



# The Aesthetics of Trauma in Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove*

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## Abstract

Since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trauma theory has gained academic status for analyzing literary representations of various forms of violence, oppression, and social upheavals. Drawing upon the Freudian model of trauma and more recent categorizations of post-traumatic stress disorder, this paper aims to study Fadia Faqir's third novel, *The Cry of the Dove*. The author, who writes about and from diaspora, leads her young Muslim female character to fight for her identity in a Western country. The paper analyzes the literary strategies and narrative techniques in this feminist trauma narrative to indicate how the author has tried to represent what is originally marked by voicelessness. In order to imitate the forms and symptoms of the impact of trauma, the novel's narrative style features fragmentation, non-linearity, repetition, poetic prose, and stream of consciousness. This paper proves that the interplay of these techniques helps the reader understand the evasive nature of traumatic experience and engage her or him emotionally with the narrator's story. Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead, and Laurie Vickroy are among the main theoreticians of the research.

**Keywords:** trauma, diaspora, Fadia Faqir, *The Cry of the Dove*, narrative techniques

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## Introduction

Nancy Miller (2002) proposes “the age of trauma” (p. 11) for the current age. The world has seen a large variety of violence and conflict during the last two decades and trauma theory has gained academic status for analyzing literary representations of various forms of violence, oppression, and social upheavals. Literature, according to Cathy Caruth (1996) “opens a window on traumatic experiences because it teaches readers to listen to what can be told only in indirect and surprising ways” (p. 6). Moreover, it is through literary works that authors are able to scrutinize more deeply the psychological effects of events and to reveal the human dimension of traumatic experiences.

The empirical basis of trauma theory has been mostly in Holocaust, the two World Wars, and more recently September 11, and has disregarded the miseries of less fortunate nations who have been silenced. Radstone (2007) observes that “it is the sufferings of those categorized in the West as other that tend not to be addressed via trauma theory” (p. 25). Craps (2013) verifies this notion; “the funding texts of the field (including Caruth’s own work) largely fail to live up to the promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement; they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-western or minority cultures” (p. 46). To lead trauma theory away from its Eurocentrism and in order to decolonize trauma studies, emphasis should be placed on narratives that provide insight into phenomena such as slavery, forced immigration, Islamophobia, and racism.

This paper tends to shift attention by bringing contemporary psychological and cultural trauma theory together to study a novel by a female Muslim novelist who writes about and from Diaspora. Faqir in this novel, *The Cry of the Dove*, tells the story of a Muslim female immigrant who has been the victim of tribal and patriarchal value system in her own country and the target of racist and Islamophobic hatred in the host country. Faqir develops stylistic strategies to reproduce the especial function of traumatic memory with its “fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation” (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1999, as cited in Moran, 2007, p. 4). Her stylistic feature reflects the sensorial details and broken pieces of images related to her trauma of loss and separation.

This study tries to explore how Fadia Faqir utilizes modernist narrative forms to “reproduce and aestheticize the characteristics of traumatic memory” (Moran, 2007, p. 3). As Whitehead (2004) establishes, “the rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered” (p. 3). As some scholars have pointed out, “modernist narrative form, with its emphasis on interiority, memory, psychological verisimilitude, and its development of fragmented, nonlinear plots, provides an ideal medium for the transcription of traumatic experience” (Herman, 1992, as cited in Moran, 2007, p. 3). By utilizing these literary devices and narrative techniques, the author aims to illustrate how deeply the traumatic event has impacted her main character’s life.

Fadia Faqir is an acclaimed writer who was born in Jordan in 1956, and is an Honorary Fellow of St. Mary’s College at Durham University now. She has written a number of academic papers on Islam, gender, and democracy, and is a serious challenger of ‘honor killing’ on which she has written broadly. This

theme is reflected in her third novel, *The Cry of the Dove*, which was published in 2007. Faqir sets the story of *The Cry of the Dove*, also known as *My Name Is Salma*, between the Middle East and Britain. "As an Arab woman who writes in English, Faqir displays the intricacies of postcolonial discourse. (Her novels) stand between East and West, and combine Arabic traditional storytelling with postmodern narrative mode" (Al Maleh, 2009, p. 282).

This novel investigates the immigration of its central character, Salma, who is the victim of what is called honor killing. Salma gets pregnant before getting married and runs away from her brother who plans to kill her to repair the family's lost honor. To protect Salma from family 'honor killing', her teacher introduces her to the police and they take her into "protective custody". Salma spends several years in prison where her baby girl, Layla, is born. The child is taken away from her immediately. Salma is then rescued and adopted by Ms. Asher, under the name of Sally Asher. She takes Salma into England. As an unskilled Bedouin woman, Salma has to confront the conflicts of forced immigration, assimilation, racism, and separation. This settlement in Britain exposes Salma to a different culture and religion, which she finds it very difficult to adapt to.

It is in Exeter, a new homeland, that Salma undergoes a painful process of forming a new identity, with a new name, Sally Asher, and a new language with which she fuses Arabic. She is still obsessed with traumatic past experiences echoing from Hama, her home village, while the terror of being shot by her own family members never leaves her sedate. She gets a job as a seamstress and plans to save money to go back to her homeland and her daughter, whom she calls Leila. Even after seventeen years of separation, she still thinks of her mother, daughter, and village; she plans to go back home in spite of all the dangers awaiting her.

### **Review of Literature**

The present paper analyzes the linguistic and stylistic mechanisms in *The Cry of the Dove*, as a feminist trauma narrative to indicate how the author has tried to represent what is originally marked by voicelessness. Most of the studies which have been conducted on the novel focus on the question of gender and religious identity. For instance, El-Miniawi in "The Crisis of Identity in *My Name Is Salma*" (2016), traces the character's search for and assertion of identity. She tries to prove that Salma undergoes a physical and psychological change from a state of pure innocence to one of organized experience.

Hasan Majed in his PhD dissertation at the university of Sunderland entitled as "Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British novels" (2012) examines Islam and Muslim identities in Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove* in third chapter. He argues that this novel incorporates both colonial and post colonial discourse.

Within the same framework, Esra Mirze Santesso in *Disorientation: Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (2013) focuses on the Muslim immigrants' experiences in the novels published in Britain after 9/11. The chapter entitled as Mimicry in Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove*, examines the promise as well as the limits of 'British Muslim' identity and the challenges of coordinating a non-Western religious identity with the secular policies of Western states.

Seda Canpolat, in "Scopic Dilemmas: Gazing the Muslim Woman in Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*" (2015), describes the representation of racist and sexist gazing in two British Muslim women's novels. She argues that both female Muslim protagonists veer between racialized and sexualized ways of being seen. We can claim that *The Cry of the Dove* has not been investigated through trauma theory, and the stylistic features of the novel as a trauma narrative has not been identified in any forms of academic research.

### ***An Overview of Trauma Theory***

To read *The Cry of the Dove* within the framework of trauma studies necessitates a quick look at the origin of the theory and its definition. Drawing upon the Freudian model of trauma and the more recent categorization of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), most cultural and literary theorists position trauma as a tardy reaction to an agonizing incident that one cannot fathom. Bond and Craps define it as a "belated response to an overwhelming event too shattering to be processed as it occurs" (2019, p. 4). In this definition, obviously, the words *belated* and *overwhelming* are considered as significant features of traumatic experience; thus, it can be inferred that, because the traumatic event is very devastating, it cannot be unraveled on the spot and is consequently delayed. Not surprisingly, the delay in dealing with trauma occurs in memory and the excessive pain or agony in the traumatic situation disrupts the memory's function, so that the traumatic incident "could not be assimilated at the time of its occurrence and only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return" (Wolfreys, 2002, p. 132). Accordingly, the response to traumatic events occurs sometime after the event.

The difficulty of integrating traumatic experience into memory due to its 'overwhelming' nature affects its retrieval. The traumatized subject is unable to process the event as it occurred; the interrelationship and sequence of events are disrupted and only fragmented images or excited senses are preserved. Luckhurst (2008) emphasizes the inaccessibility of traumatic memories and the metamorphosis they undergo in the process of revival. He verbalizes this process as follows: "traumatic memories are repressed as they are formed, leaving them unavailable to conscious recall; subsequently, they recur in various displaced ways, as hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares" (p. 3). Put differently, due to the enormity of the traumatic experience, the unconscious tends to repress it; hence it has to get transformed in order to find some outlet in the conscious mind.

Bond and Craps (2019) accentuate the indefinability of trauma by using the term "slippery". They go on to define it as "blurring the boundaries between mind and body, memory and forgetting, speech and silence. It traverses the internal and external, the private and the collective" (p. 5). The fluctuation they refer to can explain the difficulty a traumatized subject experiences in diagnosing and healing the source of her/his distress. As Bohleber maintains, trauma can be a permanent experience with unforeseen durability: "Trauma, and being overwhelmed by its remembrance, was not only a concern for the surviving victims, but also had specific consequence for their children and children's children" (2010, p. 102). In addition to the

psychoanalytic aspect of trauma, its effect on literary studies is also noteworthy.

Since the 1990s, a group of scholars including Caruth (1996), Felman and Laub (1992), and Herman (1992) have examined the concept of trauma and its role in literature. In her pioneering study of literary trauma, entitled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Cathy Caruth (1996) suggests “trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language” (p. 3). She goes on to elaborate on this “insolvability” by stating: “trauma is an injury to the psyche that language often fails to adequately represent or express. Trauma is both highly resistant to articulation and wildly generative of narratives that seek to explicate the ‘unclaimed’ originary experience” (p. 76). The paradox of resisting articulation on the one hand and generating narrative on the other is exactly the focal point that literary studies, including the present article, try to elucidate.

Other critics have pointed to the same difficulty in representing the traumatic experiences; Ronell (1994) declares that, “trauma can be experienced in at least two ways....as a memory that one cannot integrate into one’s own experience; and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to the others” (p. 313). The unrepresentability of trauma experience poses a paradox or contradiction; the paradox of having to remember and being unable to communicate what you remember. Whitehead (2004) acknowledges such a paradox and asks, “if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction” (p. 3)? Whitehead (2004) provides an answer for this contradiction in her *Trauma Fiction*, pointing out that “trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique” (p. 14). In this fashion, the solution to fill the gap between memory and its expression could be traced mostly to the level of form rather than content; i.e. stylistic measures of narrative techniques.

Vickroy (2002) attests the above mentioned claim and defines trauma narratives as narratives that “go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or in characterization; they also incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures of these works” (p. 24). Vickroy’s emphasis on the “structure” is further explained by Caruth. She (1996) suggests that “if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence” (p. 13). These critics advocate departure from the conventional and realistic mode of narration and experimentation with innovative narrative techniques for the communication of the traumatic experience.

The representation of the traumatic experience, a psychological event which is originally marked by unrepresentability and voicelessness, requires structures and techniques that may communicate the unspeakable. Whitehead (2004) identifies the characteristics of literary imitation of trauma experiences, which can be found within fictional trauma representation; she maintains that, “novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only be

adequately represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection" (p. 4). Therefore, shattering the chronological order can be regarded as the primary narrative technique in trauma literature. Wolfreys (2002) also refers to the same mechanisms in writing or reading trauma narratives: "to read trauma is to register the sign of a second experience and recognition of the return of something spectral in the form of a trace or sign signifying, but not representing directly, that something having occurred, has left its mark, an inscription of sorts on the subject's unconscious, ...and does return repeatedly" (p. 133). In other words, lack of directness is an indispensable feature of trauma narratives. Perhaps dissimulation and disguise are two terms which can define the ghostly nature of trauma literature very well.

These critics have all stressed the inexpressible experience of trauma and the movement of structural repetition. Repetition is also a key term which is inseparable from trauma experience. As Žižek (2001) avers, "there is an inherent link between the notions of trauma and repetition, signaled in Freud's well-known motto that what one is not able to remember, one is condemned to repeat...as such, it repeats itself indefinitely, returning to haunt the subject" (p. 37). Moran (2007) draws attention to the somatic, as opposed to linguistic, aspect of memory and maintains that, "traumatic events persist as preverbal 'body memories' that resist narration; they recur as incomprehensible and intrusive memory fragments that are almost hallucinatory in their intensity" (p. 8). This lack of verbal competence is acknowledged by Herman as well: "The excessive arousal of emotions in trauma victims leaves them almost mute. These memories remain "wordless and static" (1992, p. 175). Indeed, as Herman carries on, the trauma story is "pre-narrative, it does not develop or progress in time, and it does not reveal the story teller's feelings or interpretation of events" (p. 176). Defying the conventional narrative time lines leads to another stylistic feature in the genre. Trauma stories instead feature "fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation" (Moran, 2007, p. 47). As mentioned before, trauma involves an enigma; a relentless desire to repeat the traumatic memory and the impossibility of communicating it to others. Due to the so called unspeakable, unrepresentable nature of traumatic experience, "trauma theory is forced to engage with the paradox of the incommensurability and impossibility of language and representation in relation to trauma on the one hand, and the desperate need for means of expression on the other" (Wiel, 2014, p. 14). Modernist and postmodernist narrative techniques are suitable choices for representing the unrepresentable traumatic experience.

It seems that "trauma aesthetics correspond with the modernist and postmodernist turn in critical theory towards fragmentation, a decentered self, non-linearity, and stream of consciousness" (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1999, as cited in Moran, p. 16). Corresponding to the ruptured and disorganized memory of the traumatized subject, trauma literature reflects the same tendency: "Following trauma theory, trauma fiction thus largely privileges narrative rupture as the only proper work of a trauma aesthetic" (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 89). Following the nature of traumatic memory which is fragmented,

“the trauma aesthetic is uncompromisingly avant-garde: experimental, fragmented, refusing the consolations of beautiful form, and suspicious of familiar representational and narrative conventions” (p. 81). As a consequence, instead of representing trauma in literature, the unrepresentability of the experience is depicted through stylistic methods. “Trauma victims have often been observed to recount their experiences in incoherent and fragmented narratives; it is due to the excessive arousal in a traumatic situation [that] significantly alters processes of encoding, storing, and later consolidating a memory and its recall” (Bohleber, 2010, p. 129). That means, the scar that is imprinted on the psyche by the unexpectedness and severity of the traumatic experience fragments memory and hence linguistic representation.

The chronological temporality of the linear narrative dominant in realistic novels allows the reader to create an organized sense of time, while trauma survivors often “report feeling that time is standing still” (Bohleber, 2010, p. 97). In trauma narratives, such a disturbance in the sense of time is shown in the flashbacks and repetitions in which the past and present are hardly distinguishable. These techniques aim to mirror the distorted perception of time. The affliction the traumatized subjects undergo cannot be traced to what they recount; rather, their distress must be diagnosed in how they narrate the suffering.

## **Discussion**

The present study aims to explore literary techniques by which Fadia Faqir has sought to represent trauma, or narrate the unnarratable, in *The Cry of the Dove*. It attempts to identify the implications of Caruth’s conceptualization of trauma for narrative fiction generally, and for Faqir’s *The Cry of the Dove* in particular. The perceived inadequacy of the traditional narrative style has created the need to develop a new narrative that can effectively represent trauma. The tendency of realist narratives to produce a fixed meaning contradicts the inconceivable nature of trauma experience. The structure of the narrative in *The Cry of the Dove* incorporates the chaos in Salma’s traumatized mind and follows the structure of traumatic memory.

Fadia Faqir’s style in *The Cry of the Dove* is far from being realistic; the reader is fascinated by her non-linearity, polyphony, and references to Arab sources of storytelling. Nash (2007) observes that “there is an exceptionally close connection to Arabic narrative forms in her oeuvre” (p. 22). Her prose gives way “to snatches of verse and song, both folk forms and high art by Arab writers, such as Nizar Qabbani and Mahmoud Darwish” (Chambers, 2011, p. 61). In an interview, Faqir refers to some important points regarding the narrative techniques she employs in her novels in general, and in *The Cry of the Dove* in particular; she asserts: “I don’t believe in linear narrative, it doesn’t appeal to me .... My narrative is always fractured, the glass is held in the hand and then dropped to the floor. A fractured narrative could perhaps become more tragic and more beautiful than the whole” (Faqir, 2007, as cited in Chambers, 2011, p. 64).

It seems that the broken glass could also be considered as a proper image for a person who has experienced the overwhelming effects of a trauma and is now suffering what Bohleber (2010) calls “the dissociated state of self”

(p. 101). He defines the concept of dissociation as “the splitting of consciousness” (p. 102), and explains it in these terms, “in the patients who have undergone trauma, parts of their psyche are like split-off states of the self and when activated give rise to a severely altered state of consciousness” (p. 130). The traumatic experience involves fragmentation and disconnection; the traumatized subject’s sense of self and her environment might differ from what is supposed to be normal and real. So much like a broken glass scattered on the floor, the traumatized subject’s speech is dispersed and fragmented, which can reflect the fractured structure of memory.

### ***Non-Linearity***

“The so-called nonlinear narratives are considered in literary theory, those that lack a straightforward storyline” (Larocca, 2015, p. 82). Faqir reminds that her novel keeps shifting between the past and present. “The character...takes one step forward then two steps back, and is torn between her past and the present. The juxtaposition of the past with present serves to reinforce the idea that the past is alive in the present” (Faqir, 2007, as cited in Chambers, 2011, p. 64). Fragmentation in *The Cry of the Dove* is thematic as well as formal, which, in the disjointed and nonlinear narrative style, reinforces the theme of ‘dissociated state of self. Non-linearity, silence, and gaps in *The Cry of the Dove* are expressions of the rupture or trauma that is experienced by Salma.

Felman and Laub (1992) describe testimony as “fragmented and broken in form, composed of bits and pieces of memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not been settled into understanding or remembrance” (p. 5). In Salma’s narration of the events, the reader has to bring the pieces of her thoughts together to be able to make sense of it. One can notice these disjointed fragments all over the novel, but as a striking example, it could be referred to a story told by her mother when she was still in Hima. Later on, she remembers the pieces of the story and inserts them within her thoughts:

I took my pipe and walked to my favorite spot at the very top of the mountain where I play happy tunes watching the sun sink into the water and listening to the jingling of cow bells and the bleating of sheep. The kerosene lamps were lit one by one in the valley. It reminded me of my village Hima, my mother, and my teacher Miss Nailah. She no doubt would swim out of the castle to safety and then her patient camel would carry her home (Faqir, 2007, p. 43).

The last line refers to the story of ‘Jubayyana and the camel’ told by her mother when Salma was a little girl. In these lines, “the past emerges in bits and pieces and the plot strays in time, resisting chronology and closure” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 35). As in doing a puzzle, the reader who bears witness to Salma’s traumatic memory and life experiences, has to put the bits and pieces from different places to make a tentative picture of what has happened to her. Larocca (2015) considers such narratives as a ‘labyrinth’ and maintains that, “the narrative develops in circles and parallel levels, in a web of different times and places all intertwining and at the same time excluding each other” (p. 82). The reader’s active role in passing through the ‘labyrinth’ of such a narrative,



joining the creative process, and thus making sense of it becomes evident.

The inversion of the traditional linear concepts of time as represented through an orderly, sequentially progressing plot, is an important narrative strategy that works to engage the reader with the issues of trauma experience. For example, the sequentially progressing plot is disrupted in the section in which the dialogues are interrupted with cartoon scenes; “Did you have a good time yesterday?’ Tom was chasing the Jerry around the house. ‘Yes, thank you.’ ‘Who was it?’ Jerry was trying to tie Tom’s tail to an electric iron. ‘A guy who has a health shop’” (Faqir, 2007, p. 54). The intrusion of cartoon scenes disrupts and fragments the narrative. This style of writing evokes a mood of detachment, it hints at the impossibility of any kind of effective and genuine communication between Salma and other characters. This sense of aloofness and distraction suggests the difficulty of talking about herself and her traumatic experiences.

The fragmentation of the narrative that mirrors the effects of the trauma is also represented by the inversion of time concept. The time stretches backward and forward between the past, present, and future. This provides a sense of timelessness, a concept that is very relevant to experiencing and recollecting the trauma. Some paragraphs in *The Cry of the Dove* go back in time to narrate Salma’s early experiences in her home village, some describe her prison days, some refer to her temporary stay in Lebanon, some of them tell the story of her voyage to Britain, some describe her early settlement in Exeter and friendship with Parvin, and some refer to present time and her settlement in Liz’s house. “The present and past events are tightly braided as Salma finds herself falling on past memories as they left permanent scars on the present and her future life” (El Miniawi, 2015, p. 61). The juxtaposition of the past and present serves to reinforce the idea that Salma’s traumatic past is still alive in the present, and intrudes to haunt her memory and the narrative alike.

### ***Stream of Consciousness***

Stream of consciousness approach employed by modernist and postmodernist fiction writers is an attempt to express how the mind works. According to Abrams (1993), “stream of consciousness is the name for special mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without a narrator’s intervention, the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character’s mental process” (p. 202). “Stream of consciousness point of view creates a sense of dissociation and aloofness” (Versluys, 2009, p. 24), which are among the key symptoms of traumatic memory. In *The Cry of the Dove*, the flow of thoughts draws Salma back and forth from past to the present and vice versa. She jumps from one idea to another in a way that the readers feel the agonies of her traumatized psyche; “she yanked, bit, belted, until I turned black and blue and sank blissfully into darkness, walking alone under electric poles, whose shadows were getting longer and longer, I hugged my shopping bag. No, it was not easy living here in England as an ‘alien’ which was how the immigration officer had described me” (Faqir, 2007, p. 34). In the above extract, Salma first remembers how her mother got infuriated when she heard about her pregnancy and hit her, then notices the shadow of electric poles while she is walking in the street, and once again her mind sways in the past, remembering the time she immigrated to England.

In some parts of the novel, the rapid shifts in the way Salma thinks makes it rather impossible to trace and puzzle out which part of the story it is from and what she is talking about. For instance, in her flight to Greece the flow of her thoughts revolve in a way that is difficult to discern:

A long well, cold water, seeds popping open, a body breaking free, yielding, 'I wish I had never set my eyes on you', 'C'est la vie ma fille!', 'Jesus died to save you all', 'you are on you own, Salma', a gun slung on a shoulder, grime-filled toe nails. 'Enough, shoot me!', throwing up in the bin, ...'too much past', doves crying, sniffing falafel, 'Min il-bab lil shibak' .... get married to Sadiq, eating dry bread, Noura's blood and snot running down her chin, a heart-wrenching howl (Faqir, 2007, p. 241).

This excerpt, which includes short sentences and phrases, reflects the chaotic state of Salma's thoughts and feelings. These intrusive memories from different people and places which suddenly rush to her mind demonstrate her suffering from the trauma and inability to cope with it even after seventeen years. The author employs these narrative techniques to reverberate the inner voice of Salma's dissociated self. Balaev (2014) believes that "the use of stream of consciousness to describe the traumatic experience is to create a dissociating effect" (p. 135). Replicating the experience of thinking through stream of consciousness allows the reader to enter the mind of the traumatized character of the novel and get access to her gloomy world since the words fail to express what is marked by voicelessness.

### ***Poetic Prose***

In some parts of the novel, poetic overtones can be heard. A melodic style, harmonized by integration of emotions and affects, "releases language from the governing body of ideas into the life of the soul expressed through the incessant eruption of musical motifs, ... the states of thought, in no logical order, in the form of bursts of thought rising from the depths of the self" (Dujardin, 1991, p. 135). Challenging genre boundaries and establishing a poetic language seem to be at the heart of trauma aesthetics. Onega and Ganteau (2011) identify the importance given to formal experimentation as a way to "shock readers into affective participation and reflexive thought as well as understanding of trauma" (p. 270). The incoherent words that the author repeated again and again with very slight modification in reference to different characters are finally phrased as a final tribute to her daughter; "Layla was emerald, Indian silk cascading down from rolls, fresh coffee beans ground in an ornate sandalwood pestle and mortar, honey and spicy ghee wrapped in freshly baked bread, a pearl in her bed, ... pure perfume sealed in blue jars, .... a full moon hidden behind translucent clouds... the clear whiteness of my eye.... the blood pumping out of my broken heart" (Faqir, 2007, p. 258). Figurative language as a structuring device is employed in some parts of the novel notably when Salma is meditating on her daughter. Her use of metaphorical language gives the reader a vivid impression of a mind full of scattered ideas that will not integrate into a pattern.

This refrain which is repeated on several pages with its oriental Arab elements and richly sensual imagery “[is] used to trap the reader in a mesmerizing image or spectacle, to render any form of distance impossible” (Onega & Ganteau, 2005, p. 210). Faqir employs rhythmical narrative, symbolic, and metaphorical devices as a way to address feelings, senses, and emotions. Through breaking the boundary of genres (fiction and poetry), the author explores a way to communicate the overwhelming, unspeakable experience of trauma. “Trauma is both highly resistant to articulation and wildly generative of narratives that seek to explicate the ‘unclaimed’ originary experience” (Caruth, 1996, p. 76). Onega and Gateau (2005) in their joint introduction to the edited collection of *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction*, contend that, “through the process of intensification (through hyperbolic soliciting of affects), the text becomes rhetorically, thus pragmatically, iconic of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder), by relying not only on the representational but also on the performance of its affects” (p. 17-18). “Trauma’s affects can indeed be said to be excessive, overwhelming, which is why a cognitive aesthetics of trauma emphasizes containment of these affects through symbolization” (Wiel, 2014, p. 172), and also metaphors and images.

### ***Repeated Imagery***

Trauma literature can utilize imagery to emphasize the “frozen and wordless quality of traumatic memories” (Herman, 1992, p. 37). Imagery “is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other works of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the vehicles of its similes and metaphors” (Abrams, 1993, p. 86). Emotional impact, repetition, compulsion, states of hopelessness, and other symptoms of trauma can all be traced through visual clues and repetitive imagery in *The Cry of the Dove*. As Whitehead (2004) points out, “trauma narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection...Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images” (p. 38).

In this novel, Salma is haunted by the picture of a man (supposedly his brother), or a group of men, (men of his tribe) with daggers and guns to kill her and to restore the family’s spoilt honor with her spilt blood. In several paragraphs, this frightening image disturbs and haunts Salma, both in sleep in the form of nightmares and in wakefulness as flashbacks and intrusive memories:

Listen for the galloping of horses, for the clank of daggers being pulled out of scabbards, for flat-faced owls hooting in the dark, ...for the swishing sound of his sharp dagger. Sniff the air for the sweat of assassins. Listen to his arm grabbing Leyla’s neck and pulling it right back, to his dagger slashing through flesh and breaking bones to reach the heart. Listen to your daughter’s warm red blood bubbling out and drip dripping on the dry sand. .... ‘Kill me instead,’ I screamed at Mahmoud’s shadow by the steal railway (Faqir, 2007, p. 262).

Two or more kinds of “sensations are experienced” in this passage. “Synesthesia is applied to descriptions of one kind of sensation in terms of

another" (Abrams, 1993, p. 210). The synesthetic imagery of sight, color, motion, sound, and heat has been made by "Listen to your daughter's warm red blood bubbling out and drip dripping on the dry sand" (Faqir, 2007, p. 210). Through a combination of word and image, this novel succeeds in illustrating the intrusive symptoms of trauma. Employing these stylistic features successfully overwhelms the reader through strong sensations. Intrusive repetitive imagery appears throughout *The Cry of the Dove* to illustrate the trauma caused by this escalating sense of fear and helplessness.

Since trauma survivors often experience repetitive intrusions of imagery related to the trauma, authors of trauma narrative, as explained by Whitehead (2004), often utilize a form of repetition to illustrate this characteristic; "one of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery, or plot" (p. 86). Repetition also "has a constant impact on the audience's capacity of narrative reformulation when functioning on the thematic, structural, and linguistic levels" (Miller, 1982, p. 2). The itinerant image of the wind functions mysteriously in relation to Salma's traumatic experience of losing her daughter. After giving birth to her daughter in prison, the infant is immediately snatched away from Salma, and the bitterness of failing to hug and to breastfeed the child haunts her till the end of her life. "Suddenly the fine hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I knew that breeze. She was out there crying for a foothold ... A sudden chill ran through me so I bent forward as if winded and hugged my erect nipples" (Faqir, 2007, p. 192). The chilling wind unexplainably reminds her of Leyla.

The intense excitation in trauma victims "splits the memory into various isolated, somato-sensory elements: into images, affective states, and somatic sensations, as well as smells and sound" (Bohleber, 2010, p. 117). The repetition of these images suggests that Salma is reliving these events even after seventeen years and cannot escape or recover from her trauma since "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). Traumatic memory is stored as a state of affect and its "reappearance depends on the occurrence of certain stimuli that are associated with the original traumatic scene" (Bohleber, 2010, p. 83). The certain stimulus which triggers Salma's sense of loss and the subsequent bitter memory of guilt is the chilling wind. "The sudden intrusion [of the stimuli] into consciousness is overwhelming and often shocking, reducing the ego to a state of passive helplessness; it can neither gain control of the situation through self-reflection, nor dissolve it" (p. 130). The narrator stresses the familiar nature of the chilling wind which is also mentioned in other pages of the novel. This recognition is related to the trauma experience; "a sudden and passively endured trauma is relived repeatedly, until a person learns to remember simultaneously the affect and cognition associated with trauma through access to language" (van der Kolk & Ducey, 1989, p. 271).

The white dress which Salma had made for her daughter in prison also acts as an important repeated image which associates her with the past traumatic events. "This dress which stands for all the beauty and purity of the unseen daughter, will be a life savior for Salma" (El Miniawi, 2015, p. 62). She cannot resist the temptation of watching and feeling the dress in spite of the

fact that the doctor has prohibited the reminders of the past. The dress “will be used as an evidence of her skill as a seamstress, and also secure her the much needed job as a means of livelihood in England” (p. 63). The imagery of flowers abounds in the novel; Salma calls herself ‘black iris’, but her daughter is lily. Flower imagery may suggest beauty, purity, and the motherly feelings toward a fragile little child; “I spent hours making that baby-girl dress. I spent hours trying to imagine what a white water lily would like floating in clear water on a luminous jolly night: Lelyla. I tried to make the shape of the dress similar to that of a lily” (Faqr, 2007, p. 39). Elsewhere in the novel, Salma nostalgically associates the dress with her home, “it was a promise of a reunion, a return. That white dress was home” (p. 7).

Exeter Cathedral has a particular affective resonance in Salma’s narration. It seems that she negotiates her state of being alien with this visual image. “Whenever I went, I saw churches in the distance: old, decaying and dark houses of God. Whenever I entered, the cathedral or a church I would feel cold” (p. 25). The image of the church as a dominant symbol of Christianity reminds her of her difference as a Muslim immigrant. “I could hear it sung everywhere in the cathedral; where do you come from, ...Go home” (Faqr, 2007, p. 167).

Salma is suffering from her shameful past and thinks that she has spoilt “her family’s honor with her dark deeds” (p. 177). Her compulsive tendencies, especially with regard to cleaning, could be explained by her obsession with guilt and shame. It seems that she struggles to wash and purify her soul in doing so much cleaning and scrubbing; “I sat down watching the clothes being tossed around in the soapy water, spun, then tossed around again... I wished I could put me among the washing so I could come out at the other end ‘squeaky clean’, without dry stains or dark deeds” (p. 44). Closely related to her obsession with cleaning, the image of darkness and dirt are also emphasized in the novel. “My face was black as if covered with soot, my hands were black and I had smeared the foreheads of my family with tar” (p. 101).

The repetition of imagery operates in negotiating the initial traumatic memory, as well as representing the language-deficient quality of trauma, in which the images voice the unspeakable. Repetition of images “replays the past as if it was fully present and remains caught within trauma’s paralyzing influence” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 86). *The Cry of the Dove* is structured around the notion of repetition in stylistic terms. Images and motifs echo the initial trauma of loss and displacement and the novel “mimics the effects of trauma in its persistent repetitions and returns” (p. 120). The disturbing and dark atmosphere of the novel is stressed by repetition of words and images related to the trauma experience.

### **Polyphony**

*The Cry of the Dove* exhibits the polyvocal quality of trauma fiction in relation to many voices contained within the memory of the trauma. Polyphony, as a Bakhtinian concept, literally means multiple voices. “To make a reference to Bakhtin is basically to focus on how he read Dostoevsky’s work as texts containing many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective, and not subordinated to the voice of the author” (Sarnou, 2016, p. 209). “Instead of a single objective world, held together by the author’s voice, there is a plurality of

consciousnesses, each with its own world. The reader does not see a single reality presented by the author, but rather, how reality appears to each character" (p. 210).

According to Vickroy (2002), one authorial approach in stylistic representation of trauma "involves the creation of dialogical interaction between testimonial elements and multiple subject positioning" (p. 27). She believes that, "multiple voices of characters and narrators bearing witness to traumatic pasts situate the reader within the struggle for accounts of and responses to oppression, the responsible remembrance, and defensive amnesia, thereby giving them a sense of being within the traumatic condition" (p. 28). It should be noted that many critics use the terms *polyphony* and *dialogism* interchangeably; as Clark and Holquist point out, "the phenomenon that Bakhtin calls 'polyphony' is simply another name for dialogism" (p. 242). "In polyphonic novels different centers of consciousness are allowed to interact on the plane of novel. For Bakhtin a polyphonic novel captures a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness" (p. 6).

"The patients who have undergone trauma especially in childhood, parts of their psyche are like split-off states of the self and when activated give rise to a severely altered states of consciousness" (Bohleber, 2010, p. 130). "Trauma effects an incision in the self, so that one effectively becomes two" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 178). These altered states of consciousness reflected in Salma's interior monologues confuse the reader who is caught between different voices which are echoed through the narrator's "internal psychic splitting" (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 100). Sometimes, the reader hears Salma, the Bedouin oppressed woman who has recently immigrated to England, while at other times, the voice of Sally, now an assimilated Arab-British woman, is heard as manifested in the following excerpt:

I wanted to cover my head with the quilt and just lie still in the darkness.... A policeman visited Khairiyya recently and asked her about the whereabouts of all the girls she managed to smuggle out. You must go with Miss Asher to England. 'Hinglaand? Fayn Hinglaad?' ...the grey concrete building of Exeter Public Library looked like army barracks, but its glass windows gleamed in the warm light of the sun. When I opened the door I was met by a hushed polite silence so I cleared my voice and said to the middle-aged librarian, 'I would like to join the library'" (Faqir, 2007, p. 48).

In the extract above, the first voice the reader hears is that of Salma, the Bedouin illiterate woman who is unable to pronounce the word England; however, then there is a sudden shift in the narrative voice and the reader hears another voice, that of Sally, the British educated woman who speaks English fluently.

Lindbladh (2017) attempts to demonstrate the interrelatedness of polyphony and trauma theory and the psychological hardships experienced by the witnesses in the act of representing a traumatic experience. He maintains that, "a testimony of traumatic events is characterized by the existentially ambivalent feelings experienced by the witness towards the very act of narrating a traumatic past. In his point of view, the representation of internally

focused monologues accords with polyphonic composition of trauma narratives” (p. 296). The necessity and also the impossibility of talking about her overwhelming experiences of loss and separation make Salma write imaginary letters to friends and relatives in Hima. These letters which are never sent express the agony of her mind and the scars of her soul.

In some of these letters, which are full of lies about her present condition in Exeter, heterogeneous voices are heard, in which her hopes and ambitions lie. These heterogeneous voices in the same letter belong to the two halves of the character’s split or dissociated self, Salma and Sally. Salma in a letter discloses her suffering to an old intimate friend in Hima, about being hit by her drunken landlady who mistook her for one of her ponies; “the wound was coiled around my arm like a snake. With no one to make me soup...I feel sorry for myself. I wish you were here to run your hand on my head” (Faqir, 2007, p. 168). Suddenly and all unexpectedly, the narrative voice of Sally is heard fabricating and bragging about her unseen daughter’s accomplishments; “Layla has passed her A-levels and will go to university soon. She will come home weekends and we will drive to Dartmouth and spend the day swimming in the sea” (p. 260). These “interweaving of voices represent the various inner parts of the same person” (Riccioni & Zuczkowski, 2012, p. 271), which could be considered as an “image of a heterogeneous self which is in the process of self-understanding and the creation of an identity, most important to consider in the processing of traumatic experiences” (Lindbladh, 2017. p. 297).

## Conclusion

Trauma studies have been mostly Eurocentric in orientation, disregarding the pains of less fortunate people in other nations who have been condemned to silence. Fadia Faqir gives voice to a Muslim female immigrant who is the victim of a patriarchal value system in his own country where wrong traditions such as ‘honor killing’ are supported and the target of racial discrimination and hatred in the host country. This paper has investigated the effect of trauma on a displaced Muslim woman in the narrative of an immigrant Muslim novelist in the context of post 9/11 Islamophobia. The research shows that, although trauma is marked by unrepresentability and silence stated by the major theoreticians of the field, it can be tracked through literary strategies and narrative techniques like non-linearity, poetic prose, repetition, stream of consciousness, and polyphony. Through the fragmented, reiterated, and polyvocal discourse of the novel’s first person narration, which is full of gaps and silence, the reader is invited to participate in the formation of the text, as a means to bear witness to the suppressed and marginalized character’s suffering. The interplay of these techniques in *The Cry of the Dove* helps the reader appreciate the evasive nature of traumatic experience and emotionally engages her or him with the story.

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