

The Maven

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The Maven

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THIS EDITION PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE SACRIFICES OF INDIAN SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR I AND ITS COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY YEAR BY PULSE FOUNDATION AND MR. MURUGESH NATARAJAN. THE ISSUE SALUTES AND APPLAUDS THE THE DEDICATION AND DILIGENCE OF MR NATARAJAN FOR THIS INITIATIVE.

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Editor's Note

From the origins of civilization, to its nascence, expansion and burgeoning, for the claims to rule over regions, lands, territories, resources and wealth; wars have been fought to seek indubitable yearning for power, to mitigate primacy, predominance and preeminence; as a social-cultural phenomena it remains a complex enigma, seen as absurd, experienced as instrumental necessity, wars have ministered the political, self-serving, opportunistic, and egotistical design to teach lessons, seek revenge/revanchism, establish superiority, even safeguard self as defense of nations, communities and individuals. History has brazenly, flagrantly, and shamelessly repeated wars despite the violence it begets at all levels, psychological, physical, psycho-familial, the damage never recovers, but mostly closeted, shunned, shrouded, and disguised or unforgotten through memorials, museums, monuments, statues and unsettling personal memories. In times of distress and conflict, art and poetry have navigated the personal and political, shaped the irrational to a paradoxical rational, created genres, exhibitions, commemorations, spoken to soldiers with poems in their pockets, on their deathbed or graves, questioned the jingoistic and patriotic rhetoric with fervor and poetic rationality, sparked debates, knocked at the door of conscience, rigged the chivalric romantic glory of propagating more violence and clamored to put a stop to the bullets, shells, bombs and weapons. While not always this has met with an assenting reflex, it exposes humans of their fellow insensitivity, vindictive malevolence, and a rather bull-headed stubbornness to injure and

chasten, arm-twist the party involved of its inflated facticity. War and representations in literature and allied subjects, has explored the trauma of socio-emotional, somatic, eco-environmental, financial, fiscal and consequences so deep, it often carries unconsciously to generations and epochs before getting rid of the wounds and psychic-laceration in the dna of the heritage and blood of its citizens. Poems and papers across disciplines, dealing with the trauma/post-trauma in war literature, novel ideations, unheard dimensions of wars of the past, in the nineteenth century or the troubled or strained nationalities/borders of the current world order have been undertaken for the current issue. The twentieth century war climate will particularly be the case in point. Battlefield horrors, fear-mongering, policy-negotiations, imaginary lands, utopias/dystopias, failed social architecture, distorted political visions, destructive civil or military actions, revolutions, falling stocks, crippling economies, troubled poetic psyche, expansive prose critique etc are some of the thematic ambit for deliberation and review of the current summer edition. The editor hopes to give the readers some cerebral food for thought through the articles and their researched opinions upon the matter at hand, differing in directions, seasons, eras and nations. It comes as a powerful yet terrifying warning from Pastor Martin Niemoller, “First They Came”:

“Then they came for the Jews

And I did not speak out

because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me

**And there was no one left”
to speak out for me.”**

Try to Praise the Mutilated World

(Adam Zagajewski)

Even if the peace doesn't come easy, you create one:

Go tone deaf, turn a blind eye, shrug and say:

“It doesn't exist

It never happened

It isn't truthful”

and then:

try to praise this mutilated world

From the jeep's bonnet,

when limbs were hurled

and mangled homes become

the relics of dead,

the disfigured face of a five-year-old,

reminds you of your little girl,

your helpless rage smirks,

It tells you to take this pill

down your windpipe:

of gag

and hush,

turning away.

try to praise this mutilated world;

.
. .
.

and then comes peace.

(Bhawna Vij Arora)

Does No Means: Please!

I don't really know who you were, but I remember how you smelled.

Your flannel jacket reeked of this, etched into my mind like rotting food.

It permeated my nostrils with every embrace; I recoil internally when I smell it.

Everyday when I step outside, I'm hit with a heavy, oppressive wave of smoke clouds everywhere I go. My coworkers reek of months and years of stale smoke.

I'm transported to a different time;

Suddenly, I'm 7 and in my living room again, sitting on the floor.

The carpet is purple, and I'm playing old, cheap video games. Everything inside smells of stale cigarettes.

Including you.

Mina F Forozan

God and the Soldier

All men adore

In time of trouble,

And no more;

For when war is over

And all things righted,

God is neglected -

The old soldier slighted.

Matthew Joseph Wisconin

My Trauma is a Piecemeal of Delight for You

Broken Girl

I'm not worthless.

It's not my fault.

My shirt wasn't too short.

I was not asking for it.

I did not deserve it.

I am not to blame.

He is not innocent.

He never should have touched me.

It's ok that I can't remember most of it.

It's ok to trust again.

It's ok to feel again.

All the numbness

Will all be worth it one day.

I am brave.

I am heroic.

And I am broken.

But broken things

Get out back together.

I don't have to stay the broken girl.

YOU don't have to stay the broken girl.

(The writer is a thirteen year old from Kabul, who has published on the

condition of Anonymity)

Poems, Bombs, and the Road to Baghdad

(Matthew Doherty)

Poems, Bombs, and the Road to Baghdad

does it remind you

of Yemen,

Ukraine,

Myanmar,

Manipur

It perhaps is not your business

to be bothered

in joy or sorrow

for broccoli or a beetroot,

green jilted to barrens red

to bloody-

for it does not matter

if food turns sulfuric

or rains of drones surveillance

in your drawing room

for dank drips of water or white phosphorous

you the troops of soldiers bleeding

metaphors/ anagnorisis bleeding

wars make no difference,

looking through the squinted eye

of the crocodile in algae filled pond.

BVA

Shawn Thomson

**Reading the Loyalist Trauma of the American Revolutionary War in
Anthon's Notes**

In *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (2017), Holger Hock counters the popular American memory of a bloodless American Revolution. Hock writes that to “understand the Revolution and the war—the very birth of the nation—we must write the violence, in all its forms, back into the story” (12). Hock highlights the Patriots’ use of physical force and psychological violence upon the Loyalists in what amounts to an American upon American reign of terror (12). Anthon’s Notes registers the Loyalist Staten Islanders’ personal and collective trauma of the American Revolution and its devastating effects on successive generations.

In 1850, Charles Anthon began working on the history of Staten Island that his father had begun after his family purchased the family estate of Aquehonga on Grymes Hill in 1840. They resided there until 1852. Anthon continued to visit Staten Island after the family had sold Aquehonga to complete his research for his unwritten history of Staten Island. I discovered Anthon’s Notes in the Staten Island Museum Special Collections. Its record describes it as “nine bound ledgers in which the Anthon’s [...] recorded their interviews with Staten Islanders between the years 1840 and 1865 [...] to discover family reminiscences about the Revolutionary War years on Staten Island and record something about life on Staten Island during those years especially” (Staten Island). Anthon became Professor of History and Belles-Lettres at the Free Academy that became the City College of New York

in 1866 from 1853 to 1883. Charles Anthon served as the editor of *American Journal of Numismatics*, the Corresponding Secretary of the American Numismatics and Archeology Society, and President of the American Numismatics and Archeology Society from 1868-1870 and 1873-1880.

As an inquirer into the unexamined past, Anthon enters into this Loyalist community and offers a sympathetic outlet for the Staten Islanders to express the brutalities of the American Revolution and their remembrances of life during wartime. Anthon often returns to the same interviewer for further questions, and in several instances, he later pastes an obituary notice above the person's recorded conversation. Anthon's curation of his Notes suggests his intimacy with the lived experience of the former Loyalist community and his view of his notes as a living record of his personal connections to the people and places of Staten Island.

Anthon's Notes become a vehicle for the Loyalists of Staten Island who were on the wrong side of history to have their traumatic personal and collective memories of life during wartime set down and recorded. As neighbors, friends, and family relations before the American Revolution, the New Jersey Whigs knew where the Loyalists lived, what possessions and wealth they had, and even their daily routines. Anthon's record of the physical violence and psychological terror enacted upon the Staten Island Loyalists by the Whigs' pillaging raids of their homes and property that often involved the torture and murder of family members positions Anthon's Notes as a counter history of the American Revolution. Anthon's excavation of Loyalist Revolutionary memory opens a space for the recovery of these stories of trauma and for a more nuanced or balanced reading of the American Revolution. In the conversations with the former Loyalists that Anthon recorded in his notebooks, Staten Islanders speak of their own experience of physical violence and psychological terror during the American Revolution or retell a traumatic event passed down

from within the Loyalist community.

The Staten Islanders Anthon interviews lived through the Revolutionary War era as children or young adults. Their memories of the war are told to Anthon some seventy-five years later between 1850-1853. Anthon's record of the conversations told to him illuminates Cathy Caruth's depiction of the story of trauma as "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 7-8). The Loyalist Revolutionary memory that emerges from Anthon's interviews lays bare the physical suffering and emotional cost of the Loyalists' allegiance to the Crown and the weight or hold of a singular and consequential moment of the violence and terror of life during wartime. The traumatic memories in Anthon's Notes are not shut away but intrude upon the present (Barry).

As a collection of recorded conversations of Staten Islanders who experienced the Revolutionary War, Anthon's Notes uncovers the trauma of the Loyalists' collective memory. In Anthon's article of his conversation with Mr. Disosway, he clearly highlights the dread of the Staten Islanders who lived through the Revolutionary War. Mr. Disosway states that "Mrs. Judge Ryers is buried in the Moravian Church yard. She was killed by fright at the landing of the British" (Anthon 76). The Revolutionary War era in Staten Island is marked by the arrival of General Howe and his brother Admiral Howe and the Hessian soldiers on Staten Island on July 12, 1776, the brutal whaleboat wars between Staten Island Tories and New Jersey Whigs, Lord Stirling's Continental Army attack on Staten Island in January 1780, and the evacuation of the British from Staten Island in December 1783.

The vividness of the memories demonstrates the traumatic reverberations of the Revolutionary War upon the Loyalists of Staten Island. The historian Peter Loewenberg suggests studying both "critical personal traumas" and "social traumas" that can shape the

life of a nation much as childhood traumas shape the life of an adult (28). Loewenberg argues that groups that live through “a common historical situation” might “possess common features or patterns of response that can be identified decades later” (Loewenberg 28). The Loyalists were not a part of the national memory that elevated the heroism of the 76ers. Anthon’s Notes constitute the collective trauma of the loyalists who were on the wrong side of history and on the opposite side of the Arthur Kill separating the New Jersey Patriots from the Staten Island Tories.

In its opposition to the national narrative, Anthon’s Notes is a work of counter-history of the American Revolution that reveals the physical and psychological violence the Loyalists endured during the American Revolution and its heavy toll upon their lives when they had to step in line with a new social order. Papas, the most significant contemporary historian of Staten Island during the Revolutionary War, utilizes Anthon as a source but does not recognize the power of Anthon’s Notes as a source of trauma in the collective memory. His conclusion to his chapter on Richmond County, Staten Island states that “by 1784 civil government was fully restored in those areas of New York formerly under British occupation. [. . .] Moreover, the religious affiliation of the island’s post-Revolutionary leadership shifted from Anglican to Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed. The residents of Staten Island, once maligned for their Loyalism, had made the successful transition to their nation” (Papas 97). This seemingly seamless transition belies the hidden signs of trauma from the era’s continuous state of lawlessness and crisis and the rents in the social fabric of the Staten Island Loyalist community. Anthon’s Notes documents that Staten Islanders become both targets of violence and agents of terror. They suffer the death or imprisonment of a parent or family member, the loss of property and wealth, and the destruction and upheaval of the old imperial order of things. The brutalities committed against the Loyalists and their own concerted efforts to seek vengeance upon the New Jersey

Whigs must be suppressed, unspoken, or forgotten lest they be deemed unpatriotic in these new United States of America.

Lord Stirling's Raid of Staten Island in January 1780 demonstrated the vulnerability of the Loyalists during the Revolutionary War. Under General Washington's directive 3,000 Continental Army troops crossed the Sound from New Jersey to Staten Island. Although Lord Stirling's attack was met with stiff resistance from the British troops tipped off by their New Jersey spies of an upcoming raid, this action did not deter the hordes of Whigs who joined the Continental troops. The New Jersey partisans took the opportunity to plunder the Staten Island homes, farms, and businesses. They took whatever moveable property they could carry such as the Loyalists' enslaved persons, food, valuables, cattle, and the literal clothes off the Loyalists' backs (some women suffered the indignity of being forced to strip to their underpetticoats and hand over their garments]). And what could not be plundered was destroyed or burnt (Papas 90). The British occupying forces too robbed, murdered, pillaged, and raped the Loyalists of Staten Island and saw any sign of defiance or disaffection of the Staten Islanders as an act of rebellion. After the war, the Loyalists were powerless to redress the crimes committed against them and had to accept the founding principles of the American nation and its history of the American Revolution. The retribution and reprisals against Loyalists were evident in the 1779 Act of Attainder (or Confiscation Act), which banished and confiscated the land of fifty-nine prominent Loyalists from New York, including two Staten Islanders, Christopher Billop and Benjamin Seaman (Papas 107).

In examining the trauma of the Loyalists who experienced the war firsthand, Anthon excavates the historical memory of men and women who grew up during the Revolutionary War. The most striking and concise evidence of this dramatic change brought home to the Loyalist children of Staten Island during the Revolutionary War is evidenced in Mrs. Blake's,

then Miss Merrall, memory of a dinner at her home: “A lot of Americans once came over from the Jersey shore and were making merry at a drinking-house which was there, having put their guns in a corner. There was an English officer staying at her father’s house and when he came in to dinner it was remarked that his ruffles were bloody whereupon he said he had killed half-a-dozen of them while drunk. She recollects seeing a negro woman covering one dead body with brush” (Anthon 75).

Loyalist families provided the British officers room, board, and hospitality requisite for the gentry. The bloody ruffles of the British officer’s dress shirt expose the refined manners and elite tastes as a cover for his killing potency on behalf of his Majesty King George III. Mrs. Blake calls to mind the enslaved person covering the body of the New Jerseyman with brush, but there is no concealing the trauma of living through the Revolutionary War. This scene of death is Miss Merrall’s new reality. Where the Loyalists and the American may have had some agreement that the guns in the corner were a signal of peace and the enjoyment of the tavern life, the British officer did not recognize this custom and familiarity and acted to dispatch the Jerseymen. Mrs. Blake is complicit in this violence in boarding the officer and had to be courteous to the officer’s gentlemanly overtures of grace and decorum even at the tea table knowing full well he is here to murder the Rebels and uphold her way of life in imperial Staten Island.

For the Loyalists, the Revolutionary War era was an era of terror and lawlessness. Mrs. Bird, who was only fifteen at the time of the outset of the American Revolution, had felt the trauma of homes and property being invaded and robbed and the threat of violence and rape. The New Jerseymen took advantage of the vulnerability of the Loyalists and crossed the Arthur Kill to rob them of whatever they could take whenever they could take it. Mrs. Bird relates the story told to her by Mrs. Bodine:

Mrs. Bodine told her that their house was entered by a party during the War, who tied

her husband, John Bodine, with bed-cords, and tortured him to get his money, though he had none in the house. They ransacked the house and whatever they could not take, they destroyed. Nathaniel, her second son, was then an infant, and they stood over her and him with the bayonet, while her husband was being tortured in the worst manner. (Anthon 108)

The threat of murder and violence was a fact of life for the Loyalists during wartime. Anthon recounts his conversation with Mr. Isaac Housman who was 78 years old at the time of the interview at the Black Horse, Aug 24, 1853. Born in 1775, his childhood would have been formed by the decade of the local civil war and transatlantic arena of the American Revolution. He was a witness to the war and relates the same incident as Mrs. Bird:

John Bodine was tortured during the war, by certain Jerseymen, who afterwards bought the Dongan house. [...] The room where they tortured him was not ceiled but there were beams instead, in which were spikes on which he was in the habit of hanging his guns. They fastened him to these, and then heated the shovel and tongs red-hot, and burned him with them, but in spite of this he would not tell where his money was. A British soldier, coming along the road, heard the noise and fired a gun to give the alarm, on which the Jerseymen ran off. (Anthon 82)

Both accounts are part and parcel of the collective memory of the Loyalists of Staten Island. Mrs. Bodine told Mrs. Bird this story; thus, the memory has passed from its original source directly to a secondary source while Mr. Houseman, we can surmise, heard this story directly or indirectly from Mr. Bodine. When seen side-by-side, these two distinct perspectives form a complete and vivid picture of this traumatic event. Mrs. Bird's account focuses on the emotional trauma of the torture. Mrs. Bodine told Mrs. Bird of the horror of having her infant threatened with a bayonet, witnessing her husband strung up with "bed-cords, and tortured," and having the house ransacked and her possessions destroyed

(Anthon 108). In contrast, Mr. Houseman's story focuses on the mechanical means of the torture and its resolution. Mr. Housman centers the account on Mr. Bodine as the master or head of the house—his wife and sons are not mentioned. Mr. Housman details how the hooks used for his guns are instead employed to hang him to be tortured by the red-hot fireplace implements. Mrs. Bird's account is intimate and reflects a home turned upside down. What was once an ordered, secure, and safe place for her children has become a space of violence, chaos, and terror. The rebellion has entered into the home and this is the site of Mrs. Bodine's trauma. In contrast, Mr. Bodine's manhood is tested by the Jerseymen's intrusion. Under great pain and violence, Mr. Bodine does not give up his secret stash of money even though Mrs. Bird's account suggests that there was in fact no money to give up. Mr. Houseman's telling of the story raises Mr. Bodine's stature among the men of the Staten Island community.

It is not a leap to conclude that Mrs. Bodine was psychologically scarred by this home invasion. The fact that these same Jerseymen bought the Dongan house and entered the Staten Island community with impunity as Patriots and not as robbers and torturers demonstrates the underlying tensions of this transition from the Revolutionary era to the early National period. One can imagine Mrs. Bodine's unease if not terror in seeing these same Jerseymen walking the streets, attending her church, or going about their business as if nothing had happened. Mrs. Bodine would not so easily forget these men with their bayonet threatening her child or the screams of her husband. She must have yearned for old colonial-era Staten Island and its tight-knit Loyalist community.

In the case of the murder of Peter Houseman, the distinction between individual and collective memory becomes more pronounced. Anthon records his conversation with Isaac Housman on the circumstances of his father's murder: "Peter Housman, father of Isaac was killed in his own house by a party from Jersey. ... There were nine of these Jerseymen and

all had their faces blacked” (Anthon 83). In Anthon’s interview with R. Henry Crocheron, a radically different version of the Houseman murder emerges: “Just about evening they were as usual barring the windows and doors. As they were about to fasten the door the robbers came, all having their faces blacked, and shoved it open” (Anthon 97). Remarkably, the only detail consistent in both accounts is the blackened faces of the Jerseymen and their entry into the Housman home before the door was barred.

In the first account, Isaac centers the account on his father Peter Housman. Peter Housman was known for his wealth and hid his money in the cellar, presumably, telling none of his family for fear of them being tortured like Mr. Bodine for information of its whereabouts. The Jerseymen knew or were informed of Peter Housman’s routine and stormed the house before sundown when Peter Housman was known to bar the door. Isaac was the only son present when the nine blackened-faced Jerseymen forced their way into the house. Anthon tells us his brothers were away “p a’ d-rolling” on patrol, and Isaac was the only Housman son present during the robbery (Anthon 83). Being a young boy, Isaac was quickly whisked away from this scene of brutality and put in the kitchen by the “negro slaves” and the door barred behind him (Anthon 83). Isaac states, “It was all done in a very few moments (Anthon 83). Whether he saw the Jerseymen club Mr. Housman and his son-in-law David Tysen is not clear.

Crocheron’s account (the second of the two accounts) of the Housman murder is part of the collective memory of the Staten Islanders and bears little resemblance to Isaac Housman’s Revolutionary memory. With Peter Housman being bed-ridden, the protection of the home shifts from the father to the “two sets of sons” who were charged with “barring the windows and doors” (Anthon 97). The collective memory admonishes the sons for their actions that led to the death of their father and taking “to their heels” (Anthon 83). In failing to bar the door and overwhelm the first Jerseyman who forced his way into the home, the

sons have failed to defend their home and protect their family patriarch. In contrast, the individual memory of Peter Housman emphasizes the Jerseymen's execution of the robbery before Peter Housman could bar the door at sundown. Which account of the murder of Peter Housman is true? Obviously, these accounts are so drastically different that both cannot be true. But a more important question is how do these conflicting memories clarify the traumatic experience of the Staten Island loyalist community during the Revolutionary War?

A telling detail from Isaac Housman's account is that after the murder of Peter Housman the Jerseymen do not take the plate: "There was a good deal of plate about, but they were afraid to take it, for fear of its being identified" (Anthon 83). The plate would often bear the family seal or other distinguishing design features of the silversmith's craft. The Staten Island Tories had their own loyalist partisans and guerilla militia that could enter New Jersey at will and rob, steal, and exact revenge for acts committed against the Staten Island Loyalists. If the Loyalist militias discovered the Housman plate on their raiding parties into New Jersey, it would link them to the murder, and they and their Whig family would suffer severe retribution. Thus, in not taking the plate, the blackened-face robbers would make off into the dark of night with nothing linking them to the brutal clubbing of Peter Housman.

Jacob Housman's insanity stands out in the Loyalist collective memory as a symptom of both the personal and social trauma of the Loyalists' plight during the whaleboat wars and the effect of their loss and suffering being "undescribed" in the national narrative of American fight for independence. Crocheron states: "Jacob Housman is now in the Lunatic Asylum. He accused Robins of being one of those who killed his father" (Anthon 97). Jacob Housman's insanity can be seen as a symptom of the violence and lawlessness during the Revolutionary War and the lack of reprisal and consequence for the crimes committed against the Loyalists during the early National era.

Jacob Housman's accusation of Robbins "being one of those who killed his father" either directly taking part in and orchestrating the attack or tipping off the robbers of his father's routine casts the Revolutionary War as a time of opportunism and nihilism (Anthon 97). A recent British emigrant to the colonies, Captain Robbins settled in Staten Island before the Revolutionary War and married a Staten Islander. He became a leader of a band of Loyalist refugee marauders who fled the countryside to Bergen Point opposite to Port Richmond on Staten Island. The refugees cast their lot with the British, and Capt. Robbins channeled the refugees' festering resentment and growing vexation at the state of social decay and misrule and crossed into New Jersey to settle scores. Captain Robbins sought to make the New Jersey Whigs pay for their rebellion against the Crown and viewed the Revolution as an opportunity to profit by the lawlessness at the border by raiding and looting the New Jersey Whigs and selling stolen provisions to the British for hard currency (Papas 96). If Jacob Housman is correct, Captain Robbins also saw the Staten Island Loyalists as vulnerable and sought to rob them as well.

In his interviews with the Staten Islanders, Anthon seeks out information on Robbins but is frustrated by their unwillingness to discuss the exact nature of Captain Robbins's wartime activities. Mr. Crocheron speaks of Captain Robbins's role in the Revolutionary War: "Robins drew pay as a British officer, and went by the name of Captain Robbins" (Anthon 97). Abraham Simonson states, "Capt. Robbins was once so closely pursued on the Jersey side that he had to jump into a hog-pen and hide. He used to go over to Jersey side to plunder" (Anthon 143). In his conversation with Mr. Isaac Simonson, Anthon records an account of Robbins during the Revolutionary War that shows the division between New Jersey Whigs and Staten Island Loyalist that continued into the early National era: "Captain Robbins was on the British side. He had a bad name. He took the house at the Neck long after the War. His wife was a Staten Island woman. He never dared till the day of his death

go into Jersey. When his family were going over, he would accompany them only to the New Blazing Star. They would go over, but he never would” (Anthon 136). Even as Simonson relates that Robbins dare not take the ferry at Blazing Star, very little information is revealed about what he actually did that would prohibit him from crossing to New Jersey after the Revolutionary War. Captain Robbins’s bad name connotes bad deeds, and the Loyalist community seems unwilling to speak openly of Captain Robbins’s wartime atrocities lest it implicate other Staten Island Loyalists.

In the record of the conversation with Edmund Seaman, Anthon excavates the terror Edmund’s family was subject to and how his father John Seaman was haunted by the Revolutionary War. Anthon records a traumatic memory passed down from John Seaman to his son: “Mr. John Seaman, when about eighteen, killed a cow-boy who had come over from New Jersey with his companions in quest of plunder. His brother Henry and his nephew Benjamin Micheau, (son of Paul), kept a store there” (Anthon 79). The store set up by the Billopp and Seaman families of the Perth Amboy Group was a target of the New Jersey Whigs who had traveled on the Fresh Kill waterway to Richmond passing the home of Col. Seaman (Papay 16). John Seaman was alarmed and rushed from the Seaman home to defend the family store in Richmond. When John Seaman fired at the flash of the New Jerseyman’s flint-lock musket, he fatally wounded one of the plunderers:

The Cow-Boys had bound and gagged them, and put them into the cellar, and were quietly packing up goods. On seeing Mr. John Seaman enter the hall, one of the party snapped his flint-lock musket at him. It missed fire. Mr. Seaman aimed by the flash: the ball penetrated the man’s arm, and then passed through his body into the frame of a window, where it long remained. (Anthon 79)

John Seaman spent two or three days caring for the dying man. Edmund Seaman’s statement that his father “always felt unpleasantly about the circumstance, and did not like to talk of it”

reveals the weight of this singular event in his life (Anthon 79).

John's memory of killing a Patriot even as his story suggests he was forced into this act to defend himself and save his brother and nephew from being kidnapped and taken to New Jersey puts him on the wrong side of history. Edmund Seaman's story of Loyalist atonement for his violence against an American Patriot belies John Seaman's position atop the social hierarchy of imperial Staten Island. This act of contrition to the ethos of the new nation that he fought against may be a convenient story to tell that covers over the brutal part both sides played in this civil war. There may be more to Seaman's story. Benjamin Mischeau, John Seaman's nephew, was an active member of the Loyalist militia and took part in raids into New Jersey, and one wonders if John Seaman did not also participate in these raids knowing the Staten Island Anglo-Dutch aristocracy was at stake—Judge Benjamin Seaman III's property would be confiscated and he would leave Staten Island for Nova Scotia with ten of his eleven children. (Papas 84). This was a bloody almost tribal civil war in a state of suspense where no one knew who would be victorious. John Seaman must have known at the critical moment of life and death that the past, present, and future generations of Seamans in Staten Island were at stake.

Anthon's *Notes* registers the Loyalist Staten Islanders' personal and collective trauma of the American Revolution and its devastating effects on successive generations. Anthon does not arrive at a conclusion, reach an endpoint, or achieve closure but enters into the gloom of historical memory and brings to light the unexamined and suppressed history of Staten Island during the American Revolution. Although Anthon often interlines statements that are contradicted by other sources, those memories are not struck from the record but reinforce Anthon's grounding in the history of Staten Island. In its opposition to the national narrative and founding myths, Anthon's *Notes* is a counter-history of the American Revolution—something that should be excavated and brought to light.

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Wei H. Kao

**Post-nationalism, Post-memory, and Two World Wars
in Three Irish Plays by Dermot Bolger**

Introduction

The concept of the nation seen as a restrictive and neither glorious nor aspirational notion can be attributed to the postmodernist suspicion of grand narratives. In Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), he envisioned that all grand narratives would probably break down in the post-industrial world with knowledge, acquired or created, being more fragmented than coherent in all disciplines, scientific or artistic. As knowledge would be splintered into smaller and smaller segments, "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses" (Lyotard 37). This is the same with nationalism, among other grand narratives, supported by a single authoritative viewpoint rather than multiple, sometimes conflicting, ones.

This postmodern intervention, in similar vein, resonates with Irish revisionism and other emerging political criticisms by challenging nationalist propaganda, deconstructing the making of nationalist hero(ine)s, myths and historiography, and questioning the cultural isolationism that sustains the inward-looking nationalism. It might be argued that the strategic contribution of Irish revisionism lies in its success in debunking "the sanctified centrality of the nation" so as to loosen "the grip of [nationalists] on the intellectual parameters of thought in and about Ireland" (Graham 89-90). In other words, Irish revisionist historians challenged the received myth of nationalism by pointing out that not only the "nation" is "a restricting force" but "the nation-narrative had become the macro-narrative, denying the plurality and complication of history" (Graham 90). The demand for more

pluralist interpretations of Irish experiences prepared for different approaches to and frameworks of local history in a much wider context, liberating the nationalist tradition from being repressive in its formation and agenda. Discarding the British-Irish dualism that had kept revisionist and nationalist historians antagonistic, critics of post-nationalism—with which this article aims to approach Bolger’s three plays—further differentiate themselves from Irish revisionism by situating relevant issues in European politics rather than within an Anglo-Irish context and narrative.

This essay will examine Dermot Bolger’s war trilogy, which features young or underaged working-class characters whose struggles and predicaments during the two World Wars have yet to receive more serious attention, despite some Irish playwrights having delved into a fraction of wartime issues. The essay will not centre on textual analyses of these plays—some of which have not received much critical attention—but show how their dramatic stories exemplify the transition of Ireland from being dominated by prescriptive, state-centric nationalism to post-nationalism that recognizes multiple identities, localities and war experiences shared across borders. It will also suggest how the post-memory exhibited in these plays challenges the existing public memory of national heroes but is yet to be reconsidered. The three plays to be discussed are *Walking the Road* (2007), *Rope Knots: A Finglas Life Reclaimed* (2017), and *The Messenger* (2017).

Post-nationalist Ireland and Post-memory

What concerns the critics of post-nationalism is not how to reconstruct lost memories through conventional publications, such as memoirs, documentaries or personal testimonies, but instead to *discover* and present them in more reliable yet creative ways. Take Great War memories, for instance. The veterans are no longer able to express themselves or be interviewed, whereas the post-memory of this disastrous human tragedy is still open to

interpretation and can be seen in different versions in literature, docudramas or through stage plays, despite the fact that their authenticity is yet to be examined.

What essentially differentiates nationalism from post-nationalism is that the latter does not aim to entirely negate “the ideological constructions and restrictions of the nation” but “to preserve and move beyond them simultaneously” (Graham 55). Some people may argue that post-nationalism seems to be merely a form of revisionism, whereas the focus of the former is not to reiterate the almost outdated debate between the two camps but to propose “a critical reappraisal of the prevailing ideas and images” that have shaped a homogeneous national identity (Kearney 15). For post-nationalist critics, what modern Ireland needs is to “break away from nationalist attachments” and the over-celebrated “ethnic essentialism, gendered or ascriptive social categories and political authoritarianism” (Frost 279). Moreover, it is time to admit that Ireland, even upon its birth as a nation-state, has always been “a hybrid construct” and can be re-imagined in alternative versions (Kearney 89). It can therefore be contended that Bolger has, among many contemporary Irish writers, questioned the reliability of nationalist narratives that might have arbitrarily shaped one’s political perception. He attempts to prompt readers to move beyond the competing nationalisms across the British Isles and “towards a notion of Irish culture which views the dialogic hybridity of “Irishness” in empowered ways” (Graham 98).

It should be noted that nationalism and post-nationalism are not antagonistic concepts or demands. While the latter intends to call for an end to competing nationalisms—not to entirely supersede them, it aims to “preserve what is valuable in the respective cultural memories of nationalism” (Kearney 59). This implies that, in the trend of globalization, it is becoming imperative not only to lawfully recognize and protect people of different communities, social classes, and ethnicities but also to sustain supranational organizations, such as the European Union, for “cosmopolitan solidarity” and “the moral universalism of

human rights alone” (Habermas 108). Strategically, this would practically safeguard the diverse demands of various national identities and avoid xenophobic cultural nationalism or any racial or religious supremacy.

In this context, it may be contended that Bolger’s monologic portraits of working-class and underage characters aim to showcase more than the tragic consequences of contesting nationalisms but how they can be seen in a wider post-nationalist framework. They exemplify Bolger’s oeuvre—both novels and dramas—in which his “postmodern critique of power . . . implies the replacement of absolute sovereignty—theocracy, monarchy, bureaucracy—with republican ideals of freedom” (Kearney 63). That said, the post-memory, where he locates his socially marginalized characters, might not only question the grand narrative of nationalistic historiography but also “create meaning through an alternative, imaginative perspective” (Murphy 182). As Bolger puts it in an interview with Deirdre Kinahan, although his characters are all fictional, he is aware of the power of “poets’ theatre,” where the audience could rethink the world order—possibly with a new vision, because “theatre can be informed by poetry and be informed by the way that poetry shapes language” (qtd. in Murphy 182).

The three Irish plays by Bolger on the two World Wars might be seen to visualize strategically not only the dialogic but also the ignored hybridity of Irishness. The dialogic is needed to recover the memory of the First World War from “official amnesia” in modern Irish history. Despite the playwright—born in 1959—not having any personal experience of either World War, his visualization of its post-memory allows audiences to have “a sense of living connection” with the past (qtd. in Hirsch 1), and, with empathy or not, they are able to interpret it and debate its significance for the present. This post-memory may create some “historical distance” which, according to Mark Salber Phillips, “position[s] its audience to some relationship of closeness to or distance from the events and experiences it describes”

(95).

The value of Bolger's post-memory in the post-nationalist context of contemporary Ireland, if not contradictory or ambiguous, depends therefore on how audiences are induced to remember the wars of the past under contemporary socio-political circumstances, and whether the playwright's imaginative returns to these events produce diverse social experiences and representations that lead to alternative or new understandings of an ignored Irish reality.

***Walking the Road* (2007): Filling the Gaps in Remembrance**

Born in 1959, Bolger grew up in a free Ireland which had been dominated by nationalists, while high unemployment and cultural provincialism had compelled many of its young people, mostly unskilled, to earn a livelihood or fulfil dreams elsewhere through economic emigration. Despite John Costello's government successfully opening a door to the United Nations as a Republic in 1955, economic reality had signalled that "the nationalists' project had failed" and there was therefore a need to put its promoted historiography under the microscope (Shortt 105).

With this perspective in mind, *Walking the Road*, alongside many of Bolger's previous works featuring the sense of alienation that distressed urban and suburban working-class figures, was written in a post-nationalist context where the socially marginalized characters are critically revisited in order to uncover the complexities and ambiguities of being an Irish soldier serving in the British army during World War I.

As a memory play, or more exactly a post-memory play that comprises the playwright's own imagination of and archival research on Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917) and his companions, *Walking the Road* retells the story of this controversial Irish war poet who was described by Seamus Heaney as "our dead enigma" for his enlistment in The Royal

Inniskilling Fusiliers in 1914 and unreserved support of the nationalist cause of the Easter Rising, while he was wearing “the uniform of those who executed, among others, Thomas McDonagh” (Heaney 12).¹

In addition, Ledwidge’s friendship with Lord Dunsany, a Unionist Anglo-Irish aristocrat, also his mentor and literary agent, confounded many of his contemporaries who doubted his true political dispositions and convictions. Despite the fact that he had left behind more than two hundred poems, his conflicting loyalties almost led to his dismissal from public discussion by the end of the twentieth century because “Francis Ledwidge’s name could provoke an argument” (Bolger, “Milestone to Monument” 122). As Bolger recalled, actions of hate happened to a copy of his biography that he saw “in one library near me” as it “was covered in graffiti -- Republican readers having doctored the text to scribble slogans on the margins” (Bolger, “Milestone to Monument” 122). Arguably, Ledwidge was representative of those Irishmen who were forced to pledge political allegiance without knowing its exact consequences during the most turbulent time of a rebellious Ireland, when the nation was engulfed by all kinds of uncertainty and scepticism.

What is particularly noteworthy about *Walking the Road* as a post-nationalist play is that it reassesses the legacy, if questionable, of Irish militant republicanism and its political dichotomy between its own allies and the potential enemy of the new state. This resulted in disregard, intentional or not, in nationalistic discourse and education for Irish experiences during World War I. Arguably, Ledwidge’s story, as the play gradually discloses in a non-chronological manner, reflects not simply his own aspirations under difficult circumstances but those of the entire missing Irish contingent of young men who joined the British Forces, died overseas, and were not properly commemorated for many decades due

¹ In his poem “In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge,” Heaney described this Irish First World War poet as “our dead enigma” in that his ambiguous political leaning had confused most of his contemporaries in whom “all the strains / Criss-cross in useless equilibrium” (Heaney 80).

to their unpopular political choices.²

Notably, when audiences meet Ledwidge, already a ghost as the curtain rises, they are prompted into a “dreamlike continuum of time” where the convention of nationalist narrative is disrupted and open to new speeches and alternative sentiments (*Walking the Road* 5). Around him are unnamed companions who switch between different ghostly roles to represent those formerly killed on battlefields on the European mainland but who are unable to return to Ireland due to having been forgotten. As these ghosts, including Ledwidge himself, express their attachment to their homeland, not geographically from a nationalist Ireland but somewhere in Europe, it can be contended that the playwright intends to place Irish war memories beyond the domestic scenario and instead in the European context of the First World War.

Among these ghosts that Ledwidge encounters are not only his fellow Irishmen but those having been blasted into pieces “from Australia and Belfast and Antwerp and Berlin” (*Walking the Road* 68). They are no longer confrontational with each other but share the same desperation to return home. Notably, when Ledwidge asks his companion if all the dead soldiers ever reach home, he was told “Not from any lacking of trying, Frank, because every night some last few, stragglers like you, still walk this road. But you must forget all those others now and forget everything, so that you can start on your own journey again” (*Walking the Road*: 64-65). It might thus be argued that Bolger unveils the truth about the romanticization of war that lures the youth of all the belligerent states to fight a distant enemy; most significantly, he intends to alert audiences to the disaster of war and the suffering of civilians in a more universal context, despite not featuring directly the exclusivism of British or Irish nationalism nor the historical revisionism that mostly

² Having been “considered traitors” after returning to Ireland, many of these ex-servicemen who joined the British Forces were not willing to openly share their war experiences for fear of “endanger[ing] their families,” as “the rise of militant nationalism which was hostile to veterans” (Kędzierska 102). Those 35,000 Irishmen who did not manage to return home were soon easily swept under the carpet of national memory, as Emily Pine suggested (Pine 127).

propagates within a narrow Anglo-Irish paradigm.

Featuring Ledwidge's upbringing in Rathfarnham, Ireland, and different moments of his life, *Walking the Road* appears to be biographical, whereas it comprises the post-memory constructed or partially imagined by the playwright about the protagonist. As mentioned earlier, Ledwidge's story is unfolded not chronologically but through a series of flashbacks that depict his destitute childhood, friendship with his Anglo-Irish patron, a failed love affair with someone above his social rank, sudden enlistment in the British forces, and death in action at the age of twenty-nine during the Battle of Ypres in 1917.

Although *Walking the Road* to some extent constructs a theatrical recollection of Ledwidge's lifetime, fulfilling Bolger's intent of "acknowledge[ing] . . . people like Frank, whose stories and identities have been obliterated within various contexts" (Decker 268), the playwright admits that the onstage figure is actually "filtered through my own reimagining to hopefully become a sort of Everyman" (*Walking the Road* 11). It can be argued that the play therefore constructs the story of Ledwidge while also interrogating its credibility, in that without firsthand interviews and his own writings on politics, it is likely to fall into the gaps of remembrance for anyone intending to produce the poet's biography. Notably, in the latter part of the play, while the ghost of Ledwidge is eager to go home and coincidentally joined by other ghosts, the audience realizes from their conversation that all of them are not only erased individuals in the existing documentation of the war but could be conveniently identified as either betrayers or patriots, having few opportunities to speak for themselves. More interestingly, the meta-narrative, flashbacks, and the protagonist's own talk with his split self all contribute to the post-memory of wartime Europe and the doubt regarding the credibility of nationalist historiography. As a result, this history play turns into an open text with incidents and characters that the playwright creates, but they are not absolutely incredible because the artist is free to "fuel his psychological explorations of characters and

his sometimes visionary imagery” to dramatize the unsaid and undocumented perhaps more thoughtfully (Murphy 182).

***Rope Knots: A Finglas Life Reclaimed* (2017): From Margin to Centre**

Premiered on 22 February 2017 at the Abbey Theatre, *Rope Knots* can be seen as a sequel to *Walking the Road*, which the playwright wrote a decade previously. The affinity lies in the fact that the two male protagonists from World War I both live in destitution and are figures of almost no importance, easily neglected by historians and politicians. As the playwright stated in an interview, his childhood “on the edge of a Dual Carriageway” near Finglas prompted him to have empathy with those also marginalized “on the edge of any society, outside the general flow” (qtd. in Murphy, 181). Bolger also indicated that the protagonist, John Bell, alongside Ledwidge, shared my “‘own experiences’ within communities” that the “official culture” of Ireland had excluded (qtd. in Keatinge 198). In other words, only those “essentialist conceptions of Irish identity” that were “principally rural, Gaelic and Catholic” were likely to be included in nationalist discourses (Keatinge 198). It can thus be contended that Bolger’s depictions of working-class figures in an urban scenario and their marginalized experiences are post-nationalist interrogations of the official historiography that has catered to the collective memory of the nation-state in a republican context, rather than of those who suffered and were silenced on the lower rungs of the social ladder.

To further explore the wartime experience of impoverished Irish labourers during the First World War, *Rope Knots*—as a monodrama—gives John Bell a complete platform, disclosing how he has been stricken by hunger, enlisted in the British army, captured and imprisoned by the French, mistaken as an army deserter and executed without trial by the English, and also given no mention in any official document except for a three-line telegram

sent to his family after his execution.

It is also noteworthy that his enlistment in the army is due to the consequences of having participated in the 1913 Dublin Lockout as a leader and “marked down as a troublemaker” by all potential employers (*Rope Knot* 72). After being blacklisted by all factories and farms, “it suddenly struck me that surely the safest place to hide would be behind a uniform myself,” while he does not realize that World War I would break out ten months later (*Rope Knot* 72). Ironically, what leads him to be captured by the French is not only the language barrier but also because he and his companions get separated from their unit when looking for food so as to “fill our bellies and . . . our pockets and hard hats with eatables to bring back as treats for the other chaps” (*Rope Knot* 74). His misery is exacerbated after he escapes from the French prison and returns to the English army. He is thrown into jail and then sentenced to death, for “[i]t’s only Irish lads they shoot, because they need to make examples to stiffen the backbone of the other lazy lice-ridden Paddies” (*Rope Knot* 76).

Because the spotlight has been shone specifically on this Irish private, the play can be seen simultaneously as a critique of traditional nationalist historiography and a supplement to it by exemplifying this man of no influence. What the playwright unearths is therefore more of those wartime experiences that were rarely thrown light upon due to not being politically correct after the Free State was established. Having been born into the lowest social stratum and lived in penury, the protagonist seems to have a premonition that soldiers like him would be forgotten in official Irish history because even before they die, “all officers were too busy to see riff-raff like us,” and we have been “lines of soldiers scurrying like rats” (*Rope Knot* 75). Arguably, Bolger’s insistence on revealing these ignored realities corresponds to the agenda of post-nationalism not to reject “past identity constructs” but to introduce “a critical revisitation of the past in order to expose the other realities that

sanctioned versions of identity submerged” (Llena 116).

That *Rope Knots* can be a post-memory work in a post-nationalist context resides in the fact that the playwright not only questions the ideological manipulations of Irishness but situates Finglas—a “working class area where I was raised” but was told nothing about it “in my school education”—in a European context (Kurdi 7). That said, the whereabouts of John Bell—an ordinary lad from Finglas—and his observations on No Man’s Land, where he feels in despair of ever going home, allow this area of the Dublin suburb to be seen within the theatrical repertoire of World War I. Moreover, his monological description of how he has lived in slavery and in forced labour in Finglas and in No Man’s Land, alongside his English companion and many other undocumented, deceased soldiers of all nationalities, is an interrogation of insular identity politics that have antagonized people of different cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages. Instead, by dramatizing common human miseries across European boundaries, a dialogical interaction may be fostered as a key element to remind the audiences of how the Irish republican movement was embedded in an international context following on from the French Revolution, which had inspired many anti-English activists about democracy and political autonomy.

John Bell’s memory is by nature fictional - partly based upon the playwright’s imagination and also his research and speculation. Differently from Ledwidge’s story in *Walking the Road* that concerns an actual person and event, Bell’s memory is entirely a mixture of historical recollections of World War I, re-narrated by the playwright. Bell’s account is thus more of one of post-memory than Ledwidge’s, as the former has been created many decades after the war and combined with the playwright’s anti-war sentiments and political judgement. In other words, a fictional individual’s monologue of the post-memory of an armed conflict more than a century ago may effectively counteract the collective memory of the tragedy, establishing a new dimension of assessment of the necessity of war.

That said, the critique of the war provided in the play is barbed, with the protagonist speaking his mind after death: “War is meant to be about King and Kaiser and Home Rule and poor little Catholic Belgium, but a week in the trenches puts paid to such gobbledygook” (*Rope Knot* 70). It could therefore be claimed that the theatrical post-memory of the Great War, as the playwright delivers it in the twenty-first century, visualizes the memories and experiences of ordinary folks almost unseen and unexplored by nationalist historians. The reconstruction of these ignored yet crucial memories strategically conjure up those ghosts to be seen in an increasingly pluralistic post-nationalist context before they are swept away in silence by history.

***The Messenger* (2017): Traumas on No Man’s Land in Ireland**

The Messenger and *Rope Knots* are both plays that were staged at the Abbey Theatre on 22 February 2017 as part of Dublin’s Culture Connects: The National Neighbourhood Programme. Both plays are monodramas featuring young Irish working-class characters whose fates are entirely subject to the consequences of the two World Wars. Differently from *Rope Knots* on the Great War, *The Messenger* is set against the backdrop of the bombing of Dublin by the Nazis during the Second World War in January and May 1941.

The play, at the outset, appears to be about the one-sided longing of a teenage girl, Margaret, for Alfie O’Connor who lives in her neighbourhood. Nevertheless, from her monologue, the audience soon realizes that Margaret and her family have been bombed out of their previous home in Cabra, northern Dublin, and have been relocated to an unfinished council house, as have other victimized families. Unfortunately, before long these temporary shelters are bombed again, and Grace, Margaret’s younger sister, was “thrown from our bed to collide with the wall” and died from a broken neck (*Messenger* 59). Her mother was rescued from the “hordes of startled cockroaches . . . in the clinker walls that were only

made from horse hair and cinders of old coal,” incidentally losing her capacity to speak, probably due to post-traumatic stress disorder (*Messenger* 59). Without any other council houses to move into, Margaret’s family can only be relocated to a campsite.

In addition, the loss of Grace during the war leads to Margaret’s personality being distorted by a feeling of guilt for missing the chance to take her to safety before the bombing began. As she believes that Alfie is responsible for Grace’s death for certain other reasons, her love for him turns into hate and seeking revenge “until you’re driven so demented with desire by this fire inside me . . . and take me out of my parents” new house that’s haunted by the dead” (*Messenger* 62). Moreover, although the areas of northern Dublin where Margaret’s family used to live and to which they have been relocated due to German bombing are far away from any actual battlefields in mainland Europe, they are the continuation of no man’s land as the playwright has depicted journalistically in two previous plays. Through Margaret’s eyes and narration, audiences are given a quite graphic picture of how bombings kill civilians and destroy their homes: “I saw Mr McGrath come flying through his bedroom window in his nightshirt. . . . Half his bedroom furniture came out through the wall as if the wall was only made of paper”; “There were children buried alive under heaps of rubble and stone. . . . they kept finding the dead in the oddest places: a corpse discovered four days later blown up onto the roof of the cinema” (*Messenger* 58). Arguably, the wartime casualties within Ireland and these cinematic descriptions of bombing raids on Dublin might be regarded as a theatrical interrogation of Éamon de Valera’s *Fianna Fáil* government and its stance of neutrality, as the state was not immune from such militant actions but was still bombed seven times by Germany.³

By dramatizing the plight of Margaret’s working-class family and her experience as a teenage girl in her homeland, which is already an extended no man’s land divorced from the

³ For details of these seven bombings, see “Bombing of Dublin in World War II.”

European mainland, the playwright might have intended to disclose how Irish nationalism has overemphasized the homogeneous yet exclusive characteristics of the nation-state but has not catered to the interests of economically and politically disadvantaged communities. Notably, the government that strongly advocated neutrality as a means to be detached from the war, if not an illusion, failed to protect Margaret's and her neighbors' homes from bombardment and from seeing all their belongings and family members "burst into flames in mid-air": "My face was cut from flying glass but I could feel nothing except fear. . . . fathers and uncles desperate to find [their children] and yet praying that they wouldn't be found – or at least not found dead" (*Messenger* 58). While specifying the horrors of the war and the suffering of ordinary folks, the playwright may not intend to negate the devotion of Éamon de Valera's government to avoiding Irish involvement in the war. However, the playwright clearly regards it as important to address issues that extend both "upwards towards Europe and downwards towards regions and localities," in order to explore alternative ways to resolve armed confrontations for common goods from a post-nationalist perspective (Tonra 237).

The bombing disaster that Margaret and her working-class community experience is definitely not a single incident across wartime Europe but a tragic consequence of a prolonged war that has broken thousands of families and destroyed infrastructure. What can be perceived between the lines of *The Messenger* is the fear of being air raided and bombarded, which had been commonly shared by all individuals across national boundaries without language or cultural barriers. In other words, it was the misconceived political ideology and pro-war propaganda that created not only a false enemy but also false hope if a particular nation could win the war. As a result, the depiction of bombing in *The Messenger* allows the text to reflect not just a local Irish tragedy but also an international one, for its wartime story apparently goes beyond the boundary of the nation-state with its focus on the

suffering of the working class across Allied and Axis countries alike.

Despite Margaret's war memory, as presented in a dramatic form, appearing to be imaginative, it is not necessarily unreliable in that a mixture of historical realities is incorporated within her story. This allows the post-memory (of World War II) to be told convincingly, although not illustrated in the more conventional form of documentaries or personal interviews. For example, to show the scarcity of resources during wartime and how the Catholic Church was always granted pre-emptive favours under the auspices of *Fianna Fáil* government, the playwright has the protagonist take advantage of the cover of the religious magazine, *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, thanks to its flamboyant red print. She dampens the cover of every issue to get the red print off in lieu of real rouge for colouring her cheeks. She admits that this behaviour makes a "holy eejit of myself," whereas "no government would dare deny the Jesuits their ration of red ink to print the Messenger" (*Messenger* 52, 49). Although how a teenage girl makes do with improvised cosmetics may seem insignificant or trivial to the historiography of World War II, this post-memory not only creates an empathic connection to the past in a more humane manner but also facilitates a post-nationalist perspective through which the Irish wartime experience should be understood more broadly with concerns for people from various social corners rather than merely favouring a single story based on vested interests.

Conclusion: Living in the Present Moment of the Past

The three plays, produced at the end of the Celtic Tiger period and witnessing its aftermath, might thus reflect the playwright's concern for the possible decay of memory if history repeats itself, and people fall again into a less happy world. These plays, which provide perspectives from post-nationalism and incorporate post-memory, not only seek to entertain Irish audiences as interesting historical dramas but also to nurture an alternative

and more distant standpoint from which people can see “what my own house was like” from being outside it, as Peter Keegan states in George Bernard Shaw’s *John Bull’s Other Island* (95).

One of the reasons why Francis Ledwidge in *Walking the Road* and John Bell in *Rope Knots* rarely receive attention from historians and sociologists is not simply because they are economically and socially marginalized, but also geopolitically marginalized due to being from a “working-class area where I was raised.” This background was reckoned to have nothing deserving to be written about, as Bolger put it in an interview (Kurdi 7). Bolger was even advised early in his career that he had to write stories recognizably Irish or catering to the mainstream market; if not, “you weren’t truly Irish in terms of your interests and occupations” (qtd. in Murphy 181). In other words, a narrow definition of Irishness—“monolithic, anti-modern and distinctively rural” as favoured by fundamental nationalists—was what Bolger aims to question (Harte 18). For Margaret in *The Messenger*, the northwestern outer suburb of Dublin where her family is dislocated and relocated is likely to be in the vicinity of Finglas—a place where extensive housing developments were built in the 1950s to rehouse victims of bombing during World War II.

To understand the ups and downs of these characters in the twenty-first century within the frame of post-nationalism and post-memory, as proposed, might help raise public consciousness of those disturbing or embarrassing memories that are either liable to be downplayed or accepted only grudgingly under certain circumstances. The three plays, seen as a whole, illustrate Bolger’s concern for the ways in which the past, when Ireland rose to affluence in the Celtic Tiger years and experienced its failure, should be rewritten and represented in a more thoughtful manner. More significantly, by re-opening the shadowy past to the view of current audiences, the three monologues might lead to questioning of the nationalist historiography as often emphasized in textbooks and mainstream media. The

playwright, who had experienced alienation in his Finglas upbringing, might be seen as contributing to this historical reassessment of Irish wartime memories while not aiming to be teleological and conclusive.

T.S. Eliot once remarked in his critical essay, “Tradition and Individual Talent,” that an artist would not know what is to be done unless he is aware of himself living in “the present moment of the past,” and conscious of “not what is dead, but of what it already living” (22). Bolger, and also contemporary audiences who are witnessing the prolonged conflicts in the world—either closely or distantly, might find the outcome predictable from looking at Irish experiences and beyond. Those who suffer the most are the weaponless, dislodged individuals perpetually enduring a broken self and home, helplessly subjected to the forces of the political spectrum.

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MANAL S. KHAN

The Cosmopolitan Ethics in Human Rights Work in Anil's Ghost: Postmodern Techniques with Postcolonial Feelings

Introduction: The Contradictory Nature of Anil's Ghost

Anil's Ghost is the first novel Michael Ondaatje published after winning the 1992 Booker Prize for *The English Patient*. Published in 2000, the book has received multiple awards and accolades including Canada's Governor General's Award for English language fiction. It has also received intense criticism for its lack of any clear, specific political stance, especially from Sri Lankan and diasporic writers. The novel's multiple view-points frustrate and counterbalance any political bias. Neither character has a predominant political view; they are shown as bystanders to the war, essentially trying to avoid the politics. It is this complex tension between the novel's apolitical stance and the sought-after local concerns of national and political repercussions that Ondaatje explores in *Anil's Ghost*, and this complexity is deepened by the author's deliberate political neutrality and refusal to offer what he calls any "assured judgments" about what should be done in or to Sri Lanka by the global body. I believe that *Anil's Ghost* is deeply political, but its politics resides in its self-conscious neutrality and in its exploration of how "unhistorical lives . . . decipher things and move in the world," (Jaggi 5).

The story takes place in the island's capital Colombo during its devastating 30-year civil war (1983-2009). The protagonist is Anil Tissera, a United Nations forensic anthropologist returnee charged with investigating reports of human rights violations and organized disappearances. Together with her government-appointed partner, archaeologist Sarath Diyasena, they discover the skeleton of a young man in a government-protected ancient

burial site. Believing it to be a politically motivated murder, they set out to discover the identity of both the man and his killers in order to bring justice not only to him, but to all the voiceless people who have been traumatized or lost because of the violent conflict. The novel rests on their attempt to identify this man as proof of an extrajudicial killing. However, the familiar murder mystery, where convention dictates that truth is discoverable and justice prevails, unfolds in a dislocating manner. The mystery disintegrates in the end and turns into something far more troubling: the identities of both the victim and the culprit are revealed, but justice remains unresolved and potentially unattainable within the confines of the narrative. Anil and Sarath identify the skeleton, who they nickname Sailor, as Ruwan Kumar, but when Sarath sets out to confirm Ruwan's name on a government list and inexplicably disappears for some days, Anil is unable to fully trust his allegiances and inadvertently loses her evidence, causes Sarath's death, and is both forced to flee the nation and exiled from the text (she literally disappears from the narrative). Chelva Kanaganayakam describes this narrative move as "a situation in which the form works against the content . . . A whole novel's epistemology is called into question" (21).

Anil's Ghost is typical of Ondaatje's eloquent, postmodernistic approach to storytelling. Weich describes the book as "a forensic thriller" that has moved the detective genre "to another place entirely" (Weich, PowellsBooks.Blog) in which the pursuit of justice is both encouraged and baffled. This is complicated even further when Anil's Ghost was read as a postcolonial detective fiction expected to represent, besides the conventions of the detective genre, Sri Lanka's postcolonial condition from a partial, native (or even a nationalistic) perspective. The book is about individuals living in a warzone – it is descriptive in its depictions of fear, violence, and brutality – but Ondaatje does not provide any contextual details about the political or historical origins of the conflict. The five main voices are all part of the Sinhalese majority and not the Tamil minority, the two ethnic groups fighting

each other. Four of the characters, Sarath, Gamini, Palipana, and Ananda, live in Sri Lanka and give the readers their own local perspective on the conflict. Yet even though Sarath and his brother Gamini reveal their love and worry for Sri Lanka during their arguments with Anil about the repercussions of her investigation, Sarath has retreated from the conflict while Gamini remains stubbornly neutral. Anil, considered by many critics and scholars to be the main protagonist, is positioned the prodigal returnee representing the West. But she does not exhibit feelings typical of an immigrant's nostalgic connection to the homeland, and instead views Sri Lanka with a "long distance" (11) gaze. She has become westernized in her outlook and manner, and she feels like a foreigner when she returns to her native land. Anil originally courts this divide; earlier in the novel she resists any attempts to reminisce about her teenage swimming championships or her childhood with Sarath or her government escort. Ondaatje establishes both the conflict and her foreignness in the opening paragraphs, and places Anil in an ethically complex and contradictory situation: she has essentially returned to find evidence to betray her country according to the rules of a global human rights discourse. The reader is therefore presented with a distanced outsider's perspective to a "local" conflict.

I propose that these contradictions occur because *Anil's Ghost's* postmodernist tendencies bend the detective genre in unexpected and subversive ways, allowing him to complicate the novel's postcolonial concerns. This is why the book reflects the tension experienced between postmodernism's ahistorical and apolitical approaches and postcolonialism's concerns for the cultural legacies and the economic exploitation. The story represents the limits of the modern nation-state on the brink of collapse and dissolution: the population is literally at war to remain together. Anil, Sarath, Gamini, Palipana, and Ananda are forced to negotiate not just their lives in a volatile political climate where the country is divided along ethnic and religious lines, but also issues between east and west, subjective and objective, and local and

universal. My essay will show how Ondaatje subverts the rational western detective genre using postmodernist techniques in order to consider Sri Lanka's postcoloniality and to go beyond these binaries. In this way, he suggests a communal space where personal and plural identities, social relationships, and ethical concerns are negotiated without fear of reprisals, and exposes shared universal ideals that include peace and justice while, at the same time, recognizing its own local pluralities.

The Cosmopolitan Detective Meets the Postcolonial Detective: The Politics of Voice

Anil's Ghost has been described as a "quest to unlock the hidden past – a story propelled by a riveting mystery" (blurb in the back cover). It is about solving a murder but the story's narrative structure obfuscates the genre codes of detective fiction in which the reader expects the detective to solve the crime and end the story on an ethical reaffirming that justice has returned to the world. Typical detective novels tend to follow a formulaic set of conventions that mirror and "reaffirm the culture's dominant ideology" (Pearson & Singer 1), which are considered to be Western white male values. Ondaatje's novel has replaced the white male protagonist with a partnership between two South Asians, one of whom is a female immigrant to the west. This plot sets up the novel as a detective story in which the forensic investigation into the death of an unknown individual is analogous to an investigation into the political order of country. Their partnership interrogates the mechanisms and effects of repression by the state, and suggests ways of connecting and communicating across national and cultural boundaries. Anil and Sarath try to identify Sailor, and in the process create a space that allows them to explore discursive strategies for border-crossing and communal relationships. Anil forms connections with her Sri Lankan coworkers and acquaintances, and begins to feel "citizenized by their friendship" (200). They are three very different characters, and their community at the walawwa is tenuous at best, but it reflects the country's fragility

and tenacity to hold itself together.

When Anil examines Sailor's skeleton, she becomes convinced that his identity will lead them to evidence of organized murder campaigns on the island. Sarath forces her to consider the violent repercussions of suggesting (and even revealing) the idea (or truth) that the government was responsible for Sailor's murder. He believes that instead of justice her truth will lead "to new vengeance and slaughter" (137). The concept of "truth" plays an integral part in the novel. For most of *Anil's Ghost* Anil and Sarath challenge each other's motivations and the results of the investigation (whether it will provide justice or cause more violence). The partners are used to show how the novel does not reflect any dominant ideology but ontologically challenges the concept of truth, history, and identity in a postcolonial country. This challenge is most clearly revealed in the debate between Palipana and Anil when he tells her that "truth is just opinion" (102). The reader recalls these words towards the end when Anil is interrogated after she inadvertently loses control of the skeletal remains and Sailor is confiscated. The novel does not provide the closure and justice that Anil seeks. In the end it is Anil who sabotages her mission, and exposes the insufficiency of purely universal and scientifically-verifiable truths within uniquely postcolonial contexts. *Anil's Ghost* does not provide the closure and justice that Anil seeks: Sailor's skeleton is confiscated and Sarath is murdered. The reader never finds out if Anil completed her final report on Sailor's skeleton, whether she was able to successfully submit it to the proper authorities, or if the assassination of the president in the novel is a retaliatory outcome of her investigation.

The narrative's detective plot is challenged and thwarted by almost everyone Anil meets. The government does not want Anil to solve Sailor's murder because of the political repercussions at the international level. Her completed report would implicate them in extrajudicial killings, expose the "unofficial war" (17) alienate foreign powers and trade

partners, and cause violent retaliations internally. Sarath challenges Anil's investigation because he fears that her lack of contextual knowledge about Sri Lanka could cause her to misuse the truth and instigate more violence. Ananda's reconstruction of Sailor's skull becomes an abstract representation of the peace he wishes for his wife rather than a representation of Sailor's face for the villagers to identify. Palipana questions the infallibility of any kind of truth, while Gamini asks her "What would you do with a name? . . . What would you do with her name? Would you tell my brother?" (252). Gamini's retort concerns his lover (who was Sarath's wife) Ravina who was one of the many "suicides during war" (252), but it can easily refer to Anil's mission to restore the truth of Sailor's name. Ravina's name, or even Sailor's name, will not reveal anything substantial about them or bring them back to life. Revealing Ravina's name to Sarath would only result in anger and heartbreak, just as revealing Sailor's name could result in chaos. Gamini's question, like all the challenges she encounters, forces her to reconsider her own understanding of truth within the context of Sri Lankan history and politics. The confrontations between the Sri Lankans and Anil challenge the dominant, global viewpoint of Western universalism and the detective genre's investigative evolution to a successful conclusion. They also reveal the oppressive policies of postcolonial nations, as well as various modes of resistance that range from violent guerilla warfare to courageous acts of helping and caring. The novel's two detectives not only reflect the power relations in today's neocolonial and globalized world, but they also allow Ondaatje to negotiate a common ground between binaries of universalism and particularism. Anil and Sarath's confrontations force them to consider questions of universal and singular values, ethical and political responsibility, their obligations to others in need, and to negotiate ways of acting collectively for change. Anil is the modern western detective whose tools are science, logic, and a cosmopolitan connection with the human race. Sarath is the native detective whose investigative approach is influenced by the cultural attitudes and

postcolonial concerns of Sri Lanka.[Emily Davis uses Ed Christian's *The Post-Colonial Detective* as her point of departure in her essay *Investigating Truth, History, and Human Rights* in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. She notes that it is Sarath and not Anil who is the native detective as defined by Christian.] Anil is a part of a group of legal, scientific, and medical professionals from multiple national and ethnic backgrounds who intervene on behalf of people with whom they have negligible connections. By the time Anil returns to Sri Lanka, the ethics of human rights and of offering aid to individuals in need is firmly entrenched. She is also a diasporic-returnee with a genuine desire to help the people in her country of origin. After Sarath sees her save Ananda's life in highly skilled and time-sensitive manner, he tells her "You should live here. Not be here just for another job," she replies that "This isn't just 'another job'! I decided to come back. I wanted to come back" (172). She believes that solving Sailor's murder will create the possibility of justice and give victims a voice. But her approach to Sri Lanka's political reality is based on Western rational and belief in truth and justice; she does not understand or appreciate the postcolonial complexity of Sri Lanka's ethnic violence, exclusionary politics, and nationalistic identity. She questions Sarath's neutral status, but is unable to differentiate between her understanding of "neutral" as considering all individuals with equal moral value and Sarath's desire to avoid confrontation and bloodshed. In a country where even a "father [feared to] protest a son's death," (47), Sarath wants to circumvent "new vengeance and slaughter" (137) that could occur in response to Sailor's extrajudicial killing.

Yet even though Sarath challenges Anil's naivety, he himself has retreated into in his archeological work on sixth-century statues. His retreat is weighed against Anil's activism. Like Sarath she buries herself in her work to avoid the complications in her personal life. But unlike Sarath, her work requires her to respond to others in need, and for this reason she feels obligations to humanity that Sarath does not. At one point she recall's Manuel, a

member of the Guatemalan community, who

. . . told me once, When I've been digging and I'm tired and don't want to do any more, I think how it could be me in the grave I'm working on. I wouldn't want someone to stop digging for me. . . I always think of that when I want to quit. (34)

This stance reflects a cosmopolitan ethic to recognize and respect everyone and offer aid whenever possible. When Sarath and Anil rescue the driver Gunesena, they are both are suspicious of the silence surrounding his truck as they drove by, but it is Anil who asks Sarath to stop and help. Her ethical activism is again contrasted to Sarath's fearful silence when he tells of an incident he witnessed when two men blindfold and kidnap a third man. As an outsider who has not been immediately affected by the conflict, Anil's status actually facilitates rather than hampers her interactions with her countrymen and creates instances of fellowship. Anil is Sinhalese, but she has no problem visiting her Tamil ayah, Lalitha, during a time when the Sinhalese and Tamils are at war. Ondaatje uses her to inject a different perspective on a situation weighed down by proximity, anger, and disillusionment. Unlike Sarath, she is able to ask questions like "what did you do," and "who killed him," and believe that these kinds of questions are valid and their answers are important. Just as Sarath forces Anil to contextualize her mission within Sri Lankan history and politics, so Anil tries to make him understand the fear and loss suffered by the living family members and their need for closure and justice. She succeeds better than he does. At a key moment when Ananda reconstructs Sailor's head, Anil tries to stop Sarath from showing it to nearby villagers for identification, worried about the affect a disembodied head can have on communities that dealt with lost people and beheaded bodies (186). He asks, "'What's our purpose here? We're trying to identify him. We have to start somewhere.'" Sarath has decided to "return to the intricacies of the public world, with its various truths" (237). It could also be argued that Sarath helps Anil because he has grown to care for her; however,

this highlight the fact that he participates in a political act on behalf of an outsider with tenuous ties to Sri Lanka.

Sailor becomes the novel's site of postmodernist contention and postcolonial interpretation. Anil's argument on how to historicize Sailor is complicated by Sarath's worry that the existence of this particular skeleton could lead to more bloodshed. Sailor's skeleton reflects the numbing violence imprisoning the Sri Lankans who are living as if "don't even know if they are two hundred years old or two weeks old," (45). The skeleton is described in ahistorical terms where his remains are "five years old in death" reburied in a sixth-century burial ground, and like the people Ondaatje uses Sailor as a narrative devise to "mirror . . . the postcolonial society itself" (Knepper 38), which suggests that the novel has . . . two bodies under examination: the body of the victim (plot of the crime novel) and the body of the (post) colonial society . . . consequently, the body of the victim is transformed into a site of multiple investigations and subject to many, often overlapping or intersecting modes of analysis and meaning (39).

Anil and Sarath investigate Sailor's death as an extrajudicial execution, and as and are therefore trying to gather evidence against the Sri Lankan state for human rights abuse. In this context, at the micro level, Sailor's bones reveal the nature and manner of his death and, at the macro level, reveal the complexity and violence involved in the process of nation-building in a postcolonial country.

Just as Sailor's unhistorical body is used by Anil, Sarath, Ananda, and even the government, his skeleton, just like the postcolonial country it mirrors, tries to retain its agency. Sailor's bones "tell" Anil whatever they are able to: his gender, age, profession, and the manner of his death. In this regard, they are like the bones discovered in Pompeii and Guatemala, and contain historical and scientifically verifiable truths. Without the evidence of his five-year old skeleton, Sailor cannot provide Anil with any information, as demonstrated during the

inquiry towards the end of the novel when she is unable prove her verbal report about the government's crimes. She cannot speak for him when he is no longer with her, highlighting the politics of voice in the novel: who has a voice, and who is heard, and who can be heard in the global world. Anil is a representative of the west and its history of usurping third world voices and representing them in their own opinion. Without Sailor's bones – the only voice Sailor has – Anil cannot speak for him. However, Ondaatje is cognizant of the politics of representation, especially in a novel about human rights abuses that is being written by a Sri Lankan outsider. He resists appropriating Sailor's voice; when Ananda reconstructs his face, he gives him a peaceful look that Sarath recognizes as foreign to the historical reality of a young man living amidst fear. Ondaatje respects the silence that Sailor's death signifies, but he also demonstrates that though identity can be (re)constructed, without a public sphere there is no subjectivity, there is only imposition. He resists appropriating Sailor's voice and the "extra" representation of Sailor's subalternity.

Conclusion: A Question of Resistance

Ondaatje has observed that the tragedy of Sri Lanka's conflict is that it is a "completely multicultural and multi-religious" (Jaggi) country. The island's civil war was caused by ethno-nationalist tensions whose origins could be traced to the various European occupations on the island. These tensions between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil Hindu minority were exacerbated after independence in 1948. It has been described as one of the bloodiest civil wars in recent memory, and the loss of life due to the conflict is staggering: more than 80,000 people were killed, including civilians, soldiers, policemen, rebels, and even Indian peacekeeping soldiers. While the Tamil Tigers (the separatists) were considered terrorists across the globe[See TIME magazine's web article A Brief History of The Tamil Tigers.], the anti-government Sinhala insurgents and the Sri-Lankan government forces were

also accused of committing war crimes against the civilians.[See the Sri Lankan country profile on BBC.com.] Suicide bombings and forced disappearances were perpetuated by all sides. Ondaatje admits that the country's plight became a kind of obsession for him, but as someone who had left the island as a child, he is deeply conscious of not making judgements or offering didactic advice. He tells Jaggi that the ethics is in what the writer chooses to write about. Therefore, his decision to write about how five people experience this conflict is an ethical decision. This approach is not surprising; most of Ondaatje's novel are concerned with the "unhistorical lives" and are concerned with representations of history and identity. This translates into delving and unburying hidden and marginalized stories, just as Anil and Sarath do in their professional lives.

Ondaatje's use of postmodernist techniques to explore Sri Lanka's postcolonial civil war requires the reader to approach questions of identity, truth, justice, and history in a manner that takes the human costs into account. Anil's fact-finding mission is challenged by Sarath's insistence that she situate her understanding of truth within the context Sri Lanka's politics and history. Her work collapses because she is unable to comprehend the full implications of her political intervention in Sri Lankan politics, revealing the tension between Western universalism and third-world particularities. But her cosmopolitan ethics and human rights investigation force Sarath, Gamini, Palipana, and Ananda to consider issues about their government's exclusionary policies, the lack of personal rights, and their obligations to help fellow countrymen like Sailor and Gunesena in the face of life-threatening danger. Anil's intervention in Sri Lanka gives Sarath and Ananda the opportunity to imagine a praxis for community-building and border-crossing in the absence of an egalitarian national public sphere. Anil's *Ghost* ultimately reveals that there are local truths that are internal to Sri Lanka's long history, but that there also truths that such as justice and personal liberty that should be universal and objective.

Anil's Ghost does not end on Anil or Sarath, or even at the moment when the investigation is terminated. The reader knows Sailor's real name, but the narrative does not tell us whether Sarath finds his name on a government list, whether Anil completes her report, or if she even leaves Sri Lanka. The last time we see Anil in the novel, the narrative has moved back to the day she is sitting with the Diyasena brothers at Galle Face Green in Colombo, listening to their conversation. At this moment, Anil becomes a family member and behaves "like a sister between them, keeping them from mauling each other's worlds" (285). This last image of Anil, Sarath, and Gamini together metaphorically depicts a way for the estranged brothers (and community) to come together through an outsider who can also become part of the family

"there was a want in each of them to align themselves, she was the excuse. . . They were, in retrospect, closer than they imagined" (285).

But Ondaatje also juxtaposes this peaceful moment alongside the sordid reality of interventions. This passage ends on Gamini's reminder about the American and European political involvement:

. . . American movies, English books— remember how they all end? . . . The American or the Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him. . . He's going home. So the war, to all purposes, is over. (285–6).

His words illustrate that Anil's quest for truth is a western objective that will end when she, as the Western woman, will board a plane and go home. The reality of Sri Lanka's conflict will cease for her. However, Ondaatje moves the focus away from Anil while she is still in Sri Lanka and onto the country and people she came back to help, expressing the reality of a world outside of the west and "western writing[See Ondaatje's interview with Maya Jaggi.]."

Anil may or may not have left Sri Lanka, but it is the connections that are created and the repercussions of her intervention that are important.

The failure of Anil's mission begs one to consider whether it is possible or even desirable to represent ways of resisting postcolonial violence that allows for communal spaces that traverse national and ethnic boundaries. How can objective and universal values – which are applicable to all of humanity – be practiced alongside local particularities, especially in places where there are violent tensions between the nation-state and the people? Anil's *Ghost* does try to explore an egalitarian, discursive space where these questions are negotiated by the characters. The novel does suggest ways of restoration and community-building that is negotiated through the tensions between the cosmopolitan ethics practiced by Anil (and Gamini) and the local complexities argued by Sarath.

By challenging ways of telling and receiving truth, history, and identity, Ondaatje disassembles traditional notions of communal spaces to explore alternative sites within the context of Sri Lanka's postcoloniality. Hospitals, for example, retain their mythic properties of healing and inclusiveness. The ancient truth of Sri Lanka as a place of healing, with “'halls for the sick' four centuries before Christ” (192), is reinforced by the dedication of the nurses and doctors working in hospitals, emergency clinics, and medical camps. The Ward Place Hospital, for example, had been attacked and ordered to close; the nurses returned regardless of the threat and the “hospital remained open.” Buddhists and Buddhist temples, by contrast, are implicated in the violent bipartisan politics when Palipana's brother Nārada, a beloved monk, was rumored to have been murdered by his novice. The *walawwa* is an old building whose “site and location . . . make you turn inward rather than dominate” (201). Like the villa in *The English Patient*, the *walawwa* is an architectural island and a safe haven that gives the characters a space to consider themselves and each other, and to debate ways of living within a civil war. It is a refuge for Anil, Sarath, and Ananda, who can be acrimonious to one another, to try to identify a victim of a political murder. During their brief time in this space Sarath begins to feel an obligation to solve Sailor's murder and Anil

begins to understand how grief, loss and, fear can engulf a Sri Lankan like Ananda.

Even though Anil disappears in the end, the novel suggests that there is value to her work that is carried on by Ananda. The book ends on an epiphany that Ananda experiences after he returns to his former profession as a religious artisan. Ondaatje does not specify how much later this takes place after Sarath's death, but he does call this section "Distance," suggesting a temporal and emotional distance from the tragic investigation. Ananda, ironically, is working for the archeological group that Sarath worked for, and he is in charge of reconstructing an ancient Buddha that was accidentally destroyed by young men looking for food. He recruits local villagers in his reconstruction to provide them with a safeguard from being pulled into the army or rounded up as a suspect. As an artist he engages in constructive work that creates a sphere of safety and exhibits a responsibility to help his fellow countrymen. This act is his form of resistance against the civil war, where "he knew if he did not remain an artificer he would become a demon" (304).

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SHAHRIAR KHONSARI

Echoes of War: Psychological Trauma in Iranian Literature of the Iran-Iraq Conflict

A Comparative Study of Trauma Narratives in “Sorraya in a Coma” and “Streets of the World”

Introduction

When it comes to conflicts in the Middle East, literature is a strong tool for showing the complicated experiences of war, moving from one place to another, and making it through. Previous research has looked at how Middle Eastern literature describes the many aspects of trauma, offering a variety of stories that show personal and group pain. This research examines the primary studies that explore the portrayal of war trauma in the Iran-Iraq war literature, focusing on themes such as mental strain, social and political perspectives, and the significance of memory in the conflict. The Iran-Iraq war literature examines how the fighting affects people's minds. For example, "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi shows the confusion and sadness people feel during war. A study by Nassim Yaziji in 2009 shows that these stories use personal experiences and deep thoughts to explain the worry, sadness, and lasting mental effects that people who lived through the war have. In her book "Trauma and Recovery," Judith Herman (1992) discusses the common signs of trauma, which are evident in books from the Middle East. Her ideas help us see how people in these stories show signs of being very alert, have sudden memories of the past, and feel nothing emotionally. Across the Middle East, the experience of individual distress is a difficult and common issue of government influence. In his novel titled "Culture and Imperialism" (1993), Edward Said studies simple narratives from areas of conflict that show resistance to injustice and the overpowering presence of aliens. For instance, literary works such as Tayeb Salih's "Season

of Migration” express this concept and explain how miserable colonial regulations are causing the war, and the people have no choice but to leave their houses. Arthur Frank examines the creation of stories about sickness and pain in his 1995 book "The Wounded Storyteller," a perspective that aligns with the narratives found in Middle Eastern literature about wars help us understand how writers like Mahmoud Darwish use poetry to express the shared memories and pain of the Palestinian people. Memory is essential in Middle Eastern stories, helping to keep history and identity alive during times of war. A study by Samir Khalaf (2014) in his book "Lebanon Adrift" shows how memory is important in Lebanese stories. For example, Elias Khoury's "Gate of the Sun" discusses the real-life experiences of Palestinians who had to leave their homes, as well as how these experiences affected their children and grandchildren.

Marianne Hirsch (1997) discussed the concept of "postmemory," a phenomenon in which children experience the impact of their parents' challenging experiences. This idea is very useful when studying stories from Middle Eastern wars. Hisham Matar's "In the Country of Men" clearly illustrates this idea, as the main character grapples with the lasting effects of his father's disappearance during the political unrest in Libya.

Techniques for Examining War Trauma in Iran-Iraq War Literature.

In books from the Middle East, researchers use different methods to study the effects of war on people's minds. These methods include:

looking at stories: This method involves carefully reading and analyzing the text to find themes of pain and strength in the stories. It helps us understand how writers show the emotional effects of war.

Studying the Mind: This method examines characters' actions and thoughts to identify deeper mental struggles caused by painful experiences.

Looking at Society and Culture: This method investigates how personal pain connects with

larger cultural and political issues. It examines how books depict and discuss social norms and significant historical events.

The writer in this study focuses on two books to show that the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) had a deep impact on Iranian and Iraqi society with combination of these three techniques. Iranian literature, which includes many novels, poems, and memoirs, clearly shows the experiences and hardships of this difficult time. We look at an important Iranian and an intriguing Iraqi novel that describe the complex effects of war trauma, focusing on how authors explain the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of the conflict. In these two specific novels, the primary focus is on portraying the impact of the Iran-Iraq war. We're looking at how the writers use techniques like showing thoughts continuously and mixing up time to describe the emotional harm from the war. The writer looked closely at how "Sorraya in a Coma" and "Streets of the World" tell their stories. When we compare these two books, we can identify similarities and differences in their portrayal of the effects of war on people. "Sorraya in Coma" story:

Ismail Fassih is an Iranian writer who wrote the well-known novel "Sorraya in a Coma." This novel, first published in 1983, chronicles the journey of Jalal Arian, an employee of the Iran National Oil Company, to Paris and his encounter with a group of Iranian immigrants in the city. The story is that Jalal's nephew, Sorraya, who studied in Paris, now plans to immigrate to her motherland after finishing university. However, a tragic event sends her into a coma, necessitating hospital care before she can proceed with her plan. After receiving this news, Jalal leaves Abadan for the French capital. In this scenario, the Iraqi army also attacked Iran's territory. Once again, Jalal makes it to Paris to take care of Sorraya. In the meantime, through Iranian friendship, he gets to know a group of his compatriots, more or less all of whom were immigrants after the Islamic revolution. Ismail Fassih, by creating an interesting story situation, drew the audience's attention to the psychological trauma that led

Iranians to self-imposed exile from their land. Upon its publication, the audience widely welcomed "Sorraya in a Coma," making it one of the few Persian novels that critics and experts agreed with. Today, this book is considered one of the best-selling fiction works of recent decades in Iran.

"Streets of the World" Story:

The book "Streets of the World" by Janan Jasim Halawi explores love and freedom in the middle of life's troubles. Riad El-Rayyes Books published it in 2013. This story follows the lives of many characters who are all trying to find peace and balance in a messy world. Salem is looking for stability, Zaki is looking for salvation, and Zainab and Malik are looking for peace. Who succeeds and fails on danger's cliffs and edges? Who is lucky enough to escape the grip of a world governed by authorities that have made man a prisoner who only thinks about escaping his fate? "Streets of the World" is a narration of human destiny through a journey filled with questions and transformations. The novel revolves around these interconnected stories, exploring concepts such as pondering life's purpose, seeking significance, and persistently striving to enhance one's life. The characters' challenges happen in a world full of political and social changes, which makes their personal journeys even more touching. Halawi's way of telling the story shows the feelings and thoughts of his characters, giving "العالم شوارع" a deep look at how people keep going and keep searching for freedom and love in a world that's always changing.

The reflection of the Iran-Iraq War in Two Novels, Comparative Analysis:

"Sorraya in a Coma," along with the story "The Streets of the World," is the enumeration of the two novels within the angle of the Iran-Iraq war. An analysis closely scrutinizes the individual parts of the novels and the way that each writer treats the theme of personal trauma. It analyzes the characters' interior states, showing their war memories, their experiences in war stories, and their impact on society and politics. The examination also

demonstrates the use of various writing techniques to convey the characters' and readers' intense and clear-cut feelings and thoughts in each book. The portrayal of the Iran-Iraq War in literature, particularly the analysis of the war's experiences in the chosen novels, is intended to understand the narrative techniques used to psychologically project the trauma and socio-political issues throughout the war's period on individuals and society. In their writings, the readers might get to know the inside of a person's soul fully and completely. This method blocks the readers from the war's psychological influence through the characters' sometimes provisional and sometimes confused thinking. The style of writing used in "Sorraya in a Coma" depicts the primary protagonist's state of mind that has been clouded by the war's trauma. "The Streets of the World" also uses this method to disclose the characters' mental disorders, and apart from that, it gives a window into their internal struggle and war recollections. Both novels' main characters frequently employ brief time jumps to alter the sequence of events. Therefore, the way things are told, which seems chaotic and non-linear, may also involve bad or uncomfortable events. In Fassih's "Sorraya in a Coma," the switch of scenes from the past to the present and back again conveys to the reader the character's inability to distance themselves from the war memories and integrate into real life. Halawi's "Streets of the World" also uses stories that don't follow a straight timeline to show how past bad experiences continue to affect the characters' lives today. Both writers focus on the mental trauma that wars create. Both writers depict their characters grappling with various forms of psychological distress, such as sorrow. In "Sorraya of Coma," the immunity of the protagonist is emphasized; it was a very weepy time when the desire to avoid the past events was stronger than sleep itself. This shows how harmful our whole psychological system is to humans, as it can all be destroyed through trauma. In "Streets of the World", it shows how war still affects people's psyches, with characters suddenly remembering the past and feeling emotionally distant, showing how the

psychological scars from war last a long time. Both novels depict how traumatic memories are fragmented and difficult to piece together using modern narrative techniques such as thinking out loud and time blending. The memoir describes the ongoing fear of bombings and the worry about what will happen next. The writer's detailed memories of wartime emphasize how these early, scary events continue to affect the characters. These novels also look at how the war affects society and culture more widely. Both authors use their stories to discuss the changes in society caused by the war. Fassih focuses on how the war breaks down social systems and weakens cultural beliefs. Halawi discusses the blending of cultures and the identity struggles people face because of the war, showing how the conflict changes social standards and personal identities. They focus on how the Iran-Iraq war affected people's psyches and relationships, showing the lasting scars it left on individuals and communities. These books portray in moving images what people went through during and after the war, showing how combat exacerbated their mental suffering. They use a particular narrative style that makes the horrific effects of war on people's psyches look very real and strange. Both books strongly emphasize how war destroys people's lives and family ties. The stories of families struggling to maintain their faith amid political turmoil reflect the suffering that many families in Iran and Iraq endured during the war. The books are like a personal diary that tells about the writer's years during the war. It gives a close-up view of how families felt and dealt with the tough times of living in a place destroyed by war.

Both books explore the widespread feelings of fear and worry among Iranians and Iraqi people during and following the war. The characters' internal lack of clarity and emotional confusion, reflected in the war-ridden, disjointed plot, demonstrates the direct correlation between a fear-filled life and war. The two novels uncover the depths of the war experiences and the trauma that each country had to face. From psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds, the writers create the most amazing stories that give a long-lasting message

about the war between Iran and Iraq. This writing is a good choice for those who have gone through the war, as it will help them to look back at their experiences as well as the future for the new generation and scholars who are focusing on the emotional part of the war. It illustrates how the war intensifies their emotional issues, and how significant societal changes further complicate the process of coping with their pain. They use a special style of storytelling that combines real and magical elements to explore how these people deal with grief. Their story connects individuals' personal sadness with the group's larger sadness. Their books recount growing up during and after the Iran-Iraq war. It shows very clearly the deep sadness felt by families who lost people they loved in the war.

Fassih's "Sorraya in a Coma" focuses on peering into the protagonist's mind, using the coma as a symbol of mental withdrawal. After the war, the authors sought to understand and remember what happened during the conflict. This leads to a moving look at how war still affects people's relationships and daily lives. The protagonist's thoughtful journey shows that the pain of war lasts a long time. Iranian writers use stories to illustrate the psychological impact war has on individuals. To understand how the book can communicate the emotions and thoughts people feel because of war, we consider the narrative structure, character development, and the central themes of the story. The book contains a series of stories that show the memories of people who lived through the war and the ongoing challenges. This narrative style emphasizes the importance of remembering the past in order to understand and progress.

Halawi's "Streets of the World" provides a broader view of society and demonstrates how the shared pain of war has altered cultural identity and community bonds. It reflects how war reshapes culture and national identity. The book discusses the loss of cultural heritage and a sense of identity crisis that comes with the turmoil of war. The conflict radically changes society, forcing the novel's characters to come to terms with their roles. Halawi's book deals

with the notion of forced migration and the search for one's own identity. The protagonist travels through a war-torn country, describing how survivors often feel lost and unsure of who they are. The book depicts the deep emotional scars of migration and the struggle to establish a stable identity. The book also depicts how war and political troubles shatter family confidence. In the midst of this turmoil, the characters struggle to understand themselves, reflecting a larger issue that many in Iran face: not knowing who they are. Halawi's story emphasizes the big challenge of finding purpose and feeling like you belong after a war. He helps us see what characters really want and struggle with in their minds, revealing more about the deep pain they feel.

Using concepts from comparative studies, researchers uncover hidden meanings within the books, highlighting themes of fear, loss, and identity confusion stemming from war. Grasping Iraq's culture and historical significance is extremely important, especially when reading a book about the Iraq War's perspective reveals the literature on a global level, privileging them from the cultural and political backdrop of Iraq's past and the inquiry of whether there is an interconnection between the societal and historical facts and the representation of novel war.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the recent literature on the trauma of the war in Middle Eastern literature was a very interesting and multifaceted research field concerning psychological, sociopolitical, and cultural issues. The novels not only disclose how the adversities of war affect individuals and societies, but they also uncover the upbeat and never-say-die spirit of individuals in the midst of war.

The scholars' examination of such themes by incorporating different methodological perspectives aids in a better understanding of the human condition in the face of war-related

destruction.

This research is summarized as follows: the novels, “Sorraya in a Coma” and “Streets of the World” are both different in their type of literature, but the common factor regarding the war that they present is the knowledge of the author's cultural background and narrative style. It also brings out the importance of the two works as means of sustaining cultural memory and as avenues of insight into the human dimension of conflict.

The research delves into the comparative analysis of the two novels, emphasizing their significance as invaluable sources of information on the impact of war on the mental state and psyche of individuals in the Persian and Arabic texts. It discusses what these findings mean for studying war stories, as well as the future effects of trauma. It suggests that both books provide useful ideas about the mental impacts of the war between Iran and Iraq, as well as how to tell these difficult stories well.

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Billy Gardner

**“Those are my brothers there”: Remediating Memories of War in Kurt
Vonnegut: *Unstuck in Time***

“Those are my brothers there”: Remediating Memories of War in *Kurt Vonnegut: Unstuck in
Time*

“The exercise of power without a sense of ethical responsibility is dangerous; the exercise of power without historical knowledge is a prescription for disaster.”

-Gabrielle Spiegel, “The Case for History and the Humanities”

“And Lot’s wife, of course, was told not look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human. So she was turned into a pillar of salt.”

-Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Introduction: POWs and portrayals of war

This essay will investigate the comparisons made between WWII and the Iraq War as depicted in Robert Weide’s documentary *Kurt Vonnegut Vonnegut: Unstuck in Time*, which will hereby be referred to as *Unstuck*, paying special attention to discussions in the film about the experiences of prisoners in these wars. As this documentary is a biographical piece about Kurt Vonnegut, there are mentions of the U.S. firebombing of Dresden during WWII, as well as discussion and portrayals of the U.S. invasions of Vietnam and Iraq. More

specifically though, in analogizing the prisoners in these various wars, the documentary *Unstuck* not only provides an insight into Vonnegut's own positions on these wars, it demonstrates the value of comparing and contrasting catastrophes across time and space. This paper, like Weide's documentary, seeks to address the benefit and also the limitations of juxtaposing WWII and the Iraq War. It seeks to understand what is to gain from remediating Kurt Vonnegut's experience as a POW during WWII in what is a 21st century film.

In the book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, when discussing holocaust memory, Michael Rothberg argued that, "comparisons, analogies, and other multidirectional invocations are an inevitable part of the struggle for justice". Envisioning his multidirectional framework for memory as, "an ethical vision based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness and working through partial overlaps and conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics," Rothberg's concept can help us think through the analogies between traumatic experiences of war, like those depicted in *Unstuck* (29). Moreover, it's evident that, as Rothberg encourages us to see memory as "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing", one could argue that so do Kurt Vonnegut and Robert Weide (3). With this essay I'll seek to show how Weide's film *Unstuck* uses this lens of multidirectional memory in its discussion of POWs in WWII and the Iraq War, illustrating a similar

productive/intercultural dynamic that Rothberg deploys when discussing interactions between different historical memories. And as we witness the remediation of Vonnegut's experience as a POW in WWII throughout Weide's documentary, at the time of the Iraq War, both conflicts (WWII and the Iraq War) are seen in a new light.

Analogizing wars

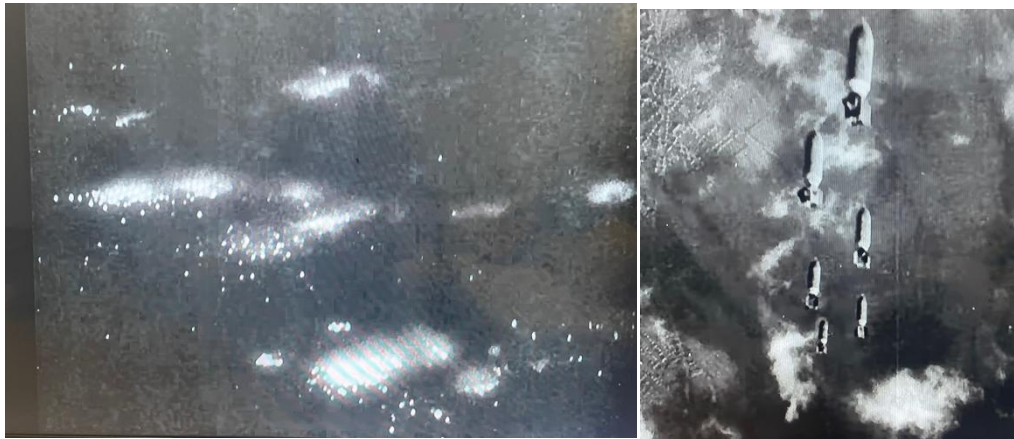
Multidirectional Memory was published in 2009 and in that book, Rothberg described the Iraq War as a “dominant political site of multidirectional memory,” considering how the “liberal use of torture and indefinite detention... have produced uncomfortable echoes of the Holocaust and colonial adventures past” (28).



Figure I: Image from *Unstuck*, depicting news footage of the American “shock-and-awe” bombing of Iraq.

Like Rothberg, Weide also makes clear comparisons to how the “war on terror” in Iraq was reminiscent of the horrors committed in WWII. In its discussion of the outbreak of the

Figure II (left) and Figure III (right) are images from Weide's documentary, showing actual footage of the bombing of Dresden.



Iraq

War,

the

documentary *Unstuck* displayed CNN footage of the American “shock-and-awe campaign”, showing U.S. fighter jets bombing Baghdad (see Figure I). Mark Vonnegut narrates the clip and says that his father’s view was that the outbreak of the Iraq War was a sign that “the American dream was over”. While seeking to illustrate Kurt Vonnegut’s disposition during this era, as well as his views against the invasion of Iraq, the clip also seems overt in its attempt to analogize the bombing of Dresden with the shock-and-awe footage from Iraq. In watching U.S. fighter pilots bombing Iraqi cities, how could someone like Vonnegut not draw such comparisons, the documentary seems to imply. Moreover, the CNN footage from the Iraq War appears eerily similar to the much grainier footage from earlier in the film that shows the bombing of Dresden (see Figures II and III).

It’s worth noting that, in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut also analogizes the bombing of Dresden during WWII to other *previous* catastrophes. Vonnegut’s citing of Mary Endell’s *Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery*, which he uses to describe the

near-annihilation of Dresden by the Prussians in the 1700s, is meant to be contrasted to the later fiery devastation of that same city during WWII, which occurs later on Vonnegut's novel. He wrote,

Now, in 1760, Dresden underwent siege by the Prussians. On the fifteenth of July began the cannonade. The Picture-Gallery took fire. Many of the paintings had been transported to the Königstein, but some were seriously injured by splinters of bombshells,—notably Francia's "Baptism of Christ." Furthermore, the stately Kreuzkirche tower, from which the enemy's movements had been watched day and night, stood in flames. It later succumbed. In sturdy contrast with the pitiful fate of the Kreuzkirche, stood the Frauenkirche, from the curves of whose stone dome the Prussian bombs rebounded like rain. Friederich was obliged finally to give up the siege, because he learned of the fall of Glatz, the critical point of his new conquests. "We must be off to Silesia, so that we do not lose everything."

The devastation of Dresden was boundless. When Goethe as a young student visited the city, he still found sad ruins: "Von der Kuppel der Frauenkirche sah ich diese leidigen Trümmer zwischen die schöne städtische Ordnung hineingesät; da rühmte mir der Küster die Kunst des Baumeisters, welcher Kirche und Kuppel auf einen so unerwünschten Fall schon eingerichtet und bombenfest erbaut hatte. Der gute Sakristan deutete mir alsdann auf Ruine nach allen Seiten und sagte bedenklich lakonisch: Das hat der Feind gethan!" (Vonnegut 30)

And while there is a clear through-line to the bombing of Dresden during WWII to the "boundless" devastation of that city by the Prussians in 1760, considering it was, of course, the same city, Vonnegut seems to include this passage to further the connections between the needless devastation of these incidents, of war, in general. Moreover, the specific language of "bombshells" and numerous mentions of fire, flames, and devastation no doubt evoke later descriptions in *Slaughterhouse-Five* of a Dresden utterly destroyed during WWII.

Therefore, it's evident that we readers are encouraged to draw comparisons between these two catastrophes. And in yet another multidirectional comparison, Vonnegut also contrasts this destruction of Dresden to the annihilation of Sodom in the bible, when early on in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he endears himself to Lot's wife, who was instructed not to look back as Sodom burned, but did anyway. One could even argue that Vonnegut's novel itself is a similar witnessing and "looking back" at destruction, thereby also highlighting distinct comparisons between the firebombing of Dresden in WWII and the destruction of Sodom in the bible.

In documenting Vonnegut's life and anti-war sentiment, Weide's *Unstuck* furthers the comparisons of catastrophes from Sodom, to Dresden, and now to Iraq. As a result, any images of Dresden burning during WWII that are shown in Weide's documentary (like Figures II and III above), which already evoke comparisons to the earlier destruction of Dresden in the 1700s and the devastation of Sodom in the bible, now illicit analogies to the news footage of the fiery bombing of Iraq during the U.S. "shock and awe" campaign (Figure I), and what stands as a stark anti-war critique. It's evident that by comparing these various catastrophes across time and space, both Weide and Vonnegut are using a multidirectional framework for memory, while also making arguments against disastrous bombing campaigns by the U.S. government.

Notably, the documentary *Unstuck* also conflates WWII with the Vietnam War, all the while addressing the complications that can arise when analogizing wars and tragedies. Weide included a clip of Lyndon B. Johnson's State of the Union address in 1966, when Johnson said, "The war in Vietnam is not like these other wars. Yet, finally, war is always the same. It is young men dying in the fullness of their promise." Drawing clear comparisons between Vonnegut's description of WWII as a children's crusade and Johnson's above quote about the war in Vietnam as being fought by young men, it's evident that the documentary *Unstuck* also analogizes WWII with Vietnam, among other wars, while also attempting to assert the uniqueness of these conflicts and their inability to be fully equated, which is reminiscent of Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* in its calls for careful comparisons and distinctions between catastrophes.

And it's crucial to note that not all analogies of wars and tragedies are created equal. Rothberg wrote that, "The Bush administration frequently references Algeria as an analogy for Iraq," while demonstrating the potential harm in offering this broad comparison between these conflicts (28). In fact, in various speeches and interviews, George W. Bush has also compared the Iraq War to WWII, Vietnam, Korea, the Civil War, and the Revolutionary War. In a 2004 commencement speech to the U.S. Air Force Academy, in regards to the ongoing Iraq War, Bush remarked that, "Like the Second World War, our present conflict began with a ruthless, surprise attack on the United States. We will not forget that treachery, and we will

accept nothing less than victory over our enemy.” In equating the terrorist attack of 9/11 to Pearl Harbor, we see how Bush uses his own comparisons between the Iraq War and WWII as a means of justifying the invasion of a country that had nothing to do with the attacks on the Twin Towers and again, showing the potential dangers to analogies between varying wars and conflicts, especially when made for political purposes.

I would also be remiss if I didn’t mention a gaffe that Bush made in a speech at the George W. Bush Institute a few years ago, which provoked comparisons between his Iraq War and the current invasion of Ukraine. In speaking about the corruption of the Russian government, Bush said, “The result is an absence of checks and balances... and the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq... I mean, of Ukraine.” While accidental, the slip-of-the-tongue caused an uncomfortable analogy to be drawn between Bush and Putin’s “wholly unjustified” and “brutal” wars and numerous news outlets made the comparison. Moreover, one could argue that the Russians are even taking from the Bush administration’s playbook, considering Russian officials have used the rooting out of weapons of mass destruction as a narrative for justifying their current invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. spoke of “liberating” Iraq, while undertaking a full-scale military invasion of the country. Similarly, Putin and his cronies speak of their “special military operation” as a means of liberation for Ukraine and not what it really is, another invasion. However, does this mean all comparisons of war are invaluable? Is it possible to analogize wars or

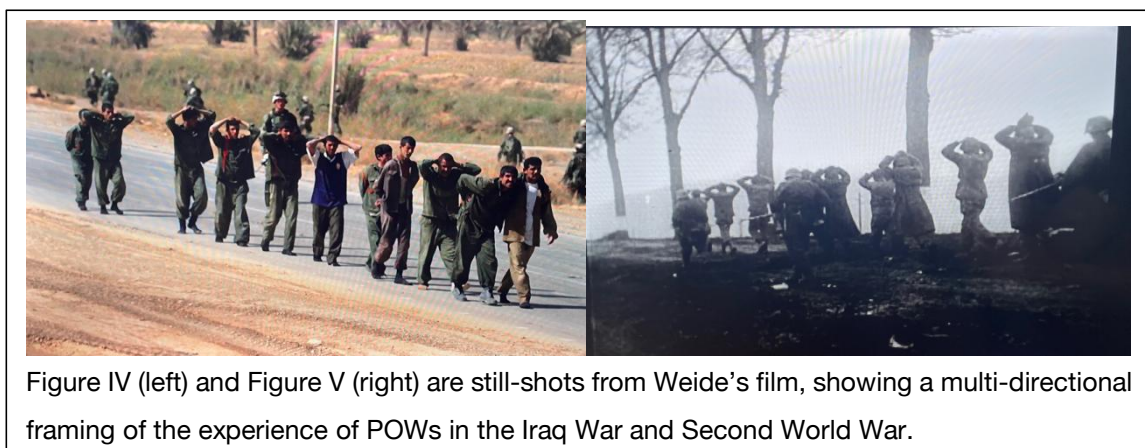
catastrophes or different historical moments in a more productive way? And at what point does such an endeavor become “productive”?

Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an example of a book that complicated the post-war narrative of U.S. involvement in WWII. Published during the Vietnam War, the novel focuses on the U.S. firebombing of Dresden and Vonnegut’s experience as a POW living through that incident, and what was clearly a message that resonated with an anti-war public of 1969. In an interview in Weide’s film, Vonnegut scholar Jerome Klinkowitz said that, “*Slaughterhouse-Five* was the breakthrough because it was the right place at the right time. It was in the ugliest phase of the Vietnam War and in the ugliest phase of our domestic crises at home.” In his biography *The Vonnegut Effect*, Klinkowitz said of Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* that “... it was only during the Vietnam era the he could write his World War II novel and see it accepted not just as a best-seller but also as a work of art so indicative of its present age, the American 1960s.” And like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the documentary *Unstuck* highlights Vonnegut’s criticisms of his own military during WWII, as well as his experience as a POW. However, unlike *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the film *Unstuck* is also able to provide insight at how Vonnegut felt about the later American wars in Vietnam and Iraq. In one of his interviews within the film, Weide said that Vonnegut “was not a big fan of the Bush administration. Either one actually. And especially the war with Iraq... Either one.” It’s therefore evident that *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Unstuck* do the work of

multidirectional memory in providing a more complicated view of our traumatic histories of war, by more thoroughly contextualizing and analogizing these catastrophes - be that WWII with Vietnam or WWII with the wars in Iraq - and enabling for what Rothberg described as the “commitment to uncovering historical relatedness.”

Hands on heads

The particular moment from *Unstuck* that I would like to further focus on is toward the end of the film, when Vonnegut is shown giving a speech and offering his reaction to seeing POWs being captured by American forces during the Iraq War. In the speech, Vonnegut says, “When I saw photographs of the Iraqi kids with their hands up like this, having been shelled and bombed until they were half-witted, I said, ‘Those are my brothers there.’” As Vonnegut addresses the audience, Weide’s documentary displays a photograph of Iraqi POWs with their hands on their heads, having been captured by American forces. The film then immediately shows a short black-and-white video of American forces being captured during WWII, also at gunpoint with hands on their heads, offering a clear juxtaposition of these two



wars and the experiences of prisoners in them (see Figures IV and V). “I didn’t think it was amusing or wonderful at all to see kids in that situation,” Vonnegut says of the Iraqi POWs. While the numerous mentions of the Iraqi fighters as being children also endears these POWs to Vonnegut, considering again that he described war as a children’s crusade, it’s evident that *Unstuck* seeks to further this connection between Vonnegut and the captured Iraqis, as well, especially considering the comparable imagery it displays of POWs in both wars. And both Vonnegut’s quote and the imagery also hearkens back to Johnson’s State of the Union address about Vietnam that appeared earlier in the film, which stated that war was always the same in that “it is young men dying in the fullness of their promise.”

It’s also worth noting that the photograph of captured Iraqis and the video of American POWs during WWII that are shown in Weide’s film - marching with hands on their heads - are also reminiscent of Vonnegut’s description of Billy Pilgrim being taken prisoner in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Billy was **marching with his hands on top of his head**, and so were all the other Americans... At each road intersection Billy’s group was joined by **more Americans with their hands on top of their haloed heads**... Through the valley flowed a Mississippi of humiliated Americans. Tens of thousands of Americans shuffled eastward, **their hands clasped on top of their heads** (63-64, bold added from the author).

And later on in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut also wrote:

Then the shelling stopped, and a hidden German with a loudspeaker told the Americans to put their weapons down and **come out of the woods with their hands on the top of their heads**, or the shelling would start again. It wouldn't stop until everybody in there was dead.

So the Americans put their weapons down, and **they came out of the woods with their hands on top of their heads**, because they wanted to on living, if they possibly could (106-107, bold added).

In seeing images of young Iraqi soldiers shelled, captured, and marching with their hands on their heads, with guns being pointed at them by American troops, Vonnegut's reaction is disdain for his government's actions, but more significantly, it's sympathy; he draws connections with the Iraqis from his own experience as a POW in WWII. And while different in their historical contexts, according to the depictions in Weide's film and the words of Vonnegut, WWII and the Iraq War have some significant similarities, particularly in their treatment of young POWs. Vonnegut even goes as far as endearing these Iraqi POWs as his family members - his brothers - deepening the relation between these captured soldiers in these two very different wars.

In a recent speech commemorating the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, President Joe Biden made explicit connections between Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Hitler's takeover of Europe in World War II, illustrating the ongoing and prescient nature of the conversation *Unstuck* and Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* are addressing. In reference to the American Rangers who stormed the beaches of Normandy, Biden asked, "Does anyone doubt... that they would want America to stand up against Putin's aggression here in Europe today?" Later on, Biden said of the Rangers, "They're asking us to do our job: to protect freedom in our time, to defend democracy, to stand up [to] aggression abroad and at home..."

These connections demonstrate the constant multidirectional comparisons being made with current war in Ukraine, but also throughout the rest of the world. Drawing comparisons to Nazis is common in many of the world's current conflicts. Both sides will use Hitler as a way of instilling fear. So, at what point do these comparisons become useful, if ever? Are some comparisons to WWII or Hitler more "useful" than others, or should none *ever* be considered? Many would bristle at humanity's obsession with comparing current crises to WWII, maintaining that no useful parallels could be learned from the Holocaust or Hitler's actions. And yet, it's undeniable that these connections that are constantly made to the past, to WWII. These multidirectional comparisons elicited from one crises to another continue to dominant our discourse and our ways of "using", as Rothberg would say, whether we agree

with their specific “uses” or not, and it’s therefore incumbent on us to better understand how they are (constantly) operating.

In again detailing Vonnegut’s experience as a POW, in contrast with the ongoing U.S. military conflict with Iraq, *Unstuck* provides a particularly timely and multi-faceted example of how remediation of memories, as scholars describe it, can instill new perspectives when they are considered in later historical moments. It demonstrates how memories can continue to influence later events and vice versa. Vonnegut’s story of capture in WWII brings a new insight into the Iraq War and conversely, the Iraq War, and the U.S. treatment of prisoners in that conflict, offers a new salience to Vonnegut’s stories as a POW, as well. In remediating Vonnegut’s service at the height of the Iraq War, as Weide’s documentary does, both historical moments become fused, demonstrating a value in comparison that is in the same vein of Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory*, and one that is fittingly unstuck in time.

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Sumeeta Chanda

A Postmodern Reading of Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home – Stories from a War Zone*

Postmodernism is relevant to India because after the liberalisation of trade in the 1990s, a surge in capitalism and consumerism has been seen in the Indian society. The North-Eastern state of Nagaland had been one of the backward states in the nation, however it has seen some economic development in recent years owing to the Look East Policy, wherein India wishes to strengthen its economic ties with East Asian countries. The East Asian nations and North-Eastern states of India share a similar racial profile. The North-Eastern states, including Nagaland, has seen development and promotion of tourism in recent times. Patton says that the Nagas are of the Mongolian race, and they belong to the Tibeto-Burman family. (44) The Nagas have been fighting for self-determinacy since the Indian independence of 1947.

The Indian academic elite subscribes to the view of postmodernism, and Temsula Ao being an academic herself, has shown signs of the postmodern in her writing. She is a poet and an author, and this essay analyses her collection of short stories, *These Hills Called Home – Stories from a War Zone* from a postmodern lens.

Ao has written these set of stories from the memories of people from her culture, that is the indigenous Naga Ao people and their oral tales. Most of the stories hark back to the 1950s when the Naga Movement or the Naga underground insurgency was at its peak. The Nagas had been fighting the Indian nation-state for its independence from India owing to differences on grounds such as ethnicity, race, religion, and culture. The Indian state declared Nagaland as a disturbed area and it has been marked as such since then. The application of the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958) to Nagaland and other

nearby North Eastern states led to many cases of violations of human rights in the area, perpetrated by some elements in the Indian Army. Patton says that during 1953 – 1955, over 10,000 Nagas had been beaten up and tortured. Lawlessness and terror spread in the state, leading to fear psychosis among the residents. (58) Nagaland has been a site of internal conflicts and war between the Naga underground and India, and Ao has captured the memories of people from those times in this collection of short stories.

These stories narrate the tales of men who had been a part of the Naga underground, of women who have suffered rape and death, and children who have lost the innocence of their childhood due to the war. Aspects of postmodernist writing are seen in the writing of Ao such as non-linear chronology; rejection of meta narratives; a rejection of modernist humanism and drift towards paganism; and reversibility or search for the roots.

Lyotard says that knowledge need not necessarily always be an objective, scientific knowledge. (18) He also says that traditional knowledge takes the form of narrative. (19) Ao shares her knowledge of the Naga struggle for independence and the sufferings of Naga people, derived from oral tales that she has heard and written in the form of narrative. It is in the culture of the Nagas to tell oral tales sitting by the hearth of their homes. The elders tell these stories to the young ones, who in turn pass them on to the future generations, and thus the stories and memories of the tribes are preserved.

In the section titled, “Lest We Forget,” Ao says that in her short story collection, she has endeavoured to tell the tales of those Nagas who have suffered during the 1950s and beyond – representing the pains of those unmentioned and unacknowledged. The stories, or rather the narrative, aims to show how the Naga struggle has shaped the current Naga society, and also revolutionized the Naga psyche. The stories are set against the backdrop of the war between Naga underground and Indian State, and they narrate how the war has caused psychological and socio-emotional trauma. Ao specifically writes from the perspective of the

people of her tribe, the Ao Nagas. She has also written articles on oral tradition, folk songs, myths, and culture of the Ao Nagas.

O'Cottage says that postmodernism is not completely conceptualised at the present moment, but there are eight factors that help assign postmodernist characteristics to a text. Some of these classifications have been applied to Ao's text, and are described in the following sections.

A Preference for the Present

The history of the Nagas and Nagaland dates back to the era of British Raj when Nagaland was an 'excluded' area. Srikanth et al say that at the time of partition in 1947, the national leaders sought to build a strong and united nation-state, thereby leading to the forced inclusion of Nagaland and other North Eastern states considered to be 'backward' into the Indian Union. Initially, the Nagas peacefully protested against the forced assimilation by the Indian state, but gradually during their rebellion took a violent turn. (57)

Many stories in this collection are concerned with the present or the immediate. Ao does not express an anxiety for the future, but is more concerned with the current state of the Nagas. This contradicts modernism's anxiety about the future, the very belief system that upholds tradition. Postmodernism on the other hand, is incredulous of metanarratives – that which designates tradition as high and mighty. In *The Jungle Major*, Punaba escapes near arrest and detention by the Indian Army because of the quick-mindedness of his wife, Khatila. Khatila, by averting his arrest, also protects her entire village from persecution, because in those days if a rebel was found to be protected by a village, then the entire village would be persecuted and not only the rebel. The story ends with Punaba and Khatila chatting with their friends about his escape. They are neither preoccupied with the happenings of the past, nor wary of what the future holds for them.

The persecution of entire villages is known as 'grouping.' An entire village suspected

of harbouring the Naga rebels, would be dislodged from their ancestral home and land, and grouped into a new area in which it would be possible for the Indian Army to guard them day and night. The Nagas are indigenous inhabitants of the land, and they are closely tied to the land that belongs to any particular tribe. Each village would be populated by the members of any one tribe, and uprooting from their village had the consequence of uprooting them from their culture and traditions. In the groupings, villagers were tortured physically and mentally, which resulted in the alienation of the Nagas from mainstream India. Ao says that it was most humiliating insult to be uprooted from the soil of their origin and being, confining them in alien environments, denying them access to their fields, and essentially taking away their freedom at gunpoint.

Delegitimation of Grand Narratives

In *Shadows*, Ao narrates the tale of a young boy named Imli, who wishes to join the Naga underground army despite the best advice from his father, who himself was in a leading position in the Naga underground. The antagonist, Hoito, was guided by his sense of personal revenge against Imli's father, and he used this emotion to have Imli murdered by his own comrades. The grand narrative that the Naga rebels were all united against the Indian Army is shown to be a myth, and that the underground itself was mired by internal strife and rivalry. In the end of this story, Hoito himself is tortured and murdered by a band of Naga marauders who reside in the remote jungles of Nagaland.

In *The Last Song*, the grand narrative that the Indian Army or the Indian State tortured the Nagas with the sole intention to repress them is challenged. Apenyo, the protagonist is the lead choir singer and during one of the attacks by Indian Army at their church dedication Sunday ceremony, she refuses to stop singing her hymns even at the face of rape and death. Apenyo and her mother, Libeni were eventually brutally raped and murdered. The church was burnt down, and a great many of the villagers were shot at and

their bodies burned in order to destroy the evidence of the atrocities. That day is remembered as Black Sunday. The surviving villagers, later on, find out that the captain was being kept in a maximum-security mental asylum in a big city. Ao suggests that the Indian Army had punished the captain by keeping him in confinement, and because of his insanity, they could not give him the capital punishment. The story ends with an old woman storyteller narrating oral tales to her grandchildren in the warmth of the hearth. She claims to be able to hear Apenyo's singing in the howling wind as it happens to be an anniversary of the Black Sunday. Ao hints at the possibility of the village being haunted by the ghost of Apenyo years after her unnatural death. Apenyo was not given a regular burial. The Nagas, although converted into Christianity by British missionaries, originally believed that those died an unnatural death would be buried outside the premises of the village. Apenyo's body was buried in the village but just outside the premises of the cemetery, and there was no headstone given to her or Libeni's graves. According to Christian rules, they should have buried them in the cemetery, but the villagers rejected Christian ideas and followed their indigenous ancestral customs instead, thereby, in this situation, rejecting the grand narrative of Christianity.

Anti-Foundationalism

The postmodernists rejected the modernists' concern for humanity on the basis of fixed ideologies, that is they reject the idea of a metanarrative or master discourse to be the criterion for judging various situations. Paganism is a way of thinking in which the differences are taken into account. Lyotard believed that just as the pagans believe in many Gods, so does paganism believe in pluralism and multiplicity. This idea is in turn used to oppose the idea of universality of modernism.

In *An Old Man Remembers*, Sashi and Imli were childhood best friends, and Imli had just passed away owing to old age. The two grew up together, and were cadets in the Naga

underground army together when they were young. In this story, Sashi narrates to his young grandson the events from his childhood and underground days because he comes to believe that these stories need to be told to the younger generation, and not let be buried deep in his heart as secrets. Initially in the story, Sashi was against narrating those stories to his grandson because they were of a violent kind. But after the death of Imli, he slowly changes his mind and thinks to himself that although his grandson is still a child, he needs to know about the Naga army and the violent times the Naga people have faced because of their struggle for independence from India. Ao shows the dichotomy of modernist and postmodernist through the characters of Sashi and Imli respectively. Sashi or the modernist believes that there is only one way to judge the goodness of the situation, and thus does not tell his wife of grandson about the war and its violence. Imli on the other hand believes that the younger generation needs to know about their past, and thus eventually convinces Sashi that the war stories need to be told.

In *Shadows*, Ao says that the Naga underground used to instil fear in the minds of the villagers so that they would be compelled to help the rebel groups. The villagers would then give food, toiletries, clothes, etc., to the rebels who used to live in the jungles. The Burmese, although belonging to the same race as the Nagas, refused to further help the Naga rebels on account of them being rebels. The master discourse of brotherhood amongst racially similar peoples, and oneness amongst the Nagas, fail in this scenario.

Local Over the Universal/Identity Politics

In *Soaba*, Ao narrates the tale of a small-town simpleton named Soaba who gets embroiled in the Naga underground's politics, and eventually is murdered. In this story, Ao explores the identity of the Naga people, and how it has undergone changes through the years from 1950s until the present, in terms of ethnicity, race, and nationality. Ao writes about the Nagas and the 'outsiders' in Nagaland, although the outsiders being referred to

here are the non-Naga Indian people who have settled in Nagaland. India is a land of diverse ethnicities, and several of them such as the Assamese, Bengali, Marwari, Bihari, and Nepalese peoples are referred to as ‘outsiders’ in *Soaba*.

There are about seventeen tribes in Nagaland, and they are collectively referred to as the Nagas. These are the Ao, Sema, Lotha, Angami, etc. The universality of Indianness is rejected in favour of belonging to a community called the Nagas. The non-Naga population residing in Nagaland is referred to as outsiders, or even as foreigners.

In *Soaba*, Ao says that many Naga people had migrated from the villages to the towns in order to look for better jobs in the government services, and schools. Many of the Nagas had abandoned the security of such jobs and had joined the rebellious underground outfit in order to gain Nagaland’s freedom from India. There was a power struggle between the then Indian government and the Nagas. However, a number of Naga people became informers/home guards for the Indian government who reported on the Naga underground outfit to India. Such informers/home guards gained power and money in the long run.

The lady of the house who informally adopted Soaba, Imtila, was married to one such man named referred to simply as ‘Boss’ in the story. Boss had become drunk on his power, and he would sometimes have people brought to his home on grounds of suspicion. The arrested individual would be tortured in his home for information, and his howls and cries would be muffled by the sounds of a loud stereo system. One fateful night, in his drunken frenzy, Boss shot Soaba through his heart because he suspected that Soaba intended to murder him. Soaba died on the spot, and Boss became remorseful of his boisterous ways soon after. Boss was not prosecuted for the murder, but the story shows that among the Naga people, there was an identity politics in place, which led some people to choose to be on the Indian side rather than to side with the Naga rebels.

In *The Curfew Man*, Ao says that Satemba and Jemtila were a married couple facing

poverty. These were times of night curfews in Nagaland, when the general public was forbidden from stepping outside their homes after sunset. The Indian security forces would and could prevent the public from visiting hospitals, or shoot them on suspicions of belonging to the underground outfit. Being poor and in dire need of money, Jemtila takes up work as a domestic help in the household of an Indian army officer. The officer also hires Satemba as his informant against the underground. Each day, Satemba would gather his required information and intelligence from the town, and in the night when the curfew was in place, he would deliver the intelligence to his boss. He was permitted to traverse the town because he had the password required every evening to be given at all check-posts, so that the sentries would allow him to pass unhindered. Satemba came to know of many incidences of torture of his fellow Nagas, and one day he decided that he no longer would side with the Indian government. He and Jemtila quit their jobs at the Indian army officer's house. This story shows that although mired by poverty, some Nagas were overcome with feelings of empathy and sympathy for their fellow tribesmen, and ceased to work for the Indian Army.

Indifferent attitude

Ao says in the section, "Lest We Forget," that Nagaland's struggle for self-determination began with ideas of high idealism and romantic nationalism. However, as time passed, the ideals withered with disillusionment, and "it became the very thing it sought to overcome." She further says that the traditional Naga way of life is increasingly becoming irrelevant to the Naga people, who now displaced from their rural setting have been placed into an urban, conflicted and confused space. The traditional Naga way of life encouraged living in harmony with nature and neighbours, but the current generation has been rendered, to an extent, indifferent to such virtues.

In *A New Chapter*, Ao relates the story after the war had subsided and a series of ceasefires had begun during the 1960s. The underground retreated further into the jungles,

and new players emerged with new roles. The Indian Army became a more prominent presence, especially in prime locations in the towns and villages. Ao says that in order to justify the presence of the Indian Army in Nagaland, they carried out encounters with suspect rebels, and there had been bomb explosions. A new class of army contractors emerged in those times, whose task was to procure supplies for these army establishments.

One such army contractor was a man named Bendangnungsang, who had an Indian friend named Bhandari. Bhandari helped Bendangnungsang to win contracts for the Indian Army, and also to win a local election. When Bendangnungsang won the election, Bhandari asked of the new Legislator “to spearhead the introduction of a bill to recognise his tribe as an indigenous group in the state.” Bhandari being a non-Naga person, had brought in the possibility of recognising non-Naga people as indigenous peoples of Nagaland. Ao suggests that due to the indifference of the Naga people, many outsiders received indigenous status in Nagaland.

Search for Roots

This collection of short stories is an attempt to look back at the past and to search for the roots of the Nagas. In the stories, *The Pot Maker* and *The Journey*, Ao relates tales of Naga traditions such as their traditional pottery-making, and their current lifestyle respectively. *The Pot Maker* celebrates the art of pottery-making. Sentila is a little girl who wishes to learn the art from her mother, which is her birthright. The mother, however, prevents her from learning the craft because it involves hard work. Eventually, Sentila learns the craft despite of obstacles created by her mother. In *The Journey*, Tinula is a little girl studying in Assam who visits her native village during the holidays. She and her brother, travel through the Naga hills, at first by train and then later on foot to reach her native village in the interiors of Nagaland. The closeness of the Nagas to nature is highlighted in this story.

Apart from the characteristics of postmodernism cited above, the postmodern also

challenges our thinking about time, that is, it is not necessarily an occurring after modernism, but rather an extension to it. Bennett et al say that undecidability, a new enlightenment, dissemination, little and grand narratives, simulation, depthlessness, pastiche, the unrepresentable, and decentring are some of the features of postmodernism. A reading of Ao's text using some of these lenses have been described below.

Undecidability

Bennet et al say that in classical logic, paradoxes or contradictions are an exception, but in the case of the postmodern, it is a regularity. All absolute values such as Truth, God, Reason, and the Law become questionable. (249) In *The Jungle Major*, Khatila, a beautiful young girl, is betrothed and then married to Punaba, who is not only not good-looking but also someone who ranks inferior to Khatila in terms of social standing and educational levels. They marry against the wishes of their community of villagers, who object to their relationship because according to them Punaba is not good enough for Khatila. Khatila not only marries him and ardently loves him, but also saves his life from the Indian Army. She also stays true to him after he enlists with the Naga underground movement.

According to the established norms of literature, it is the man who saves the woman, and lovers are equally beautiful. But this story defies such rules in which the woman saves the man's life, and one lover is beautiful whereas the other is not. Even in a fairy tale such as *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beast changes into a handsome prince in the end. However, in *The Jungle Major*, the man Punaba, does not morph into a beautiful being. It can be said that Punaba does not figuratively transform into a beautiful being either. He is an underground rebel, and a fugitive, who does not receive glory from the nation for his services to the Naga underground. His position remains unaltered, and he remains a fallen hero, unlike the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*.

A New Enlightenment

Postmodernists believe that throughout history reason has been used to justify oppression of various types. For example, the Enlightenment beginning in the seventeenth century favoured ideas that led to oppression and persecution of people who were considered non-progressive by the then social, economic, and cultural standards. Postmodern thought blurs the clear distinction between the rational and irrational, which has been termed as ‘a new enlightenment’ by Jacques Derrida. (250)

In *Soaba*, the murder of Soaba is rational and irrational at the same time. It is rational because the Boss thinks that Soaba is an informant of the Indian Army, and will murder him. Although Soaba does not show any signs of threat to the Boss’ life, in an irrational act, the Boss shoots him in the chest and murders Soaba. This story traverses the line between the rational and irrational because Boss commits an irrational murder out of a rational fear for his own life.

Little and Grand Narratives

Bennett et al say that ‘grand narratives’ such as Christianity, Marxism, the Enlightenment, etc provided an explanation or framework for everything, but in the postmodern era, it is the ‘little narratives’ that provide explanations for events or phenomena, and they do not claim to be able to explain everything. (251)

In *The Last Song*, Apenyo continues to sing her hymns even when she is being dragged away from the church, and when she is being raped. Her song becomes embedded in the mind of her perpetrator, so much so that he continues to hear her song even after her death, and which drives him to insanity. There is no universal explanation for this phenomenon, but it only be explained in local terms from the fact that many Naga people are musical from birth. Apenyo, who loved to sing, and who sang beautifully, fell back on her art for personal courage when faced with a dire situation with the Indian Army.

In conclusion, a postmodern reading of Temsula Ao’s short story collection, *These*

Hills Called Home – Stories from a War Zone, renders it possible to appreciate the unwillingness of the Nagas to assimilate with mainland India. The region remains underdeveloped and backward, and leaves much to be desired in terms of progress and development. Although ceasefire is in place, there are incidences of violence of an ethnic nature even in the contemporary times. For example, on the 7th of June 2024, Abdul Kayum Talukdar, the Gaonbura (village head) of New Market, Dimapur, had been shot dead by a group of unidentified armed men. The incident has been labelled as “a tragic assassination.”

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