

The Transcultural Response to War Trauma in Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen**

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Abstract

The location of war is a multicultural arena where multiple traumatic discourses of dissimilar nationalities are converged and yoked together by the bond of a collective traumatic response; it significantly functions as a major generative character that directs the formulation of the traumatized identity of an individual, group, or community. The present paper, in this regard, examines Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* through the premise that the location of war is a place of an encounter through which Benedict expounds and mirrors multiple internal struggles and multiple responses that are structured in relation to the location of trauma. The war-ravaged country, Iraq, in Benedict's novel, functions to convey the paradoxical truth regarding the extent to which the transcultural traumatic turmoil engendered by war can, on the one hand, establish a collective traumatized identity and how this particular collectivity, on the other hand, is continually torn apart by the same force upon which it is established.

The study draws on the psychological as well as literary aspects of trauma theory in which the components of the traumatic experience are encapsulated within the literary form of trauma fiction. As such, the meaning and the being of the traumatic experience parallels the close connection between psychology and literature.

Keywords: Helen Benedict; Sand Queen; War Trauma; War Zone; Traumatized identity.

Introduction

One of the controversial issues of the traumatic experience is its unrepresentability. Ann Whitehead, however, in her *Trauma Fiction* identifies the means by which the components of trauma can be "narrativised in fiction" and how this literary genre transforms the attention from what is represented to how it is represented (Whitehead, 2004, 3). This literary genre, as Whitehead explains, "is able to represent what 'cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives' (Whitehead, 83). By means of modern and postmodern literary devices and techniques such as fragmentation, the shift between the past and the present, the use of intertextuality and the like, trauma fiction mimics the 'symptomatology' of overwhelming experiences such as war. Trauma fiction, accordingly, is a literary representation of individual and collective traumatic events and experiences. It may include factual dimensions especially when it is based upon personal and collective testimonies. In this context, the reader may not be confined to the role of a mere recipient of the traumatic event; he is rather "a participant", "coowner", and mutual recognizer of a "shared knowledge" (DoriLaub, 1992, 57-64). Recognition of such knowledge is fulfilled in so many times through the direct reference to the location of trauma. Sometimes the reference is made symbolically in a sense that the careful and adequate use of symbols is powerful in revealing the structural dimension of trauma especially when it is based on the different layers of the collective memory. Considerations of collective memory and collective tragic

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realism in trauma narrative emphasize the role of setting which significantly organizes the meaning as well as the memory of trauma.

Elucidating the importance of setting in depicting the traumatic effect through metaphorical means, Michelle Balaev in her "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" underscores that the setting of trauma novels offers the opportunity to define the meaning of the traumatic experience (Balaev, 2008, 149). The setting in Benedict's *Sand Queen* offers such opportunity through emphasizing the traumatic effects of contemporary war upon Iraq in the post-9/11 era. The location of a military war functions as a meeting space for key characters, each of whom represents a distinguished part of this traumatic experience.

Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* is the first novel written about Iraq War by a female writer. Benedict is a professor of journalism at Columbia University. Her nonfiction book *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* has inspired an award-winning documentary *The Invisible War* which has resulted in calling Benedict to testimony twice before the US Congress on the issue of women in the military. Benedict's book fosters the hardships of war faced by female US soldiers. In addition to bombs and mortars, the harshness of the climate, sleeplessness, loneliness, and fear, the book intensively identifies degradation and sexual persecution as the most distinguished components of female veterans' trauma. About sexual harassment, a female veteran says: "I was fresh meat to hungry men. The mortar rounds that came in daily did less damage to me than the men with whom I shared my food"(quoted in Benedict, 2009, 4). Benedict underscores that female recruits who survived rape or sexual assault have suffered a long lasting effect of psychological trauma alongside medical problems. They struggled against emotional numbness, helplessness, fearful flashbacks and nightmares (Benedict, 7).

Benedict's nonfiction book provides her with much material for her novel *Sand Queen*. The novel, in fact, is also inspired by Benedict's many interviews with many female veterans of the Iraq War who mainly served at Camp Bucca, Al Basra, Iraq. Employed in *Sand Queen* as a setting, Camp Bucca and the war zone of Al Basra are, quoting Kate McLoughlin, "conceived of as space[s] of isolation and exceptional cognitions" (McLoughlin, 2014, 84). These particular locations are presented as hostile spaces in which women must decide their way and confront forces like denial, terror, anxiety, and threat. Each time Kate and Naema, the main characters in Benedict's narrative, try to evade or exorcize these forces, they are brought back by war zone's hostility.

The components of the traumatic experience can be traced in Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* through the location of war trauma and its after effect. These components are encapsulated within a dialogical text that narrates traumatic experiences belonging to individuals from two different cultures and territories, America and Iraq. Kate Brady, the American female veteran, experiences trauma through the lenses of war's violence mirrored by Iraq's severe topography and the traumatic reality of the daily combat duty. This traumatizing setting ignites the division of Kate's consciousness between the military self and the civilian one. This is confirmed by Van der Hart who believes that "when we are traumatized we have different selves—each with its own voice—made a lot of sense" (Hart in an interview with Caruth in *Listening to Trauma*, 2014, 180). The novel, in fact, presents three versions of Kate: the civilian individual before war, the female traumatized veteran during war, and "The Soldier" with post-traumatic

stress disorder after war. Between Kate's first version and the last one there is a huge gap engendered by the physical and psychological destruction of war. Naema Jassim is the Iraqi medical student and the second voice in the novel. Her trauma is constructed out of the way her ambition to be a doctor and marry the one whom she loves is reduced to the struggle for survival against the chaotic violence engendered by the American invasion of Iraq. Accordingly, Iraq is a locus of trauma which, quoting Balaev, "refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (Balaev, 2008, 149).

Sand Queen's events are mainly set in the prison of Camp Bucca, Al Basra, Iraq. It is presented as a space of encounter between two different cultures—an idea that is supported by the symbolic indication of the Camp as well as its barbed wire that "block[s] the prison entrance"(18) and thus separates the American veterans from the Iraqi civilians. Naema says: "They have barricaded themselves in here, safe and blind behind their wire and checkpoints, while the rest of us, sisters and daughters, parents and grandparents, are out here in the real world, suffering the real world suffering"(18). Though Naema uses "They" and "us" to indicate separatism and the mutual gap that separate the two sides of conflict from each other, she uses "we" in another place to indicate how the two are "burning under the sun and buffeted by the wind, ready to endure the same wait as any who have been beaten into passivity by war and history" (18). Bridging the gap between "they" and "us" is also enhanced by the trope of translation which Naema takes on to function as a mediation of cultural interchange between her and Kate; it significantly paves the way for cross-cultural communication. Anthony Wall in his "Characters in Bakhtin's Theory" explains that translation enables the characters to be in a constant interaction with each other, thereby "posits the image of ...currents which have countless possibilities of confluence and branching apart"(Wall, 1984, 45). However, when American soldiers, with their "hideous" faces and "roaring" voices, break into Naema's grandmother's house to arrest her father and brother, translation does not function according to its assigned role of interaction. It is silenced by a colonial power as if it has "no voice, no existence"(16)—a matter that enhances separatism. Benedict enhances, implicitly, separatism and the difference between the American side and the Iraqi one through creating two characters that are totally different from each other in features, cultural background, and personal traits. Kate is short, not well educated, has one young sister called April, and has strict religious outlooks that limit her ability to confront problems and handle them. Naema, on the other hand, is tall, well educated, has one young brother called Zaki, and has a rational and secular way of thinking. While Kate is overwhelmed by her traumatic experience, Naema works through it exceedingly well.

War, however, brings Naema and Kate together when they describe the unspeakable nature of death and the supremacy of its force in Iraq in general. In fact their narratives give voice to the wounds of people who have lost their lives by the barbarity of war, and thereby echo what Dominick La Capra identifies as the "empathic unsettlement." The term identifies the way one takes critical attitudes in watching and responding ethically and sympathetically to the suffering of others. It refers to the fact that what one has in common with others is at the kernel of physical and emotional human suffering. Naema describes a traumatic scene on her way out from Baghdad: "People screaming, running, guns exploding,

and blood drenching the vegetables. Five people dead, among them a mother and her baby, the child's pink dress matted with blood, her arm a ragged stump"(33). Kate, likewise, describes a similar scene on her way out from Basra towards Baquba: "Corpses lying in the streets, smashed and gory, like those run-down deer on the highways at home, only with human faces" (8). Having common experience is implicitly referred to by Benedict in the scene of the hospital described by Kate and Naema. Both of them focus upon the traumatizing aspect of this hellish place as well as their traumatized reaction to its suffocating atmosphere that is fueled by the smell of blood after an explosion. They describe how they are drenched in blood and how they lose all awareness of themselves, bodies, and their sense of time. In this regard, bloody scenes, rotted corpses, squashed bodies, and poisoned air, along with their own experiences that are directly linked to the war zone of Iraq, have a profound impact on the formulation of their traumatized consciousness and panic responses.

Sand Queen follows three threads of dialogical narratives that constitute the traumatic discourses of the novel as well as its components: the psycho-geographical war experience of Kate (the effect of a geographical location on the emotions and behavior of individuals), the disrupted and ruptured life of Naema, and postwar psychiatric therapy of a female soldier who is implicitly revealed to be Kate herself. Kate and Naema's narratives are bound by their short and brief encounter at Bucca Camp which, Kate guards and where Naema looks for her imprisoned father and brother, Mr. Al-Jubur and Zaki. In her "Women's/War Stories: The Female Gothic and Women's War Trauma in Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen*," Jennifer Haytock confirms that the dialogical technique transforms the reader now and then between "us" and "them". Such technique enables the reader to identify himself with both sides, and, thus, challenges the traditional war novel that focuses upon one particular side"(Haytock, 2015, 1). War always has two sides. Reflecting on the two sides of Iraq War, Benedict takes on the dialogical technique to be like a call and response between two different cultures that happen to encounter each other within the borders of the war zone. As a starting point, the dialogical technique serves the aim of converting the stereotypical representation of the oriental women by identifying Naema as an educated Iraqi woman whose traumatic experience is not less than the traumatic experience of American women in the military. Furthermore, through the traumatic voice of Naema, in particular, Benedict simulates Iraqi civilians who have been massacred by a war that transformed millions of them into either refugees or dead.

Representing the subaltern who is given a voice, Naema wonders how Kate would feel if "Iraqi hajjis" flow over America's cities and towns, "dropping missiles and cluster bombs" until many dead fill the streets; how Kate would feel if "hajjis" arrest or shoot any American individual who tries to protect the American land against such attack; how she would feel if "hajjis" drive American individuals from their homes, scatter their friends, families, and lovers and kill their children (51). Kate's answer for all these questions is that: "before 9/11, none of [them] was thinking about war"(41), yet when war started they were taught that "A soldier is asked to lay down his life for others just as Jesus did" (44); during and after war, they(American soldiers) have discovered that they were wrong and misguided; they discovered that war has stimulated the brutal nature of some soldiers and instead of the "band of brothers and sisters" they were supposed to be, they became "no more than a band of snakes"(103). The idealistic view of war, as

Francoise Davoine explains, "was quickly destroyed by the confrontations with war's realities"(Davoine in an interview with Caruth in *Listening to Trauma*, 2014, 84). The unrepresentability of war makes Kate feel that she is in a nightmare in which she will be stuck forever. In fact the nightmarish aspect of the daily confrontation with death makes the whole experience "real but it's not real"(285).

By exploring the traumatic experiences of Kate, Naema, Naema's father, and other characters, Benedict shows the full spectrum of how the war zone as well as "the wanton destruction of war" (141) "conspire[...] to make [people] helpless"(142). This is emphasized by the different qualities by which characters identify the war zone and the location of trauma. For Naema it is "the real world of suffering"(18), "the corruptive prison"(88), "suffocating desert"(141), and a "hellish place"(220). For Kate it is "disgusting"(57), "the flattest damn place on the planet"(102), "a hell on earth"(279), and "the land of fucking dead"(220). For Naema's father it is a "hideous place"(193). All these qualities share the negative sense by which the characters respond to the war zone; thereby, they share a collective traumatized consciousness. This echoes what Thema Bryant-Davis in her *Thriving in the Wake of Trauma* discusses about the concept of interpersonal trauma. Bryant says that "interpersonal trauma is a physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional violation of one person or group of people that is perpetrated by another person or group of people when that violation results in feelings of intense fear, powerlessness, hopelessness, or horror" (Bryant 2008, 2-3). Within this context, the war zone can be, symbolically, identified as a persona that violates and disempowers characters who encounter each other within the limits of one location and thus share one traumatic discourse—a matter that formulates their traumatized collective consciousness.

Among the main forces that constitute Kate's traumatic discourse are those of rape and sexual harassment. She narrates how two soldiers attempt to seduce her and how another female veteran is actually raped. While Kate tries to report her sexual assault formally, Third Eye reveals the story of her seduction in "a hoarse whisper"(139). She fears that reporting her rapists will place her life in a regular danger by transforming her from Camp Bucca into truck convoys that are daily attacked and blown up. Third Eye, in fact, cannot oppose the sovereignty of the masculine culture in her unit—a matter that drives her towards post-traumatic disorder and finally suicide. Kate explains that the respect she looks for in the military is converted into sexual assault and ignominy at the hands of comrades for whom any female veteran is no more than a sex object. This is confirmed when she describes how the commander runs his eyes over her body and stares at her chest. She significantly explains that these looks are "popular theme[s] among the guys in my platoon—me having big boobs"(26). She realizes that "Sand Queen" is the worst title a female veteran can be called by in the army. Under the umbrella of this title, she is "like a whore at a frat party...she's nothing but a mattress"(ibid). Accordingly, "Sand Queen", the title of the novel by which Kate is labeled, parallels the meaning of dehumanization and disrespect female veterans suffer from in this novel. This is explained by Benedict as the following:

It's derogatory term that's specific to the Iraq War, which comes mainly out of the army. It means an unattractive woman who is the object of a lot of attention from men because women are so scarce...As one soldier said, "She's a mattress." The language they use about women is so horrific.

I decided to use it not only because somebody says that about Kate, but because it summarizes the denigrating attitude that so many military men have towards military women. (Benedict, 2014, 67).

Benedict's words, "horrific language", are confirmed by Kate who says that soldiers used to describe their bathrooms as "whore's bath" rather than a bathroom. Kate describes their bathrooms as the following: "There aren't any bathrooms to wash in, either. For showers, we dump bottles of water over ourselves...or once in a while hang up a poncho and get under a portable shower bag"(57). Benedict's gritty description of a soldier's life in the war zone, namely the Iraqi desert is provided also with details about US army's food which is called Meals Ready to Eat (MRE):

MREs come in these brown, plastic sacks, and inside there's a main course of cardboard disguised to look like greasy meat, along with a bunch of artery-clogging junk food and a chemical pouch for heating the mess up without fire, which probably tastes better than the stuff it's supposed to cook. The MREs are famous for clogging up your guts like plaster—we call them Meals Refusing to Exit (52).

These details may evoke the following questions: why is it like this; isn't the U.S the richest country in the world? Why do soldiers have to live like they are in a pigsty? Kate answers these questions as that nothing can be more "disgusting like it is here at Bucca"(57.).

In her *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*, McLoughlin explains that "the place is often distinguished from mere location through being understood as a matter of human response to physical surroundings of locations" (Ibid, 85). Such physical surroundings are incarnated in the novel through the repetitive focus upon the sources of terror invoked by the physical environment and the arid "suffocating desert" (141) surrounding Camp Bucca. Snakes, beetles, spiders, scorpions, as a case in point, are presented as sources of trauma to which Kate has to respond with an outwardly sense of stability. Kate explains that such dangerous insects can make her "jump or squeal"; however, she has to use up all her energy" trying to look unfazed" (122). In the opening sentence of the novel Kate describes "The biggest frigging spider"(5) that she has ever seen in her life. Though she kills that spider and hangs it over her bed to warn the thirty-three snoring male veterans with whom she shares the barracks, she cannot avoid confronting another source of gothic terror represented by the wind of the desert: "a creepy, skin-prickling sound I can never get used to. The desert whistles all day and night out here...The moaning whistle of it winnowing through the razor wire...and then it hits me again, that deep-down ache that makes me want to curl up and die" (5). Reinforced by the fact that setting, as a fictional element, implies time, place, and weather, the land, in this regard, allies with forces of weather to announce their refusal to the American existence and control of a land that will never accept imperial occupation. The war waged by the weather against Kate is repetitively resembled whenever she walks alone at night:

It's a spooky walk at this time of the evening, all shadowy and gray, the tents snapping in the wind, the dust blurring in the twilight till you can't tell whether the figures you're seeing are soldiers, hajjis or hallucination. I clutch my rifle...my hands trembling more than ever (147).

The words "spooky", "shadowy", "gray", and "dust" present the location of war with ghostly features that fuelled Kate's feelings of terror and consequently trauma.

The gothic terror, like it does with Kate's narrative, structures part of Naema's one. It is materialized in the form of "hideous" American soldiers who, as mentioned above, invade Naema's house at night to arrest her father and brother. This appalling scene is the fuse that fuels her trauma and recalls a previous traumatic experience of loss. Arresting Al-Jubur and his young son Zaki takes Naema back as well as her mother and her grandmother to a trauma they experienced before when Naema's father was imprisoned during the former regime of Saddam Hussein. Imagining what kind of a torture the father and his son might be exposed to transforms Naema's grandmother into a traumatized individual who daily wakes up at night "shrieking" from nightmares; the grandmother cannot "shake the horror from her head" (112). Naema's traumatic thoughts move around assumed tortures of her father and young brother: "The not knowing, this is what drives one mad" (113). Haytock suggests: "The language of "madness" recalls figures of "mad woman" in literature disempowered female characters relegated to attics and backrooms" (Haytock, 2015, 1). Madness, according to the feminist discourse, symbolically indicates confinement to the domestic sphere and a removal from social interaction and intellectual activities. Naema, however, means by madness a repressed anger which she reasonably controls in response to extremely stressful and traumatic conditions like those in Iraq.

Balaev explains that "the physical place of suffering becomes an identifiable source [of explicating] ...the specificity of emotional [and physical] responses"(Balaev, 2012, 39). Describing the zone of war and the dusty summer days at Camp Bucca is in striking contrast to the American green fields that Kate longs for: "God, what I would give for a breath of clear air, one that isn't filled with dust and the stink of burning shit and diesel. Air like the air at home: clean, cool, mountain air"(7). Naema, like Kate, misses her old life in Baghdad where it was not important to be a "Shiite or Sunni, or half and half"(170) as she is. She longs for a time when no one can "stamp upon the freedom and joy of others"(ibid.) War and its destruction rewrite her trajectory in the same way it rewrites Kate's body and the Iraqi land. Kate's period has stopped, her face becomes dry, her fingernails have turned "weird, weak and flabby", her hair falls out, her walk looks "half a swagger like a man, half a hobble like an old lady... That... the injuries."(260). Kate's feminine identity has been taken away in the same way the productivity of the Iraqi land has been replaced by a traumatic hostility and terror. Discussing the traumatic structure of the Iraqi land and describing it as the "dry, dying earth"(165), Naema explains: "all the beautiful date groves near here have been ploughed under or bombed by the American" (Ibid.). Like Kate, whose body is recontextualized as a response to the demands of the war zone, Naema recontextualizes her feminine style and wears hijab for the same reason. Naema believes:

We are sliding backwards in my country. We are becoming narrower than we have been for decades...I know that some fundamentalist clerics, who have taken the advantage of the current chaos and fear to gain new power, are already trying to obliterate the rights that Iraqi women have had for fifty years. They want to put us under the Sharia laws that treat us as slaves. If this comes to be, how are we women-how is our culture-to survive? (169-70)

The tragic decline of Iraqi society in general and the social conditions of Iraqi women in particular did not happen in a vacuum; it was engendered by long years of war and occupation. The Eight-Years War with Iran, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the first Gulf War, the subsequent years of sanctions, and the last Iraq War, force the whole Iraqi society into impossible situations. Many women, as a case in point, are transformed into war widows. Many of them are forced to sell off their personal furniture so as to provide their basic requirements like food and medicine. Girls are pulled out of their schools either to marry or to work to support and help their families. Many women, even those with high educational degrees are forced into prostitution. The social condition of Iraqi women has continued its deterioration under the US occupation. Many of them are kept locked in their homes because of a real fear of torture, rape, sexual humiliation, abduction, and criminal abuse. In fact, since the invasion of Iraq, many Iraqi women have been denied their rights including education and employment. Iraqi woman is recontextualized into a second class citizen who has to follow Islamic Sharia and thereby has no power in deciding her life. Such deterioration for the whole Iraqi society in general and the Iraqi woman in particular is echoed by what Ikram Masmoudi tackles in his *War and Occupation in Iraqi Fiction* regarding the distinction between Baghdad in the past and Baghdad in the present. Masmoudi distinguishes between Baghdad Dar al-Salam and Baghdad Dar al-Harb which is marked by a permanent state of war, lawlessness, and barbarism. Baghdad, Dar al-Salam, the abode of peace and Islam, is recontextualized to be Baghdad, Dar al-Harb, the abode of danger, blood, and war (Masmoudi, 2015, 144).

Being recontextualized places Kate between two lives and thus divides her consciousness. Stacey Peebles suggests that "war is a kind of second life, where many of the rules of civilian life don't apply" (Peebles, 20). Kate views and senses the beauty of her first life, namely the civilian, through *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen's novel and the book she reads and attempts to read at certain occasions. While the components of Austen's domestic and romantic world are interchangeable with these of Kate's civilian life, the two are contrasted by the components of her second life; the military life and the traumatic forces of the war zone construct her traumatic identity and her post traumatic stress disorder which is incarnated in the third narrative voice of the novel. America's beautiful landscape with its rosy glowing sand that implicitly correlates with the natural beauty of parks and gardens mentioned in Austen's novel are contrasted by Camp Bucca's desert where "the sun's burning a hole in the sky" and birds are caught by fire and "fall, black and smoking to the ground.. they breathe in the bomb smoke and depleted uranium and burning bodies and oil and shit, and crawl away somewhere to die" (63). Many aspects that correlate with connotations of peace and love in *Pride and Prejudice* are contrasted by Kate's daily trauma in the war zone. Mansions and houses are contrasted by barracks, scenes of love and family warmth are contrasted by scenes of blood and explosions, and most importantly marriage plot in Austen's world and Kate's first life is contrasted by sexual harassment. All of those antagonisms have created her new identity—an identity with which she is trapped in an unresolvable plot of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. Like Kate, Naema finds herself leading an extremely different life from that one before war; she becomes one among many Iraqis who suffer the devastating circumstances of war. She loses her life as a

doctor and future wife to be no more than a "saddened scarecrow woman with no control over [her] fate and no knowledge of her future" (309). Comparing Naema to a "scarecrow" brings her closer to Kate whose standing on the guarding tower like "a scarecrow on a broomstick"(173) fuels her feelings of passivity and transforms her into a mere recipient of trauma.

Sticking up in the guarding tower like "a scarecrow on a broomstick"(173) exposes Kate to the prisoners' daily violence, sarcasm, and humiliation. As such, she is transformed into a receiver of power that is subjected to physical and psychological injury. In fact, the way prisoners adopt violence as a valuable force in their anti- colonial struggle converts them into agents of power through which they achieve equal status with the colonizer. This is confirmed by Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which he believes that "The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity"(Fanon, 1961, 82). While the psychological violence of the prisoners is embodied in the act of throwing excrement at Kate and practicing masturbation in front of her, physical violence is fulfilled in "a hail of stones" the prisoners throw at Kate. Feeling "a scary numbness "on her face and blood on her cheek, Kate shoots the prisoners with the impulse of unconscious aggressiveness. This particular reaction fosters her shattered identity. On the one hand she fires, and, on the other, she does not want to see "a dead body" or a "pool of blood"; she does not want "a body on [her] conscience. Elucidating this from the perspectives of trauma theory, Kate experiences severe psychological violation to which her traumatic response takes the form of a persistent repressed anger. As far as her anger lacks the technique of stress management, it is unleashed aggressively. Such aggressiveness is materialized once more when Kate is offered the opportunity to beat one of the prisoners. She stamps her boot down on the back of his head, and grains his face deep into the desert to the extent that "the blood and sand clog [...] his mouth"(204). While Camp Bucca enhances the sense of divisiveness between the two conflicting sides, it also fosters Kate and the prisoners' reciprocal violence—a matter that relates her, the colonizer, to the prisoners, the colonized, through the aspects of a collective traumatic identity. They collectively share the feelings of hurt that step towards the center of their being, thereby constructing their collective traumatized consciousness.

Kate's revengeful response with regard to the way her anger is acted out does not bring her feelings of satisfaction; it rather catalyzes her feelings of guilt when she discovers that this prisoner whom she beats is Naema's father, Halim al-Jubur. Promising Naema to look for her father in the prison motivates Kate's feelings of guilt. The phantom of this guilt haunts her again and again to the extent that she is trapped in the unresolvable traumatic memory of this traumatic scene: "Again I feel her dad's head under my foot, see the blood clotting in his smashed face, hear him struggling to breathe..."(242) Kate's promise, the only good thing she does in war, is closely related to her upbringing culture and her civilian identity, which oppose the military culture and identity that she must abide by when dealing with the prisoners. Peebles, in this regards confirms:

For soldiers, killing in the context of war is presented as a pragmatic, political, and even moral necessity, a complete inversion of the legal and moral tenets of civilian life. Soldiers can kill, do kill, must kill, and the possession of that lethal power can at times be intoxicating"(Peebles, 21).

Attacking or being attacked places Kate between an unexpected altered consciousness: to be human and nonhuman. Her traumatized consciousness is blended between two antitheses of thinking that are to be enchanted in war and perceive in its violence certain kind of power or to be disenchanting and perceive the absurdity of war, thereby losing the ability to transcend its pain and suffering. In *Shade it Black: Death and After in Iraq*, Jess Goodell, who served in a Mortuary Affairs unit in Iraq, describes what it means to be in a war zone; it almost elicits the violation of moral beliefs and conscience. Consequently, it leads to the negative evaluation of one's behavior (Goodell, 2011, 48). Killing, torturing detainees, abusing dead bodies, witnessing a friend get killed, and all the anguishing conditions of war lead to the practice of a moral conflict that seeps into a post-traumatic stress disorder.

Benedict's critical voice directed against the military culture is heard, on so many occasions, through the way it is inserted within Kate's and Naema's revelation of their traumatic experiences. Naema says: "It is the business of war to be unjust and cruel, I realize this. To imprison and kill the innocent. To crush hearts and families, cities and lives. And yet we human seem no more able to stop waging war than we are able to stop breathing. Why?"(195). War's business can be viewed as the spring of Kate's trauma that results in feelings of hate, disgust, and guilt that "sit stinking inside of [her] all the time"(204). With feelings of guilt, in particular, Kate feels "too filthy" (221) to the extent that she feels "the black ooze" of her guilt spread "through her organs like a poison"(229) and nothing she does or thinks can stop it. As a soldier, Kate's critical discourse implicitly blames the US political regime, represented by President Bush, for being in Iraq and thereby the construction of her traumatized identity: "President Bush, the daddy of the monkey faces who got me into this war"(149). The US may have won its war in Iraq; however, quoting Peebles words, "the social and political sense of victory that followed would provide no lasting satisfaction"(Peebles, 36-7). Indeed, many soldiers, like Kate, still feel themselves in the land of trauma, Iraq. Kate's trauma is the reality she perceives out of her direct encounter with war's violence; a demon because of which she is objectified both as a soldier and as a woman.

The theme of in between is represented in the brutality of the military self and its constant struggle against the tenderness of the civilian one. Kate compares her shattered consciousness to a "ragged blue wing, zigzagging torn and crooked across the long, black sky" (80). When Tyler sends Kate a letter, marked by a tender language, to tell her about his music, she cannot complete reading it. This emphasizes the way her military self, structured in Iraq, "the land of the fucking dead"(220) has effectively isolated her from her original self. On the one hand, she is consciously well aware that if she loses the "best side" of her represented by Tyler she will never be able to live the rest of her life; on the other hand, she views his letter as a "shit" amid this nightmare in which she "will be stuck forever" (285). This clash leads her, consequently, to hate who she is in the land of Iraq. Yvette's traumatic death during a military duty in Baquba has the profound effect in resolving the clash of the two identities. The clash is resolved in favor of the military identity when Yvette's ghost completely controls her senses. She cannot eat without feeling

Yvette's blood in her mouth, she cannot sleep without feeling her fingers on her body, she cannot go out without seeing Yvette everywhere, and she cannot sit in the tent without hearing Yvette's voice calling her to be a soldier. All these traumatized feelings lead Kate finally to announce the death of the woman inside her and the replacement of "a real military robot soldier" which feels "hard and tough and cold inside—a robot soldier who knows whom he hates and whom he wants to kill "and all the rest is bullshit"(283).

Within the frame of America's weary war on Iraq's traumatic land, Kate's feelings of passivity with regard to her military self is incarnated in the way she identifies herself as well as others as no more than "killing machines" and "robots" which have to sacrifice "their robot lives for [their] country and freedom". From an existentialist point of view, Kate is reduced to the level of an object—a form of being that opposes the direction of human existence towards its authenticity. Furthermore, Kate's military self is emasculated by her feelings of being guilty and dirty. This is revealed through the way she identifies herself with Hester Prynne, the heroine of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: "I feel like Hester Prynne in that book we read in high school, the girl who had to stand up on a pillory so the whole town could jeer and throw things at her' cause she slept with a priest or something. Only I'm not noble and long-suffering, like her"(173). Watching the prison and the prisoners, Kate parallels her passive standing on the tower to Prynne's standing on the scaffold; the same humiliating and degrading situation; instead of being a well-respected impressive soldier, she fluctuates between the prisoners who throw excrement at her and comrades who snitch about her supposed promiscuity.

Discussing the importance of place in the traumatic experiences, Balaev comes across the interactive relationship that binds place and memory. Balaev relies on the term 'warehouse' to describe the way memory is engaged in a fluid process of interaction with the place to "demonstrate the ways traumatic experience restructures perceptions, as well as that the meaning and value are constructed during and after the event"(Balaev, 22). Describing memory as a warehouse finds its echo in the way Kate consciously records many traumatic scenes that exceed the limits of Camp Bucca with all its suffocating natural atmosphere, comrades, and the "dusty and unshaved and slumped"(189) prisoners. Her memory, as a case in point, stores the traumatic scene of "a dog eating a human hand. Just chewing on it, like it was a rubber toy" (175). Heading to Baquba with her military convoy, Kate's memory records, with a high sense of panic, more traumatic scenes; she views "blood and torn flesh [spread] everywhere... squashed bodies, the vulture eating a kid. [A] poor boy with his arm in shreds "(253-4). These traumatic scenes are raw materials by which Kate's post-traumatic stress disorder marks her identity at home. They are employed skillfully to convey the effect of place in shaping Kate's traumatic experiences as well as her post-traumatic stress disorder. This is recognized in the way war's permanent ghosts haunt Kate's body and soul at home:

Blood is in my eyes and my soul. Yvette's blood, Zaki's blood, the jerk-off's blood, the blood of the Iraqi worker I let die in the mortar attack. The blood of that little boy's donkey. Naema's dad covered in it as I ground his face into the sand... I look in the mirror. Pale skin, empty eyes...(299).

Her psychological disruption is so intense to the extent that her emotional and cognitive functions and capabilities are impaired. When Tyler visits her in the psychiatric hospital, her traumatic response does not echo the friendly and lovely tone he uses in calling her. She "flinches" and "scoots to the far side of the bed, pulls herself to her feet and backs up against the wall"(28). Embracing the body in this way is a response to the call of her overwhelming experience which weakened her self-esteem and her confidence in the outside world and those close to her. Furthermore, her traumatic consciousness materializes itself in a form of physical pain that "shoots through her neck and her mouth twists into a grimace. Her face feels hard and immobile...she doesn't feel like talking" (47). Somatization, the pain Kate feels through her neck and in her back, is a bodily symptom that projects emotional distress. It usually occurs with those who have traumatic stress reactions, including post-traumatic stress disorder. *Urinary incontinence* (uncontrolled peeing) is another physical symptom of Kate's trauma. The root of this infection goes back to the original place of trauma, namely the war zone, where Kate explains how the stifling hot weather makes her crazy with the permanent feeling of being thirsty; she cannot drink more than one sip of water because "if you are a female [in a war zone] it's too fucking dangerous to go outside for a piss" (60). Her repressed desire to drink more than what she really needs of water is materialized in a dream: "I dreamed I was swimming in my local lake with my mouth open, drinking my way across" (60). The narrative of the soldier in the psychiatric hospital mentions implicitly this physical infection. The nurse in the hospital drags Kate out of her bed which is "wet and reeking"(13). Feeling shame of this disease, Kate consciously prays for God to "not piss her pants"(234). This, in fact, can be seen as an additional trauma encapsulated by her post-traumatic stress disorder.

In her *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman states that the conscious holding of a traumatic reality requires a social context that emphasizes and protects the traumatized individual. Such social context is created out of relationships with friends, lovers, and family (Herman, 1997, 9). The denial of the social context is indicated in the narrative voice of "The Soldier", who resembles Kate herself, through the technique of anonymity; it symbolically indicates the removal from kinship and the isolation from the surrounding social milieu. Kate in this sense is identified by her traumatized identity that succumbs to trauma. Her denial of the social context is enhanced when "The Soldier" steps out of the way when her mother wants to hug her. This contradicts completely the way Naema needs social and family ties. Feeling helpless, desperate, and powerless, Naema calls her father to come home so as to take her in his arms and bring with him "peace and an end to all... fear and suffering"(171). Though her domestic space is violated by a male power, represented by the American soldiers who apprehend her father and brother, she longs for the male power, particularly the father figure, represented by her father, to provide her with feelings of safety and peace. While Kate is arrested by her trauma, Naema's traumatic conditions fuel her determination to reject any sense of passivity: "I will go back to Baghdad, to my fiancé, Khalil, and to medical school, for I am determined to qualify as a doctor and make something to my life"(89). In this sense, Naema, unlike Kate, does not want to be an anti-icon of the past. In other words, she does not want to be fixated in trauma and thus confined to "a past that does not pass" (Davoine in an interview with Caruth in *Listening to Trauma*, 2014, 82).

The denial of the social interaction is also embodied in Kate's verbal and physical aggressiveness. Verbal aggression is recognized when Tyler tells "The Soldier" that her parents want to visit her. "Fucking blessings" is the foul language she uses to declare her refusal to get their blessings. Her aggressive behavior, furthermore, is incarnated when she throws the bible her father gives her "at the vase, send[ing] yellow petals and shards of glass flying all over the room" (135). Being occupied by fears that she may "hear cars backfire...a shout or a scream" or "see a soldier" (234) makes her pray "not to hurt anybody" and not to "do something dumb"(253). This fear is crystalized through the gothic device of being haunted by ghosts which stands for Kate's haunted consciousness. She sees faces of war's ghosts staring at her through the windows of the dining room of her parents' house. They are faces of soldiers who tried to rape her, faces of the prisoners, and Mr. Al-Jubur's face. "The Soldier" is evaded by a state of "disorder of non-realization", which mainly springs from her traumatic memory. Being extensively controlled by the belief that she has to protect April, her young sister, makes Kate take her father's gun and shoot the faces. This particular scene is a projection of the way she is darkly twisted by her post-traumatic stress disorder that places her in positions marked by increasingly defensive and passive responses. In fact, these defensive responses are also recognized in the way "The Soldier" avoids any traumatic memories and bloody dreams through taking "pills all the day"(253.). She intentionally represses these memories because "she's afraid the innocence inside will fly out forever" (253.).

Being stuck in trauma may demolish any sense of cohesion and interaction with the social surrounding, thereby impeding working through it. This is explained by the fact that the emotional part of personality becomes the dominant system which experienced an overwhelming event, namely war, and remains stuck there. The emotional part of "The Soldier's" personality cripples the process of interaction—a matter that totally blocks her within the limits of the past. This is manifested in "The Soldier's" refusal to talk and to be involved in the therapy circle. For "The Soldier" "other losers" with whom she has to share her traumatic memories are no more than "assholes" because none of them has examined what it means to be a female veteran in the war zone.

"The Soldier's" refusal to unleash her traumatic memories and to work-through them is contrasted by Halim Al- Jubur's response to his traumatic memories. His exposure to torture and execution when he is incarcerated in Abu Ghraib prison during the former regime of Saddam Hussein does not place him in a state of a confused fluctuation between coexistence and re-experiencing of his traumatizing experience. He rather addresses his wife by writing poems and letters in his head and writes them down when he is released. Al-Jubur, accordingly, verbalizes his agony so as to work through it and to "prove that the corrupt have no power over love or art" (166). In a "prison poem" Al-Jubur says:

A flower trembles in the prison shadow
Struggling to blossom,
One pale petal at time,
Just as I, in this exile,
This graveyard of hope,
Struggle to remember you,

One pale kiss at a time (167-8)

Though the prison, as Al-Jubur senses it, is a place where "it is hard...to keep up one's spirit [and where he is] plagued by [his] helplessness" (149), he is unlike "The Soldier"; Al-Jubur seeks salvation via memories and dreams which are triggered by writing letters and poems to his wife Zaynab, Naema's mother. He decides to survive not only for his own sake, but rather for the sake of his wife and children alike

Conclusion

Reflecting on a shared knowledge of pain and suffering and its relation to the location of war, Helen Benedict commits her dialogical narrative to others; thereby she becomes responsible for the revelation of a truth that goes beyond personal towards general. This is enhanced by way of shifting from one traumatized voice into another and from the past into the present to show the diversity of the traumatic experience when it is related to war and to convey the paradigm of the past intruding the present, thus mimicking the tension between them. In this regard, Benedict's trajectory contradicts the nature of mourning that may evoke violence and vengeance. Evoking senses through the employment of visual, auditory, olfactory, kinesthetic, and gustatory images, Benedict presents Iraq as dreary world of war where beauty, peace, and love are replaced by loss and suffering, and where reason is swallowed by war's brutality as well as political and religious dogmas. Accordingly, the novel discussed above has panoramic scopes as well as intensive focus in terms of time and place. Benedict skillfully attempts to transcend the borders of oppositional binaries to depict the shared experience of trauma and the shared responsibilities of dissimilar nations involved in the novel. The novel is an invitation for the whole world to feel the suffering of others by means of empathetic unsettlement, which is to come into the space, read others' suffering, look at things, and think about them.

الاستجابة لتجربة صدمة الحرب عبر الثقافات في رواية هيلين بندكت (ملكة الرمل)

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الملخص

يشكل موقع المعركة أحد أهم الجوانب المركزية في النظرية الأدبية لصدمة الحرب وبخاصة عندما يعكس ضمن إطار أدبي رمزي مدى الاستجابة النفسية لأصوات ذات ثقافات متعددة قاست مرارة التجربة. ومن هنا نستطيع أن نبني فرضيتنا على أساس أن موقع المعركة ما هو إلا ميدان متعدد الثقافات، حيثما تلتقي وترتبط خطابات جنسيات متعددة غير متجانسة برباط جرح الحرب والاستجابة الجمعية له. يضاف إلى ذلك أن موقع المعركة تحديداً لم يعد مجرد خلفية أو محيط للأحداث وإنما شخصية مولدة تحدد تشكيل الهوية المصدومة لفرد أو لمجموعة أو لمجتمع. انه البناء الذي يؤثر في النسيج العاطفي والشكل السردى للحدث. على أساس ما تقدم فإن الدراسة معنية بتحليل رواية الكاتبة الأمريكية (هيلين بندكت) ملكة الرمل من خلال التركيز على موقع المعركة كونه -ووفقاً للطريقة التي أطرته بها الكاتبة- مرآة عاكسة لصراعات داخلية واستجابات متعددة لشخصيات بنيت وفقاً لتفاعلها مع هذا الموقع. على أنها أرض دمرتها الحرب وظفت الكاتبة العراق ليكون مؤشراً يحلل مكونات حقيقة متناقضة تتعلق بصدمة جمعية نجمت عن حرب العراق الأخيرة. من جانب كان لهذه الحرب الأثر البالغ في خلق وعي جمعي مفردته الأساسية صدمة الحرب، مفردة تشاطرها الفرد العراقي مع الجندي الأمريكي إلا أنها ومن جانب آخر هاجمت وبصورة مستمرة هذه الجمعية ومزقتها لتعمق الفجوة بين طرفي النزاع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هيلين بندكت، ملكة الرمل، صدمة الحرب، أرض المعركة، الهوية المصدومة.

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