journey. Near the borders where her family is supposed to be, Nadia and Basel beg Ammo Mazen and Umm Anous to come with them to Turkey. With a dauntless bravery and courageous sacrifice, Umm Anous replies, "No, my dears, our bones are too weary to leave (...) this is our land, our home. We will be buried here with our forefathers, in the dirt of Syria" (Senzai 312). Martyrdom and sacrifice have an ethical function too. Through refusing to flee Syria, both Umm Anous and Ammo Mazen fulfill what remains from their life with devotion and love to their beloved Syria. And so, "Ammo Mazen's last words ringing in Nadia's ears: I was blessed to have been given the wisdom to leave the mukhabarat. I then chose to journey on a path filled with compassion and mercy. Now it is your turn –be wise in the choices you make" (Senzai 313-314). Guided by a rebel intellectual in her search for family, Nadia's trauma lessens as she makes it safe to the borders with the presence of her father. Educated by Ammo Mazen, she grows resilient and now becomes consilient. In a closing scene, "Nadia caught a flash of a man's bald head and grabbed Basel's hand. The man stood pressed against the gate, staring back into Syria, wearing a bulky olive-green coat that matched the cap on her head" (Senzai 319). And Nadia's journey culminates at the Turkish border, leaving space for uncertain happiness and certain uncanniness. There is a deep sense of confusion in the sense that crossing borders does not guarantee happiness to the traumatized individual; rather, it adds more traumas, a point which will be explored in the last section.

By and large, we have seen how Ammo Mazen's type of intellectual is versatile; ranging from traditional, true, specific and universal to a rebel intellectual. Metaphorically speaking, he symbolizes a paste that fits in various molds. So, Senzai makes him run the risk of a life sentence in persecution or worse. Although he knows all about the dangers of engaging with the accomplishment of risky errands, he braces himself to look in the eye of the tyrant with a raised head and a steady courage. Ammo Mazen is one of the Syrian intellectuals who still exist and whose ongoing commitment to the country's purification is the fruit of their sacrifices to what they cherish the most: the protection of their history from intentional and/or unintentional erasure, in addition to bearing witness to human suffering. In conflict zones, such a commitment is the psychological core of intellectualism and the most adequate definition of its mindset.

In the end, one can but salute an author whose intellectual impulses urge her to cogently forge a narrative of psycho-historical vulnerability that shakes even the utmost stoniest soul. As demonstrated above, she succeeds in raising a sensitive subject for discussion, a subject that finds its echoes in the cries of history which are alleviated by intellectuals. Apart from broaching the psychological wounds, Senzai's assertion that the historical sense of a literary text lies not only in the healing of the present, but also in the protection of the past. Thus, the production of a war novel is much more complex than the mere description of the war atmosphere in that it requires an intellectual figure to help the individual and the history purge of the war trauma. Driven by the same motives, Ellis, too, engages with the concept of intellectual by creating intellectual characters such as Mrs. Weera and Fatana.

IV.2.2. The Incarnation of Afghan Female Intellectuals through Mrs. Weera and Fatana

With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, Kabul becomes "the patriarchal belt" which carries the physical and psychological pains of Afghan women (Caldwell 20). These women are not only obliged to confine to the domestic sphere and

perform their traditional roles, but also be invisible and isolated from the outside world. If one were to ask people about the status of women in Afghanistan, he would deduce that their existence is a taboo in itself. This is projected in Ellis' tetralogy which casts light on the complex situation and the inferior position of women under the Taliban patriarchal regime.

We have briefly seen in the second chapter how Afghan women are subject to gender abuse; fueling their traumas and jeopardizing their lives. So, there is a feminist hint in Ellis' *The Breadwinner* tetralogy that is clearly not found in Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*; a nuance that makes the comparative study occupy a good deal of analysis. As a result, a new generation of intellectual women has come into being. While a large portion of Afghan women accept the code of construct that is imposed by the Taliban patricentric attitude, a rebellious wave of women fight against domestic violence, gender-profiling, sexism and male chauvinism. With a daring resistance, they champion protection and re-establish education for women, despite the restrictive policies.

Just like Ammo Mazen who stands against the war atrocities in Syria and helps Nadia alleviate the intense pains she endures, Mrs. Weera and Fatana are important characters in Ellis' narrative; they incarnate the role of the intellectual and help Parvana construct resilience amidst the Taliban despotic regime. What make Mrs. Weera and Fatana different from Ammo Mazen, in fact, is the sexist circumstances with which Afghanistan is marked and the situation through which Afghan women experience trauma of gender. In other words, they are traumatized by the fact of being women. Female gender is almost a taboo in a country that is ruled by an extremist patriarchal regime. While Afghan women fight for education and women's rights, Ammo Mazen combats the violation of history. This difference does not make them disunite, but rather complement each other in the intellectual pursuit of finding a cure against the plague of the war. Together, they build a clean world devoid of violence and oppression and brimmed with justice and equality.

To begin with, Mrs. Weera is presented as “a tall woman. Her hair was white, but her body was strong. She had been a physical education teacher before the Taliban made her leave her job” (The Breadwinner 57). With these traits, Ellis makes Mrs. Weera a strong woman; both physically and mentally. In the same way, Fatana, Parvana’s mother, “had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station” (The Breadwinner 15). Ellis makes these characters share the same passion for gender equality, constituting a narrative of resistance and cooperating in the building of elite cells throughout Afghanistan. Parvana informs us that “Mrs. Weera had been in the Afghan Women’s Union with mother” (The Breadwinner 56). More than colleagues, Mrs. Weera and Fatana fight against the forces of patriarchy and evoke a collective desire for women education and liberation in Afghanistan.

Throughout Ellis’ tetralogy, the role that is attributed to both Mrs. Weera and Fatana suggests a revolt against the patriarchal norms in Afghanistan which sabotage women’s visibility and existence. In brief, they are an example of the kind of Afghan women who disturb the masculine-dominated discourse of the Taliban regime by re-establishing education for women. As early as their meeting in the first volume, they already initiate discussions on planning procedures. The following dialogue between Mrs. Weera and Shauzia highlights how the idea of opening a secret school is manifested:

“I’ve been thinking of starting up a little school here,” Mrs Weera said to Parvana’s surprise. “A secret school, for a small number of girls, a few hours a week. You must attend. Parvana will let you know when.”
“What about the Taliban?”
“The Taliban will not be invited.” Mrs. Weera smiled at her own little joke. (The Breadwinner 91)

With the opening of a secret school, Parvana’s home becomes a hive for knowledge. To Mrs. Weera and Fatana, girls in Afghanistan have to get education in order to safeguard their existence from the fierce attack of the male’s oppressive ideologies. For a lack of better terms, education is the only weapon to secure a woman’s place in the society and to attain independence from man’s subordination. Once a teacher, always a teacher; that is the motto Mrs.

Weera and Fatana adopt despite the Taliban's prohibition to perform this noble work and the punishment they might receive. Such a commitment makes them fall in line with Gramsci's concept of 'traditional' intellectual; they are adrift in a realm of their own and endowed with a "timeless" and "unchanging" errand, transcending the ephemeral nature of the era's ebb and flow (Gramsci 5). To better grasp Gramsci's concept, Edward Said adapts it in the sense that teachers simply "continue to do the same thing from generation to generation" (Said 4). Motivated by a utopian future perspective, courses are promptly planned and distributed, "I could teach arithmetic and history," Nooria said. Mrs. Weera could teach health and science, and mother could teach reading and writing" (*The Breadwinner* 92). And the school emerges gradually from within the dystopian present.

Not only do Mrs. Weera and Fatana open a secret school, they also engage in a more risky mission; putting their lives at stake. In order to gain more women agency, they further expand their intellectual cell to the creation of a magazine. In Fatana's voice, "Mrs. Weera and I are going to work together (...) we're going to start a magazine" (*The Breadwinner* 77). The latter is the medium through which broken voices are heard and inner wounds are exteriorized. More than just a magazine, Ellis formulates a testimony of violence, trauma and crisis of Afghan women living under the Taliban regime. The non-fictional asset of the magazine resists historical neglect and goes beyond the domestic sphere to an international audience. In brief, the magazine testifies to the collective traumatic experience of Afghan women. And Fatana is the chosen one who has agency to testify to such traumatic experiences.

There are two key events which give Fatana an irresistible impulse to write, and later publish, in the magazine. One is when she heard of Shauzia's story. This is apparent when the girl declares: "My father's parents don't believe in girls being educated, and since we're living in their house, my mother says we have to do what they say" (*The Breadwinner* 91). In response, Fatana declares: "We must pay her mother a visit. I'd like to get her story for our magazine" (*The*

Breadwinner 91). Fatana's position symbolizes a form of resistance which is based on acts of bearing witness. Additionally, it denotes an implied assertion that Afghan women are able to bypass their victimization and testify against the distressing conditions of their vulnerability. Thus, Ellis demonstrates awareness of, and opposition to, the injustices and indignities of women at the hands of the Taliban powers while also celebrating the boldness of an Afghan woman who challenges patriarchal authority and exposes the truth that is under the threat of burying.

And the second key event is when Fatana knows about Parvana's labor as a bone digger. As stressed earlier, in addressing children's traumatic experience with bone digging in chapter one, Ellis cast light on the duty to tell and the imperative to transform trauma into a memory narrative in order to resist historical erasure and psychological silencing. This is projected through Fatana who insists on Parvana to give her a thorough account of what is happening in Afghan cemeteries to write about the traumatic event in the magazine. "You must tell me everything that happens, she told Parvana. We will put it in the magazine, so that everyone will know" (The Breadwinner 104). Within this context, Fatana feels the responsibility to publicize human rights abuses. More to the point, she is the voice and the mouthpiece of the oppressed. Both events lead up to the major role of the intellectual in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the magazine materializes those traumatic memories, a burden which is carried by the subaltern. In a collaborative *mélange* of testimonies, it further voices what has been kept silenced and preserves what is under threat of historical removal. In addition to the national impact, the magazine seeks to bring Afghanistan to the attention of an international audience, and therefore encourages critical engagement with testimonies by many scholars and critics looking at the lingering effects of the war. In the form of a dialogue, the following excerpt reveals how the magazine's publishing procedure is planned to make of it a success:

“How are you going to publish it?” Parvana asked.

Mrs. Weera answered that. “We will smuggle the stories out to Pakistan, where it will be printed. Then we’ll smuggle it back in, a few at a time.”

“Who will do the smuggling?” Parvana asked.

“Other women in our organization,” Mother answered. “We’ve had visitors while you’ve been in the market. Some of our members have husbands who support our work and will help us”. (The Breadwinner 92)

This incident unfolds the representational mission Afghan women undertake in their production of a testament of the individual and the collective traumatic experiences of war. More importantly, it discloses the intellectual’s vigilant attempt to leak the testimonies and to open up a possibility for potential reconciliation with the impact of the current Afghan scene. Moreover, it reminds us of Ammo Mazen whose circle of connection is marked by an intellectual network. Just like him, Mrs. Weera and Fatana enlarge their bond with the help of other people who feel the ethical responsibility and hold the duty to defend the oppressed, denounce violence and defy the despotic regime. Such a magazine aspires towards potential resolution and healing.

Metaphorically, Mrs. Weera and Fatana are the architects of Afghan women’s torments in the sense that they offer a calculated design to their pains and supervise their construction of resilience. Through the magazine, Ellis is not only interested in constituting a testimony which bears witness to the collective appalling experience of Afghan Women; she also implicates the reader in an act of witnessing by pressing hard on the faculties of imagination and empathy of which the testimonial account is composed. As they collect testimonies, the magazine begins to resonate across the world. In Mrs. Weera’s terms, “[Parvana], tell your mother that copies are being sent out to women all over the world. She has helped to let the world know what is happening in Afghanistan” (The Breadwinner 143). With this fruit of deep devotion, one can but cherish the humane errand Mrs. Weera and Fatana accomplished in the face of all the eminent perils and selfless sacrifices for the sake of moral values and cherished beliefs. Such is the essence of being a revolutionary intellectual in Fanon’s optic

and the most adequate definition of it. To draw an intertextual resonance, these Afghan female intellectual characters remind us of Ngugi's Wariing'a, a Kenyan secretary who, despite being abused by her boss, realizes her dream and becomes a mechanical engineer, as *Devil on the Cross* (1980) is built on her fruitful journey into revolution. Just like Mrs. Weera and Fatana who revolt against Afghan patriarchy and educate Afghan women, Wariing'a breaks the chains of the 'national bourgeoisie' and dedicates her expertise and knowledge to serving her people.

Equally important, Mrs. Weera and Fatana meet to a great extent the status quo of Afghan women whose traumas oscillate between patriarchal oppression and compelling submissiveness. Indeed, their stories, too, are not without pain. *The Breadwinner* tetralogy is also a story of a troubled and anxious mind. For example, Fatana, too, is traumatized and goes through cries of consciousness, especially when her husband was arrested by the Taliban and died without her presence. To allude to Arthur Frank's book, she symbolizes 'the wounded storyteller'. And so, her motivation to delve into collecting vivid stories of oppressed women, in fact, aims also to project her hidden pain. Albeit unconsciously and unknowingly, the magazine's published testimonies allow her to work through her own trauma, to negotiate her past and to revisit her unwell self. Such a psychic pursuit falls in line with what Arthur Frank calls a form of 'reflexive monitoring', that entails "the perpetual readjustment of past and present to create and sustain a good story, [in addition to] the creation of a coherent self-story, the re-creation of memory, and the assumption of responsibility" (65). Within this view, Fatana's writing is then an act of reflexive-monitoring which helps her revisit her past, and therefore creates a coherent self. In brief, the magazine stands as an instrument of external and internal stories' reproduction which makes Fatana come to terms with her own traumas.

As *My Name Is Parvana* unfolds, Fatana goes as far as to venture her life by establishing education for girls in Afghanistan. With the fund of charity organizations and the permission of military officials, she manages to turn a

ruined construction into a new building and open a school. This time, it is not a secret but a public school: Leila' Academy of Hope, a name that Parvana chooses in the memory of her friend Leila⁵⁵. Furthermore, her contact with organizations and military authority signals a shift in profession that makes her more an administrator/manager and less a teacher. Such a shift, in fact, does not make her break up with the concept of the traditional intellectual, but simply espouse a more fashioned category of it. And so, Fatana does not step in Gramsci's thought on the 'organic' intellectual, but rather pushes the function of the traditional one to its limits. On the one hand, being socially committed to empower oppressed individuals and equip them with the weapon of education makes Fatana wear the crown of a *modernized* traditional intellectual; on the other hand, it puts her at the edge of unpleasant dangers, if not execution.

One example of such dangers includes Fatana's constant reception of threatening letters. On a mysterious day, Fatana disappears; leaving no trace of where she was except for telling Parvana that she is attending a regular meeting of the college planning committee. As the meeting takes long, Parvana becomes skeptical and starts looking for answers in her mother's office. For better illustration, one might attend to the scene which touches upon the disappearance of Fatana,

The only drawer left to explore was the bottom one. Parvana opened it. It held just one thick file. She put the file on the desk and looked inside.

It was full of letters.

Each letter was a threat.

Parvana counted seventeen of them. All were nasty. (My Name Is Parvana 178)

This incident puts Fatana in a vulnerable position and sets the floor to an anticipated tragedy. After two days, with a note pinned to her, Fatana returns home murdered. The note says, "This woman ran a school for evil girls. Now she is dead. Her school will be closed" (My Name Is Parvana 189). Tragically, the

⁵⁵ For more details about this character, it must be remembered, see the last section of Chapter One where an in-depth analysis is devoted to the examination of Leila and her fluctuating function in the narrative of both trauma and resistance.

sacrifices Fatana made are the result of her death. It is in the grim terror of the Taliban regime that such an intellectual mission jeopardizes Fatana's life in order to disseminate knowledge and educate Afghan girls. Hence, her tragic death is but a stream of consciousness to the cherished moral values. As in the case of Ammo Mazen, she is a rebel intellectual whose conscience is characterized by a moral strength and a psycho-historical mend. Furthermore, what stimulates her daring opposition to the Taliban and induces her to stick to the deathly path of education, albeit the threat she receives, is her faithfulness to the values she embraces so dearly above any other thing, including life.

As for Mrs. Weera, her vigorous qualities and heartfelt passion lead her to a higher rank. She now runs a special section for widows and children in a refugee camp named The Widow's Compound. Additionally, she administers "a secret women's organization that operated on the other side of the Pakistan border in Afghanistan, [an organization which comprises] secret schools, clinics and a magazine" (*Mud City* 5). With such a position, she becomes more engaged with the work that requires humanitarian commitment. Metaphorically, she nearly moves heaven and hell just to make sure Afghan widows are not subject to any sort of harassment and assault in the camp she runs.

Contrary to Fatana, Mrs Weera moves from a 'traditional' to an 'organic' intellectual. This shift is actually reinforced by the urge for social reform and economic production where she hailed from an oppressive patriarchal milieu with a revolutionary spirit, attempting to bring about positive change. Such a point is well illustrated in *Mud City* when Mrs. Weera jumps through so many hoops to produce as much as first-aid kits and to take the nurses back to Afghanistan, a decision which makes Shauzia stupefied. More to the point, the incident goes in the form of a dialogue as follow:

"We'll have your first-aid kits ready this afternoon," the nurse said to Mrs. Weera, who had brought Shauzia to the clinic. (...)
"Mrs. Weera is a very brave woman;" the nurse said. "I hope you treat her with respect. She is taking several nurses back into Afghanistan."
"You're going back?" Shauzia almost yelled. "Why would you want to do that?"

“Our people are being bombed,” Mrs. Weera replied quietly.
“Thousands have gathered at the border, trying to get out, but the border has been closed. Nurses are needed,”
“If the border is closed, how will you get in?”
“We’ll have to sneak in, probably across the mountains”. (Mud City 148-149)

The brave decision Mrs. Weera made bespeaks a myriad of values and faithful devotion to a country that is torn between local disturbance and international interference. Notwithstanding the dangers it takes to go back to Afghanistan without being escorted by a man, she places herself in the frontline; behind her a female white army (nurses) whose mission, too, symbolizes noble sacrifices and embraces morality.

As of late, Mrs. Weera’s intellectual position, again, marks a drastic change in the narrative of resistance. We have seen in chapter two how Ellis resorts to the flashback technique to reflect on the convoluted nature of trauma. More precisely, we examined how Parvana, who is mysteriously detained in custody at an American military base for Taliban cooperation’s suspicion, is plagued by a relentless back and forth between past and present. Yet, we have not tackled the part of how she manages to acquit herself on all counts. As *My Name is Parvana* progresses, the reader realizes the critical condition in which Parvana is put; ranging from national betrayal to international accusation. In the wake of her shock at hearing the major says: “you’re being transferred to the prison north of Kabul” (Ellis 219), Parvana succumbs to despair. To her surprise, Mrs. Weera intervenes. One might attend to the valorous incident where she steps in the prison with a shrill voice and a tough attitude, asking the major for an immediate release of Parvana:

“You let her go this instant!”
A loud, bossy woman’s voice hit Parvana’s eardrums like birdsong.
“Get those guns out of my face. What do you mean, treating a minor Afghan child in her own country this way? Under whose authority do you dare do this? Get those chains off her!”
There in front of Parvana was the beautiful, furious face of Mrs. Weera, Member of Parliament.
“I represent the Parliament of Afghanistan. I have a letter in my hand from the President of the country demanding you release this child

into my custody right now, and if you hesitate even a second, if you take the time to blink or breath before obeying this order, I will have Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations International Children's Fund, the American Civil Liberties Union, and every television station in the world come down on you like a ton of bricks!". (My Name Is Parvana 220-221)

This time, Mrs. Weera is presented as a member of parliament. There is no surprise there, because her intellectual impulse envisions such a position. As of late, this profession of mediumship allows Mrs. Weera to be more involved in the government's decisions, and therefore to gain agency in a world where women are shrunk to invisible creatures. Just like Ammo Mazen who embodies the helper persona towards the weak, Mrs. Weera embraces redemptive powers. Without her, Parvana's life would definitely take a tragic path. Furthermore, being politically committed, Ellis now prizes Mrs. Weera with the medal of a revolutionary and *rebel* intellectual, one that refuses to give in to authority. She rebels against not only the Taliban regime, but also the conventions that deny women's involvement in politics for gender-discriminatory reasons. And so, Parvana is released.

So, Ellis utilizes both Mrs. Weera and Fatana to remind us of the contribution of Afghan women in national resistance and international assistance. More to the point, the intellectual bond between Mrs. Weera and Fatana enables them to defy the Taliban regime, to educate women in Afghanistan and to lead a nation doomed to masculine domination towards justice, equality and liberation. Mrs. Weera and Fatana are cases in point to such a definition. Seen in this shimmering light, the tetralogy under scrutiny functions as a historical construct of Afghan women's commitment to exorcise the country as well as the spirit from the insidious demons of the Taliban regime. Only then, Afghanistan will be purged and women will be re-humanized. But, once more, noble sacrifices should be espoused by intellectuals, just the way Fatana puts her life at stake and opened Leila's Academy of Hope. Equally, female voices should be high-pitched, just the way Mrs. Weera leads Afghan vulnerable women towards liberation.

Given all these points, we reach a point where one can say that the categorization of the intellectual in conflict zones is indeed a continuous and a multifaceted subject, for the world is prone to various atrocities and the human mind is prone to the reception of random psychological tortuosities. Nevertheless, the role of the intellectual, tell us Ammo Mazen, Mrs. Weera and Fatana, transcends voicing buried historical truths and silent psychological wounds. It has always been a matter of ethics, and the authors' intentional creation of those intellectual characters is merely but an attempt to insist on embracing moral values in order to ensure the decontamination of mankind from evil forces. And so, the two authors under study approach the role of the intellectual in different ways. Comparing these approaches enables to strike a balance between the national and the universal in Ellis and Senzai.

With the fruitful intervention of the intellectual in the bleak life of Parvana and Nadia, war trauma does not come to an end, as it seems to be the case. Rather, it metamorphoses into another wound and takes the shape of another monster. An increased risk of psychological metastasis, in fact, is what characterizes war trauma. The first reason is already hinted to, and that is the ongoing war in Afghanistan and Syria; up to the time being, these countries are still under political upheavals. The second reason has to do with the long-term diagnosis and development of post-traumatic stress disorder which may pave the way for unpredictable episodes of psychological consequences on the traumatized mind, a point to which only the future holds answer. The third reason for its crucial part, manifests in the sequel narrative which makes war trauma go timelessly on, that is, refugee crisis. With this follow-up narrative of human vulnerability, the next section steps in the examination of the refugee figure and the way it carries cumulus clouds of trauma in Ellis' third volume, *Mud City and Senzai's Escape from Aleppo*.

To draw the final curtain, this section provided a thematic analysis of the role of the intellectual, a role which consists in protecting history from potential removals and mending the psyche from the bruises of war trauma. These are the responsibilities of the intellectual in conflict zones. Ammo Mazen, Mrs. Weera

and Fatana took care of traumatized children in their journey to search for home. Driven by an impulse to escape war atrocities, they escorted them safely to the borders where they can hopefully have better life conditions. Although their journey culminates in the borders, the sun seems to never shine to traumatized children as they, once again, find themselves burdened by another blow, this time that of refugee crisis. As the next section sheds light on the suffering of refugee children, the authors under study do not let them alone. Being revolutionary intellectuals, they call for humanitarian actions.

IV. 3. Crossing Borders, Inviting more Mental Disorders

Broadly speaking, a refugee is someone who “has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (Donnellan 5). The idea which the definition draws upon suggests a cluster of reasons which prompt the vulnerable person to flee home. Under the various forms of oppression, there is no surprise in having a flux of people running from their home countries and seeking refuge in other countries. In essence, the refugee subject is a victim of forced displacement who escapes war, violence and persecution. What is strikingly problematic about the refugee subject is the traumatizing reality s/he faces when crossing borders. More precisely, it is the very experience of being different that engenders xenophobia, and therefore inflicts more traumas on the vulnerable subject, despite the existing literature of multiculturalism which advocates acceptance and integration of ‘outsiders’. Often unwelcomed and discriminated against, the refugee becomes a threat in the eye of the host country; s/he struggles to cope with the *othering* attitudes and the *contemptuous* views.

So, it is clear that there is a sequel narrative of trauma to the already traumatic experience of war. For millennia, the world has always known a surplus of displaced people who have been forced to cross borders, leave their homes and seek shelter in other countries. Needless to say that such a reluctant displacement comes with its challenges. The flux of refugees the world witnesses today is the result of a chaotic past, a traumatic present and an uncertain future.

Within this context, the Afghan and Syrian experience with refugees is brought to the fore. The aim of this section is to go beyond, while analyzing and criticizing, the delicate status of refugees by digging deep into the appalling conditions of displacement and the surrounding atrocities of the war. The sufferings and misfortunes of refugees are not to be denied or ignored, otherwise humanity is dead and buried.

IV. 3. 1. Nadia and the Anxious Journey of a Syrian Refugee Subject

In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, no one can forget the heartbreaking picture of Alan Kurdi (figure 1), a three-year-old Syrian refugee boy who was found dead on the shore in Turkey. Since its release in 2015, the picture has become the focal point of most media coverage and works of art. It is not for nothing that Nilüfer Demir's photograph steps in the catalog of '*Top 100 of the most Influential Photos of all Time*', for it evokes international sympathy and elicits human vulnerability⁵⁶. In an interview conducted by the CNN with Demir, a Turkish press photographer, she declares, "there was nothing left to do for him [Alan Kurdi] nothing but take his photograph (...) This is the only way I can express the scream of his silent body" (O'Hagan). As a response to such a poignant picture, mountainous waves of intellectuals urgently feel the need to engage with the sensitive issue of refugee crisis. Intellectuals such as journalists, writers, authors, activists and artists, to name but a few, take bold initiatives to voice the traumatized voiceless and to constitute narratives of bearing witness to the war atrocities and human tragedies.

⁵⁶ For a quick look, see '#7 Alan Kurdi, Nilüfer Demir, 2015' published on the following website: https://www.boredpanda.com/top-100-world-photos-influential-all-time/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic



Figure 1(Nilüfer Demir, 2015)

Although Alan Kurdi's photograph invites a wealth of critical discussions on refugee crisis, it still lacks a voice which helps create a rounded image of the traumatized experience of war. In this regard, photographs appear to have the tendency to remain incomplete and limiting in constructing facts that are historically relevant; hence the need for a narrative of fiction (Nicholls 4). On the limited influence a photograph has, Susan Sontag argues that "[a] narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel. No photograph or portfolio of photographs can unfold, go further, and further still (95). While a picture captures a given event in a single moment, literature adds richness to it in terms of contextualization, thematization, characterization and historization. More to the point, works of fiction invite the reader to participate in witnessing the horrors of the war, listening to the cries of the wounded, and therefore testifying to the collective experience of trauma.

Influenced by the tragic story of Alan Kurdi, countless writers step in the literary enterprise of producing trauma narratives that bear witness to the lost childhood that is torn between the traumatic experience of war on the one hand and the uncertain journey of displacement on the other. For example, Khaled Hosseini' *Sea Prayer* (2018) is a short, illustrated book that explores the refugee experience and the devastating impact of war on families and communities. The

story is told from the perspective of a father who addresses his son, Marwan, as they prepare to flee their home in Syria by boat. The father recounts memories of the peaceful and vibrant Syria he knew before the war, and the hope he had for his son's future. He describes the beauty of the sea they are about to cross, but also acknowledges the danger and uncertainty of their journey. The narrative structure of Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* is unique and effective in that it is told through a series of illustrations, accompanying the father's words and creating a visual and emotional landscape that captures the desperation and resilience of refugees. In brief, the illustrations by Dan Williams are haunting and evocative, depicting the father and son against a backdrop of turbulent waters and an ominous, darkening sky.

On the refugee's challenges in the face of adversity, Mohsin Hamid cajoles us with a deeply humanistic and empathetic work that invites the reader to engage with some of the most pressing issues of our time, the refugee crisis, in his fourth novel *Exit West* (2017). The story is set in an unnamed city in an unnamed country where a violent conflict has forced millions of people to flee their homes. The main characters, Saeed and Nadia, meet and fall in love in the midst of the crisis, and are forced to leave their home and embark on a perilous journey to an uncertain future. As they move through different cities and countries, they encounter other refugees and form new connections and communities, demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of human beings in the face of adversity.

Of course, a plethora of literature has been brought to the fore regarding the humanitarian crisis of refugees. Through the above-mentioned two examples, I only attempt to fleetingly provide some intertextual nuances that are relevant to the novels under study⁵⁷. As examined so far, both Ellis and Senzai are authors whose works are inhabited by the theme of war through the creation of

⁵⁷ For more readings on the refugee crisis, see Khaled Khalifa's *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, Cristina Henríquez's *The Book of Unknown Americans*, Dina Nayeri's *The Ungrateful Refugee*, Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing*, Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* and Cynthia Flood's *The Strangers We Became*, to mention but a few.

fictionalized characters endowed with the manifestation of trauma. These characters are not only insecure from the war's turmoil around them, but also left alone with a heavy heart and a broken soul. Each obstacle they overcome places them closer to their goal. By making the protagonists have some ray of relief with the assistance of the intellectual, the authors under study offer no happy ending to the traumatized subject who thinks that life outside Syria and Afghanistan would bring better conditions. In reverse, they overwhelm them beneath another cruel environment that shatters the dream of happiness and fuels the nightmares of refugee crisis. The new reality they face is again plagued by a miserable life that is, too, devoid of hope. This makes the wound veer into an extended experience of trauma and dwells the traumatized anew in the dark world of melancholy which further stirs the reader's faculty of empathy.

In *Escape from Aleppo*, Senzai builds her narrative upon the idea of escape, an escape that is filled with an endless dive into fear, despair and loss. Although the story revolves around the Jendali family's decision to flee Aleppo and seek refuge in Turkey, the author did not tackle the hurdles facing Syrian refugees. Instead, she prefers to close her novel with an opening ending. Nadia's journey, which culminates at the Turkish borders in the presence of her father, does neither signal a happy ending nor make the protagonist safe. Rather, it opens the door to another narrative of trauma, namely that of being a homeless refugee in a foreign country. Unless the author plans to write a sequel narrative to *Escape from Aleppo*, one might have an irresistible readerly impulse to take a step and put the last piece of puzzle that is left missing to its proper place. Nevertheless, there is a minor detail in the novel which touches fleetingly upon the bleak life of refugees, giving a flavor of how appalling the experience is going to be. In the omniscient narrator's voice,

Nadia's thoughts turned north to Turkey, imagining what it would be like. Life would not be easy there, she knew. After her family had made the decision to go, she'd sought out pictures and news clips of the refugee camps, and the images had scared her: rows and rows of overcrowded tent, little or no access to jobs for adults or schools for kids, inhabitants jostling for food, water, and medicine. (Senzai 280)

This imagined scene gives the reader an image of how refugees are subject to another aura of suffering. By placing Nadia in such a complex setting, Senzai provides an insightful view and a realistic portrayal of a humanitarian crisis. Over the last decade to the present, the proliferation of refugee crises is one of the most conspicuous phenomena in literature, film industry and other fields of social science and humanities. It is assumed that the abundance of literary works detailing the experience of forced immigration is attributed to the way refugees' life narratives act as a global plea for rescuing humanity from potential tragedy, as was the tragic case with Alan Kurdi.

While the twentieth century witnesses a large scale movement of independence from, and revolt against, the restraint of colonialism, resulting in the displacement of people from and to colonies, the twenty-first century is a period of global chaos and conflicts which cause a flux of refugees fleeing their homes and seeking safety in host countries. In both cases, however, the idea of being *different* is the first step to the creation of tension among majorities and minorities because of the lack of understanding and the difficulty of accepting other ethnicities, cultures and religions. Within this context, the Syrian refugee crisis becomes today's central debate of different political parties, ranging from the right to the left wing, in addition to media mis/representation and public opinion. According to the UNHCR, "Syria is considered as the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time". As examined in the previous chapter, the Ghouta attacks, the use of chemical weapons and the foreign interference turn Syria into a fertile ground of conflict. This provokes more disasters, including more killed, missed, injured and certainly more displaced people. To illustrate and according to an online article in the Guardian, "almost 700,000 Syrians in deadly first months of 2018" are displaced due to war atrocities; indeed, a shocking number which invites more humanitarian actions and less political reactions.

What adds to the anguish of the Syrian refugees, as reflected in Nadia's thought, is their non access to employment and education. Drawing on Michael Dummett's book, '*On Immigration and Refugees*' (2001), the refugee subject

lacks not only basic needs, such as employment, health care and housing, but s/he also causes unemployment for the local people (11). From this angle, one might find it offensive to construct such a tendentious assumption about a vulnerable subject. What is more threatening, the western media plays an important role in fostering the hostility to refugees, and therefore leads to the discrimination against them by employers. Therefore, the racist-framed image of refugees as “unwanted invaders”, to debunk Samuel Parker’s offensive article⁵⁸, stirs feelings of hatred and resentment. Such a racist-framed image implies considering refugees not only as a threat, but also as invaders who only rely on a discursive psychological method, including intentional dramatization, in order to obtain asylum in the occident. And so, those asylum seekers face other obstacles, such as “border closures” and “barriers to entry” that are imposed by the host countries (Donnellan 31).

Throughout *Escape from Aleppo*, a somehow cursory look is given at the complications Syrian refugees go through. One might claim that the author’s shallowly representation of such an important facet of war trauma and humanitarian crisis disqualifies her from providing a complete narrative of bearing witness to the Syrian collective experience of forced immigration. This succinct mode, however, could be seen as a potent literary device, a califfhanger, that the author potentially adopts in order to create a sense of suspense and tension that can keep readers engaged and curious about what will happen next. More than that, such a technique can also be seen as a way to highlight the ongoing conflict in Syria and the many individuals who are still facing an uncertain future due to the war ramifications. And so, the opening ending is merely but an attempt to reflect on the complex and layered nature of the Syrian conflict. By leaving Nadia's future uncertain, the author acknowledges that the conflict is far from over and that there are many challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead. To this end, this approach demonstrates a way to humanize the conflict and the individuals who are affected by it. Equally, she paints a vivid picture of

⁵⁸ For further information about this point, see Parker’s article entitled ‘Unwanted Invaders’: The Representation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK and Australian Print Media.

children's sufferings in contact zones and leaves room for an intellectual participation in bringing humane lights to the soulless dark world.

So, the opening ending leaves the fate of the main character ambiguous. While she manages to escape Aleppo and reunites with her family, the reader is left in suspense, wondering what will happen to Nadia in the future. This ending embraces both hopeful and ominous realities. Although the protagonist has survived a traumatic experience, she is still faced with an uncertain future. In brief, the denouement of Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* is a stylistic choice that can be effective in engaging readers and encouraging them to think critically about the story. Finally, it is a way to encourage readers to take action and advocate change. By highlighting the ongoing conflict in Syria and the many individuals who are still struggling to survive, the author may be urging readers to get involved in advocacy efforts or to support organizations that are working to provide assistance to refugees and individuals affected by the conflict. This can be a powerful call to action that encourages readers to think beyond the pages of the book and to make a difference in the world around them. With the plight of refugee crisis, Ellis joins Senzai in her intellectual concern with such a humanitarian catastrophe that deprives Afghan children from the feeling of safety, home and happiness.

IV. 3. 2. Shauzia and the Anxious Journey of an Afghan Refugee Subject

Unlike Senzai who provides a superficial representation of the Syrian refugees, as examined in the previous subsection, Ellis offers a panoramic, critical and rounded picture of Afghan children's experience with immigration by devoting a whole volume to the complex life of Afghan refugees. Ellis' third volume of Parvana's series, *Mud City*, tells the story of Shauzia, Parvana's friend, who ventures in crossing not only Pakistan borders but also targets France as a final destination. Suffocated in her overwhelming attempt to leave, as the journey from Afghanistan to France veers into a nightmarish experience, Shauzia revises her survival instinct and reconsiders her decision.

In fact, Shauzia's wish to leave Afghanistan is first spotted in *The Breadwinner* where the reader is given a minor detail on her dream to leave Afghanistan and go to France. Unlike Parvana who is loyal to both her family and her country, Shauzia is an independent girl. In truth, Shauzia's determination to flee her country is sparked by a bold rebellion against the Taliban patriarchal codes of conduct. As the novel unfolds, she disguises as a boy, changes her name into Shafiq, works as a tea-boy and roams freely over most of Kabul's streets. At no moment Shauzia shows a desire to stay in Kabul; rather, she draws her future "at the top of Eiffel Tower in Paris" (Ellis 144). The following dialogue traces the moment she opens up her ardent wish to Parvana:

"I'm saving money, a little bit each day. I'm getting out of here."

"Where? When?"

"France. I'll get on a boat and go to France."

"Why France?" she asked.

Shauzia's face brightened. "In every picture I've seen of France, the sun is shining, people are smiling, and flowers are blooming. France people must have bad days, too, but I don't think their bad days can be very bad, not bad like here. In one picture I saw a whole field of purple flowers. That's where I want to go. I want to walk into that field and sit down in the middle of it, and not think about anything".

(Ellis 111)

Taking into account Shauzia's difficult circumstances in Afghanistan, the wish to leave her home country does not come as a surprise. It should be remembered that Shauzia is exploited and used for business marriage as she tells Parvana, "My grandfather has started to look for a husband for me (...) I overheard him talking to my grandmother. He said I should get married soon, that since I'm so young. I'll fetch a good bride-price, and they will have lots of money to leave on" (Ellis 138). Under such human-trade conditions and illegal forced marriage, the author casts light on a serious and sensitive issue of children's exploitation, signaling the violation of children's rights. And so, the dream to escape becomes the only option left to Shauzia before her already cruel life turns into an extended nightmare. Driven by an unflinching determination, the journey towards France starts with a stopover in Pakistan. There, Shauzia works hard to save money and

to buy a one-way ticket to Karachi, a coastal town where she thinks there are boats that embark for France.

From another angle of reading, France is often portrayed as a beacon of hope and opportunity for Shauzia. As a Western country which is founded upon principles, namely liberty, equality, and fraternity, France represents a new beginning for many refugees who fled persecution in their home countries. Overall, these notions symbolize France's noble organs in the making of the nation. Shauzia, in particular, sees France as a place where she can finally escape the challenges and hardships of life under the Taliban regime, and therefore build a better future for herself. To her, it is to the moral values that the philosophy over the French dream crystallizes its foundations regardless of diversity in all its forms and aspects.

What is deceptive, however, is that France itself proves to be built upon the myths of democracy. On many occasions, let us not forget, France warrants failure to keep pace with the fulfillment of equality, betraying the democratic norms it is built upon. As such, the French beacon of hope, dreams and opportunities becomes fuelled with extreme despair, loss and nightmare. The bureaucracy and legal barriers that refugees encounter when they apply for asylum in France, for example, reflect the complex and often frustrating process that many must navigate when seeking refuge in a new country. Under such dehumanizing conditions, a myriad of literary works is forged to explore the overwhelming experience of Afghan refugees in France.

In order to give the refugee subject a voice, Ellis formulates a testimony to the Afghan experience of displacement as shortly lived by Shauzia in Pakistan. In fact, she goes as far as to portray France in a complex and nuanced way, reflecting the darkened depth of Shauzia's psychological stream where the dream to reach France becomes, instead, a nightmare. In particular, *Mud City* implicates the reader in witnessing the hurdles that face children refugees and add burden to their traumas. As the novel addresses a humanitarian plea, the author offers a critical and rounded picture of the human crisis by making visible, audible and

readable the wounds which have been kept eclipsed by supreme powers after the 9/11 attacks. This thorough picture is also enforced by a glossary at the end of the novel in which Ellis covers a list of terms explaining the divergence between Pakistan and Afghanistan, in addition to cultural and historical guidelines, such as Badakhshan, chador, Pashtu, roupee and Genghis Khan, to cite only these (Ellis 159).

So, from a historical context, *Mud City* highlights the impact of the 9/11 attacks on the life of Afghan people. More to the point, it casts light on the plight of refugee crisis which comes as a result of Bush's detrimental policy under the 'war on terror' campaign. Torn between local assault and international fault, traumatized Afghans, now, stand in endless rows at the borders with the hope of having nothing but basic rights in other countries. As such, Ellis reminds the reader how the west is also complicit in the flux of refugees many countries are witnessing. Because the refugee crisis looms so largely in the contemporary world, it is necessary to re-consider certain policies vis-à-vis vulnerable people. These include social integration, borders configuration and moral foundation. For example, as in the case with Afghanistan, the situation is alarming in the sense that:

Millions of Afghans have fled their country, looking for safety in refugee camps and communities in Iran, Pakistan and other places. Life in the camps is very difficult. People frequently spend all their money simply trying to get out of the country. When they end up in a camp, they live without a steady supply of food, no clean water, no access to go to school, and no legal way to work to make their situation better. (Hilaldo 27)

Just like Syrian refugees, Afghan people are forced to flee their county and seek protection in neighborhood countries, such as Pakistan. Driven by utopian visions, their dreams collide with an extended trauma inception. After experiencing so much losses and tragedies, they find themselves far from the expected paradise and without roofs to shelter them. Despite the decreed policy, which encourages the integration and resettlement of refugees in host countries, the bitter reality regarding the suffocating air which they are subject to says

otherwise. Under these miserable conditions, it is fairly reasonable to say that the post 9/11 era engenders a violation against humanity where basic rights are only signed papers and forgotten conventions, and therefore to raise skepticism vis-à-vis democracy.

One, amongst many, illustration of these grim realities that are confronted by refugees is found in *Mud City*; actually, it revolves around the status of being viewed more as a beggar and less as a refugee in the host country. Such a dehumanizing reality is tackled by Ellis in order to endow Afghan children with the agency to testify against the allegedly stereotypes. To better understand the dire atmosphere that annihilates the refugee subject, one might attend the incident where Shauzia asks a Pakistani baker for bread and promises to pay him later. As a response, the baker constructs a misjudgment by not believing an Afghan child. The incident goes as follows,

The baker picked up a loaf of nan from a small stack and tossed it at Shauzia. She wasn't expecting it, and it landed in the dirt. She quickly picked it up.
"How much do I pay you tomorrow?"
"Go away, beggar. I've given you food, so go away."
Shauzia's face burned with shame. She wasn't a beggar. (*Mud City* 36-37)

In truth, many Afghan children resort to the act of begging as a means of survival. If truth be told, however, all refugees are identified within this frame. And one can think of any refugee his/her country welcomes to vouch for this idea. Thus, the author broadens our understanding of the beggar's formation and the refugee's deformation. In other words, she puts flesh on the bones of central questions concerning the pejorative perception of refugees, namely otherness. Unable to find a job and fulfill her needs, Shauzia herself succumbs to humiliation and engages in beggary, shoving the dignity she holds.

To further press on the reader's empathetic engagement and reflect on the experience of Afghan children who cross borders, Ellis places Shauzia in the streets of Pakistan where she confronts evil in the people's eyes and experiences the mistreatment of their attitudes. In one of the usual days, Shauzia goes near

‘University Town’, where foreigners live, in order to beg money from them. To her surprise, a man hands her a hundred-roupee⁵⁹ note. It is not for nothing that the man offers such a fortune to a refugee child; in return, he clearly seeks something. Although the man’s malicious intentions remain unspecified to the reader, one might grasp them the moment he “tightened his grip and began to pull her along the sidewalk toward his car” (Mud City 73). The following excerpt illustrates the assault Shauzia faces, offering a profound insight through which *clichés* against Afghan refugees are framed:

A crowd began to gather. The crowd attracted the police.
“What’s happening here?” a policeman asked.
“This boy stole from me, one hundred roupees,” the man said.
“I didn’t steal! He gave me the money!” Shauzia yelled. “He tried to put me in his car, but I didn’t want to go.”
“Search him,” the man said. “You’ll find my hundred-roupee note in his pocket.”
Shauzia didn’t want them searching her and taking the rest of her money. She took the bill out of her pocket and held it out to the man.
“Take it back.”
One of the policemen took it.
“Evidence,” he said. (Mud City 74)

What Ellis draws in this deep scene is the oppressive grounds Afghan refugees are subject to endure in Pakistan, and elsewhere. Unlike the lengthy check and inspection a normal accused person goes through, Shauzia's experience is quite different. One does not mind the rigorous inspection as much as its biased-based policy. Although Shauzia informs the policeman that the man gives her the money with his consent and reluctantly drags her into his car, which also gives suspicion for him to be accused of a kidnapping attempt or even pedophilia, he shows no interest in listening to her part of the story. Instead, he immediately arrests her for theft. Indeed, the incident is not an exception; it should not be treated as such because the grounds upon which Shauzia is detained are fuelled by discriminatory prejudices. In fact, this highlights but a tiny part of the differential treatment that Afghan refugees encounter. What further adds to the

⁵⁹ Roupee is the basic monetary unit in Pakistan and other Asian countries, namely India and Nepal.

xenophobia of refugees is the complicity of the Pakistani people. Although there is a crowd that witnesses the event, no one testifies against the man's culpability. Such an experience is appalling and dehumanizing, making Shauzia feel different, inferior and, above all, a 'second class citizen'. Therefore, the nation preaching about building a sense of community and belonging is often inattentive to the very sense of alienation that is imposed through several mechanisms, such as the status of being a refugee.

Destined to always fall in the deep end of sufferings, the night seems to never shine brightly for Shauzia. Her life encapsulates neither redemption nor rehabilitation. This time she is taken to a dreadful prison where her wounds get intensively worse. More than just a normal prison, Ellis weaves her novel in a way that shows the extent to which Afghan refugees are subject to racial discrimination, as one of the boys declares, "We are all Afghans in this cell. The Pakistan boys are kept somewhere else" (Mud City 81-82). This suffices to reveal the hidden policy of racial classism Pakistani government implements towards Afghan refugees. Furthermore, such favoritism reinforces the narrative of war on terror and its repercussions on the Afghan dossier.

Another important point which Ellis introduces to the setting of the prison is the severe haunting of trauma and the manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorders. Not only does the refuge subject endure racist abuse; s/he also goes through psychological unrests, due to the relentless accumulation of trauma. This is projected in an incident during which Shauzia's attention is disturbed by the moaning of a boy,

"That's just the Headbanger," she was told. The moaning boy rocked and banged his head into the wall over and over as he moaned.
"He's all right when the lights are on, but he doesn't like the dark. He does this every night. You'll get used to it."
"Soon you'll be like him," another boy said, and several boys laughed.
(Mud City 85)

Accordingly, the boy's moan explains his inability to cope with the dark because of the pain and shock he endured. Clearly, there is a deep sense of trauma, a sad moan of dormant wounds and a painful memory inflicted on the boy's fragile

mind. Unable to come to terms with his trauma, the boy occupies a place in which signs of recovery are not brought ahead. In this context, Caruth argues that “in its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence” (153). And so, the boy’s post traumatic pathology is characterized by constant moan. Furthermore, the nickname attributed to him is very symbolic in the sense that its meaning holds power and echoes the silent wounds that are kept tattooed and glued in his subconscious mind.

Of similar interest in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder is the risk of developing insomnia and inviting disturbing feelings. Just like mentally unstable ‘Headbanger’, Shauzia, too, is haunted and contaminated by an intense aura of trauma. In her sleepless night, she witnesses how “the night went on forever. [And how] Some of the boys cried out in their sleep, and the fleas kept biting. Worry and fear would not let her escape into sleep” (Mud City 85). Again, Caruth tackles the contagious nature of trauma. To her, there is an inevitable “danger of the trauma’s contagion, of the traumatization of the ones who listen (10). Though the boy’s traumatic narrative remains unknown, his moaning triggers ‘compulsive repetition’ and ‘incontrollable return’ of trauma. Thus, disturbing nightmares, the constant crying of boys in their sleep and insomnia develop as post-traumatic stress disorders.

Ellis goes on to bring up another blow to Shauzia’s miserable life, that of otherness. More precisely, she puts her in the care of an American family after they release her from the dreadful prison. By rescuing the innocent Shauzia from the dreadful prison with the help of an American character, Tom, Ellis does neither valorize America nor crowns the American individual with the grade of a hero. This, instead, symbolizes the hypocrisy of America in that it pretends sympathy yet adds injury towards the vulnerable subject. In a neo-Orientalist reading, as examined in the first section, Ellis makes an argument about the way in which American racial attitudes towards Afghans are shaped by a hidden narrative of terrorism, which reinforces stereotypes and prejudices about the otherness and foreignness of non-Western cultures. This argument is supported

by the previously analyzed passage⁶⁰, which suggests that the American Club is exclusive towards locals, and therefore reinforces a sense of cultural superiority or entitlement among expatriates. It is assumed that, following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent 'War on Terror' campaign, the occident has contributed to forging a narrative of dehumanization and demonization of people from Muslim-majority countries, including Afghanistan. As a result, Shauzia is no longer welcomed in the American house. And so, Tom takes her back to the refugee camp where Mrs. Weera takes care of her. All that Tom does is "take her out of one prison and put her into another (Mud City 114). This is how Shauzia's dream to make it safe to France starts to fade.

Disillusioned by the American heroism and captured by the French dream, Shauzia develops an intense psychological relapse. On the days that follow, however, she abandons the dream and goes back to Afghanistan in order to serve her country and her people. One might deduce that humans always tend to create their own truth in order to appease themselves, for it is much easier than accepting reality. Unable to bear life in Afghanistan, Shauzia creates a utopian image of France. To her realization, the journey towards success is imbued with tragedy, loss and despair. Because of the toxic assimilation, her perception of France changes; she realized that her country needs her more than France does. Being in the care of an American family is indeed a great opportunity for Shauzia to realize that the dream embraces illusions. This democratic country is betrayed by favoring and superiorizing Western culture at the expense of moral values. Consequently, she advances a convincing conclusion, "what's so great about a field of purple flowers? It's probably full of thorns. And snakes" (Mud City 116). The thorns and snakes which France is identified with are what makes the refugees suffer more from inevitable traumas. To such metaphoric signification, Ellis tailors the stylistic fabric in order to make her novel palatable to a universal audience: revealing the dystopian facet of the occident towards the orient refugee rather than constructing a utopian reality out of its democracy. In brief, she is a visionary author on the hassles facing the refugee subject.

⁶⁰ For more analysis on this idea, see page 219.

As a synthesis, one might conclude this section by commending Senzai and Ellis for engaging in a highly politicized subject, that of the refugee crisis. Together, they manage to denounce and criticize the implemented mechanisms with which Syrian and Afghan refugees are treated. As demonstrated, the dilemma of being different adds more bruises to the scares of trauma. Neither Nadia's nor Shauzia's accomplished journeys culminate in a happy ending. Instead, they are swamped by future uncertainties, at once hectic and traumatic. Furthermore, their experience of being refugees paves the way for the continuity of suffering and springs a sequel narrative of trauma. In short, immigration does not guarantee any better future for them. To this end, both *Escape from Aleppo* and *Mud City* are much more than just war novels, detailing the physical and psychological impacts of the war in Syria and Afghanistan. Amidst their pages, the reader surfs the psychological wounds and dives deeper into silent cries.

All points considered, Syrian and Afghan children are doomed to always embark on a journey that is not without trauma, a journey that is devoid of tastes and colors. Until a miracle takes place, refugees are at the heart of today's world crisis. They still suffer from the unjustifiable hegemony, horrendous crimes of barbaric regimes and segregationist power, which adorns itself with democratic ornaments to find favor with those who deliberately veil their eyes so as not to pretend blindness. Despite the intellectual's massive efforts and eloquent plea for promoting peace in Afghanistan and the Middle East, the overwhelming situation worsens day after day. In a world that is haunted by the incurable disease of war, there is no more need for diplomacy or weapons; instead, one might learn the practice of psychological exorcism to defeat the insidious devil.

The labelled oriental refugee often remains an eclipsed subject to the divergent modes of reading that mystify the dynamics of security in his/her journeying between local cries and international ties. This is mainly because the narrative of multiculturalism has been mostly categorized as an economic drawback and a security threat in the post 9/11 era. While living in countries torn by wars results in psychological torments, running out would spawn more traumas, more dogmas and more auras of immorality. What is more threatening,

refugees lack basic rights and therapeutic facilities to help them wipe inner pains and construct resilience. Overall, the refugee crisis warrants further attention in the literary enterprise of human vulnerability and invites to raise more disturbing questions, which have been left unanswered in critical appraisals of trauma theory, on the fragile and complex globalized nature of the present world.

Conclusion

Not only did this research work embark on the endeavour to voice the traumatized voiceless and explore children's construction of resilience and search for home in Deborah Ellis' tetralogy and N.H. Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, as the title propounds, it also turned its attention to examine the chasm of history wherein truths and wounds are buried beneath debris of traumas. As such, it explicitly departed from the assumption that history, just like the psyche, is torn apart and splinters of trauma reside stealthily underneath its broken layers. Throughout the centuries, war trauma has found a way to inflict an invisible hemorrhage on the psyche and history, a malicious one that makes the world in constant struggle, not knowing how to stop its profusion. From the collective experience of violent wars during the twentieth century to the sudden prevalence of global threats during the twenty-first century, trauma is everywhere. Like an intruder who disturbs the neatness of life, it infiltrates here and there, and drifts into the opaque innermost world causing chaos, ruin and loss.

In the complete picture of the study, I have begun this research work with the historicization of literature in war settings and closed the discussion with the examination of the refugee crisis. This thread allowed me to better situate and understand the components of the whole study, namely the theoretical framework, historical background and literary backbone. In so doing, the analysis fell profoundly on the examination of war trauma that is experienced by children in conflict zones. Closer to the core aim of the thesis, my reading revealed psychological, historical and literary patterns; it has been concerned with rendering visible the abstract matters that overweight so heavily upon both the human mind and history. What lies between and beyond war settings and refugee crises is thus the elusive manifestation of trauma. The latter has been approached from a psychoanalytical angle as it haunts the brittle mind and plagues the fragile history; each element is left subject to vulnerability.

So, the psychoanalytic reading of Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* tetralogy and N.H. Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* culminated in the understanding of children's inner pains in war settings. This was achieved through bringing the

wit of contemporary theorists who refashioned Freud's concept of 'shell shock', invested in studying the intricate abstractions of the unconscious mind and governed the theorisation of trauma. Key figures such as Cathy Caruth, Dominique LaCapra, Anne Whithead and many others were invited to back up the arguments, formulate the hypotheses and expose the findings of this research work. More than that, the analysis adopted a comparative approach, juxtaposing both thematic and stylistic dimensions of the selected novels. Hence, Ellis and Senzai were confronted in their attempt to testify against the immoral conditions of war. Espousing such theory and approach helped the study gain a thorough understanding of children's sufferings in conflict zones, sufferings that were unvoiced. Furthermore, they granted the study a space within the realm of literary criticism.

In the first chapter, I offered a kaleidoscope of theoretical outlooks, historical context and literary skeleton that together highlighted the identity of the research work. Taking children as a case study, the chapter traversed the realm where war trauma bloomed and swept through the dark corridors that were imbued with psychological interiorities and historical atrocities. In the three subsequent chapters, I embarked on the analytical journey of the research work where I applied the espoused theory and highlighted its injection in the war novel genre, in the novels under study. First, chapter two initiated the analysis by exploring the war torn countries. Scrutinising the setting served to prepare the ground for trauma inception. And so, the heavy atmosphere that strangled the vitality of Afghanistan and Syrian reflected the inner condition of children in contact zones. Furthermore, the chapter stepped in the characters' unconscious mind, an attempt to examine the responses to, and the reactions against, the haunting of trauma inception. In doing so, it examined how Ellis and Senzai resorted to realist and modernist techniques in order to shape a more realistic crafting of human psychology, signalling the explosion of the war novel genre. Second, chapter three moved on to examine the exteriorization of traumatic memories and the hurdles they put in the face of the healing process. As we saw in the case of Assif and Basel, the traumatized children created an alternative

reality to protect themselves from the unbearable awakening of a dormant pain. All their traumatic images were underground and refused to be pushed beneath the surface, hence why they remained stuck in their past and failed to build resilience. Parvana and Nadia, however, could develop psychological strength and made their strenuous journey into the unknown less burdened. The fourth and last chapter marked a shift in analysis as it partially opted for an author-based approach, proposed the notion of revolutionary intellectual under which Ellis and Senzai find their place and addressed the role of the author/intellectual in the post 9/11 era, an era that is marked by an intense tension between the occident and the orient. Moreover, the chapter was also devoted to the analysis of the people's errands in sewing the psycho-historical chasm wherein trauma resides comfortably, authoritarian regimes pervade powerfully and democratic powers watch silently through the author's creation of intellectual characters. Lastly, it posed the question of refugee crisis, and therefore touched upon the sequel narrative trauma further evoked.

To bring everything full circle, reading Ellis' tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo* attempted to bring answers to the questions the thesis previously advanced. In the beginning, Ellis and Senzai were confronted to each other in their attempt to forge a vivid trauma narrative and bear witness to children's traumatic experience of war. This confrontation proved that there were many thematic commonalities and stylistic resemblances between the two authors when it came to the expression of their profound concern with the psychological interiorities that overweight so heavily upon the children's fragile psyche. In other words, they draw the same multifaceted and rounded portrait of war trauma where children are overwhelmed by the war atrocities that play out within their brittle mind. As we read the writers' two novels, Ellis' *The Breadwinner* tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, we come to realize that the latter are war novels that not merely intersect at the examination of lost children in conflict zones; rather, they share much more in common: they embody the same state of being that reflects the chaos inside and outside the mind, and mirrors the war's insufferable gloom that penetrates the soul. Such a

coalescence of the works under study heats up a contextual reading of the war novel genre which often leads to the fusion of realist and modernist premises. In particular, it gives at once a similar asset regarding war atrocities and offers a three-dimensional picture of the sickening of the mind: the weight pressing down on Afghan and Syrian children, the debris of trauma their minds carry within and the abstract matters of inner pains that surface across the membrane of the unconscious mind. It is indeed at the crossroads of their common settings, plots, characters, themes and styles that Ellis and Senzai meet.

Amidst the inner labyrinth of psychological chaos, both Parvana and Nadia were drenched in a dark world filled with feelings of fear and melancholy, a world that is inhabited by absurd psychological mechanisms and characterized by an abrupt influx of traumatic memories. In order to survive and shove the insidious fiends the mind invites, they had to *act-out* and *work-through* the delicate bubble of trauma. Within this context, the mind symbolizes an antenna that transmits and receives random voices, inner voices. It is only by listening to these voices, locating their sources and responding to them that the traumatized subject can fetch order to the mind's disorder. In this light, the process of exteriorization is the key to healing. And so, the exteriorization of the psychological wounds is what makes Parvana and Nadia succeed in resisting the sudden detours life constantly brought. Also, only by having a backward glance at their pasts that a forward narrative of resilience was brought ahead, flavouring the dreadful present. In brief, it is through being thrown in the murk of human psychologies where the mind shatters and chronology collapses that both main characters succeeded in making sense of a life replete with traumas.

The research also proved that not all western writers dye their literary works with *clichés* against the Muslim community. By highlighting the traces of neo-Orientalism in Ellis' third volume, *Mud City*, and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, the hypothesis is proven true. The overreaching arguments, in fact, were the fruit of an in-depth analysis of which the last chapter was the testing ground. As it tends to be the case with Ellis and Senzai, the western author can be faithful

to the orient's historicity and to universal/humanitarian values. To be sure, the authors under study humanize the labeled oriental subject in general and the refugee in particular. In their works, they resort to a neo-Orientalist discourse to transcend the psychological ground and spotlight the cultural classification of the world. Regardless of their affiliation to the occident bloc, Ellis and Senzai are more concerned with universal values to the point where they go as far as to criticize the west for betraying democratic principles and fuel global violence. In this light, an effort to assert the historicity of fiction is meant as another stepping stone to unravel the dark secrets of politics wherein traumatized children are caught in-between local stabs and international traps. There is no need to say that a great concern with the plight of the oppressed is felt in the selected novels, which gives the war novel its due importance, especially in the depiction of the psycho-historical schisms that burden vulnerable children in conflict zones that is often neglected in favour of a shallow descriptive narration.

Another common point that unites the writers under study consists in embracing universality and adopting a revolutionary thinking in their attempt to denounce the war atrocities that are caused by both local assaults and international faults. In other words, Ellis and Senzai were more or less daring in the sense that neither neutrality nor partiality vis-à-vis political dogmas were identified in their work. To them, universal morality is the essence of humanity, regardless of the race, culture and religion which make the world beautifully embrace diversity. So, the function of the war novelist in the post 9/11 era transcends cultural diversity; it becomes more global and more therapeutic. Driven by humanitarian impulses, Ellis and Senzai critically engage with denouncing both the atrocities of the Taliban and Bashar al-Assad regimes, in addition to criticizing the evil spread by Western countries. Hence, they commit themselves to the cultivation of the people's consciousness on the carnival of pains where the child is thrown innocently. They cautiously provide an arena in which universal values confront political abuse and historical bruise. This is the function of the activist war novelist in today's dire atmosphere: to voice the traumatized voiceless and to protect history from potential removals. In other

words, one of the duties of nowadays' war novelist is to advance the global awareness of, and opposition to, humanitarian crises while also celebrating historical resistance and intellectual assistance. In their works, Ellis and Senzai succeed in raising a sensitive subject for discussion, a subject that finds its echoes in the cries of history which are alleviated by intellectuals. Thus, the production of a war novel genre emanates but from a revolutionary author who has reverence for the universal values that are being evaporated in the inhumane contemporary world.

Despite all the referred to simalarities, the comparison also pointed out a cluster of disparities which made Ellis and Senzai artistically divorce from time to time. Indeed, distinguishing between the authors' concern was what add a bulk of credibility and rationality to the achieved results. There was a considerable difference, for example, between the role of the Afghan intellectual and the Syrian one. While the former fought for education and women's rights, the latter revolted against the violation of history. Both of them, however, met at incarnating the persona of intellectual -the one who helps sew the psycho-historical chasm and cherishes ethics and morality. So, such a difference did not make the authors and characters contradict; rather, they complemented each other in the intellectual pursuit of finding a cure against the plague of war. Together, they built a world collectively where a pang of conscience was felt, a world devoid of violence and brimmed with humanness. Hence, Ellis and Senzai's divergence served to solidify the bridge between them and connect their thoughts. With this in mind, the research work scrutinised the function of war novelists in the contemporary era that is not only soulless but also inhabited by toxic venoms. In so doing, it was interested with the inclusive nature of authorship and the way it hones the human faculty of empathy without falling in the trap of sentimentalism.

On the venture into creating empathetic engagement that attunes to the reader's sensibility, it was made apparent that attention is paid to the reader's presence. In this light, the traditional view of literature which leans on the

assumption that it opens a window of opportunities for the reader to decipher the writer's feelings, disclose historical truths and provide subtle healings is refashioned and readapted in this research work. More precisely, it is regarded as a prism through which reality is projected by means of empathetic waves the author releases and the reader receives. These allow us to go beyond imagination, to empty us of the gimmicks of romanticism and to inhabit humanness in a more connected world through fiction. Drawing on Roland Barthe's question of what is like to be an author in the modern age, there obviously is no such a premise on the 'Death of the Author' when it comes to constituting narratives of bearing witness that are characterized by their collective ethos. In fact, the birth of the author is what leads to the awakening of a rational reader, and therefore the production of a literary fabric that ushers the essence of life to morality.

By acknowledging full authority of the text, the author is not dead. Instead, s/he functions as a universal antenna, receiving voiceless channels of trauma and delivering curative waves of human aura. The reader, too, serves as a conduit of reception of human unspeakable sufferings, an activist agent of change, and a producer of universal cure. Together, they build a just world where insidious demons are exorcized. If truth be told, everyone is responsible for the psychological bruises children in conflict zones are subject to. The intention is neither to accuse nor to blame, but to raise awareness on the ethical responsibility that is incumbent on the clear conscience of the people. Within this context, children's experience with war trauma deserves much richer data by giving room for sensitive subjects to be further explored and gain more in-depth and focused attention. Besides, it merits as equal of literary representation and examination as that of the adult and soldier cases. In brief, the plight of Afghan and Syrian children as traumatized refugee subjects necessitates urgent scholarly engagement.

As the analysis set foot on the refugee crisis, a point that was inevitably expected and predicted in the context of Afghanistan and Syria, the thesis reached out new horizons and challenges that make children in conflict zones

neither leave trauma dwelling nor break up with traumatic experiences. In a word, the night seems to never shine brightly for Afghan and Syria children as they are destined to receive random emotional outbursts that shatter their fragile psyche, to walk in tortuous paths that constitute a minefield of physical and psychological pains, to run fearfully with sharp stitches in their feeble body and to climb the highest mountains of inner pains, the *himalayas* of trauma. All these trials, however, test their psychological strength and remind them of how resilient the human subconscious mind is. In brief, they are fated to experience life in its most tormenting ways; yet, construct resilience from within psychic tortures. If they surrender to the cruelties of wars, they know they will never make their ways through life safely. And if they succumb to the insidious fiends of trauma, they will fall in the dark abyss of chaos and psychic turmoil forever. Either of these were still options both Parvana and Nadia could have chosen but they never made them theirs.

In the end, there is a literary artistry in Ellis' tetralogy and Senzai's *Escape from Aleppo*, an artistry that pushes the war novel genre to its limits where fiction defeats reality in the depiction of abstract matters. Thus, the authors' talents and wits are acknowledged as they managed to raise a sensitive subject for discussion which finds its echoes in the fragments of children's mind and in the cries of history. In simpler terms, there is a profound sense of trauma that pervades the novels under study ubiquitously, like a germ causing tortured psychic disease and historical infection. One might conclude the thesis at hand by commending the artistry of Ellis and Senzai who made of fiction a stream of consciousness where inner and outer voices flow across the velum of the shattered self. In the depth of their narratives, humanness finds its niche. So, both authors provided a critique of, and a comment on, the war atrocities inhaled by Afghan and Syrian children. Together, they championed the very essence of the war novel genre by illuminating the complex nature of psychological interiorities, unfolding what threatens the excision of history's noble organs, and therefore transporting fiction beyond reality. Looking at the overall panorama of this research work, Ellis and Senzai reminded us that life does not always

welcome gentle voices, that other voices knock the doors of our broken soul just like unwelcome guests whose unwavering presence belies their invitation and instilling a pervasive sense of trepidation in one's warm home. So, to live, even for a moment, is a traumatic experience yet an introspective journey to build resilience and develop psychological strength.

As the sun sets finally on this humble research work, a fading ray of sunshine unfurls regarding the disease of war and the struggle it entails to come up with a cure for psychological ills. In this light, trauma in general and war trauma in particular remain a propagative blow that looms largely over the horizon, signaling a timeless infliction of parasites on the psyche and history. These are fresh wounds that speak volumes of sufferings and provide a myriad of literary representations. I hope that this thesis will inspire future contributions and debates on the examination of traumatized children in war settings aesthetically, ethically and politically.

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ملخص

بين الأزقة المظلمة لمناطق الصراع و عبر الأروقة الخافتة للأنظمة الاستبدادية، يواجه الأطفال المصابون بصدمات نفسية هالة خانقة من الرعب تجعلهم يعيشون حالة ذعر بقدرما تختبر محاولتهم للصمود. فمن غير معرفة الوحش، أو التماس اللجوء أو ايجاد طريقة للبقاء على قيد الحياة، لا يزال هؤلاء الأطفال المتضررون يتكبدون من شدة المعاناة، مغمورون بمشاعر مكبوتة و غارقون في فيضان الذكريات. بالرغم من وحدتهم، إلى أنهم تمكنوا من الصمود ضد الفوضى النفسية التي يعيشونها و نجحوا في صرف الأشباح المأساوية التي تطاردهم و إيجاد طريقهم في الحياة المفجعة. و مع ذلك، يبدو أن الشمس لن تشرق أبدا لهؤلاء الأطفال، خاصة في ظل ظروف الحرب الحالية، أين يصبحون لاجئين و عناصر غير مرغوب فيهم. يوفر هذا البحث، استنادا إلى نظرية الصدمة، قراءة تحليلية نفسية لرباعية ديورا إليس بعنوان "المعيل" و رواية سينزاي بعنوان "هروب من حلب". الأهم من ذلك، تسعى الدراسة الى استكشاف الكدمات النفسية و التاريخية أين تنشأ الصدمة بسهولة وتقتن بأريحية. هكذا، تشير المدونة قيد الدراسة و المشبعة بتيارات الواقعية و الحداثثة إلى انفجار رواية الحرب، مما يعكس استقبال الأطفال لفضائع الحرب و رد فعلهم لها. من جهة اخرى، تضيف الدراسة، في ظل السيمفونية الكئيبة للفاجعة، نغمات لحنية في صفحات الفصول الأربعة، مندمجة مع الأسلوب الفني للروايات المنتقاة و مخففة لمعاناة الأطفال في مناطق الاحتكاك. علاوة على ذلك، يخوض التحليل رحلة أدبية عبر المستويات المجردة للنفسية المشتتة و الصفحات الممزقة للتاريخ المنهار. و بهذا، يتم علاج هذه الحالة من خلال خلق شخصية المثقف و إدراجها في خط المواجهة و بالتالي ملء الفجوة النفسية التاريخية. و عليه، تكشف نتائج البحث، بالارتكاز على المنهج المقارن، اخلاص كل من ديورا و سينزاي لهذا النوع من رواية الحرب في تصويرهما للآلام النفسية الباطنية التي تثقل كاهل العقل الهش، بعبارة أخرى العقل اللاوعي. أخيرا، تجتمع الروائيتان لسرد رواية حية تشهد على تجربة الحرب الساحقة للأطفال الأفغان و السوريين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأطفال، الفاجعة، التاريخ، التحليل النفسي، مناطق الصراع، الواقعية، الحداثثة، رواية الحرب، المثقف.