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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE PROGRAM
MASTER’S THESIS

THE TRAUMA OF WITNESSING DEATH IN
JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER’S *EXTREMELY LOUD AND*
INCREDIBLY CLOSE* AND SINAN ANTOON’S *THE
CORPSE WASHER

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İZMİR- 2022

APPROVAL PAGE



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this master's thesis term project titled as "The Trauma of Witnessing Death in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*" has been written by myself in accordance with the academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honour.

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Simge ŞİRİN

ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

The Trauma of Witnessing Death in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*

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In representations of trauma the past event is apparent in narratives beyond the witness's recognition. Consequently, trauma narratives demand contextual analyses. Witnessing death arising from historical violent events can best be analyzed with literary trauma theory. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to focus on the trauma of witnessing death and its aftermath in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013). In Foer's novel, narrators witness the two traumatic historical events, the first is the Dresden firebombing in 1945 and the second is the September 11, 2001 attacks and they go through the trauma of bereavement. In *The Corpse Washer*, representation of trauma is conveyed through the analogy of death caused by the US invasion of Iraq and its narrator is a corpse washer. In both novels, "death encounter" emerging from witnessing death in these violent events is the common experience for the witness narrators. Accordingly, narrators fail to respond to the trauma since they are affected by the presence of death which means bereavement in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and washing dead bodies in *The Corpse Washer*. This study indicates that first-person narrators in both novels develop a narrative without recognizing the trauma of "death encounter" since it silences them.

Keywords: Death, Trauma, Witnessing, First-person Narrative, Historical Violence

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Jonathan Safran Foer’ın *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* ve Sinan Antoon’un *The Corpse Washer* Romanlarında Ölüme Tanıklık Etmenin Travması
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Travma anlatılarında geçmişte yaşanan olay, hayatta kalanın tanıklığında her zaman mevcuttur ve bu durum anlatıcının farkında olmadan anlatısına yansır. Bu yüzden, travma anlatıları travmanın sebebine yönelik bir analizi gerektirir. Tarihsel olayların sebep olduğu ölümlere tanıklık eden anlatıcılar, en iyi şekilde edebi travma kuramı ile açıklanabilir. Bu tez çalışması, Jonathan Safran Foer’ın *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) ve Sinan Antoon’un *The Corpse Washer* (2013) romanlarında, ölüme tanıklık eden anlatıcıları edebi travma kuramı ile analiz etmektedir. Foer’ın travma anlatısında 1945 Dresden Bombardmanı ve 11 Eylül 2001 saldırıları, olaylara tanıklık eden anlatıcılar aracılığıyla temsil edilmektedir. Antoon’un anlatısında ise, romanda geçen tarihsel olayların şiddeti ölüm analogisi ile verilmektedir ve anlatıcı karakter bir ölü yıkayıcısıdır. Farklı tarihsel olayların sebep olduğu, ölümle karşılaşmanın travması her iki anlatıda da anlatıcılar için ortak bir deneyimdir. Her iki romanda da anlatıcılar, ölüme tanıklık etmenin travmasını fark etmeden bir anlatı geliştirirler çünkü ölümle karşılaşmak onları sessizleştirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ölüm, Travma, Tanıklık Etmek, Birinci Şahıs Anlatıcı, Tarihsel Şiddet

**THE TRAUMA OF WITNESSING DEATH IN JONATHAN SAFRAN
FOER'S *EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE* AND SINAN
ANTOON'S *THE CORPSE WASHER***

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INTRODUCTION

This research aims to analyze the representations of traumatic historical events narrated by the novels' different witness narrators retrospectively in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer*. The focus is on the intricate relation between witnessing death and its trauma in relation to characteristics of "death encounter" such as inability to recognize the events as traumatic and becoming silenced after. To analyze the two trauma narratives, there is a need to explore how witnessing death is a traumatic event in collective events, how trauma requires a retrospective narrator and how first-person narrators are shaped by the trauma of "death encounter". The aspects of trauma taking place when narrators are forced to bear witness to death due to collective violent events is one of the primary interests of this research. Particularly in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* trauma is transferred with letters through accounts of witness narrators and death transpires with bereavement. And *The Corpse Washer* represents death at the core of its narrative as an analogy for destruction caused by the US invasion of Iraq that its witness narrator is subjected to. All things considered, emphasis is given to the analyses of how historical violence creates forced witness to death and how the novels' first-person narrators fail to recognize its trauma in its aftermath. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer*, social realities that are deep-seated in witness narrators' experiences shape their narratives, and they must be taken into account. Within the boundaries of these theoretical discussions, examinations of first-person narrators' forced witness to death in collective events and their belated confrontation of its trauma in both novels are provided in the developing chapters

In the first chapter of this master's thesis, relevant issues that literary trauma theory raises in trauma narratives are discussed. These relevant issues include characteristics of trauma such as failure in recognizing the event as traumatic and the experience of "death encounter" leading to silence. Literary trauma theory is significant for both Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013) since the two narratives are representation of collective events that leads to "death encounter" in both novels. Creating a narrative based on witnessing the violent event that is traumatic is brought

into attention in literary trauma theory and being a witness belongs to the process of resilience and recovery. Therefore, the importance of creating a narrative based on witnessing and silence emerging as a result of being subjected to collective violent events are provided within the arguments that Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub raise.

In the second chapter, the discussions diverge from literary trauma theory and move closer to the definitions of death. Death is an issue that is not explored much in literary trauma theory and there is a need to combine different disciplines to discuss what death brings about. In exploring psychoanalytic works on death, Freud's famous work on death drive cannot be excluded, since it is the underlying force behind unconscious acts of survivors. Death drive operates when one encounters a traumatic event or a threat and trauma's relevance in Freud's pioneering works are needed to understand how witnessing death acts out as a traumatic event in trauma narratives. In addition to death drive, Robert Jay Lifton's works on "death encounter" will be explored, especially his psychiatric report on Hiroshima survivors is very relevant since they can easily be associated with discussions about witnessing death as trauma. Moreover, Lifton's arguments are relevant for examining the trauma of witnessing death in collective events. As such, discussing death drive and death encounter is necessary, because both *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* are representations of the trauma of witnessing death caused by historical events.

In the third chapter, relevant discussions in narrative theory about the characteristics of first-person narratives are given. Trauma narratives are always about the past whether or not they are about personal or collective events, and as a result, temporality is an important aspect in representations of trauma. Narrative theory provides new ways to discuss first-person narrators and fragmented traumatic memory. Therefore, arguments on first-person narrative's influence on constructing a narrative based on witnessing traumatic events, which is particularly about bearing witness to death in this research, is raised as an issue. Since both *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* have first-person narrators, witnessing is intricately related to creating a narrative based on the traumatic experience of death encounter, which then gradually lends itself to the process of recovery.

In the fourth chapter, discussions of Dresden firebombing and September 11, 2001 attacks are provided with the analyses of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, because first-person narrators go through the trauma of bereavement caused by these two collective events. The chapter begins with the analysis of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* in conjunction with how historical violence causes bereavement for its witnesses who are also narrators. The novel deals with the aftermath of Dresden firebombing in 1945 and links it to September 11, 2001 attacks to convey the idea that trauma spreads among generations, and historical information about the two events are given at the end of the chapter. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* as a trauma narrative represents that trauma of witnessing death can be transferred among generations through bereavement triggered by Dresden firebombing and later 9/11 attacks. In the novel, narrators fail to recognize witnessing death as trauma since “death encounter” makes them silenced about the events.

The fifth and last chapter brings discussions of *The Corpse Washer* in relation to the analogical representations of death presented through the novel’s narrator Jawad Kazim’s encounters. *The Corpse Washer* exposes death analogically with objects that reveal so much about the narrator’s character construction as a corpse washer. The trauma of witnessing death in the novel is caused by recent historical events of Iraq that are borrowed in its narrative, yet the most significant event appears to be the US invasion of Iraq. And information about the invasion is brought into attention with the analysis of trauma and death analogy in *The Corpse Washer*. It is inevitable to present information about Dresden firebombing and 9/11 in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and the US invasion of Iraq in *The Corpse Washer* since these events cause character narrators to bear witness to death in both narratives. It is revealed in the novels that character narrators fail to recognize witnessing death caused by collective events as trauma, since “death encounter” forces them into silence.

Trauma is an event that is not fully comprehended by the survivor. What is central in Cathy Caruth’s arguments is her insistence that traumatic event is never completely realized by the survivor. It operates in the unconscious acts such as dreams and it is beyond the survivor’s reach. Caruth contends:

The accident, that is, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but

also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known. (1996: 6)

Caruth defines trauma as an event appearing in different narratives and what is revealed through them is the survivor's inability to gain knowledge about its occurrence. Caruth's arguments about the characteristics of trauma are borrowed in this research since they are relevant to discussing the novels that deal with consequences of "death encounter" driving witness narrators into silence as to the past events.

Unconscious acts are complications that Sigmund Freud is highly interested in. Caruth improves Freud's theory on death drive in tandem with experiences of trauma. Caruth proposes "it is this incomprehensibility of survival" which is at the center of Freud's death drive theory (1996: 64). Death drive functions in life and in the acts of survivor. It emerges from Caruth's understanding that death drive functions as if life depends on it, and unconscious acts surpass death caused by traumatic events such as witnessing death and becoming silenced in its aftermath. In that case, Freud's death drive and Robert Jay Lifton's "death encounter" become significant to discuss the trauma of witnessing death born of historical violent events.

In the coming chapters, a detailed analysis of witnessing in literary trauma theory will be provided because first-person narrators of the novels are also witnesses. Witnessing and surviving are important aspects of this research, since in both Foer's and Antoon's narratives, character narrators go through the trauma of death encounter. It is important to discuss meaning of witnessing in traumatic encounters.

Witnessing and taking part in battle, being involved in killing, being captured and perhaps subjected to torture, taking part in being a victim or witnessing atrocities against other soldiers or against civilians, destroying artefacts- all of these can lead to a breakdown in one's belief systems and have an impact on one's identity. (Hunt, 2010: 10)

Witnessing consists of the violence of traumatic events and in collective cases such as war atrocities, survivors are left with the destruction. In that sense, violence of witnessing becomes the reason for witnesses to go through the experiences of trauma which is significantly related to "death encounter" as the leading cause for narrators' silence in both novels.

Trauma emerges in different ways in its aftermath. One of the fundamental definitions of trauma is about its belatedness as is discussed in the coming chapters.

Caruth's approach emphasizes belatedness as constitutive of the temporal structure of trauma: trauma is characterized by a delayed response to an overwhelming event that cannot be processed at the time of its occurrence but manifests itself through intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares. (Davis, 2020: 4)

For the critic here, belatedness is a characteristic of trauma appearing in narratives. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* deals with an aftermath of “death encounter” i.e., witnessing death, and belatedness as a concept is significant to examine how first-person narrators fail to recognize the past events as traumatic.

Analyzing *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* necessitates literary trauma theory. In both novels, death is depicted as a traumatic event witnessed by the narrators. They are trauma narratives representing the violence of historical events for those left behind, namely witness narrators. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013) cannot be thought without their historical contexts. Moreover, the trauma of witnessing death born of historical violence is at the core of the arguments raised in this thesis, since both narratives borrow from different social realities such as 9/11 in 2001, Dresden firebombing in 1945 in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 in *The Corpse Washer*. In the end, it becomes clear that the first-person witness narrators come to a point where they cannot have an access to past events that cause a traumatic encounter with death. Therefore, character narrators fail to recognize the trauma of “death encounter” that leads them to silence in both novels.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. LITERARY TRAUMA THEORY

Emerging in the 1990s with Yale deconstructionist Cathy Caruth's pioneering works on trauma, literary trauma studies has been influenced by psychoanalytic works of Sigmund Freud. Focusing on how representations of trauma work in fiction, literary trauma theory prominently emphasizes trauma's existence in novels, testimonies and other texts.

Literary trauma studies has often focused on historical catastrophes and explored their impact on both individuals and communities. Like cultural memory studies, it has frequently been interested in how literature explores the interplay between the personal and the cultural in narrating particular experiences of trauma. (Davis & Meretoja, 2020: 4)

Narratives are one of the many concerns of literary trauma studies in addition to Caruth's and other scholars' multiple definitions of trauma. In relation to memory studies in cultural contexts, literary trauma studies can be considered intricately with memory construction, even though a little attention has been given to analysis of memory in the field. Yet as referred in the above quotation, literary trauma studies is concerned with aspects of cultural influences in narrative construction in traumatic encounters.

Freud's examinations in processing, mourning and war neurosis during the First World War have contributed to the field particularly in Caruth's work. Caruth takes the cue from Freud's analyses and dwells on the idea that history needs to be considered as the trauma itself. "Beginning with the example of the accident neurosis as a means of explaining individual histories, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ultimately asks what it would mean to understand history as the history of trauma" (Caruth, 1996: 60). Freud's text in which he develops his concept of death drive in relation to repetition compulsion becomes the text that Caruth choose to base literary trauma on. It should be mentioned that it is not the only text and it cannot be reduced only to Freud's works since literary trauma theory is an ongoing research area and it borrows from different interpretations of consequences of threatening events in both personal and collective cases.

Since literary trauma theory highly borrows from psychoanalysis, dream interpretation, repetitive acts and the unconscious are strong components in the research area. What consists of trauma is the importance of individual subjected to the violence frequently or in the past. Disrupting events become at the core of trauma theory in conjunction with the construction of subjectivity.

Trauma theory often divides itself into two basic trends: the focus on trauma as the “shattering” of a previously whole self and the focus on the survival function of trauma as allowing one to get through an overwhelming experience by numbing oneself to it. (Caruth, 1996: 131)

In the case of subjectivity, trauma includes one's disintegrated sense of self and if the event is not assimilated into a narrative so that understanding what happened in the first place can be recognized, then it becomes a burden for the survivor. Surviving the event suggests that one does not confront its reality, but the trauma plays out through the acts of unconscious.

Understanding what one has experienced is noteworthy for the survivor in trauma. Bringing the trauma into consciousness and the process of narrating what happened are important to recognize the event.

The hermeneutic conception of temporal and interpretative nature of narrating for one's experience implies that it is not just applying pre-given narrative models to singular experience but a dynamic process of reinterpretation that can involve learning something completely new that challenges one's previous narrative understandings. (Meretoja, 2020: 30)

Consequently, understanding trauma through creating narratives is an important part of assimilating the event into a narrative. The boundary between recognizing the event and being shattered by its effects, which is one of the significant definitions of trauma developed by Caruth, is transgressed by responding to the question what happened, always in the past.

Naturally, the survivor of trauma becomes a witness even to her own experience. Witnessing is what follows the traumatic event and it is inherent in memory construction but memory is highly demanding and unreliable, and one of the things that trauma theory considers is how trauma is also about forgetting.

In this view, testimony not only describes and conveys but is also constituted by an incommensurable gap between the survivor's experience and the language available to relay it; bearing witness expresses a “truth” that remains beyond the witness's comprehension and is only knowable as its

unsettling effects on the victim's grasp of reality. (Dean, 2020: 111)

Language is a great confidant in the experience of trauma and it makes the survivor available to her own trauma retrospectively. Consciousness is shattered after the event as argued by Dean, and it becomes available when the survivor gains the ability to remember the event and formulate a narrative based on her witnessing.

Narrating the trauma requires the survivor to endure it by remembering the event and create a voice from her resilience. Repressed event comes into words through the voice of those who are subjected to the violence, namely the survivor witness. The words are not uttered in the order of the violent event, rather in a nonlinear fashion, since memory is in play.

The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of "otherness," a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. (Laub, 1992: 69)

For Laub, unlike narratives in stories fashioned chronologically, the survivor recalls the event belatedly and inconsistently and she responds to the need for trauma to be out retrospectively. Through narrating the event one might name it and recognize its numbing silence that comes belatedly, and most of the time it may not even be recognized by the survivor as articulated in the quotation.

Suggested by Caruth in her formulation of trauma theory, one of the striking major ideas is how trauma occurs later than the event i.e., "belatedness of trauma". Belatedness of trauma has been a returning argument in variety of discussions so far in trauma theory and it consists of trauma's intricate relation to memory. According to Roger Luckhurst this is how belatedness occurs: "a further Freudian paradox is the strange temporality of traumatic memory: an event can only be understood as traumatic after the fact, through the symptoms and flashbacks and the delayed attempts at understanding that these signs of disturbance produce" (2018: 5). For Luckhurst, there are tell-tale signs of trauma in the acts of speaking and in the unconscious. Even it can be said that when trauma is silenced it still speaks through the unconscious acts of the survivor beyond her knowledge.

Establishing her arguments in the psychoanalytical practice of hypnosis since Jean Martin Charcot, Ruth Leys gives historical accounts of trauma developed in the

field. Hypnosis is for Leys what mimics and anti-mimics the trauma and vulnerability caused by the failure in protecting oneself against the threat is among her concerns.

Leys contends:

For the historical situation of threatened loss (of the phallus or the mother) is itself defined as a situation of helplessness or “unbinding” (primal repression) due to an excess of stimulation that by traumatically breaching the boundary between inside and outside shatters the unity and identity of the ego. (2000: 28)

For Leys, trauma resembles to infantile experiences of separation from the mother and it causes disruption in one's sense of integrity. Once the violent event erupts there are consequences: for instance, trauma disturbs one's integrated sense of self leaving the survivor unable to respond to the event.

In addition to the belatedness of trauma, mimicking effect of the event in the unconscious and in language, trauma comes to the fore, Leys also touches on the idea of witnessing. She concurs:

In other words, fundamentally victims of trauma cannot witness or testify to the trauma in the sense of narrate and represent it to themselves and others: all they can do is perform the experience as if it were literally happening all over again. (2000: 252)

Inability to narrate the event, since it is a burden in the mind of the survivor, results in failure in confrontation with the trauma according to Leys. And narrating the trauma means bringing out memories that are too painful to observe and process.

Trauma theory returns to the works of psychoanalysis, especially Freud's. In the coming chapters there is a discussion of Freud's death drive explaining how death belongs to the unconscious, however, for a moment, it is better to stay in literary trauma theory and see how in trajectory it has continued to be effective. In the groundbreaking book of Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman trauma is raised as an issue since they approach it with an intertextual look and they argue:

Theories of psychic trauma were enriched by contributions from psychoanalysis and particularly by the introduction, in 1920, of the death drive, a concept that could help to explain the recurring nightmares characteristic of traumatic neurosis without departing from the general principles of dream interpretation. (2009: 55)

As one can see in Caruth's work as well, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which he introduces repetition compulsion and death drive as components of trauma, even though he does not name it so, it is necessary to bring it to the attention

that Freud wrote the text in 1920 five years after the First World War. What can be inferred here is how trauma theory establishes itself as a discipline that is immensely the result of a research based on witnessing historical and violent events such as war.

For instance, Freud's two articles collected under the title "*Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*" in 1915 analyze soldiers' forced witness to death. It becomes more obvious that the trauma theory's solid arguments are based on the idea that witnessing death is a trauma itself in collective violent events, nonetheless, it is beneficial to add that there is not much attention paid to the idea of death in the discipline. "In contrast to the image offered by the combat shock patient of soldiers psychologically damaged by battle, the trauma of survivors testified to the transgression of a fundamental boundary, beyond which social life was destroyed" (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009: 73). Survivors and those who did not take part in the war, are one of the concerns of Freud after First World War and it remains to be a topic of analysis in trauma theory later on as well, since violence of war causes trauma.

It is germane to mention a crucial development in trauma theory. In the 1980s American Psychiatric Association introduced a new concept of trauma based on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses both human and natural catastrophes" (Caruth, 1995: 3). PTSD as a concept has been cumulatively developed on the works of Freud and the phenomenon brings trauma into a discussion and an explanation under the umbrella term. PTSD includes after trauma effects both in individual and collective experiences of violent events and it does not stay in the boundaries of Vietnam War veteran experiences, and its symptoms are pathological.

PTSD owes its debt to social movements emerging in the US against Vietnam War. Fassin and Rechtman argue that trauma has been recognized as a discipline and gained recognition in popular culture thanks to the effective political campaigns of feminist movement and Vietnam veterans in the US. They point out the symptoms of PTSD as follows:

The symptoms, which might occur in any combination, were of three types: recurrent, intrusive recollections, such as waking dreams, frequent nightmares, or painful flashbacks; avoidance of situations that aroused recollections of the event, accompanied by a numbing of general

responsiveness to the external world which might seriously affect social interaction; hyper-alertness and exaggerated startle response. (2009: 77)

In the academic circles, introduction of PTSD has been welcomed since it defines and recognizes the existence of trauma for survivors of both individual and collective events. While studying trauma theory PTSD cannot be neglected, because it opens new discussions of trauma in the field, and its symptoms are considered to be pathological.

Another important and pivotal research on trauma is Judith Herman's seminal book *Trauma and Recovery the Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* first published in 1992. Herman remarks that when there is no political movement testifying to the silence of both collective and individual traumas there are no witnesses to uncover the secrecy. "In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation, and denial are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness" (Herman, 2015: 9). As can be seen in the definition of PTSD, strong political movements are effective in definitions of trauma since they expose the silenced voice of survivors. In her book, Herman defines trauma as a social event and a collective experience. Herman's discussion of the topic of bearing witness to the silence of trauma requires a new perspective which is witnessing itself.

1.1.1. The Act of Witnessing in Literary Trauma Theory

Since the early 90s, witnessing has gained importance through the works of Holocaust survivors and analysis of representations of the genocide. Testimonies of Holocaust survivors have given rise to the emergence of literary trauma theory which elaborates on the collective trauma. Shoshana Felman, one of the pioneering scholars in literary trauma studies, remarks on the power of testimonies:

As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. (1995: 16)

According to Felman, testimony is a product of what memory brings out into the open and how one remembers the trauma is given through narratives; however, for the critic it does not suggest that the event reaches an end. It is a construct of what has been repressed and it is incomplete since it is not recognized by the survivor.

Experiences of trauma include the survivor's inability to assimilate the event into a narrative and to never recognizing its numbing silence. Felman attributes this situation to the survivor's failure in accessing the event and argues that testimony can be a way of recovery by achieving the "truth" about the event.

Psychoanalysis, in this way, profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of testimony, by submitting, and by recognizing for the first time in the history as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continue to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not available to its own speaker. (1995: 24)

According to Felman, the burden of trauma becomes so hard to handle that the survivor does not have access to the past event. Not developing a narrative based on witnessing the event and forgetting that it happened are parts of trauma, and Felman calls it failure in witnessing. For Felman, the truth about the event is not accessible to the survivor of a trauma since she is shattered by the impact of the past event.

What Felman offers in the case of failure in witnessing the event is the significance of constructing a narrative so that it can be accessible to the survivor. In that case, testimony and bearing witness in trauma compose of confronting the violent event and creating a voice or even utterances that can be traced to the trauma. "The story of survival is, in fact, the incredible narration of the survival of the story, at the crossroads between life and death" (Felman, 1995: 47). The ambiguous line between life and death here constitutes the aftermath of trauma and it becomes available to the survivor through her own narrative. Bearing witness includes remembering the event and transference of it to others who might hear the speaker. On that account, witnessing conquers the survivor and it is not outside the range of trauma.

In relation to Holocaust testimonies, Dori Laub, a psychiatrist working with Holocaust survivors who is himself a child survivor of the Holocaust, defines bearing witness as follows:

The victim's narrative- the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma- does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that

has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (Laub, 1992: 57)

Being a witness requires a hearer when the survivor embraces the event and feels the need to speak about it. Regardless of the need to narrate the event, trauma narrative may not represent the “truth” and testimony might fail the survivor as in the case of a collective event that is the Holocaust, defined by Laub.

For Laub, Holocaust testimonies refer to an absence, absence of witness and only silence and suffering of the survivor emerge from the trauma narrative. Laub continues:

That while silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, destination, and a binding oath. To not return from this silence is rule rather than exception. (1992: 57)

Silence and forgetting are intricately related to the Holocaust experience and silence provides survivors a safe space. Laub mentions the hearer’s part in witnessing as well and he cautions them to recognize the silence surrounding the survivor. Accordingly, trauma is so overwhelming that the witness survivor might fail to respond to her own suffering and confine herself to trauma’s overwhelming silence as discussed by Laub.

What is central to Felman’s and Laub’s arguments is their insistence on the idea that witnessing fails in Holocaust testimonies. They name it “collapse of witnessing” which refers to the silence surrounding the Holocaust survivor.

In other words, in her memory of her Holocaust experience, as well as in the distorted way in which her present life proceeded from this memory, she failed to be an authentic witness to herself. This collapse of witnessing is precisely, in my view, what is central to the Holocaust experience. (Laub, 1992: 80)

What emerges from the silence for Laub is how the witness survivor collapses when it comes to testifying and creating a language based on her witnessing. Not being able to obtain it, the “truth” about the event, survivor fails to respond to her own witnessing.

Testifying is an aftermath of trauma like witnessing, forgetting and remaining silent. If the trauma is collective, like the Holocaust, then it exceeds the boundaries of individuality. Felman defines the situation as follows:

To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to take responsibility- in speech- for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences. (1992: 204)

According to Laub's and Felman's articulations, on the one hand there is the burden of trauma, and on the other, there comes the problem of communication to make the listener aware of the survivor's endurance and the survivor needs to become the hearer of her own suffering. For the critics here, those people who need to hear the silence and fragmented narrative of the survivor are mental health professionals.

It can be seen that testimonies are analyzed in literary trauma theory in conjunction with different characteristics of trauma which are forgetting, failure in getting to the "truth" and becoming silent after the event. But what about literary texts that speak about the trauma of witnessing both to one's own suffering and transference of it to others? "It is precisely because of this representational paradox inherent to traumatic processes, Hartmann argues, that literature offers a privilege medium for "testimony to psychological wounds" (qtd in Sütterlin, 2020: 19). In her essay about the developments within trauma theory, Sütterlin defines trauma narratives as the medium between the event and witnessing. Trauma representations are transformed into a way of survivor's telling her own witnessing and there emerges the enduring, suffering and burden of the event that needs to be out through narratives.

There is no escape from cultural influences in literary texts. Witnessing is shaped by socially given events in fictional accounts of writings. For Hanna Meretoja, witnessing is within the boundaries of culture, and she further claims that "dealing with any kind of personal and collective trauma is always culturally mediated, and the cultural dimension of narrating and giving meaning also affects how the traumatizing event or process is experienced in the first place" (2020: 28). Retrospection is culturally constructed and therefore witnessing is highly shaped by cultural influences. What emerges from witnessing accounts of trauma narratives are cultural effects.

Consequently, it becomes more obvious that witnessing and testimonies are one of the major elements tackled in literary trauma theory. Witnessing entails an audience and it might attract the readers' or the listeners' attention. Additionally, witnessing does not know any cultural boundaries since once the word about trauma

is out, there is no control in who might hear the survivor's resilience. "Caruth and others have fleshed out this claim that trauma can build bridges between people from diverse historical backgrounds- by drawing attention to the acts of transcultural witnessing that trauma often entails" (Garloff, 2020: 211). Here, Katja Garloff argues that what testimonies and/or narratives create through witnessing acts is a transcultural empathy that might motivate readers to empathize with the speaker.

The question arises then: how does one survive witnessing death born of collective events? The question brings us to Freud's death drive and Robert Jay Lifton's analyses of survivor guilt and "death encounter". In her interview with Lifton, Caruth reminds him that he talks "a lot about the notion of witnessing in trauma and the survivor mission, the impulse to bear witness, which is presumably part of the recovery process but also about false witnessing" (1995: 138). Lifton locates witnessing at the core of his research when he conducts interviews with *hibakushas*, Hiroshima nuclear bombing survivors, and he acquires new perspectives from their experiences with the idea that what they witness is death during the explosion and this situation becomes critical in his projects on collective trauma. Death is an issue that must be raised when one talks about witnessing a collective event such as Dresden firebombing, September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Iraq which all comprise the scope of this study.

As discussed above in this study, definitions of trauma mainly stem from trauma narratives. Trauma narratives are about bearing witness to a past event that is influential on the survivor's resilience. Trauma includes forgetting, being silent and creating a narrative based on witnessing so that recovery becomes possible. At that point, assimilating the event into a narrative is significant for recovering from the event no matter how much it is beyond the survivor's recognition. And in collective traumas, such as wars and violent events, survivors bear witness to death as it is conveyed in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer*. In the coming chapter discussions about "death encounter" and how death drive operates in collective traumas are provided with Freud's and Robert Jay Lifton's theories, the issue is critical since in both novels, character narrators are forced to bear witness to death born of collective events.

CHAPTER TWO

WITNESSING DEATH IN COLLECTIVE TRAUMAS

2.1. DEATH DRIVE AND TRAUMA

Death is an enigma that brings out the destruction in life. It is an issue that is not developed and discussed much in literary trauma theory and it is in the abyss of the unconscious thoughts and acts. In this chapter, witnessing death as a traumatic event in cases of collective events is examined with Freud's death drive theory. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* witnessing death is one of the concerns of the novels since what historical violence leads to is forced witness to death in both narratives. In Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, retrospective first-person narrators endure the trauma of witnessing death triggered by wars and violent attacks; therefore, discussion on death is a sine qua non component of this research.

Death is a topic raised by different disciplines in academia but this thesis mainly operates on psychoanalytic works of death drive and "death encounter". Death is an event that is always witnessed and it acts out in the unconscious, never recognized. "Here, death takes a meaning other than an experience of death. It takes a meaning that comes from the death of another person, of what concerns us therein" (Levinas, 2000: 10). To speak of psychoanalytically, death is not completely registered and therefore inarticulate, which makes it unrecognizable. Death is what is left from its destruction in life for those left behind the event. It always includes the other and it can only be witnessed and witnessing death seems to be a traumatic event, especially in collective events.

Death, particularly being forced to witness it, includes parts of traumatic encounters in collective events such as wars. Even what the survivor experiences after a traumatic event has death-like resonances in regard to feeling numbness and remaining silent. Repetition of acts that can be considered harmful to the survivor beyond her recognition and remembering the event without one's control over the situation are bits of traumatic experience of witnessing death in collective events.

For Caruth, an analogous “deathlike break” lies at the heart of trauma; the victim of trauma who cannot symbolize or represent the traumatic event or accident that caused her condition nevertheless obsessively “performs”, reenacts, or experiences it in the form of flashbacks, dreams, and related symptoms. (Leys, 2000: 267)

Leys, in her criticism of Caruth’s interpretation of trauma as unrepresentable, compares aftermath of trauma with living as if the survivor’s sense of identity deprives her of the meaning that the trauma inflicts. In Leys’s arguments, consequences of trauma are likened to experiences of death, which reminds the survivor of her incapability to recognize what the event causes.

In the analysis of death, the importance of witnessing needs to be thought since it is what the survivor is left with after being forced to see that others die from the same event she survives, especially in collective cases of violent attacks. On this account, literary trauma theory’s emphasis upon witnessing can be developed with death encounter of the survivor which mainly relates to the approach employed in this study. “Witnessed events include, but are not limited to, observing the serious injury or unnatural death of another person due to violent assault, accident, war, or disaster or unexpectedly witnessing a dead body or body parts” (Smelser, 2004: 57). Neil J. Smelser argues that there is the situation of being a forced witness to death in collective events. Death comes to the conscious mind for instance in wars, because death brings out into the open what is repressed in life that makes the witness survivor confront the possibility of her own death.

To move further about witnessing death it is necessary to consider Freud’s influential and still controversial work: “death drive”. Cathy Caruth begins literary trauma theory with interpretation of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. What is borrowed from Freud’s concepts are that repetition compulsion and death drive are forces beyond one’s recognition and they work in the unconscious when one is confronted with a traumatic event and/or a threat.

Freud discovered the repetitiveness of certain patterns of human behavior and the inevitability or, if you wish, the inescapable nature of this repetitiveness. And he called this phenomenon “repetition compulsion” or “compulsive repetition” One more example: the second major innovation which Freud introduced into psychoanalytic thinking was the concept of “death instinct.” (Zilboorg, 1961)

In the introduction of Freud's text, Zilboorg as quoted above introduces major developments in psychoanalysis introduced by Freud which are used in literary trauma theory today. For Zilboorg, repetition compulsion becomes destructive because one does not have control over repetitive acts and death drive is at work. This is where death drive and repetition compulsion emerge from the unconscious acts and thoughts beyond one's recognition and it becomes active when one encounters a threat, in other words, a traumatic event.

Death instinct which is interchangeably used with death drive depending on the author's choice implies life's destructiveness. Even the vantage point of the concept which dates back to 1920 alludes to the annihilating effect of First World War and the phenomenon emerges from Freud's witnessing to the survivors' efforts to deal with the war's impacts. Dori Laub and Susanna Lee argue in their article:

The idea of the death instinct was created by Freud in response to his experience with the trauma of World War I. Freud tried to understand why people tended to repeat painful or traumatic experiences, since such behavior struck him as being in contradiction the "pleasure principle. (2003: 435)

Accordingly, death drive and repetition compulsion become part of traumatic experience for those who witness a collective violent event. Death drive wins over pleasure giving acts of the survivor and manipulates her beyond her acknowledgement. It is essential to accentuate that death drive is not about one's witnessing death. Rather, it is about experiencing an intermittent threat that evokes some repetitive acts harmful for the survivor caused by the event.

Purporting that death instinct is inseparable and should be considered in the treatment of trauma, Laub and Lee continue:

The connection between massive psychic trauma and the concept of death instinct is explored using the basic assumption that the death instinct is unleashed through and is in a sense characteristic of traumatic experience, and that the concept of the death instinct is indispensable to the understanding and treatment of trauma. (2003: 433)

Therefore, death instinct operates when there is a threat which is also called by Freud a stimulus that the subject cannot protect herself against since "trauma is always unexpected" (Caruth, 1996: 6). Death drive is a force beyond one's recognition and it appears when there is a disrupting event such as trauma. Death drive forces the survivor to repeat the acts of the unconscious, particularly in collective traumas.

Both witnessing death and traumatic event have an impact upon the acts of the survivor. Consequences of trauma reveal itself on different stages, though; for the time being, it is more appropriate to delve more into the relation between death drive and trauma.

Characteristics of traumatic experience, such as dissolution of the empathic bond, failure to assimilate experience into psychic representation and structure, a tendency to repeat traumatic experience, and a resistance to remembering and knowing, are considered as trauma-induced death instinct derivatives. (Laub & Lee, 2003: 433)

What literary trauma theory self-referentially returns to is the survivor's incapability to understand the event and she is left with the force of death drive after being a forced witness to a collective violent event. In their analysis, Laub and Lee places death drive at the center of traumatic experiences since it is the force behind the unconscious acts and it is what triggers the repetition of violent deeds.

The essays Freud wrote in 1915 collected under "*Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*" are significant to take into account when one analyzes death drive as a force upon the witness who experiences a collective traumatic event. It should be reminded that Freud wrote the articles in 1915 during First World War and five years before he introduces death drive. Freud examines the effects of the war on survivors and individuals who did not directly participate in the war:

I propose to pick out two among the factors which are responsible for the mental distress felt by non-combatants, against which it is such as heavy task to struggle, and to treat of them here: the disillusionment which this war has evoked, and the altered attitude towards death which this- like every other war- forces upon us. (1957: 275)

What Freud observes about the war is how the war forced witness survivors to face death. Freud here recognizes the shocking reality of death for survivors since they are confronted with its presence in life. Therefore, it can be contended that what violence brings in case of a collective event is an encounter with death. And like trauma, it influences witnesses in such a way that they are shattered by the event unconsciously.

One does not live by accepting the reality of death in everyday encounters and death appears all of a sudden from threatening collective events and even if it does not

include witnessing death, death drive is still at work. Yet, if someone is forced to witness death then it makes the survivor confront the event as one of life's realities.

Hence psycho-analytic school could venture on the assertion that at bottom no one believes in his own death, or, to put the same thing in another way, that in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.
(Freud, 1957: 289)

In that case, how does it become possible to endure witnessing death when one does not even recognize it as one of the realities of life? The novels *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* which are the topic of coming chapters might respond to the question, however, for now, Freud thinks death destroys the image of one's sense of immortality and integrated sense of self.

Locating Freud's analyses on death drive, since it discusses the importance of death as a force behind the unconscious acts in tandem with trauma, requires one to explore the text that made what literary trauma theory is today: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Cathy Caruth in her article "*Parting words: trauma, silence and survival*" discusses that:

This article examines an enigma at the heart of Freud's work on trauma: the surprising emergence, from within the theory of the death drive, of the drive to life, a form of survival that both witnesses and turns away from the trauma in which it originates. (2001: 7)

Here, Caruth interprets Freud's text in relation to death drive's existence in the unconscious and its triggering effect when one feels threatened. Trauma acts out in repetitive dreams and in narratives. What is one of the striking features of her essay on death drive is how there is still something that can emerge from the complications of witnessing death that might create a novelty. And it includes the trauma of witnessing death in case of a collective violent event and there is no appropriate scholar than Robert Jay Lifton to deal with the issue. Lifton's psychoanalytical works on death encounter are significant for this thesis, since he examines witness survivors' confrontation with death when they are threatened by a collective event.

2.2. ROBERT JAY LIFTON'S WORKS ON "DEATH ENCOUNTER"

Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist, who worked in Japan, is the earliest scholar to study the aftermath of Hiroshima nuclear bombing. What he acquires from the

interviews he conducts with *hibakushas* is annihilation, devastation of a nation that reminds survivors death in the event. Lifton observes “the most striking psychological feature of this immediate experience was the sense of a sudden and absolute shift from normal existence to an overwhelming encounter with death” (1967: 21). He refers to the effects of the bombing which forced survivors to encounter death by witnessing others’ death. Lifton locates “death encounter” at the center of the experience of collective violent events such as attacks and wars.

According to Lifton, new feelings of the survivors emerge from their witnessing specific to death encounter experience. For instance, for Lifton, survivor guilt which is the survivor’s thinking that why she has not died from the same incident that others have belongs to experiences of witnessing death in collective events. Lifton makes use of the category of “death guilt” so as to encompass “all forms of self-condemnation associated with literal or symbolic exposure to death and dying, including those usually linked with the sense of shame. Guilt over survival priority, then, is a form of death guilt” (1967: 36). From now on, and in his further studies, Lifton takes “death guilt” as the locus of his analyses as one that emerges from death encounter in the aftermath of the event, which implies that witnessing death in the event has caused survivors feel guilt, since they have not been able to do anything to prevent victims’ death.

Death haunts *hibakusha* in the disaster and this applies to other collective traumas. Survivors’ efforts against demanding complications of death encounter forces them to realize that death is real and it is a threat. Death is the force behind survivors’ feelings and it haunts them overwhelmingly.

It was an extraordinary achievement, entailing as it did a measurement of mastery over history’s greatest single act of manmade devastation, but it was to remain severely tainted by a variety of physical and emotional remnants, all related to an aura of death. (Lifton, 1967: 102)

In Lifton’s idiom, feeling of guilt and inability of the survivor to preserve her sense of self are all connected to death encounter. Death becomes visible and apparent in the minds of survivors and that is when trauma becomes effective beyond one’s understanding. It should also be added that though Lifton writes before the emergence of literary trauma theory, Caruth’s endeavor to link Lifton’s analyses to trauma reveals Lifton’s contribution to the field.

Others who borrow from the works of Lifton, such as Roger Luckhurst indicates:

Lifton himself consistently emphasized the death-in-life experienced by Hiroshima survivors and war veterans was a result of 'inundating the organism with death imagery' that could not be symbolically integrated or narratively formulated. (2008: 148)

In terms of constructing a narrative based on witnessing death, "death encounter" is another important component of the experience. For Luckhurst, death is a force on the survivor making her incapable when it comes to assimilating the event into a narrative. Death is a constituent of trauma when it is a collective event and it is taken into consideration in literary trauma theory, particularly in Lifton's works.

Caruth's formulation of trauma in relation to knowing what happened and not recognizing the event are the issues discussed by Lifton in his conducts years before the emergence of literary trauma theory. This time, in Lifton's research, not recognizing and not understanding trauma are connected to confrontation with death and being a forced witness. "This unmastered, and to some extent unmasterable, death encounter prevents *hibakusha* from grasping or "knowing" what they have been through. It prevents them from making the experience part of their ongoing self-process" (Lifton, 1967: 371). According to Lifton, the survivor is filled with fear after witnessing others' death and she is under the influence of the event without acknowledging its effects. There does not seem to be much of the survivor's identity that is relatable for her to the event since she is shattered by death's presence.

In his later work, *The Broken Connection on Death and the Continuity of Life* Robert Jay Lifton improves his psychoanalytic approaches on death encounter. He thoroughly develops his earlier arguments with new perspectives and his 1979 book is more helpful to further the idea that death encounter makes survivors confront death and feel guilt. He extends his observations on death encounter and places them in a psychoanalytic perspective arguing that witnessing death causes experiences of trauma like the effects of infantile feelings. Lifton argues:

Death is constructed from its already existing equivalents. Expanding encounters with the environment contribute importantly to that process, but as psychologists and as parents we probably overestimate the specificity of environmental death encounter. (1996: 64)

For Lifton, death is a force that is already existent since one is born and witnessing death in collective events only triggers its earlier effects.

In tandem with Caruth, Lifton also mentions the significance of death drive that is mentioned in the previous chapter. Now moving beyond death encounter, Lifton links feelings of guilt with the force of death drive operating in cases of collective traumas. “To be sure, aggression and destructiveness and even guilt derive from “death instinct” (Lifton, 1996: 30). Here, through the acts of destructive behavior that is harmful to the survivor, death drive already has its part in violent behaviors. How does something already operating in life like death drive belong to the unconscious? Apparently, it becomes observable in cases of collective traumatic events and bearing witness to what is repressed: death.

Death imprint on the survivor makes the witness feel guilt since she is subjected to its violence and she has not been able to do anything to prevent others’ death, but only becomes a witness. The survivor suffers from the burden of witnessing death in collective cases once death appears out of nowhere and its consequences haunt her. Lifton has more to say about survivor’s suffering:

Suffering is associated with being “stuck.” Hence the indelible image is always associated with guilt, and in its most intense form takes the shape of an image of ultimate horror: a single image (often containing brutalized children or dying people whom the survivor loved) that condenses the totality of the destruction and trauma and evokes particularly intense feelings of pity and self-condemnation in the survivor. (1996: 172)

In the image of death, no matter what form it takes on, the survivor is under the influence of confronting something that has been repressed for Lifton. Reality of death becomes apparent all of a sudden for survivors, especially in collective violent events since they are not capable of preventing others’ death that they are forced to bear witness.

Lifton’s work on death drive’s force on witnesses emphasizes that trauma functions beyond survivor’s recognition in collective cases. While death is not recognizable to the conscious mind, witnessing death forces survivors to face death’s existence emerging in collective events. Death drive is critical in literary trauma theory since Freud argues that it belongs to the unconscious acts of survivors when they encounter a threat. Therefore, witnessing death takes place when there is a collective threatening event especially in cases of war and attack, and witnesses are challenged

by the destructive reality of death in life which is tackled in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer*.



CHAPTER THREE

POETICS OF TRAUMA NARRATIVES

3.1. WITNESSING AND FIRST-PERSON NARRATORS

This chapter is devoted to analysis of traumatic memory and its representation in first-person narrators. There is a complex relation between the trauma of witnessing death and first-person narrator which has a retrospective look on the past events. The purpose here is to bring two significant elements together under the arguments of poetics of first-person narrators. The issue of traumatic memory and first-person narrator is not covered comprehensively, and inevitably, the analysis requires to bring different authors' perspectives on the relation. Naturally, narrating the trauma necessitates a retrospective look on the past events and witnessing accounts of writings achieve their purposes through first-person narrators as in the case of two trauma novels that are the topic of developing chapters. The relation between trauma and first-person narrators is critical for developing arguments of this research, since both novels' first-person narrators are witnesses of collective events leading to death.

Trauma is always transferred through narratives. Creating a narrative based on a traumatic experience involves remembering the event. In that case, memory becomes important for achieving "the truth" about the event and it is in the limitations of forgetting. Michael Lambek argues that "memory is understood as no mere human product" and it is always shaped by one's social surroundings (1996: 301). When it comes to remember the traumatic event there is no escape from social constructs and traumatic memory is conditioned by whoever hears the trauma and how the survivor is positioned by the outcomes of the past event.

Traumatic narratives may have first-person narrators. Witnessing the event requires its survivor to create a narrative based on her own witnessing.

Memories are eyewitness accounts (assuming sight is the privileged sense; often it is not) only if the emphasis is put on the witnessing, a moral act, rather than on the eye. Rather than treat memory as a discrete thing, stored and retrieved, or as the biologically innate processes of storage and retrieval waiting to be discovered by the experiments of the psychologist, I have been arguing that we understand it as a culturally mediated expression of the temporal dimension of experience, in particular of social commitments and identifications. (Lambek, 1996)

As discussed above that memory construction depends on witnessing, in traumatic encounters, memory has a part in creating a fragmented narrative. Fragmented narrative occurs as a result of remembering the past in pieces and trauma's presence forms the way the events are told. An important question emerges then, how does trauma narratives work in fictional accounts of witnessing?

At that point, narrative theory, especially Genette's debates on temporal relations of narratives, offers a lot for analyzing the strong ties between witnessing and first-person narrators. Trauma narratives refer to the past event with a retrospective look and they are fragmentary.

Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are filtered through some prism or perspective ('focalizer'). (Rimmon-Kenan, 2005: 3)

Rimmon-Kenan's definition on texts in general perfectly describes traumatic memory and its representation in narratives. For her, perspectives of first-person narrators are given part by part and they are unstable since witnessing is represented within the limitations of memory.

One of the issues raised in narrative theory is the idea that narrators' perspective, no matter if it is omniscient or first-person, might change with the unfolding events given in plots. "With these few distinctions in hand, narrative theorists have gone deeply and controversially into the relation between "who sees or perceives" and "who speaks" (Puckett, 2016: 130). The difference between a seeing narrator and a speaking position of a narrator arises from memory's influence. Events in plots are effective on narrator's perspective since the past may have an impact on narrating time, and memory is conditioned by social encounters. For instance, in trauma narratives with first-person accounts, "who sees" and "who speaks" are different since trauma is effective beyond the witness narrator's knowledge and past events are communicated within the limits of memory.

Just as memory is highly unreliable, trauma representations have their share of this situation. Particularly in first-person narrators, the past event is given within the limitations of memory. "In this sense, I undertake a role somewhat similar to that of a retrospective first-person narrator: a fairly complex role, often entailing double focalization, never free of the danger of unreliability" (Rimmon- Kenan, 2005: 140).

While talking about her experiences with narrative theory, Shlomith Rimmon- Kenan considers her works as if a product of first-person narrator. In that sense, she argues that first-person narratives should not be considered reliable since they are under the influence of past events given in plots for the sake of a coherent story.

Focalization is a term introduced by Gerard Genette in his narrative theory approaches. It is essential to consider what focalization does and what it means in texts. According to Rimmon-Kenan (2005), focalization is one of the characteristics of narratives that enables to create a vision through the story which is communicated by the story-teller, i.e., the narrator (45). Focalization, like many aspects of narrative theory, is part of what readers can achieve through the text that is developed in plots. As the name suggests, the narrator focalizes certain aspects of the story through repetitions and self-referentially referring back to the text's events in a way that helps to construct a meaning. In trauma narratives, focalization can be given through retrospectively observing the past event, and in witnessing accounts, it is communicated through the influence of the past's presence.

Focalization is a matter of a speaker either as a character or as an observer who all construct the text through different ways of narratives. In the case of a first-person narrator, focalization develops and changes with the observer's surroundings.

As far as focalization is concerned, there is no difference between third-person centre of consciousness and first-person retrospective narration. In both, the focalizer is a character within the represented world. The only difference between the two is the identity of the narrator. (Rimmon- Kenan, 2005: 75)

What can be inferred from Rimmon- Kenan's argument is that focalization depends on the narrator's perspective shifting with different encounters. In trauma narratives it usually takes place by remembering painful memories that are revealed later since traumatic events are faced belatedly as discussed in previous chapters.

Witness narrators may be characters in literary texts. In narrative theory, character narrators who develop with the events are called homodiegetic narrators. "A narrator who does not participate in the story is called 'heterodiegetic' (Genette 1972) whereas the one who takes part in it, at least in some manifestation of his 'self,' is 'homodiegetic'" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2005: 98). Homodiegetic characters are the ones who become witnesses to the events especially in trauma narratives since they

experience the violence first-handedly. The strong relation between witnessing and first-person narrators emerges from encountering events which are shaped by character narrator's social space.

Since trauma narratives are highly dependent on the past event they are constructed upon memory. As already highlighted that memory is highly dependent on space and time, it is formed within the boundaries of social constructions.

Narration, we say, implies memory and prediction implies expectation. Now, what is it to remember? It is to have an image of the past. How is this possible? Because this image is an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind. (Ricoeur, 1984: 10)

Ricoeur in his analyses on the relation between time and narrative bases his arguments on the idea that time is what constructs narratives and there is no escape from temporal relations both in historical and fictional narratives. Narratives are confined to temporal effects and they reinvent the past events through a retrospective look, especially in accounts of witness narrators.

First-person witness narrators are shaped by their social conditions. What they convey may have something to say about temporal contingencies. "Whether we say "imitation" or "representation" (as do the most recent French translators), what has to be understood is the mimetic activity, the active process of imitating or representing something" (Ricoeur, 1984: 33). In narrative theory, mimetic quality of art is discussed since Aristotle's *Poetics*. With the emergence of ideological approaches to narratives in the 90s, representation has been used more as a term since what narratives represent are historical and ideological construction of their times. Ricoeur argues that narratives based on witnessing acts represent or mimic social realities given within their temporal and spatial effects.

Narratives are generally about creating a meaning through plots. Narrative theory has emphasized the importance of meaning making nature of narratives and it immensely emphasizes readers' role in the process. Kent Puckett (2016) defines narrative as follows:

Narrative is what results from the effort to make real or imagined events and objects meaningful in relation to one another, whether that effort is fictional, historical, political, financial, psychological, social or scientific: narrative theory then is what we do when we try in a variety of ways to understand those different efforts to arrange events and make them meaningful. (2)

Accordingly, creating a meaning through encounters within the plot construct narratives. In that case, narrative theory deals with the issues such as remembering the events of the past i.e., retrospection, the future turn of the events, and how to convey them in a meaningful fashion.

In narrative theory, Aristotle's *Poetics* is considered to be one of the first endeavors in analyses of narratives. Like how Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* raises issues that literary trauma theory keeps returning to, *Poetics* is the text that has the same effect in narrative theory. Puckett by referring to Aristotle states:

Aristotle's famous claim: literature is philosophically superior to history; because literature deals in probabilities- not only what happened but also what could have happened- it has the potential to represent the process of historical change as well as the historical events themselves. (2016: 48)

Puckett's reinterpretation of Aristotle's claims reveals the importance of narratives about the past, since it implies the possibility of historical events' representation in narratives. And, in both trauma novels this becomes the case, because witness narrators are formed by the collective events causing bereavement in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and the narrator's recognition of death surrounding his country in *The Corpse Washer*.

In terms of analyses of plots in first-person narratives, narrating equals to witnessing events presented with different encounters. Plots in accounts of witness narratives may be borrowed from social realities. No matter what their plots are first-person narrators are influenced by the presence of past events.

Narrative, as we have seen, must ever present itself as a repetition of events that have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized repetition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events. (Brooks, 1992: 99)

For Peter Brooks, plot is a must in narratives creating conflict of stories. Brooks argues that narratives achieve coherence through repetitions that refer back to specific events and they focus readers on the importance of the event; i.e., focalization. In trauma narratives if a witness narrator tells the past event, then it should be kept in mind that the event is beyond narrator's understanding, because trauma is usually not recognized.

There is a strong relation between homodiegetic witness narrators and plots. In that situation, plots are conveyed through witnessing to an event and it becomes central in narrative construction.

It is indeed plotting, as an activity, as a dynamic machination, that may provide our best way into the reading of a fully achieved plot. And this activity of plotting may be most readily discernible in a retrospective first-person narrative. (Brooks, 1992: 114)

Brooks describes how first-person narrative works in plots and he argues that it is the most satisfying way to convey a meaning. He mentions that plotting achieves an end through character narrators' looks on the past event, and it should be added that in trauma narratives, plot is suspended with the event that is confronted belatedly since trauma is at work.

In trauma narratives, plot is constructed fragmentedly. Witness narrators who bear witness to the traumatic event confront its violence later than the event and self-referentially refer to it. "Disorders of emplotment are read as mimicking the traumatic effect.... The plots of trauma narratives can belatedly and magically reconfigure entire life stories" (Luckhurst, 2008: 88). In that case, witnessing becomes central in trauma narratives since the event haunts the narrator in her endeavors and the plot is built on testifying against its violence. For that reason, for Luckhurst, first-person narrators become witnesses to the violence in trauma narratives and coherence is created within the limitations of the past event.

In trauma narratives with a first-person look on the events, witnessing constructs the coherence of stories. It should be kept in mind that witnessing is shaped by memory construction and it exceeds the boundaries of social encounters. When it comes to testifying against a traumatic event first-person narrator might be the most effective tool since it may create recovery and make readers empathize with the narrator's struggles. Since belatedness is defined to be at the core of traumatic experiences, in trauma narratives, the past event appears fragmentedly and it is confronted belatedly. Temporality of trauma plays a part in creating a narrative and the question emerges: How does time work in trauma narratives?

3.1.1. Witnessing and Temporality in Trauma Narratives

Trauma narratives are always representation of past events. Consequently, temporality is a significant component of trauma narratives. There is a strong relation between time and trauma due to its belated appearance in narratives. How does traumatic memory appear in trauma narratives then? To think about the question, one might explore narrative theory's endeavor in time's influence on narratives. This chapter is devoted to Genette's essential terms about representations of past events in narratives and anticipation of the future, namely in that order, analepsis and diegesis. However, by discussing Genette's terms the goal here is to pay attention to trauma narratives' representation of the past event.

Temporal elements of narratives construct story's time in relation to space. Space is shaped by the time's effects. In trauma narratives time appears to be about the past events conditioned by social unexpected encounters.

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for "consuming" it is the time needed for crossing or traversing it, like a road or a field. (Genette, 1980: 34)

Genette locates time's relation to narratives in temporal and spatial experiences and he claims that the past events are revisited through memory which is always retrospective. Since traumatic memory is fragmented and bit by bit, its narrative is based on witnessing the violent event.

Introducing his terms; analepsis and prolepsis, Genette is not satisfied with defining temporal relations of the past and possible future events in narratives, especially in Marcel Proust's famous novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* which is Genette's concern in his preliminary essays on narratology. Genette proposes:

Moreover, to avoid the psychological connotations of such terms as "anticipation" or "retrospection" which automatically evoke subjective phenomena, we will eliminate these terms most of the time in favor of two others that are more neutral, designating as prolepsis any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later, designating as analepsis any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment, and reserving the general term anachrony to designate all forms of discordance between two temporal orders of story and narrative (we

will see later these discordances are not entirely limited to analepsis and prolepsis. (1980: 40)

For Genette, prolepsis and analepsis are intricately related to time's effect in narrative structures, and both refer to two concepts on time, the past and the future of events. Genette defines prolepsis in conjunction with anticipation of future events in narratives which might slightly relate to foreshadowing that can be constructed with the past events. Analepsis, on the other hand, which is a primary concern here, since looking back on trauma requires recalling the past event, is about how memory is constructed in narratives.

Consequently, what analepsis brings to the narrative is causal relations since without retrospection of events in stories, narrative does not create an intelligible account of the plot. Replacing analepsis with anachronies of the stories sometimes, Genette continues to define what analepsis does in narratives.

The first, which I will call completing analepsis, or "returns," comprises the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative (the narrative is thus organized by temporary omissions and more or less belated operations, according to a narrative logic that is partially independent of the passing time. (1980: 51)

In narrative theory, there is a strong emphasis upon the difference between story time and discourse time, and it constructs the basis of Genette's definition of analepsis. Narrative returns to an event that is significant for the overall construction of stories and it fills the gap for causal relations of stories as argued by Genette. Through analepsis, narrators, either an omniscient or first-person, return to the past event and observes it within the narrating time.

To delve more into how analepsis works in trauma narratives one needs to consider belatedness of traumatic encounters. Analepsis in trauma narratives are about belatedness of the past event.

An analepsis is a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story. Conversely, prolepsis is a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. (Rimmon- Kenan, 2005: 48)

For Rimmon- Kenan, analepsis takes place in narratives when narrator remembers the past events and in trauma narratives, it helps to construct a coherent story based on witnessing. Since trauma is repetitive beyond the survivor's

understanding and acts out in the unconscious, trauma narratives work with the same logic.

Genette calls analepsis a retrospective narrator and prolepsis anticipation of future. The line between present, past and future becomes blurry in analepsis and prolepsis. Character-narrators' anticipation of events might not correlate with the past and retrospective look might not reflect the best about the past.

But the very ideas of retrospection or anticipation, which ground the narrative categories of analepsis and prolepsis in "psychology," take for granted a perfectly clear temporal consciousness and unambiguous relationships among present, past, and future. (Genette, 1980: 79)

Genette's argument in the quotation perfectly describes trauma narratives since trauma always refers to an event in the past. In that sense, retrospection includes trauma narratives and it is a work of memory since witnessing is needed to be communicated by remembering the past events.

Narrative theory should be considered while discussing trauma narratives. Trauma narratives represent events that have a role in construction of memory and temporal relations are stipulated by social encounters provided in stories. Anne Whitehead has more to say:

Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection. (2004: 3)

Trauma narratives may represent social realities and their narrators bear witness to violent events. Witnessing, in that case, is based on remembering the past event and trauma narratives are not deprived of the event's influence.

Literary trauma theory emphasizes belatedness of trauma. Trauma appears later than the event in different forms such as in language, dreams and nightmares or in the unconscious acts of the survivor due to death drive and repetition compulsion. Anne Whitehead articulates on trauma fiction:

Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma does not line in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition. (2004: 11)

In trauma fiction, for Whitehead, trauma as an event beyond the survivor's reach becomes visible in non-chronological order of the story in narratives. The survivor does not recognize trauma's presence in the aftermath of trauma and it haunts her. The line between remembering the event and recognizing its presence becomes blurry.

On the whole, trauma narratives should be considered in conjunction with narrative theory since it has a lot to offer in terms of narrative structures. First-person narrators can be the best way to tell a traumatic event based on witnessing and it always takes place within memory construction. Trauma narratives work like trauma, since they both refer to a past event and its impact in the present. In that case, analepsis, first-person retrospective witness narrator and temporality in literary texts all relate to the past events represented in trauma narratives. Witnessing then comes to occupy the core of trauma narratives. And in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer*, homodiegetic, in other words, retrospective character narrators become witnesses to death caused by different historical events. It is high time to analyze these two narratives and representation of death encounter born of historical violence.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRAUMA OF BEREAVEMENT IN *EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE*

This chapter is devoted to analysis of representations of Dresden firebombing and the 9/11 attacks causing bereavement in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The historical events form Foer's trauma narrative and they are narrated by first-person narrators who are also witnesses. In that sense, the novel borrows from social realities of Dresden firebombing and 9/11 attacks and it conveys the idea that collective trauma means death and bereavement for witness narrators and its trauma spreads among generations. It is also needed to be emphasized that the analysis of the novel cannot be thought without its historical context since trauma begins with these two traumatic events causing bereavement for the first-person narrators in Foer's narrative, and information about Dresden firebombing and 9/11 is given at the end of the chapter. In the end, it is revealed that first-person narrators fail to recognize the trauma of bereavement and they develop a narrative without confronting the past events.

Foer's novel has three first-person narrators whose experiences of trauma complete each other in the overall narrative. The novel represents the trauma of witnessing death caused by historical violent events through bereavement. The first narrator is Oskar Schell who loses his father to 9/11 attacks in New York. Oskar is nine years old and he lives with his mother in one of the five boroughs in New York. Because Oskar's grandparents, the two other first-person witness narrators, are immigrants in the US from Dresden, the space of the novel is constructed in Dresden as well. Spatiality and temporality in the novel are built upon two different historical events and first-person character narrators go through bereavement without recognizing its trauma. Dresden firebombing in 1945 at the end of Second World War is what Oskar's grandparents are forced to bear witness. Oskar's grandpa Thomas Sr. Schell, who carries the same first name with his son, loses his loved one during the firebombing. And readers learn about the event through his letters to his son, Thomas Jr., whom he never meets. Oskar's grandmother, whose name like Oskar's mother is never given, is subjected to the violence of Dresden as well and her experiences are

given through her letters to Oskar explaining everything about her life. Therefore, both Thomas Sr.'s and grandma's letters include transference of the trauma of bereavement caused by Dresden firebombing which is later triggered by another collective event in 2001 that is 9/11. The letters written by Dresden witnesses, Thomas Sr.'s and Oskar's grandma, construct the trauma narrative in a way that the trauma of bereavement emerges from their narrative, yet a relationship based on a common experience of bereavement is given through their encounters.

In first-person narrators, witnessing becomes at the core of narratives. Particularly in *Extremely Loud*, witnessing is constructed upon a traumatic encounter with death that all the narrators are subjected to. Thomas Sr. and Oskar's grandma as character narrators are forced to bear witness to the violence of Dresden bombing and Oskar to 9/11. Even though Oskar is a witness narrator to 9/11 attacks and his grandparents to Dresden firebombing, the two events are combined under the trauma of bereavement. What emerges from the three retrospective narrators is that even though Dresden firebombing and 9/11 are totally different events, trauma is such an event that it is transferred among generations who do not need to experience them first-handedly. It should also be added that even though the three narrators share the common experience of bereavement they fail to recognize its trauma and they never talk about it with each other due to the impact of death encounter.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Thomas Sr. as a character who loves animals and lives with them, becomes a witness to death of animals. He even has to shoot animals so that they do not suffer anymore and die more peacefully, as it were. And he experiences bereavement in addition to Anna's death: non-human animals' death. Thomas Sr. describes Dresden bombing that takes place in the evening and how he becomes a witness to death:

On my way to Anna's house, the second raid began, I threw myself into the nearest cellar, it was hit, it filled with pink smoke and gold flames, so I fled into the next cellar, it caught fire, I ran from cellar to cellar as each previous cellar was destroyed, burning monkeys screamed from the trees, birds with their wings on fire sang from the telephone wires over which desperate calls traveled, I found another shelter. (Foer, 2006: 211)

One learns here that what saves Thomas Sr. during bombing is cellars and shelters that he runs from one to another and what remains from the trauma is the experience of death encounter. Death of different people and animals emerge from the

consequences of the war for Thomas Sr. who belatedly expresses what he witnesses in the bombing, never confronting its trauma.

The trauma of bereavement pushes Thomas Sr. to write letters to his son to break his silence about the Dresden. As a witness narrator, Thomas Sr. loses Anna during the bombing while she is pregnant. The need for the trauma of loss and bereavement to be out in Thomas Sr.'s narrative is because of his desire to talk about his love for Anna.

I took a pen from my pocket and wrote "Anna" on my napkin, it happened again two days later, and then again the following day, she was the only thing I wanted to talk about, it kept happening, when I didn't have a pen, I'd write "Anna" in the air. (Foer, 2006: 16)

Even far from the place where he loses Anna, Thomas Sr. still remembers her and the trauma of bereavement is the reason for him to write letters to his son explaining his witnessing in Dresden. Thomas Sr. as a character narrator never speaks, therefore, the letters he writes are significant in his narrative. Since his letters are about the trauma of bereavement caused by Dresden, Thomas Sr.'s letters represent that collective trauma could be transferred among generations through witnessing accounts of writings. And bereavement experience becomes at the core of his writing.

Thomas Sr.'s letters appear belatedly and they transfer the trauma of witnessing death. Even in the US, far away from Dresden, Thomas Sr. confronts what trauma brings to him. Consequences of Dresden leaves its mark on Thomas Sr. as a character who becomes silent after the event and he says:

I know I'm not alone in this disease, you hear the old people in the street and some of them are moaning, "Ay yay yay," but some of them are clinging to their last word, "I," they're saying, because they're desperate, it's not a complaint it's a prayer, and then I lost "I" and my silence was complete. (Foer, 2006: 17)

Thomas Sr.'s characterization as a narrator is constructed upon the loss of his identity since the trauma of Dresden leads him to silence. His sense of integrity is shaken by the effects of bereavement and the only thing left from the destruction of war is silence.

Oskar's grandma observes Thomas Sr. Her letters as the other witness narrator of the Dresden reveal more about her husband. In general, grandma's letters to Oskar and Thomas Sr.'s letters to his son whom he never meets complete the story the two

witness narrators tell. There is a significant component of those letters which is the idea that addresses never reads them since Oskar's father is dead and grandma does not send them to Oskar throughout the novel's events, yet trauma still exists. Grandma retrospectively remembers Thomas Sr.'s and her first days in the US after leaving Dresden:

He got a job at jewelry store, because he knew the machines. He worked so hard that they made him assistant manager, and then manager. He did not care about jewelry. He hated it. He used to say jewelry is opposite of sculpture. (Foer, 2006: 175)

Thomas Sr. is passionate about sculpting, however, he does not manage to be an artist and his son Thomas Jr. is also in the jewelry business in the US. Oskar's grandma and Thomas Sr. live with many different animals and their relationship is based on helping each other since the Dresden. It should also be added that while Thomas Sr. in his letters mentions his love to Anna, Oskar's grandma deeply talks about her relationship with her husband.

Bereavement and death encounter construct Thomas Sr. as a witness narrator who endures the trauma of witnessing death. His silence and remaining so throughout the novel include characteristics of Dresden experience on a national level as argued by Anne Fuchs and developed in the next chapter, and it represents loss, destruction and violence of war for those left behind. Since the novel strongly borrows from historical events, trauma consists of witnessing death and witness narrators go through the experience of death encounter. "Therefore, literature becomes a privileged site for bearing witness to trauma through innovative literary forms that mimic and transmit rather than represent the phenomenon to readers in its literality" (Rodi-Risberg, 2018: 110). If trauma narratives are based on witnessing events, then Foer's novel creates its effect through first-person narrators. Death encounter is an event that is given through witness narrators' letters and inability to recognize its trauma becomes central in their stories. What both Dresden and 9/11 cause for the homodiegetic narrators of the novel is bereavement and narrators fail to recognize the trauma of witnessing death since they are silenced by the impact of death encounter.

Another question from historical events' intricate relation to trauma emerges: How does Foer's trauma narrative represent collective events? In the context of American novels on 9/11 there is no escape from fiction's connection to history and

Foer's novel can be considered within the definitions of historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in her many articulations about history's relation to fiction says:

History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought- as a human construct. And in arguing that history does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly or "gleefully" deny that the past existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. (2004: 16)

What Hutcheon argues here is not history's lack of achievements to reach the "truth" about the events, rather, how history is a textual representation of the past through narratives. Postmodern novels in which claims about history are made, for instance in Foer's novel, historical events are the issues tackled in narratives and representations of historical events are given through fictional social encounters.

To define the relation between fiction and history, Hutcheon comes up with historical metafiction, and for this research concerns, her arguments are relevant to locate Foer's novel within the boundaries of representation of collective trauma in fiction. Since Foer's novel borrows from social realities of Dresden bombing and 9/11, it is significant to recognize that what emerges from its narrative is another discourse about the events, and in that case, it is about the trauma of bereavement caused by collective violence and becoming silenced about the events.

Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel. (Hutcheon, 2004: 40)

According to that definition, fictitious accounts of history in literary forms are given through discursive acts and representation of historical events is achieved through narratives. What can be inferred from Foer's novel with Hutcheon's definitions is the idea that fictitious representation of social real events can be given through narrative construction and they create a different reality within the boundaries of its fictional encounters.

In Foer's historical metafiction, Thomas Sr. as a survivor of Dresden and witness narrator never uses dots when he writes letters to his child Thomas Jr., and his constant emphasis on the silence brought by the death encounter is a strong component of his characterization. After fleeing Dresden due to the destruction left in the city,

Thomas Sr. moves to the United States and he mentions his experiences as an immigrant.

To my unborn child: I haven't always been silent, I used to talk and talk and talk and talk, I couldn't keep my mouth shut, the silence overtook me like a cancer, it was one of my first meals in America. (Foer, 2006: 16)

In the first sentence of the first letter to his unborn child, Thomas Sr. describes his situation as a witness narrator and he expresses his experience with bereavement. It should be reminded that his child, the addressee, never reads his letters and what makes Thomas Sr. return to the US is his son's death on 9/11. At the end of the novel, Oskar's father's never found corpse and Thomas Sr.'s burying those letters on his child's grave strengthen the trauma novel's strong ties to the idea that collective violent events leave their marks with death and bereavement for witness survivors.

Foer's novel is also about immigrant experiences as discussed above. The US has offered a secure place since Second World War for those who first handedly witnessed the violence of war in Europe, and American fiction is not deprived of this situation. Linda Hutcheon proposes:

American fiction since the 1960s has been described by Malcolm Bradbury (1983, 186) as being particularly obsessed with its own past- literary, social, and historical. Perhaps this preoccupation is (or was) tied in part to a need to find a particularly American voice within a culturally dominant Eurocentric tradition (D'Haen 1986, 216). The United States (like the rest of North and South America) is a land of immigration. (2004: 130)

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close can be situated on this need for creating a voice based on American experience. The novel represents witness narrators' experiences of Dresden and 9/11 attacks that are related to the trauma of bereavement and narrators' failure in recognizing them as traumatic while living in the US.

In *Extremely Loud*, what remains from the attacks is death encounter. Oskar Schell as the main narrator of the story is forced to witness his father's death on 9/11 attacks and he goes through the burden of encountering what death is like. Bereavement, loss, destruction and pain are the issues raised by the witness narrators who are subjected to the violence of Dresden and 9/11. Oskar narrates about his experiences after 9/11:

Even after a year, I still had an extremely difficult time doing certain things, like taking showers, for some reason, and getting into elevators, obviously. There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like suspension bridges, germs,

airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I'm not racist.
(Foer, 2006: 36)

Oskar happens to be in school when the first attack takes place in New York and he is sent to his home immediately after. While Oskar is at his home, his father calls and Oskar does not respond to his messages sensing that something is wrong and he never hears from his father again. Then the story of Oskar's search for the lock that he thinks his father left for him to find clues about his death begins, however, the message in the novel becomes clear in the end that death brought by the destruction of 9/11 leads Oskar to nowhere. Bereavement in that sense provides nothing for Oskar about his father's death and he is left with nothing.

Unexpected death of his father forces Oskar to witness death as a child narrator and he carries its burden. Death is a returning event in the novel which is connected with Dresden firebombing in 1945 to 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the trauma of witnessing death in Foer's cogent narrative is given through homodiegetic narrators. In that sense, death is tackled as an issue in terms of bereavement when there is a collective traumatic event. "Which means too that death 'is' repression" according to Robert Rowland Smith and death always acts on the unconscious thoughts and "...an impossibility which perhaps may be called absolute repression" (2010: 39). In his analysis of death drive, Smith places Freud's concept at the core of unconscious acts caused by the force of a threat and it is an unexpected never confronted event. In Foer's novel, death drive appears to be the force behind the trauma of bereavement that retrospective narrators bear witness to. As revealed above, death encounter makes narrators silenced about the trauma of bereavement in the novel.

September 11, 2001 attacks in New York require 9/11 novels to take place in New York, since characters are usually faced with the violence brought by the destruction. Ann Kaplan claims that "in addition to 9/11 involving one specific site for a catastrophe where as many as three thousand people lost their lives all at once" and she recognizes that twin towers in New York is a space which is a "postmodern area, a center for international business and communications..." (2005: 141). As a 9/11 trauma fiction, Foer's novel takes place in one of the five boroughs in New York. Even in the novel Thomas Sr. learns about his son's death from a newspaper, even though he is in Dresden at the time of the attacks. Therefore, representation of 9/11 is not only

limited to character narrators' bearing witness to its violence in New York, but also through media portrayals which transfer the trauma among different generations.

As the leading cause for Oskar's father's death, 9/11 includes intertextuality of the novel alongside with newspaper articles and references to different books. Social realities of violence include bereavement for all the witness narrators in Foer's narrative. "Undoubtedly, the destruction of World Trade Center in New York and the partial destruction of the Pentagon represent a collective traumatization of the American nation which has left America's collective sense of identity and group narcissism profoundly shaken" (Wirth, 2004: 37). 9/11 in both literary trauma theory and variety of disciplines is considered to be a collective traumatic event and it is remembered on a national level. In Foer's novel, collective trauma of 9/11 is raised as an issue that is witnessed by first-person narrators who endure bereavement without recognizing its trauma.

Another complication emerging in the novel from death encounter relates to one of the defining elements of traumatic events and experiences which are loss, mourning and bereavement. Literary trauma theory is highly concerned with those issues, since Freud tackles them with a great concern and trauma begins with unexpected events. In one of his articles about loss and mourning, Freud's claims are considered to be the starting point for defining characteristics of trauma. In "*Mourning and Melancholia*" Freud makes a division between melancholia and mourning, he defines "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place", melancholia on the other hand is a different reaction which refers to loss of anything that appears in the unconscious "in some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning..." (2016: 243). It should be emphasized that the purpose here is not to pathologize what witness narrators encounter in Foer's novel. However, bereavement is the common experience among the character narrators and they all endure its consequences. And the narrators mourn for the loss of their loved ones that they lose.

For instance, bereavement for the child narrator is an event born of his father's death on 9/11 attacks. Oskar Schell even collects the things that remind him the losses he has experienced and puts them in "everything that happened to me" box. Even the

name of Oskar's box refers to the unexpectedness of trauma and when Oskar retrospectively remembers his time with his dead father he narrates:

I read the first chapter of A Brief History of Time when dad was still alive, and I got incredibly heavy boots about how relatively insignificant life is, and how, compared to the universe and compared to time, it didn't even matter if I existed at all. (Foer, 2006: 86)

For Oskar, bereavement means loss of his father and his constant search for the reasons of his father's death makes him face death as if it is an everyday occurrence. He confronts nothingness which is his father's never found corpse and even in nights he cannot sleep and has nightmares, which all are related to the trauma of witnessing his father's death, i.e., bereavement.

When it comes to Thomas Sr., who witnesses first handedly Dresden firebombing and becomes a survivor in the ashes of fire, he is the character narrator transferring and narrating the traumatic experience through his letters. Death encounter for all three narrators in the novel is the common experience, since grandma, Oskar and Thomas Sr. are left with bereavement without recognizing its trauma. Witnessing death connects witness narrators, even though they never talk about it with each other and transference of the trauma is given through letters. Especially when Thomas Sr. writes to his son:

When I came home my father told me that her father had paid another visit, I asked him why he was out of breath, he said, "Things keep getting worse", I realized her father and I must have passed each other on the road that morning. (Foer, 2006: 116)

Thomas Sr. writes about his Second World War experiences in Dresden to Thomas Jr., and he has to live with the destruction that only causes him to encounter death in the shadow of the war. Thomas Sr., like Oskar and grandma, confronts loss and death with Anna's loss of life during the firebombing, and near the end of the novel, all these witness narrators come together without recognizing each other's trauma. Trauma's presence in that case can be connected to character narrators' silence about the events and its appearance belatedly.

Thomas Sr.'s silence after the Dresden and the trauma of bereavement shapes his narrative as a witness-narrator. He always self-referentially refers to Dresden since trauma is at work. He thinks about himself: "The end of suffering does not justify the

suffering, and so there is no end to suffering, what a mess I am, I thought, what a fool, how foolish and narrow, how worthless, how pinched and pathetic, how helpless” (Foer, 2006: 33). Trauma’s presence in Thomas Sr.’s narrative becomes more obvious that he feels encountering death makes him ‘helpless’ and it causes more suffering. There is no recovery for him from the silence that encapsulates him, however, he still manages to build a relationship with his grandchild since they share a common experience which is bereavement.

Thomas Sr.’s and Oskar’s relationship as two character-narrators requires more attention. Losing his father to 9/11 attacks forces Oskar to find the truth about the key that he thinks will solve everything about the mystery of his father’s death. Helplessness born of death encounter on 9/11 and the trauma of bereavement construct Oskar as a character-narrator who is forced to bear witness to his father’s death. “I thought about rushing down to see if I could somehow rescue him myself. And then the phone rang. I looked at my watch. It was 10:22:27” (Foer, 2006: 68). Oskar remembers the phone calls which are the only things left from his father’s death and he feels helpless since he is not able to do anything to prevent his father’s death. Oskar’s encounter with death includes the three character-narrators’ common experience of bereavement and its trauma is apparent in their narratives beyond their recognition. In that sense, it can be claimed that the trauma of bereavement and death encounter connect two different events of the novel that are Dresden firebombing and 9/11 attacks.

When it comes to Oskar’s grandma’s letters, bereavement is still the issue emerging from the violence of traumatic encounter with death. In “My Feelings” chapters devoted to grandma’s letters to Oskar, readers learn about her as a witness to Dresden and 9/11 attacks. Her letters mostly consist of her experiences as an immigrant in the US from Dresden and her relationship with Thomas Sr., her husband. “Sometimes I would think about those hundred letters laid across my bedroom floor. If I hadn’t collected them, would our house have burned less brightly?” (Foer, 2006: 83). From her retrospective look on Dresden we learn that she used to collect letters sent to her in Germany and she thinks that she could have prevented her house from burning if she did not have those letters. Survivor guilt and witnessing death emerging

in collective traumas that are the arguments raised by Lifton and mentioned in previous chapters can be seen in grandma's narrative.

The suspense of the novel is built on two different developing events in the plot. The first is Oskar's adventure to find the lock for the key that he finds in his dead father's pockets. The second, and the most significant event is Oskar's grandma's letters about her life experiences which are based on bereavement caused by Dresden and triggered later in the US by 9/11. Grandma writes to Oskar about Dresden:

From my bedroom window I watched the world. And I was safe from the world. I watched my father fall apart. The nearer the war came, the farther he went. Was that the only way he knew to protect us? (Foer, 2006: 183)

Oskar's grandma loses her parents in Dresden firebombing as a child witness and her letters that are addressed to Oskar imply that the two character-narrators share some similarities. A striking example of the two narrators' similarity would be their experiences of bereavement caused by different collective events and the trauma of bereavement spreads among generations. It should be added that bereavement starting with Dresden and triggered by 9/11 is at the core of Foer's trauma narrative.

Since intertextuality is a strong characteristic of trauma narratives it is important to examine how the novel borrows from social realities. Another intertextual component of the novel takes place in a chapter when Oskar plays a tape in school that is a voice of a Hiroshima survivor. From the testimony it says: "That is what death is like. It doesn't matter what uniforms the soldiers are wearing. It doesn't matter how good the weapons are. I thought if everyone could see what I saw, we would never have war anymore" (Foer, 2006: 189). What is revealed here is that Oskar is interested in other people's sufferings and this time it is about Hiroshima bombing survivor who witnesses death of his daughter. Foer's narrative clearly tries to connect different historical events under the assumption that wars and destruction lead to bereavement for those left behind i.e., the witness survivors. And the choice of first-person narrators makes Foer's narrative such a coherent story that it conveys the idea that witnessing accounts of writings transfer the trauma of bereavement.

Intertextuality is essential in trauma fiction. As mentioned earlier that trauma narratives are constructed fragmentedly in general because of the past event's memory construction, intertextuality becomes important. "In stylistic terms, intertextuality

allows the novelist to mirror the symptomatology of trauma by disrupting temporality or chronology, and to repossess the voices of previously silenced characters, enabling them to bear witness to their own exclusion” (Whitehead, 2004: 102). In Whitehead’s articulations, trauma narratives represent a disruption in the order of events when it comes to narrate the event. In Foer’s novel, intertextuality includes borrowing from social realities of Dresden firebombing and 9/11 to construct a trauma narrative based on witnessing. In that sense, the novel intertextually forms the silenced voice of witness survivor narrators who experience the trauma of witnessing death.

Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is highly studied in academic circles. Trauma is present in the novel since witnessing death born of two different historical events is a collective trauma that is experienced both on a national and personal levels. Bereavement in that case emerges from the destruction of violence of war and attacks for the witness narrators in the novel. Responding to the criticisms on the novel, Philippe Codde argues: “the form of the novel, far from being playful, is actually an accurate representation of a young boy’s traumatized mind, and it does not trivialize or seek premature closure for 9/11” (2007: 251). The critic here refers to the images used in the novel to convey the idea that destruction of the 9/11 attacks could become visible with images. As a result, analysis of the images given in Oskar’s narrative is significant to see how 9/11 is represented as a traumatic event in the novel.

The images used in the novel mostly refer to what Oskar, as the child witness narrator losing his father in 9/11 attacks, narrates. They include many different images that are relevant to Oskar’s narrative influenced by his social surroundings. Pictures of a rising man at the end of the novel, which strongly alludes to people falling from the burning building in New York, represents an imagined alternative end to the attacks. “The photograph is not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it is itself actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so” (Butler, 2009: 71). As it will be discussed that 9/11 was transferred as a collective event through violent images in media and in the internet, Foer here uses the visual power of the images to represent incredibly closeness of the attacks. Even though the image at the end represents Oskar’s imagining a different end to 9/11, the falling man rising rather than falling is about the traumatized child narrator’s rescuing his father from the attacks.

Since discussions on the importance of witnessing in first-person narrators in the previous chapters are already given, there is also a need to think about the trauma of bereavement's impact on Foer's narrative. Trauma narratives represent the repressed voice of witness survivors and in *Extremely Loud*, Oskar's and other witness narrators' perspectives are highly shaped by the influence of past events. What emerges from witness narrators' look on the past event is a voice that has been silenced appearing belatedly. "Voice is as much a social phenomenon as it is an individual one. This principle follows from the observation that wherever there is discourse there is voice" (Phelan, 1996: 44). Replacing voice with ideology sometimes, James Phelan argues that narratives always appear to be constructs of social influences. Particularly in Foer's narrative, the voices of different first-person narrators are formed within witnessing two events that are borrowed from social realities. Dresden bombing and 9/11 attacks condition Oskar's, Thomas Sr.'s and grandma's narratives based on their experience of the trauma of bereavement.

Death encounter is an event that is witnessed in collective traumatic events and bereavement becomes visible in Foer's narrative. In that case, trauma emerges from the destruction of bereavement in character narrators' stories. Robert Jay Lifton's arguments about death encounter in collective violent events are mentioned previously and also the emergence of death guilt in survivor's feelings in the aftermath of trauma. And in Foer's novel as well, the trauma of witnessing death makes witness survivors aware of death's presence and Thomas Sr. narrates:

I shot it again, where I thought its heart was, it looked at me, in its eyes I saw some form of understanding, but I didn't see forgiveness, I tried to shoot the vultures, but I wasn't a good enough shot, later I saw vultures fattening themselves on the human carnage, and I blamed myself for everything. (Foer, 2006: 213)

Thomas Sr. witnesses death of animals in Dresden and he feels the burden of their suffering. His inability to save those animals from dying makes Thomas Sr. feel guilty as he says so and he is not able to do anything for them but forced to watch them die. For that reason, Thomas Sr. is formed as a character who carries the burden of the trauma of bereavement and later its effects are triggered by the 9/11 attacks, since he loses his son. His silence is also structured by witnessing death which takes place in collective traumas and it is given through Thomas Sr.'s letters.

The end of the novel calls for more attention since a relationship emerges between Oskar and Thomas Sr., also called the renter by grandma so that she could hide his identity. The two witness narrators meet for the purpose of finding the lock that Oskar thinks his father has left on purpose for him to find about his death. Thomas Sr. remains silent in all his encounters, he communicates with Oskar with his “Yes” and “No” tattoos on his hands and by writing on a piece of paper. Even though the two character-narrators meet for a common cause, what brings them together in the novel is their experience of bereavement, because they lose their loved one Thomas Jr. on 9/11. Thomas Sr. writes when Oskar visits grandma: “Oskar!” she said, lifting him from the ground, “I’m OK,” he said, that song, in his voice I heard my own voice, and my father’s and my grandfather’s, and it was the first time I’d heard your voice....” (Foer, 2006: 276). Thomas Sr. finds something in Oskar’s voice that reminds him of himself and it is the common voice of all witness narrators in the novel that represent the trauma of bereavement due to Dresden and 9/11. At the end of the novel, Thomas Sr. and Oskar dig up Thomas Jr.’s empty coffin and they bury Thomas Sr.’s never sent letters to his son on his grave. The ending implies that in cases of collective violent events, the trauma of bereavement emerges from the destruction and those survivor narrators transfer the event through their narratives.

All in all, what emerges from Foer’s narrative is the idea that bereavement is a traumatic event transferred among generations. Death encounter and death as a threat for witness narrators is the leading cause for their experiences of trauma caused by Dresden bombing and triggered by 9/11 attacks. The trauma of witnessing death born of collective events constructs Foer’s narrative represented through witnessing acts of first-person narrators. In the end, it can be claimed that the character narrators fail to recognize the trauma of bereavement since death encounter makes them silenced about the violent events.

4.1. DRESDEN FIREBOMBING IN 1945

Since already mentioned that the two narrators, Thomas Sr. and Oskar’s grandma are witnesses to Dresden firebombing, there is a need to attain the knowledge about the event. In the novel, the trauma of witnessing death is triggered by two

historical events. Dresden Firebombing in 1945 in Germany is an event that both Thomas Sr. and Oskar's grandma as first-person witness narrators in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are forced to bear witness. The second event, which helps to construct the novel conveying the idea that those traumatic events pass on, is September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. Therefore, contextual analysis of the novel requires to gain knowledge about Dresden Firebombing and 9/11 attacks. Both Thomas Sr. and Oskar's grandma become witness survivors in Dresden and they lose their loved ones Anna to the war, therefore, bereavement shapes their traumatic encounter with death.

Aside from representations of Dresden firebombing in *Extremely Loud*, contextual analysis is needed to understand how the event took place. Dresden firebombing in 1945 was operated by the allied forces during Second World War against Germany. About the attacks on Dresden:

Although most German cities had been flattened by 1945 and although other attacks were to follow that left a proportionally higher death rate elsewhere, it was the destruction of Dresden that impinged on the popular imagination as an icon of gratuitous and excessive violence. (Fuchs, 2012: 6)

Destruction of the city was considered to be the most destructive event in Second World War in Germany and it was debated whether the firebombing was necessary since Hitler's power was already in decline. Large numbers of people were killed and British and American forces operated two attacks, first on February 13 and then on 14 in 1945.

Destruction of Dresden is represented in different accounts of narratives such as in media, in novels and in history books. In different narratives, Dresden remains to be related to the violence of Second World War that only caused survivors to carry the burden of its trauma.

This epistemological distinction allows me to profile the Dresden narrative as a particularly infectious form of cultural memory that managed to mobilise considerable emotional identification by relaying the traumatic experience of loss, defeat, death and destruction across a range of media and genres. (Fuchs, 2012: 9)

For Fuchs, Dresden, like other violent events in Second World War, left its annihilating marks both in the environment and in survivors' sense of dignity and

integrity. Therefore, one can place Dresden Firebombing as a traumatic event transferred through narratives.

During Dresden bombing, there was also non-human animals who became victims to the attacks. In literary representations of Dresden, this emerges as one of the issues tackled in relation to the violence of the event, since the attacks caused many animals to suffer and die. “As in Vonnegut, the animal symbolizes a historical innocence that reminds the characters and the readership of a shared humanity. As such it is particularly suited to communicate the excessive effects of warfare from an ethical perspective” (Fuchs, 2012: 19). Since there was no ethics that can be related to Dresden attacks, Fuchs argues that the violence animals were subjected to is one of the issues raised in literary representations of the bombing. Death is constructed upon animals’ suffering in literary texts on Dresden as well, since they became victims too and it appears to be one of the issues raised in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

Trauma includes becoming silent after the event and this also appears in the experience of Dresden Firebombing. The trauma of the event is experienced on a national level and witness Germans were forced to endure its violence. “Moeller shows that in their private lives many ordinary postwar Germans commingled silence with the selective memory of National Socialism and the war” (Fuchs, 2012: 73). Fuchs argues that most Germans became silent after the event and they dealt with its trauma in silence. Silence born of violent events is an important aspect of trauma and Dresden Firebombing has its share from this situation.

What remains at the core of Dresden firebombing experience and its representation in literary texts is the idea that the event caused death and destruction beyond witness survivors’ reach. Since it is a traumatic event, it stands for war and violence’s annihilating effects on the environment and survivors. And this comes to the surface in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* as an issue represented by first-person witness narrators: Thomas Sr. and the grandma. Therefore, Dresden Firebombing needs to be understood as a collective event that had traumatizing effects on survivor witnesses, and it is inevitable that its narrative is constructed upon the trauma of witnessing death caused by the bombing.

4.2. SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 ATTACKS

The more recent borrowed historical event in Jonathan Safran Foer's narrative is September 11, 2001 attacks. What is particularly significant in representation of the event in the novel is the idea that the trauma of witnessing death is transferred among generations through letters and narratives. Historical contextual analysis for *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* requires to acquire a knowledge of 9/11 attacks. 9/11 is considered to be a collective trauma. Arguments on 9/11 discussed in trauma studies is a primary concern for the developing discussions.

September 11, 2001 attacks took place at the center of New York and the Pentagon in Washington on a Tuesday morning. The attacks have created a trauma on a national level since many people died and it happened unexpectedly.

The monstrous attack of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington has- in Freud's words (1930)- once again demonstrated to the entire world how difficult it is for "the human species" to overcome "the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. (Wirth, 2004: 13)

Wirth argues that unlike personal accounts of trauma, the attacks were experienced on a collective level and it was announced everywhere that the nation was under attack. Disturbance of a traumatic event caused by human violence refers in this quotation to a disruption in everyday life, since September 11, 2001 interrupted the daily life on that day.

In that case, those who did not experience the attacks first-handedly learned it from the media. Media was highly influential to transfer the trauma of the attacks and it even came to a point where justification for invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan was established.

September 11 still has an enormous impact on the thoughts of politicians and society worldwide, consciously or unconsciously. It is also one of the main issues in the media. It is even used to justify a completely new world order. War could have almost become acceptable if in the meantime, all of the fake secret service reports, lies and tricks during the war on Iraq had not become public. (Wirth, 2004: 8)

Hans-Jürgen Wirth means by the lies and tricks that George W. Bush in 2003 claimed that Saddam Husayn in Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but it

was later seen there was no evidence for Bush's allegations. 9/11 has been transferred on a collective level, especially with the narrative influence of media.

The trauma of 9/11 spread through media and different TV channels both in the US and worldwide. There were aftermath effects of the event and they include PTSD like symptoms.

It was later claimed that the continual replaying of the images from 9/11 had produced, in both children and adults, recognizable psychic trauma in the form of recurrent nightmares, startle reactions, and a painful feeling of powerlessness, which required rapid treatment. (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009: 103)

Therefore, for the critics here, the event led to the emergence of new feelings and reactions to its trauma and it appears in different forms. In cases of collective trauma, experiences of helplessness and precarity become at the core of the experience. And particularly in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 9/11 is represented as such an event that its trauma spreads among generations through bereavement. Since Schell family loses their son to 9/11 attacks, the novel represents it as a traumatic encounter causing bereavement.

In the end, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* represents the trauma of bereavement caused by Dresden firebombing and triggered by 9/11 attacks. Thomas Sr. and Oskar's grandma lose their loved ones Anna during the firebombing, and later they are forced to witness the death of their sons Thomas Jr. due to 9/11 attacks. It becomes clear in Foer's narrative that two distinct events cause bereavement for the Schell family and the character narrators go through the trauma of bereavement without recognizing each other's common traumas. Even though *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a trauma narrative highly focusing on the aftermath of bereavement in these collective events, recovery becomes possible when the two witness narrators Thomas Jr. and Oskar come together for the purpose of finding more about their loved one's death. Death in that sense leads Schell family to a relationship based on a common experience of the trauma of bereavement however much they remain silent.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAUMA AND DEATH ANALOGY IN *THE CORPSE WASHER*

In this chapter, the analysis of Sinan Antoon's trauma narrative, *The Corpse Washer*, is given through discussions about analogical representations of particular objects and information about George W. Bush's "War on Terror" policies is provided at the end of the chapter. *The Corpse Washer* is a representation of the historical events taking place in Iraq from 1980s to 2000s, however, the purpose here is to discuss objects that reveal the novel's only witness narrator Jawad Kazim's encounters as a corpse washer. Objects such as military Humvee car, pomegranate tree, the bench and TV represent the character narrator's trauma of death encounter. Those objects are significant in Antoon's narrative since they relate to the collective events' effects on Jawad as a witness narrator. Therefore, Jawad as the main character of the novel and the narrator is strongly influenced by the events of the novel that are borrowed from social realities of Iraq. The concern of this chapter is to examine death analogy given through specific objects that convey the trauma of witnessing death caused by collective events, particularly the US invasion of Iraq. It can be argued that Jawad as a witness narrator fails to recognize the trauma of death encounter since it affects him beyond his recognition and he becomes silenced about the events.

The Corpse Washer can be considered to be a postcolonial trauma novel representing Iraq's recent history. A prominent characteristic of postcolonial novels is the usage of analogy to convey a compelling story based on witnessing violence and it appears in Antoon's narrative. Death encounter emerging in collective events constructs the trauma narrative provided with Jawad's experiences. Trauma emerges in Antoon's narrative with various corpses coming to Jawad's *mghaysil* that is the wash place where the narrator performs Shiite duties to wash the dead. And analogy of the objects helps to build its influential narrative based on Jawad's experiences as a witness. Antoon's narrative represents the trauma of witnessing death born of historical events, especially the US invasion in 2003. Jawad bears witness to death without confronting its trauma and he grows with the developing events. In the end, the trauma of witnessing born of the US invasion is conveyed through a homodiegetic character who is forced to endure its violence.

The Corpse Washer takes place in Baghdad and the witness narrator Jawad Kazim continues the family business of washing dead bodies, even though he wishes to be a sculptor. Jawad Kazim is a witness narrator to the events that are borrowed from social realities such as Saddam's regime in Iraq and the US invasion in 2003. However, the primary focus of the developing analyses is the objects surrounding Jawad's environment which reveal so much about his identity as a witness narrator. For instance, the bench that the narrator's father uses at work to wash dead bodies appear in Jawad's many dreams and it represents his traumatic encounter with death. On the other hand, the pomegranate tree stands for Jawad's struggles for survival while he witnesses destruction of his country. And the Humvee stands for the violence of the US invasion of Iraq. All these objects reveal so much about Jawad as a witness character. The character narrator studies art in Baghdad and wants to be a painter regardless of his father's plans for him to continue the family business. Jawad's family lives in a neighborhood in Baghdad that is friendly to the Shiite community and his family is also a Shiite. Jawad's grandfathers have been practicing the business for sixty years, and after his father's death, Jawad becomes a corpse washer reluctantly to make money. In that sense, the trauma of witnessing death emerges from collective events that Jawad is forced to bear witness, and because of them, he cannot achieve his dreams. As a corpse washer, Jawad encounters death as if it is an everyday occurrence and he is haunted by its trauma. Trauma prevails over Jawad's ambitions to leave Iraq and become a sculptor since he is bound to the experiences of death encounter.

Before discussing the significance of analogical representation of objects in *The Corpse Washer* it should be emphasized that the idea of death analogy comes from Hamish Dalley's arguments on the relation between colonial violence and its representation in postcolonial novels. And for the analyses of *The Corpse Washer* his insights are highly relevant, since the novel uses objects to present the trauma of witnessing death born of the US invasion of Iraq. Dalley contends "...how the cultural and historical particularities of a settler society can inflect the historical novel, producing variations on the pattern of allegorical realism that amount, I argue, to a distinct form of settler allegory" (2014: 68). For Dalley, postcolonial novels are shaped by the effects of colonial violence and in realist depictions of postcolonial witnessing historical references are conveyed through the usage of analogy. Therefore, in this

analysis, Dalley's idea that allegorical and/or analogical representations of colonial violence are given in postcolonial novels is given to further the argument that *The Corpse Washer* represents the trauma of witnessing death through analogies of objects.

The novel starts with Jawad's dream that he sees Reem whom he loves and wants from him to wash her dead body at the bench. Jawad and Reem meet in college and become close friends. She later leaves Baghdad for a treatment since she has breast cancer and dies. "She is lying on her back on a marble bench in an open place with no walls or ceilings. There is no one around and nothing in sight except the sand" (Antoon, 2013: 1). Jawad's narrative begins with Reem's death as an event appearing in his dream that refers to the bench. Even at the beginning, it becomes clear that death appears to be an event that is repeated in Antoon's narrative. The bench, on the other hand, is given as an analogy for Jawad's encounters with death that he is forced to bear witness, and in this dream, it is Reem's.

Jawad Kazim as the only retrospective first-person narrator in *The Corpse Washer* is forced to bear witness to death in Iraq since 1980s. The novel starts with Jawad's nightmare that he sees a Humvee, American military car, approaching him and soldiers kicking him.

I think I hear a car approaching. I turn around and see a Humvee driving at an insane speed, leaving a trail of flying dust. It suddenly swerves to the right and comes to a stop a few meters away from us. Its doors open. Masked men wearing khaki uniforms and carrying machine guns toward us. (Antoon, 2013: 2)

The Humvee appearing in Jawad's dreams is a repeated action and it reveals that Jawad at the center of Baghdad is haunted by the existence of violence surrounding his country. The military car represents the US invasion and its destructive force in Iraq. Jawad confronts Humvee's appearance in his nightmares belatedly which is a typical characteristic of trauma as discussed previously.

In a different event of the novel, Humvee is mentioned again. On their way back home from Najaf, where he buries his father next to his brother, Jawad sees a Humvee. Humvee in the novel is borrowed from a social reality that is the US invasion and it is a reference to the operation since the car is used during the attacks. "As we approached Baghdad from the south, we passed by what resembled a graveyard of burning and destroyed vehicles and tanks near al-Rashid Military Base. There were

people digging makeshift graves and burying the abandoned corpses” (Antoon, 2013: 70). The space of the novel is particularly shaped by the events that Jawad encounters in his hometown and also in his dreams. Humvee is a military car used by American soldiers and Jawad considers it threatening, since what it causes is more violence leading to forced witness to death.

The invasion is a traumatizing event for Jawad and its effects are given through his observations on the city. When Jawad is invited for an art exhibition by his teacher from the college, he participates in the event with an iron chair thinking that it stands for the torture in Iraq. On his way to the exhibit, he notices certain things: “When we approached al-Firdaws Square, where the big hotels are, American soldiers had blocked the street and were motioning to everyone to turn around and go back” (Antoon, 2013: 106). There are checkpoints where American soldiers check whether comers are a threat and there is a curfew during the night. Also, the invasion is the cause for Jawad’s witnessing abandoned corpses on the street. And in Antoon’s narrative, the invasion is considered to be an event that leads to an increase in internal violence and death in Iraq.

As you can see that death is at the core of Sinan Antoon’s novel and Jawad is forced to bear witness to its violence. In that case, witnessing becomes at the core of Antoon’s narrative through Jawad’s encounters both as a corpse washer and as a witness. “In ‘postcolonial’ context, this identification typically takes the form of a representational practice, self-consciously or determinedly undertaken- whether of a ‘speaking for’ or of a ‘witnessing’” (Lazarus, 2011: 62). In his different articulations, Neil Lazarus is attentive to the historical contingencies of literary texts in postcolonial contexts. And he further claims that what emerges from those narratives are usually witnessing accounts of writings about the colonial violence. Since Antoon’s narrative is a postcolonial trauma novel, witnessing and surviving form the trauma of the novel. So, the question needs to be asked: what does Jawad witness in the novel?

Jawad lives in a place where the majority of people is Shiite, however, he does not feel a belonging to the community. His father as a corpse washer teaches Jawad how to wash the dead bodies since his childhood and Jawad is forced to bear witness to death in his neighborhood with the bodies brought to his father’s *mghaysil*, the wash place. “The mghaysil was more than six decades old, and many generations of our

family had worked in it, including my grandfather, who had died before I was born” (Antoon, 2013: 15). Jawad’s death encounter and his prejudice against washing corpses construct him as a witness character. And this is given through his many different experiences with corpses both at the wash place and on the streets. Trauma of witnessing death is transferred in the family among different generations through being a corpse washer.

There is no chronological order of the events in Antoon’s narrative and most of Jawad’s death encounter is caused by events given randomly in the plot. Even the novel begins with Jawad’s memory of Iran-Iraq War, since he loses his five years older brother Ammoury to the war in 1988.

We didn’t wash Ammoury. According to tradition, martyrs are not washed. He was buried in his military uniform. I never saw Father cry after that time, but the grief I saw piercing his eyes and voice that day would resurface every now and then on his face, especially when he gazed at Ammoury’s photograph which hung on the wall, as if he were silently conversing with him. (Antoon, 2013: 12)

Death begins at Jawad’s home with his brother becoming a martyr and it is prevalent in Jawad’s other encounters. It becomes apparent in Antoon’s narrative that Jawad is forced to bear witness to presence of death surrounding his country and he endures its trauma.

One of the interesting things about Antoon’s novel is the witness narrator Jawad’s character construction. The whole novel is constructed upon Jawad’s encounters in his surroundings and the pomegranate tree is a striking example for his identity construction. In the beginning, Jawad hates the pomegranate tree that his father waters every day at the wash place reminding him death and destruction as he is forced to see corpses at work. While describing the wash place, Jawad narrates: “directly beneath the window was a door leading to a tiny garden where the pomegranate tree my father loved so much stood” (Antoon, 2013: 15). Jawad’s relation to the pomegranate tree is significant, because it is used in the novel as an analogy for Jawad’s subjectivity as a character narrator. An analogy of the tree with death’s heavy presence in Iraq shapes the trauma novel and Jawad as a character. Jawad’s changing feelings about the pomegranate tree makes him confront his broken sense of self which is highly influenced by the trauma of witnessing death.

The question emerges: How does analogy work in the novel? Since Antoon's novel has a postcolonial context there is a need to consider the ways its trauma narrative is constructed. Arguing that history is a great concern in postcolonial literary texts, mostly given in novels, Hamish Dalley observes allegory's prevalence in fictional witnessing acts of writings.

I argue that the doubleness of realist representation implies that the historical novel, as a genre, is best understood as a form of allegory. Realism is predicated on a split between representational levels in which readers move from the fictionalized surface of the text to a structure of reference projected to lie behind or beyond it. (Dalley, 2014: 16)

According to Dalley, allegory or analogy in that sense is used in postcolonial novels to represent the historical events and witnessing appears to be a coherent way of speaking about the violence. For Dalley, those novels are realist representations of the colonial violence and they are formed with analogies that always imply more than what they say. Therefore, Antoon's novel calls for an analysis of Jawad's thoughts about the objects that represent the trauma of witnessing death at the core of his encounters.

For instance, the pomegranate tree reminds Jawad death. Since the tree is washed with the same water used for washing corpses brought to the workplace, Jawad despises the tree. In that case, the analogy of death becomes the most salient with Jawad's feelings about the pomegranate tree in addition to his encounters with dead bodies as a corpse washer.

The deep red pomegranate blossoms were beginning to breathe. When I was young, I ate the fruit of this tree that my father would pluck and bring home. But I stopped eating it when I realized that it had drunk the waters of death. (Antoon, 2013: 65)

Jawad's recognition that death exists in the place where the pomegranate grows makes him intolerable to the tree. Therefore, analogy of the pomegranate tree represents that death encounter is prevalent both in the novel's milieu and in the wash place.

Even though the importance of Freud's theories about death drive and trauma at the beginning of the research is already mentioned, Antoon's narrative necessitates more discussions about the unconscious acts. In that case, dreams include the experience of trauma, and witnessing death is a repressed event that reveals itself in the unconscious belatedly. "Consciousness does not recognize the experience of

trauma. Returning of the traumatizing event appears like a waking memory, it can only occur in the mode of a symptom or a dream” (Caruth, 1996: 60). Since trauma is not a recognized event by the survivor it appears in different forms as discussed by Caruth, and dreams are highly shaped by the trauma. In Antoon’s narrative, dreams work in a way to form Jawad’s subjectivity as a witness character who does not confront death encounter. Therefore, Jawad’s dreams are immensely influenced by the novel’s events which are particularly about death encounter caused by collective events.

An example of a dream would help to see how Jawad wakes up to the reality of death surrounding him. Because of his traumatic encounter with death, Jawad always sees dreams that interrupt the flow of his narrative and they reveal so much about his subjectivity. For instance, mutilated corpses brought to him with only a head and witnessing violent events make Jawad desire to escape the country so that he could become a sculptor, even though he fails to achieve them. And his nightmares have a share of this situation since they are affected by the events of the novel such as in this dream:

Corpses scattered around and I saw people running and screaming, but all I could hear was a strange whistle. I touched my body and was astonished that it was intact. I ran to the exit and out to the street. I headed to the mghaysil and opened the faucet to wash myself. I lay down on the washing deck to die, but instead I woke. (Antoon, 2013: 159)

Jawad plans on leaving Baghdad because the violence increases with the US invasion and all there is left at the city is corpses everywhere. He sees himself getting a passport, yet while waiting, an explosion occurs which is highly shaped by the presence of violence in the country. Therefore, in that dream, Jawad wakes up to the presence of death and violence that haunts him, particularly in his unconscious mind.

Since purpose here is to discuss the importance of objects on Antoon’s narrative construction, it is a need to consider how analogy works in postcolonial novels. Analogy and/or allegory is used in postcolonial novels and realist depictions opening up new discussions of colonial violence emerge from the narratives. “Realism thus produces an excess that troubles the equation between fictional narrative and historical interpretation, complicating attempts to ascribe to it a straightforward ideological meaning” (Dalley, 2014: 16). The critic here argues that novels about colonial violence are shaped by historical events and allegory is mostly used as a

device to represent collective traumas. In that logic, both realism and analogy become compelling tools to talk about colonial violence. And in Antoon's narrative, social real events construct Jawad's identity as a witness character supported with different objects' allegorical representations.

For that reasons, analogies of objects are significant to examine the trauma of witnessing death since it forms Jawad as a character in addition to being a corpse washer and a witness. Jawad's dreams and nightmares reveal so much about his character who is influenced by the events taking place in his hometown. The bench is an object that Jawad sees in his nightmares and it refers to different things he witnesses.

One of Giacometti's statues lies on the washing bench. I assume I am meant to wash it. As I pour water over its tiny head, the sculpture dissolves into tiny fragments. I put the bowl aside and try to pick up the pieces and repair the damage, but everything disintegrates in my hands. (Antoon, 2013: 141)

There is a bench in the wash place where his father places dead bodies on to wash them and his dreams, divided in different chapters, mostly begins with a bench. The things on the bench changes in Jawad's dreams influenced by the events given in the plot. For instance, he sees Reem and his father on the bench in a dream after their death. Here in this quotation, Jawad refers to the destroyed statues in the city that reminds him his job, since he deals with corpses on the bench. The bench is an allusion to what Jawad as a witness narrator goes through in his troubled hometown and it is the destruction of art objects that appear to be dead in this dream quoted above.

Trauma of witnessing death form Jawad as a character who comes across death daily. Death's existence with different abandoned corpses in the city and at the wash place shatters Jawad's sense of self. His inability to confront the trauma of death encounter shapes his characteristics as a witness narrator.

But I imagined that death had followed me home. I couldn't stop thinking that everything that Father had bought for us was paid for by death. Even what we ate was paid for by death. When we had dinner that night I watched Father's fingers cut the bread and put food in his mouth. (Antoon, 2013: 22)

Jawad is shocked to see that his father moves on as if he never washes corpses. Since Jawad is not willing to do the job, he never recognizes death's presence as a traumatic event. Trauma in that sense is raised as an issue that is never confronted by

the survivor in Antoon's narrative. However, trauma still forms Jawad as a witness character narrator.

In that case, death encounter in the novel is built on Jawad being a witness to collective events. As already mentioned that the prevalence of death encounter in collective events cause trauma for survivors, Jawad faces the difficulties that witnessing death brings out. "Death tests everyone's integrity; the dying person, immediate survivors, and attending healers contribute to a collective psychic constellation within which issues of continuity and discontinuity, self-completion and disintegration are addressed" (Lifton, 1996: 109). Robert Jay Lifton argues that death forces survivors to question their identities since collective events traumatize their sense of selves. The violent event that is witnessing death makes survivors confront death's presence in life and they become shattered by its traumatizing effect. In Antoon's narrative, Jawad struggles to survive in a place in which there is nothing for him to find relief but only death.

Jawad's death encounter does not end with corpses brought to the mghaysil. Before deciding to continue the family business, there are already events taking place in the plot and he is forced to being a witness to death in his troubled country both as a character and as a corpse washer. For instance, a man, who makes business with Jawad's father, approaches Jawad trying to convince him to take over the job after his father's death and Jawad narrates:

He smiled. I asked him how he came to know my father. He said that for ten years he'd been in charge of collecting unclaimed, abandoned, and unidentified corpses from hospitals and from the morgue. He saw to it that they were washed, shrouded, and properly buried. (Antoon, 2013: 101)

The man who is responsible for collecting abandoned corpses on the streets tries to make business with Jawad and forces him to become a corpse washer. The man also refers to the increase in numbers of corpses since the US invasion and if he wants to do the business, he needs American authorities' approval now. At that point, the trauma of witnessing death is transferred among different witnesses who talk about the destruction left in the city as can be seen in the quotation.

Analogical representations of the trauma of witnessing death are provided with different objects and the most significant ones are the bench and the pomegranate tree. Continuing with discussions of what the bench symbolizes requires to examine its

many appearances in Jawad's dreams. From dream to dream, references of the bench change with different dreams' content.

I'm standing next to a washing bench. It isn't in the mghaysil, but rather in some other place I've never visited. There are high ceilings, but no windows. There are neon lights, some of which blink. The bench is very long. (Antoon, 2013: 75)

This dream appears when Jawad visits his destroyed college because of the US invasion. The bench that does not resemble to the one at the wash place refers to Jawad's destroyed college which looks different after the attack. At that point, the analogy of the bench in Jawad's dreams is influenced by the event that is the US invasion that Jawad is forced to bear witness to.

Another object that represents the destruction in Jawad's country is TV. With the internet and radio, TV is used in the novel as a technological device that stands for another way of witnessing the violence and death surrounding Iraq.

I'm sitting alone, watching TV and flipping through the channels, but they are all blank. No sound or image. Whiteness, silent whiteness, covers everything. I punch the TV with my fist a few times to no avail. I keep flipping through the channels in search of something that might relieve my insomnia and entertain me a bit. I find only one channel working. (Antoon, 2013: 54)

Since Jawad suffers from insomnia, he tries to find ways to keep himself entertained to forget his pain caused by encountering death. Jawad thinks TV and internet might provide him a safe space but there is no comfort in there too and channels only show the violence taking place in Iraq. Jawad suffocates from the trauma of witnessing death that is apparent in his every encounter both as a corpse washer and a character narrator, who is not able to comfort his own mind.

Traumatic encounter with death makes Jawad think about its presence in his surroundings. He defines himself as the mediator for corpses and his idea of death is significant as he reveals for the first time that Jawad embraces his identity as a corpse washer. He narrates:

If death is a postman, then I receive his letters every day. I am the one who opens carefully the bloodied and torn envelopes. I am the one who washes them, who removes the stamps of death and dries and perfumes them, mumbling what I don't entirely believe in. then I wrap them carefully in white so they may reach their final reader- grave. (Antoon, 2013: 3)

Jawad neither is a believer in Islam nor in any other religion, however, after his father's death, he is forced to become a corpse washer. His dreams for being an

artist are broken since the space of the novel takes place in a destroyed country and he witnesses violence of death every day.

As a trauma narrative representing collective events of Iraq, violence emerges in Jawad's experiences with death. As a character narrator he observes himself and talks to his dead father saying "history is a struggle of statues and monuments, Father" after seeing that the art objects have been destroyed in the city (Antoon, 2013: 103). Space of the novel forms Jawad as a witness narrator and destroys his sense of integrity. In that case, because of the destruction of his country, Jawad is left with feelings of helplessness and suffocation from the trauma of death encounter. Violence leaves Jawad unable to respond to his needs for safety and he becomes a survivor under this pressure.

Because Antoon's narrative is a representation of collective events, Jawad is a witness character who is conditioned by the effects of violence. Witnessing fails in confronting the trauma as discussed previously, and this appears in Jawad's situation as well. Dori Laub argues on failure in witnessing and the survivor's sense of self after the event: "this loss of capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (1992: 67). For Laub, silence prevails over witnessing the event and historical events become so effective that survivors are bound to its trauma. Within that logic, as a survivor witness surrounded by the presence of death, Jawad's sense of self is shattered. And his inability to confront what trauma of witnessing death means for him makes Jawad unaware of the conditions that he encounters in different events.

Violence takes place for such a long time that Jawad becomes used to its presence. At that point, trauma seems to be an event that is encountered frequently in the novel and the witness narrator is forced to accept violence as a daily experience. Jawad thinks "but we got ready for wars as if we were welcoming a visitor we knew very well, hoping to make his stay a pleasant one" (Antoon, 2013: 61). Jawad refers to coming of war that is the US invasion, and he and his mother prepare for the war by taping windows and protecting their house in case of an attack. In that situation, the novel's traumatic events appear to be a casual encounter due to the violence that is already present in his hometown.

Desiring to study sculpture abroad after college, Jawad wants to leave Baghdad. The trauma of witnessing death becomes so overwhelming that Jawad tries to find a job that is nothing like washing dead bodies. And for two years after his father's death, Jawad strives to not become a corpse washer, however, death's heavy presence still exists and he encounters it on the streets.

I thought I succeeded in distancing myself from death and its rituals during the two years following Father's death. But I discovered that even though I wasn't dealing with it with my own hands, death's fingers were crawling everywhere around me. I couldn't shake the notion that death was providing my sustenance. (Antoon, 2013: 104)

The novel is not only about Jawad being a corpse washer but also his death encounter as a witness character. When he does not wash the dead, his father's assistant pays rent money to him and he thinks death still brings food on his table. As it can be seen here that regardless of being a corpse washer, Jawad still struggles with death encounter as a character narrator without confronting its trauma.

Trauma of witnessing death becomes a repeated event in Antoon's narrative. And because of trauma's continuing presence, the novel's narrative is fragmented since Jawad remembers the events randomly. And fragmented narrative is a strong characteristic of trauma fiction mentioned previously, and Anne Whitehead argues "these include intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice" and by these the critic refers to characteristics of representation of trauma in fiction (2004: 92). Due to the trauma of witnessing death in different encounters, Jawad's narrative is based on his memories about violent events and his experiences. However, compared to different trauma fictions, *The Corpse Washer* requires to examine it within the limitations of postcolonial trauma representations.

Anne Whitehead in her compelling arguments has a lot to offer in terms of postcolonial trauma fiction. For instance, for Whitehead, postcolonial fiction differs from European modernist novels, even though the two narratives are built fragmentedly like trauma fiction. And Whitehead adds:

Postcolonial fiction has often sought to replace the public and collective narrative of history with an interior and private act of memory. Memory counters or resists the ways in which history elides difference and forgets the heterogeneous. Postcolonial novelists seek to rescue previously overlooked histories and to bring hitherto marginalized or silenced stories to public consciousness. (2004: 82)

In addition to memory construction which is formed fragmentedly in trauma fiction, postcolonial novels testify against the repressed voice of witness survivors. Therefore, in the case of Antoon's novel as well, postcolonial context necessitates a look on the violence that is revealed through Jawad's narrative based on death encounter.

For instance, Jawad's narrative is shaped by the developing events in the plot and his memories are given randomly and fragmentedly. While Jawad washes a corpse which reminds him Basim, who is his soldier friend and dies in Gulf War, he reminiscences about his time with his dead friend. He feels guilty and narrates:

Here I am washing a dead man's body while my thoughts are wandering in the fissures of my memory. Did father do this as well, or did he focus on his rituals all day long? Is that possible? Here I am, carrying them out in a semimechanical way. (Antoon, 2013: 58)

In this event, Jawad is still not in the process of recognizing what trauma means for him, and his narrative is formed within the boundaries of his memories that reveal his being a forced witness to death. And his voice as a character narrator is based upon death encounter which is a repeated action of the novel.

But what about Jawad's recognition of the painful existence of death in his surroundings? At that point, Jawad becomes aware and his realization is part of his resilience against the trauma of witnessing death. While at the Shiite shrine, Jawad prays and narrates:

But I am imprisoned by my family and my people. I'm a prisoner of the death which has overtaken this land. It is time for me to escape. My mother is on the opposite side asking you to keep me by her side and by yours, but she might not realize that this daily death will poison me if I stay here. (Antoon, 2013: 169)

His silent talk with al-Kazim, who is the seventh Imam of Shiites, shows that Jawad comes to a point where he recognizes death's suffocating presence in his country and in his painful life. Even his realization is silent and there is no way for him to recover from the suffering, except for escaping the country. He cannot manage to escape the violence of death encounter, even though he leaves for Jordan he is rejected at the border. Moreover, this event shows that Jawad is trapped in the trauma of witnessing death.

The ending of the novel is significant because it reveals that Jawad makes peace with the pomegranate tree. Which is an analogy at first representing his hatred

towards death, and in the end, it is what makes Jawad at peace with himself and his surroundings. The last page of the novel is also the climax of Jawad's narrative that is about his recognition of death and his self. He narrates:

I am like the pomegranate tree, but all my branches have been cut, broken, and buried with the dead. My heart has become a shriveled pomegranate beating with death and falling every second into a bottomless spit. But no one knows. No one. The pomegranate alone knows. (Antoon, 2013: 184)

The pomegranate tree standing at the garden of the wash place becomes an analogy for Jawad's recognition of his pain and suffering. Death is still the cause for the overwhelming atmosphere of Jawad's country, however, he grows with the tree by recognizing his own silenced voice. It becomes visible in the end that trauma's silence prevails over the things that Jawad wants to achieve, but he still acknowledges his own resilience thanks to his identification with the tree. In the end, he witnesses his own suffering which belongs to the recovery process of trauma.

All things considered; *The Corpse Washer* is a postcolonial trauma novel representing the trauma of witnessing death caused by violent events. Sinan Antoon borrows from social realities of Iraq from 1980s to 2000s, however, the most relevant event is the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Because of its context, the character narrator Jawad endures the trauma of death and his narrative is based on witnessing its violence. Analogy of objects such as the Humvee car, the pomegranate tree, the bench and TV represent Jawad's different encounters with death and his recognition of his broken self. Since analogical representation of historical violence is a great characteristic of postcolonial novels, Antoon's narrative is highly formed with analogy of death and being a forced witness to death. In the end, it is revealed in *The Corpse Washer* that death encounter compels Jawad into silence since he is not able to recognize it as a traumatic event.

5.1. THE US INVASION OF IRAQ IN 2003

The US invasion of Iraq, also called "Operation Iraqi Freedom" and Iraq War, began with Bush's War on Terror policies as a response to 9/11 attacks. The invasion began in 2003, after two years from 9/11, and costed millions of Iraqi lives even though it lasted less than a month. One needs to consider that Iraq is a postcolonial society

that was once occupied by the British. During First World War, Iraq was invaded by the British forces and heavy regulations were applied accordingly with the British law. “The first significant occupation of Iraq began with the British invasion of Iraq in 1914, the second the American one of 2003” (Yaphe, 2003: 382). It can be seen here that American invasion of Iraq is a continuum of what British did to the country and the US is a predecessor of Britain. And in *The Corpse Washer*, the event is represented through Jawad’s traumatic encounter with death, since the invasion causes the narrator to witness different dead bodies, abandoned on the street.

“War on Terror” is claimed to be legitimized as a response to 9/11 and Bush’s arguments are significant to consider since they expose the ideology behind US policies. Bush’s rhetoric on “war on terror” is highly criticized, because the policies turned out to be based on lies, and it is fundamental to consider what they were:

The US war on Iraq was shaped by the George W. Bush administration and its conservative advisers- dubbed “neocons,” or neoconservatives, in the Washington world wars. Saddam Husayn, they said, had flouted all rules; he had invaded two of his neighbors; defied the UN by refusing to comply with Security Council resolutions, especially those requiring inspections for weapons of mass destruction (WMD); provided safe haven, training, and support to international terrorists, including al-Qaida; and repressed Iraq’s people with tactics of ethnic cleansing, pre-emptory arrests, torture, and execution of real and imagined opponents. (Yaphe, 2003: 392)

In 2003, Bush replaced freedom with war by emphasizing that Iraqis were needed to be free from Saddam Husayn’s regime and he invaded Iraq. It needs to be highlighted here that how the US justified the invasion was about making up reasons to benefit from a country that was in trouble for many years, as can be seen in the argument quoted above.

The US legitimized the invasion of Iraq in different ways. Bush had plans to overthrow Saddam’s regime in Iraq justifying that Saddam had links to al-Qaida. Since al-Qaida was responsible for 9/11 attacks, Bush claimed that Iraq was involved, too.

The campaign focused on three points: (i) that, despite the work of the United Nations, Iraq still possessed weapons of mass destruction; (ii) that Iraq had strong ties with al-Qa’ida operatives; and (iii) that removing Saddam and his regime would usher in a period of peace, prosperity, and freedom for Iraq and the region as a whole. (Abdullah, 2006: 90)

As a response to 9/11, Bush had his new enemy: Saddam Husayn, and he responded to the event with a war. By promises of freedom for Iraqis, Bush went into

the war and took advantage of international organizations and allies who worked for the benefit of the US.

The US invasion of Iraq reveals so much about the position of US in foreign policies. In their many discussions on violence of modernity and United States' interventions in other countries through invasions and its military power, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri redefines what the empire has become after the Second World War. With a Marxist look on the United States' abusive and interventionist power, they define the country as the new empire working with capitalist and colonialist goals. Hardt and Negri concur:

This is commonly conceived as the right or duty of the dominant subjects of the world order to intervene in the territories of other subjects in the interest of preventing or resolving humanitarian problems, guaranteeing accords and imposing peace. (2000: 18)

The critics consider United States to have a global power attained by interventionist institutions such as United Nations which is built on promises of providing human rights all over the world, but acts accordingly with what the US dictates.

What is the exact relation between trauma and representation of historical events in fiction? There is no better scholar than Dominick LaCapra in literary trauma theory to delve into the relation between violent historical events and trauma. LaCapra concurs:

I would in general argue that in history there is a crucial role for empathic unsettlement as an aspect of understanding which stylistically upsets the narrative voice and counteracts harmonizing narration or unqualified objectification yet allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response to the voices of victims. (2001: 148)

LaCapra locates empathic understanding at the center of transference of trauma. History, like fiction, is a place where trauma can be transferred to readers. Both *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* have an impact upon creating an empathic understanding that LaCapra discusses in cases of witnessing traumatic events of history through creating narratives.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the trauma of witnessing death caused by collective events in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013) both of which highly borrow from social realities of historical violence. Regardless of their historical contingencies, both narratives convey the idea that trauma of witnessing death emerges from the destruction of wars and violence for witness narrators. Even though the two trauma narratives have different contexts, they both have first-person narrators and witnessing act of writing becomes at the core of characters narrators' resilience. And death encounter is central in both novels since retrospective witness narrators are forced to bear witness to death caused by collective events without recognizing its trauma and they are silenced.

There are differences and similarities between the two novels, for instance, Foer's novel deals with bereavement as a traumatic event caused by Dresden and 9/11 attacks, and Antoon's narrative represents death as a witnessed event through its narrator's encounters in Baghdad both as a corpse washer and as a character narrator. Therefore, in *The Corpse Washer*, the matter of focalization is not given with the experiences of bereavement like in *Extremely Loud*, rather through the trauma of witnessing death born of collective events. Jawad Kazim endures the burden of death encounter in the ashes of wars and violence in Antoon's narrative, and in Foer's novel, death is experienced with the character narrators' losing their loved ones to Dresden and 9/11 attacks. However, the two narratives are built on witnessing collective events that cause traumatic encounter with death.

Additionally, recovery is a significant issue in traumatic events. And literary trauma theory tackles recovery as a process of resilience against the violence. Recovery occurs when the witness survivor gains the ability to narrate the past event and recognize her own silenced voice. In both novels, recovery happens for the character narrators when they create a novelty from their suffering. For instance, in *Extremely Loud*, the two narrators Oskar Schell and Thomas Sr. Schell share the common experience of bereavement, even though they do not recognize each other's traumas. And from their death encounter emerges a relationship based on helping each other to deal with their loss of Thomas Jr. to 9/11 who is a father to Oskar and son to

Thomas Sr. On the other hand, in Antoon's novel, Jawad Kazim recognizes who he becomes with the trauma of death encounter when he makes peace with the pomegranate tree used as an analogy for Jawad's resilience. And both novels represent the silenced voice of character survivors who are forced to bear witness to collective violence.

In terms of their narrative structures, both novels have homodiegetic narrators who endure the trauma of witnessing death. Foer's and Antoon's narratives are based on witnessing events that cause forced witness to death and character narrators are highly shaped by death encounter. Death, on the other hand, is always a witnessed event and in both narratives, it is caused by collective events. For that reason, historical contextuality is provided while analyzing the two trauma narratives whose events are representation of collective traumas. And in collective violent events, witnessing death appears to be a common experience as discussed in previous chapters. Death drive operates when one encounters an unexpected event, as articulated by Freud. The intricate relation between witnessing death and homodiegetic narrators who develop with the events is one of the issues raised in this thesis in addition to death encounter and historical contingencies of the novels.

The two trauma narratives are examined in the boundaries of the trauma of death encounter arising from collective events which shape the plot of the novels. Literary trauma theory offers a lot to analyze trauma's presence when witness narrators encounter an unexpected event and death is the particular issue, since both novels deal with its emergence in cases of historical violence. In the end, it becomes clear that in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The Corpse Washer* first-person narrators develop a narrative without recognizing the trauma of death encounter, since it silences them about the past events.

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