

Tracing the Shadows of War in Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*: Trauma and Memory

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Abstract—As a literary text, *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019) by Arab American novelist Sinan Antoon effectively represents the psychological impact of the Iraq War in 2003. This article utilizes trauma theory to explore how the war narrative in Antoon's novel probes the event of this war to represent the experiences that Iraqi individuals had from living through it. By analyzing Antoon's embodiment for the trauma of the Iraqis and their memory crisis, the impasse of survival for the protagonist, Wadood, as well as the symptoms and features of his traumatic experience, the article argues that Antoon significantly represents in *The Book of Collateral Damage* how the Iraqis were traumatized by both the experience and memory of the Iraq War. Wadood's story accentuates that the novel focuses on representing history in connection with war impact through investigating how the lives of individuals in Iraq became caught in the shadows of the Iraq War that haunted them with bitter memory, which they faced a difficulty to cope with and foregrounded their traumatic experiences. These individuals ultimately realized that their lives were impacted not only by their individual trauma but also by the collective trauma in their homeland, intersecting with their trauma. Therefore, they were left with one option; either to collapse psychologically, or to handle the determining factors of their personal history and the history of their country.

Index Terms—Iraq War, trauma, memory, Sinan Antoon

Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival.

—Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (p. 58)

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a lot of wars took place. One country in the Middle East that had profuse combat is Iraq. The Iraq War in 2003 was one critical event in Iraq; it caused the death of thousands of Iraqis and hugely damaged their country. Hence, it is remembered as a dark period of Iraq's history inspiring many Iraqi writers to represent the wounds of their homeland and people. One is Sinan Antoon in his novel *The Book of Collateral Damage*. An Iraqi American poet and novelist, Antoon is among the most significant authors who depict Iraq's history, the wars, and the political turmoil it suffered from. Many authors from Iraq associate themselves with events in their country, though some have been in exile. The literature they produced is mainly featured by "an increasing tendency towards universal themes and vision" (Altoma, 1972, pp. 211-212). This can be said about Antoon's works that have a universal dimension through investigating the negative effects that human combat over power and wars inflict, as well as dealing with Iraq's reality. As in his other works, Antoon characterizes in this novel the aftereffects the Iraqis confronted due to the Iraq War. Originally written in Arabic with the title *Fihris*, it was translated into English as *The Book of Collateral Damage* in 2019. In his review of Antoon's novel, Manhel (2019) writes: "So many books have been written about the Iraq War (2003–2011) from both sides of that conflict, but Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* is unique in that it chooses to represent the human and environmental cost of that war" (p. 81).

This article utilizes contemporary trauma theory to investigate Antoon's representation in this novel for the Iraq War impact on Iraqi individuals. It argues that in his novel under study Antoon represents how Iraqi individuals are traumatized by the experience as well as memory of the Iraq War. The author characterizes individual trauma as a central embodiment of war's impact, which undoubtedly echoes collective trauma inflicted by the war upon his nation. One focal question the article attempts to answer is: how does Antoon represent the war and its impact to embody the traumatic experiences of the individuals he portrays? In this respect, it seeks to identify the main features characterizing the traumatic experiences of these individuals as well as the symptoms of their trauma.

Several studies are done on Antoon's novel under consideration, of which some deal with his representation of war impact. In one article, Khalifa (2020) investigates the 'archive' metaphor in this novel of Antoon and Ahmad 'Abd al-Latīf's novel *Hiṣn al-turāb* (2018), ascertaining its functions for the characters as well as the narratives in the texts. Khalifa contrasts the act of digging the archives and recording them by the marginalized in these two novels to official

powers and institutions telling history from their side and marginalizing the 'other'. The author emphasizes that "the acts of writing and digging the past are correlated. Writing the past and keeping its record is the subalterns' way of fighting death and forgetfulness" (p. 296). In another article titled "A Postcolonial Reading of Double Consciousness: Internal and External Displacement in Post-2003 Iraqi Novel," Al-Kriti and Janoory (2019) employ Du Bois's notion of 'double consciousness' to explore its relevance to the postcolonial context in some post-2003 Iraqi novels including *The Book of Collateral Damage*. Regarding Antoon's novel and the psychological effect of the war, they confirm that the novel has an "Iraqi aspect" by focusing on the duality things acquire in every minute upon the invasion. The novel is centered on a variety of hidden feelings, emotions, and ideas essential to the narrative. Therefore, "the double consciousness of things equals the duality of people" (p. 11). Bani-Mfrij and Al-Shetawi (2021) discuss Kevin Power's and Sinan Antoon's depiction in their novels for how the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003 exceeded in its damage to include not only the "human species" but also the "flora and fauna" in Iraq. Therefore, "Powers's *The Yellow Birds* and Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* are ecological conscious literary works that ethics are extended beyond human beings and that moral standing is accorded to the world of animals and plants" (p. 508).

This article is situated within these studies that shed light on how Antoon represents the impact left on people by the Iraq War. However, the significance of the present study is not only in revealing how Antoon represents trauma in his novel as evidence of the effect the Iraq War created on the Iraqis but also in elucidating how he closely links the traumatic experiences of individuals to the bitterness of their memories for the war as a fundamental source of their inflicted trauma. It contributes to the existing literature on Antoon's novel by extending the analysis of pathological, individual trauma in the text to a new direction that spots its close nexus with the memory facet and collective trauma dimension, as envisioned by the author.

II. TRAUMA THEORY AND WAR

Among other issues, trauma is related in theory and literary texts to experiences of living in wars, being displaced from the homeland, and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) that veterans going to the war experience. In her book *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Felman (2002) suggests that the twentieth century was "a century of traumas and (concurrently) a century of theories of trauma" (p. 1). As far as Iraq is concerned, the trauma resulting from the 2003 War has been represented in journalism, documentaries, and literature, as in the novel under study. However, an intriguing feature of literature in this context is its efficiency in embodying traumatic experiences caused by war. Hunt (2010) states:

The use of literature (novels, poetry) can both support the psychological evidence we obtain regarding the impact of war, and in some circumstances help to develop our understanding. [...] Apart from a means of validating theory, it provides an opportunity to explore responses to war trauma in other times and cultures.... (p. 161)

Within this context, an essential matter this study attempts to unravel is how the war narrative in Antoon's text probes and represents the traumatic event of war and the experiences individuals have by living through it.

As a phenomenon, trauma has been viewed diversely by theorists, psychologists, and scholars. Generally speaking, the word trauma describes experiences emotionally painful and distressing that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless (Centre for Nonviolence, 2014). However, most trauma theorists rely on Sigmund Freud's paradigm of trauma and PTSD category. These theorists are mainly exemplified by Cathy Caruth in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, who proposes that trauma is "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (1996, p. 3). Trauma is generally defined as something that "describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). In the same vein, Felman (2002) states that trauma is characterized as "a shock that creates a psychological split or rupture" (p. 171). Hence, in many trauma definitions by theorists we find agreement on a shattering event creating various painful, psychological responses in those suffering it.

Trauma experience has a set of symptoms characterizing those having it that can be classified under four headings: traumatic memory (nightmares, dreams, and flashbacks), repetitive actions and speech, PTSD and aspects related to it, and other emotional symptoms (including alienation and seclusion). A traumatic experience is one in which an individual's physical and psychological well-being are endangered. In terms of features, three significant elements are stressed by most trauma theorists and rooted in Freud's thinking about trauma: latency, belatedness, and incomprehensibility. As Stonebridge (2009) maintains, in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) Freud outlines the complicated temporal features of trauma, comparing the "forgetting" of monotheism or "the murder of Moses" in Judaism to the latency of the man walking away from a train accident, without being harmed physically, but suffering from belated physical and motor symptoms (p. 195). Incomprehensibility of the traumatic experience for trauma subjects is another crucial feature. There is considerable emphasis on the mind's inability to comprehend certain historical and political facts when having a trauma. Contemporary theorists reiterate Freud's notion that it is almost impossible to realize trauma consciously but only live it by its aftereffects (Stonebridge, 2009, p. 199).

As an instrumental theorist inspiring a lot of work in trauma studies, Caruth (1995) argues that trauma results from an overwhelming event haunting the traumatized afterwards. She identifies three qualities of trauma: physical violence

intruding the psyche, the temporal gap between knowing and not-knowing, and repercussions upon the traumatic event. In respect to 'belatedness', "The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (pp. 4-5). Trauma is characterized by being an event or multiple events that "assume their force precisely in their temporal delay" (Caruth, 1995, p. 8). These qualities represent the main layout of trauma theory Caruth proposes. Based on this, it can be said that war impact continually haunts and overwhelms those living within war circumstances or surviving it, as will be manifested in the discussion.

III. TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES AND MEMORY IN *THE BOOK OF COLLATERAL DAMAGE*

In his novel, Sinan Antoon represents how Iraq War creates trauma in individuals who experience it. The protagonists, Wadood and Nameer, are Iraqis whose memory and psyche are continually haunted by the shadows of this war. Most of the narrative is about reminiscence of the traumatic event of the Iraq War, precisely its beginning. With the story set during the aftermath of the war, the novel tells about prolific traumatic memories individuals suffer from, as the protagonists primarily do. For this reason, shedding light on traumatic memory provides a better understanding of the psychological trauma of such individuals.

Throughout the novel, Antoon characterizes the atrocities of the war in the death of thousands of Iraqis, on the one hand, and the destruction of a plethora of antiquities, places, plants, and animals ensuing, on the other hand. These events represent the main factor leading to traumatic experiences for the characters, which they witness in their homeland and the author impressively depicts. Antoon describes the traumatic condition of Baghdad city during Iraq War, essentially through Wadood and Nameer's perspectives. Wadood particularly provides numerous examples in the catalog he craves to accomplish vis-à-vis the history of the war in his homeland and the damage it wreaked. According to Bani Mffrij and Al-Shetawi (2021),

most importantly, what makes the novel so distinctive and unique are the coherence and uniformity of style and content in which the anthropomorphized animal and plant protagonists try to catalogue the effect of the invasion with its military activities on Iraqi flora and fauna. (p. 521)

Within this context, Antoon embodies multiple traumatic experiences individuals go through as a principal demonstration of war outcomes in Iraq. The protagonists' traumatic experiences are key epitomes of Iraqis' psychological suffering from the Iraq War Antoon personifies. However, to achieve depth, the focus will only be on Wadood's trauma.

The author presents most of the narrative through this individual's perspective, who works as a bookseller. Therefore, ample details are narrated in the eyes of a subaltern representing how the majority of Iraqis view the 2003 War in their country and recollect its memory. We are told that among the factors contributing to Wadood's psychological drawbacks is his emotional shock upon returning from military service to his family home, discovering its destruction by a missile. Thus, he spends several years in a mental hospital for treatment (p. 300). How Wadood thinks, feels, and behaves exposes his pain from this austere emotional shock inflicted by the war in his homeland, added to his torture in prison. These traumatic events embody the source of his psychological problems, leading to multiple negative sides in his life.

Wadood's psychological wreck and agony is extensively depicted by Antoon. Essentially, the multiple hard personal experiences Wadood had in the past as well as the reality of his country after the Iraq War took place leave a vast burden on him and contribute to his depression. Wadood tells Nameer that the doctor diagnoses his depressive condition as "intense bursts of crying", elaborating: "Sometimes the rain is accompanied or preceded by thunder, which I can hear inside me and which I let out too-in the form of screams" (p. 218). This foregrounds acute melancholia and inability to bear his trauma. As trauma theorists pinpoint, the shattering event is too immense for the traumatized to get along with, which quite applies to Wadood. Memories of the past have a torturing impact on war survivors, causing devastation to their lives. What it destroys in them is never to be built again, and they remain unable to adapt to the post-war period.

Therefore, it can be said that most of the narrative in *The Book of Collateral Damage* is about how individuals view what happened to their country during the war. The way Wadood speaks about the past indicates his great torment by his country's history. It foregrounds Antoon's portrayal for him to signify Iraqis' trauma from the memory of the Iraq War that damaged their homeland. In one of his musings scattered all over the narrative, Wadood says:

The moment has white walls and its ceiling is a screen on which we can see the lives and memory of the moment. [...] a device and a sign over it with the words: 'To go down and move to another history. Destruction is what will bring us all together.' The moment is a wound. (p. 121)

Wadood demonstrates his distress about the truth regarding his country's history; he keeps digging into its past, especially the history of the war beginning, or "the first moment", as he calls it. His words also echo how Caruth (1996) uses the wound image to show that trauma can just be understood with literary or symbolic language (p. 3). In this way, Wadood stands for Antoon and all Iraqis recollecting memories from their country's past and manifesting their collective trauma about its "wounded" history. Such history is integrally typified by "destruction" triggered by the war, as this quote implies.

Furthermore, part of Wadood's psychological shock is inflicted from the fact that he sensitively realizes the immense death of Iraqis that the war causes in 2003. As a depiction of his shock from this fact, he stays haunted by the images

and associations of death's tragic event in his mind and psyche. Therefore, in telling Nameer how he feels the dead address him (p. 108), Wadood demonstrates how Iraqi individuals are haunted by the traumatic experience and memory of the war in their country. Erikson (1995) writes: "Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us" (p. 184). As well, Wadood's haunt by the dead reverberate the essence of Caruth's theory about trauma. Being a trauma victim, Wadood is "possessed by an image or event" (Caruth, 1995, p. 5), which is correlated to death and destruction in his homeland. This denotes his deep influence from the death of Iraqis in the war that killed thousands of them. In other words, Wadood is affected by the historical truth of the war; remembering Iraqis who died in it causes pain to him and its memory keeps haunting him.

More significantly, driven by his shock from the war, Wadood decides to document the destruction ensuing but is unnoticed by formal institutions for being tied to objects, not people, whereas in his view it is as pivotal as casualties. Indeed, the melancholic effect of the war in his homeland and its tormenting memory is integrally stressed in this catalog Wadood fanatically aspires to accomplish. Put differently, the catalogue enormously depicts Wadood's trauma through the memory of the Iraq War. "The Colloquy of the Catalog" is an instrumental episode that expounds this mission of Wadood and his feelings towards it. Wadood justifies his aim beyond it:

My task is exactly the opposite of the task of the midwife or the obstetrician who cuts the umbilical cord after the birth. I reattach the umbilical cords between things and their mothers. I restrung burned ousds. I put the tear back in the eye.... (p. 264)

This pinpoints this person's anguish for what the war did to his country and the incredible mission he seeks to recollect the parts of his country's reality before the war.

Within his reaction to his reality and his perception for the repercussions of the war, Wadood keeps contemplating the time element. In several positions in the narrative, he significantly relates this element to the situation in his country. As an illustration, he says: "Is it the same moment everywhere? Or is each moment tied to its place in this universe? If the latter possibility is correct, then there is more than one time" (p. 189). Through Wadood's words, Antoon philosophically views time. Caruth (1996) observes, "The impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (p. 9). Wadood asserts the link between a certain moment and the place. Nonetheless, the moment he focuses on here, and elsewhere in the novel, is undoubtedly the start of the Iraq War. So, he implies that this very minute has its features by linking to the place it is attributed to, which is Iraq, of course. This suggests Wadood's agony from perceiving that the war at that time changed everything in Iraq from its normal condition before the war into something else. By this, Antoon proposes that the war made Iraq's history utterly different from how it used to be, with the damage it triggered to the country and its people.

The obsession with time is a sort of distress for Wadood since we see that in each contemplation for it, the ultimate result is almost a proclamation of how deeply he is hurt, as all other Iraqis are, from what happened to their country in the past, or the time the Iraq War took place. In another musing, Wadood meditates: "Time doesn't move in one direction. [...] I began to see my life in reverse and I went back to my mother's womb. When I turned to go back, they aborted me" (p. 251). This attests to Wadood's strong preoccupation with the matter of time and every dimension tied to it. Yet, what overwhelm him about it are the past and its memories. He selects to go to the past, as he tells here and elsewhere: "I go back to the past and sleep on the path on which time marches, in order to make it stop and change direction" (p. 119). Therefore, memories are the core factor beyond Wadood's torment on the level of his personal life as well as what happened to his homeland from the war.

IV. WADOOD'S TRAUMA AS AN "ENIGMA OF SURVIVAL"

What is explained so far underscores Wadood's inability to make peace with his past, unlike some individuals portrayed in the novel. He has complexities preventing him from adapting to his reality and living normally. Nameer's girlfriend Maria is one of those who are able to cope with their traumatic memories. She tells Nameer about her satisfaction with a wound in her body from an accident when a child: "I like that scar. It's part of the history of my body and part of my memories" (p. 249). Through this, Antoon explores the relationship between memory and history. A problematic issue he probes is how individuals respond to their past and their country's past. Individuals as Wadood in the novel cannot cope with their traumatic memories resulting from their past; they almost collapse psychologically, as illustrated in this discussion.

Yet, in *The Book of Collateral Damage* Antoon promotes an outlook that memories ought not to be fully erased. It is a part of an individual's past, despite the need to accommodate to it adequately. Maria says to Nameer: "White people keep talking about 'peace' and the need for people to make peace with their past. I don't believe in that logic. There are things that can't be accepted and memories that must stay alive" (p. 250). The memories of individuals having traumatic experiences from the war, who are war survivors, represented mainly by Wadood, echo "acting out" and "working through" principles that La Capra (2001) proposes. A trauma survivor permanently withholds an element from the past, continually haunting the mind. This individual returns to the same trauma scene and becomes caught up performatively within it. According to Goldberg (1998), La Capra distinguishes two forms of remembering trauma and historical writings about it. The first is favorable for La Capra and leads to "working through". The other is based on denial and produces "acting out", where all experiences are traumatic and recur continuously and no one is remarkable (p. 1).

Whereas individuals including Maria and Nameer can “work through” their memories, placing them appropriately in their time and these characters’ past, Wadood fails to do so. He stays haunted by the traumatic memories he keeps “acting out”, and that in the long term hinder his ability to cope with his reality.

Therefore, Wadood has difficulty in adjusting to his reality and separating it from his painful past. With this, the constant memories that he mainly brings about in association to the war are an integral reason of his unhealed trauma. To illustrate, Wadood imagines himself going on a train once to the future and once to the past: “I don’t understand what’s happening. I look at the train windows and I can see my family and friends waving to me from the windows and gesturing at me to hurry up” (p. 97). This encapsulates Wadood’s distorted feelings and confusion. He supposedly attempts to skip his reality either to the future or to the past, struggling to change his terrible condition, which confirms his distress over losing his dear ones whom he no longer can have contact with. Trauma studies indicate the overlap between how the traumatized pathologically perceives the present and the past. La Capra (2001) maintains that trauma collapses the “distance between here and there, then and now” (p. 89). Wadood declares: “I’m still standing, clutching the iron bars and resting my forehead on them” (p. 238). Thus, most of his memories are traumatic and pathological, pinpointing the rupture and dissociation trauma causes in his life. He cannot realize that he is no longer in the mental hospital! His past painful experience there keeps intruding on his present thoughts.

Through this, we see how traumatic memories of the war embody a major facet outlining the psychological pain of traumatized individuals, who remain conflicted by them. Painful moments of Wadood’s life in the past, which are predominantly imposed by the war in his country, strongly imprint his imagination. They make him imbalanced and emotionally wounded until it becomes hard for him to carry on in his life. This succinctly illustrates how, as trauma theorists explain, trauma often becomes an “enigma of survival” (Caruth, 1996, p. 58). This hardship to survive the repercussions of trauma becomes at the heart of the troubling experience for trauma subjects. Caruth (1995) observes that “it is this literality and its insistent return which constitutes trauma and points towards its enigmatic core: the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event” (Caruth’s emphasis, 5). Wadood cannot settle himself with the past, which contributes to his breakdown afterwards. Trauma rigorously foregrounds the hardships survivors face in coping with the traumatic event disrupting many things in their lives.

Wadood’s story in *The Book of Collateral Damage* dramatically personifies this idea of survival impasse, as he feverishly strives to change the history of war’s “first minute”. He does this through the archive he dwells on to record colossal details of destruction, as if to erase what happened to his country from the war that damaged it and killed his loved ones among thousands of Iraqis it killed. Wadood confesses to Nameer: “There are people who write in order to change the present or the future, whereas I dream of changing the past” (p. 23). In other words, Wadood craves to remove the imprints of the war! Therefore, it can be suggested that his fanatical desire to document the destruction that influenced his country ultimately embodies his inability to come to terms with a past he no longer can embrace and comprehend, nor with a present he is impacted by and impotent to change. In an interview with him, Antoon remarks: “Wadood’s project may be described as an unfinishable encyclopedia of destruction. Both he and Nameer are in search of the most appropriate form and genre to write about Iraq and its recent history. They write from different locations [...] but are trying to collect shards and fragments of Iraq’s history and their own shattered personal histories...” (Judy, 2020, Para. 5). Hence, the archive designates Wadood’s attempt to reenact the traumatic history or event that influenced his own country, or the invasion of Iraq, and make sense of it.

This hints at what may be called an inner, pathological conflict for several characters in the novel, manifested by their desire to narrate their own traumatic experience as well as their country’s trauma while being unable to fully articulate these traumatic events. Most features of Wadood’s trauma illustrate this element of narrating trauma, pinpointed by trauma theorists. Felman and Laub (1992) emphasize the nexus between survival and how trauma survivors are inclined to narrate their stories: “The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (p. 78). Such a desire to narrate their traumatic experience may become a life-long journey. Nevertheless, Felman and Laub accentuate “the impossibility of telling;” to express something almost impossible to be espoused in thought, memory, or speech (pp. 78-79). Part of Wadood’s dilemma is embodied by this desire and being unable to achieve it.

V. SYMPTOMS AND FEATURES OF WADOOD’S TRAUMA

The traumatic effect of war on Wadood in *The Book of Collateral Damage* is embodied by Antoon through several symptoms. These symptoms include flashbacks, daydreams, and nightmares, which closely expose the pathological conflicts inflicted on him by the war. To illustrate, Wadood tells in a flashback how he rides the bus to “go back home” and see his family after discharge from the mental hospital (p. 215). He does not “get off” when the bus approaches their house but returns to “Bab al-Mu’azzam”, where he took it! (p. 216). Kurtz (2018) observes: “We think of trauma as a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelms an individual’s normal response mechanisms” (p. 2). This is manifested by Wadood’s indeterminacy, albeit he eventually decides to leave and go to his home. However, when Wadood reaches where his house used to be, he is astonished not to find it there: “I heard a voice shouting, ‘Where’s our house?’ It was my own voice but it was coming from far away. [...] I went back but I didn’t go back” (p. 226). Caruth (1996) notes

that “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (p. 4). The wound crying inside Wadood underscores his pathetic reality; his emotional pain is heightened by his feelings of exile in his home country as he is unable to find his home in his homeland!

Wadood’s traumatic memory is considerably embodied by dreams repeatedly haunting him as a symptom of his trauma. One dream is linked to his pathological sense of suffering dominating his country through perceiving how things around him suffer from the war (p. 106). Wadood elaborates:

Everyone endowed with this talent gathered on the stage in a theater, as if they were in an orchestra. [...] Whenever one of the people screaming falls down, two men come and drag his body into the wings and a new screamer soon takes his place. Then I too collapse from exhaustion and wake up. (p. 106)

This dream symbolizes the internal agony Wadood has about the situation in his country. As well, it stands for the collective trauma all Iraqis undergo. Those screaming in the theatre symbolize all tormented Iraqis, voicing their anger over their country’s destruction by the war.

In another dream, Wadood dreams to be a “bulbul” (a type of bird) in a cage like bones which, according to him, could be Nameer’s (p. 128). He attempts to escape but needs to “rip” Nameer’s lungs and kill him to do so! This reflects Wadood’s psychological burden and the intrusion of his stay in the psychiatric hospital as part of his traumatic memory, making him emotionally restless. Additionally, it suggests his attachment to Nameer, who can be seen as his alter ego; both share identical anguish about their country. This dream is repeated in the narrative; something emphasized by trauma theorists to show constant suffering for traumatized individuals.

Furthermore, Wadood’s trauma symptoms include repetitive behavior and speech. He frequently reiterates statements about things he did or that occurred to him. When he narrates incidents about his devastating experience in the mental hospital, he restates this statement: “I see myself there” (pp. 237-241). His suffering at that place haunts him; hence, he keeps imagining himself to be there, even after a long time of departure. This also highlights the overlap between the present and past for him as a consequence of his painful experiences and trauma inflicted by the war.

One further symptom Wadood markedly exhibits is alienation, resulting from war and circumstances attached to it. Whereas Nameer embodies exiled Iraqis alienated outside their homeland, Wadood represents Iraqi individuals’ estrangement within their homeland. He explains to Nameer why he lives in a room alone in Al Mutanabbi Street upon American attacks:

This little room from which I am writing to you is my real homeland because it is full of books and every book is like a whole sky. It also contains my catalog, which in its turn will contain everything I know and can imagine. (p. 228)

Wadood’s words foreground his psychological isolation and how he confines his life to books and accomplishing his catalogue. Antoon says: “Where do you stand with respect to someone nearby who has long felt like a stranger in his own country” (p. 259). It implies the estrangement Wadood feels at his homeland and identical feelings Nameer has during his short visit to Baghdad after the war started.

Additionally, Wadood’s trauma is mainly featured by “incomprehensibility”. The immensity of psychological pain resulting from his trauma in many cases becomes an obstacle for him to enunciate his emotions and thoughts plainly and adequately. According to Caruth (1996), “Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience” (p. 58). Several incoherent passages by Wadood, especially throughout the second half of the novel, demonstrate multiple memories about things that occurred to him. They follow neither grammar nor punctuation. As an illustration, Wadood says:

Everything shuts its eye everything what I lack and I look for it for me [...] the hole of the sky is a grave I dig alone I was no I wasn’t there how don’t I know I don’t believe I believe myself did they go into the hole for who and why they didn’t wait who took the hole who took the house didn’t wait.... (p. 211)

The excerpt shows Wadood’s intense suffering from his memories, reflected by confusion featuring his statements. Many expressions are affirmative and negative, at the same time, illuminating the contradiction in his thoughts and feelings. The words; “the hole of the sky is a grave I dig alone”, seem to suggest immense death and killing instigated in his country by the war, which he feels agonized about and finds difficulty in documenting alone.

The severity of trauma for those suffering it often turns to affect their well-being and becomes threatening to their lives. This is true of Wadood, who, because of his deep trauma, considers ending his life many times. Through a flashback, he tells how he hopelessly attempts to kill himself at the mental hospital three times: “In my corner, curled up near the windows, I am thinking: how can I not be? How can I not be “me”?” (p. 237). However, he is rescued by hospital employees until realizing it would be a sign of defeat to do this (p. 238). Caruth (1996) explains that the trauma survivor’s mind loses ability to confront its death immediately, causing survival to become an “endless testimony to the impossibility of living”. Furthermore, these traumatized subjects suffer a repetition of their trauma obsessively, where nightmares reenact the shattering event, taking the survivor’s lives to an “endless inherent necessity of repetition” that may ultimately destroy these person’s lives (pp. 62-63). Trauma victims, whom Wadood succinctly represents, are continually faced by nightmares and flashbacks, preventing them from living their lives normally. Such traumatized

individuals' trauma, in Caruth's words, eventually becomes a challenging "enigma of survival"; struggling to cope with their reality and surroundings while facing their traumatizing experience and trying to forget it (Caruth, 1996, p. 64). So, Wadood's trauma succinctly represents how depressive feelings and thoughts can lead trauma subjects to deal tragically with their reality.

Most significantly, Wadood's traumatic experience comes to a climax when he deliberately decides to commit the suicide he envisioned so long. In his letter to Nameer, he writes:

My birthday is a month away and I will celebrate it in an unusual way. [...] Yes, I am going to burn the catalog. [...] The ideal ending would be for me to burn too. The ecstasy of utter annihilation, leaving this form of existence and going to absolute nothingness. (p. 291)

What Wadood says underscores his psychological wreck over time as a result of his suffocating reality; his trauma ultimately becomes so threatening, terribly driving him to finish his life and even get rid of the most precious thing he has, his catalogue, or "the project of a lifetime" (p. 46), as he calls it. Weisner (2020) pinpoints that trauma may become "harmful or life threatening and have the potential to result in lasting negative effects on one's physical, mental, social, emotional or spiritual well-being" (p. 1). Yet, Wadood's life does not end as he desired. He tragically dies because of a suicidal bomb in al-Mutannabi Street, where he lives and sells books!

Hence, Antoon delves into Wadood's trauma to personify how traumatic experiences were triggered in thousands of Iraqi individuals from the Iraq War. This war brutally impacts Wadood. It ruins his personality, causing his mental imbalance and both his traumatic experience and memory. It is primarily responsible for destroying his family house, killing his dear ones, and inflicting the psychological wreck he severely suffers from. Above all, it is the same force that ends his life and damages his remarkable project; on which his whole existence has centered.

VI. CONCLUSION

It can be extrapolated that Antoon's tracing of the impact of the Iraq War in *The Book of Collateral Damage* oscillates between showing traumatic experiences inflicted upon Iraqi individuals, on the one hand, and drawing attention to the bitterness of their memory that adds to their pathological conflicts and wounds, on the other hand. Wadood is portrayed by Antoon to exemplify this through his catalogue in which he digs into his country's past, especially the history of the war beginning or "the first moment". By this, he stands for Antoon and all Iraqis who recapture memories, demonstrating their collective trauma about their country's "wounded" history.

Therefore, memory, particularly traumatic memory, proves to be a significant concern for Antoon in his text to reexamine the history of the war in his country. One problematic issue he probes is how individuals respond to their past and their country's past. Whereas some individuals can "work through" their memories (La Capra, 2001), Wadood virtually fails to do so. He remains haunted by the shadows of war that he keeps "acting out", and struggles to adjust to his reality and separate it from his painful past. This succinctly illustrates how for individuals like Wadood trauma often becomes "an enigma of survival" (Caruth, 1996, p. 58). The narrative of Wadood in *The Book of Collateral Damage* adheres to the main symptoms and features of trauma proposed by Freud and contemporary trauma theorists, pointed out in the discussion, and gives evidence of Iraqi individuals' impact from both the experience and memory of the war in their country. In particular, most of Wadood's nightmares and dreams are linked to his pathological sense of suffering dominating his country as well as the Iraqis' demise in the war that killed thousands of them. Thus, they stand for the collective trauma all Iraqis suffer from and their deep impact by the historical truth about the war in their homeland.

Since the shadows of war inhabit the mind of the author belonging to this wounded country, Antoon traces the trauma and scars left in his mind about it the same way they are left in the minds of the characters he portrays as well as other people in Iraq. Most importantly, the traumatic experiences and the bitterness of memory for Iraqi individuals that are traced in the text testify to how Antoon writes his novel to modify the truth about the war, so that he refutes the notion of seeing what the war instigated as roughly "collateral damage". Antoon digs into the history of this war to demonstrate a detailed impact of destruction and death triggered to places, objects, animals, and plants, and above all, to human beings; their bodies, souls, and psyches.

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