

# **Embodied Testimonies, Gendered Memories, and the Poetics of Trauma**

Exploring the Intersection of Deconstructionist and  
Postcolonial Trauma Theory

Edited by

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**Series in Sociology**



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# Introduction

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As a new clinical student, Arthur Kleinman vividly recalls an emotionally charged incident in his book *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*. The patient was a misfortunate seven-year-old girl who had suffered extensive burns over most of her body. Her treatment involved the daily torment of a whirlpool bath, during which the medical team meticulously tweezed away the burnt flesh from her raw wounds. This excruciating routine was marked by the girl's screams, moans, and desperate pleas for the medical team to halt the painful procedure. Kleinman's responsibility was to hold her uninjured hand, offering her solace, while also assisting the surgical resident in swiftly removing the dead and infected tissue from her fragile body in the water, which gradually transformed from a pinkish to bloody red hue.

In an attempt to distract the young patient from her traumatic encounters with intense pain, Kleinman engaged her in conversations about her home, family, and school. He found it difficult to bear witness to the daily horrors, including the girl's piercing screams, the sight of dead tissue floating in the blood-stained water, the peeling flesh, the oozing wounds, and the ongoing struggles involved in the cleaning and bandaging process. However, one day, out of desperation and a sense of helplessness, Kleinman implored the girl to share her experiences and how she managed to endure the agonizing burns and the repetitive surgical ritual. To Kleinman's astonishment, the girl paused, her disfigured face making it challenging to discern her expression, but then proceeded to explain straightforwardly and directly. As she narrated her experiences, she held onto Kleinman's hand firmly, no longer screaming or resisting the surgeon or the nurse. As their bond grew strong and trust was established, the girl took it upon herself to share her experiences every day, enabling the student to develop a deeper comprehension. By the time the

student's training in the rehabilitation unit concluded, a noticeable improvement was observed in the girl's ability to tolerate the debridement process.<sup>1</sup>

The opening anecdote in Kleinman's narrative and its subsequent exploration in this collection serve as a compelling theoretical testing ground. The memory of the excruciating event, which involved the young girl being badly burned, and its harrowing aftermath, regardless of the underlying context in which this event occurred, becomes the young girl's sole means of establishing a fragile connection with the outside world. Paradoxically, the well-intentioned efforts of the medical team to divert and distract inadvertently exacerbate her isolation and intensify her suffering. The example of the young girl underscores fundamental concepts and areas of contention within trauma theory, particularly the notion that trauma eludes effective expression through language and the deep sense of isolation and alienation it induces.

The girl's traumatic experience resonates with two fundamental hypotheses that have shaped the theoretical foundation for this collection and have perhaps given rise to deconstructivist trauma theory that, consequently, has been critically examined by postcolonial trauma theorists. One hypothesis, proposed by Elaine Scarry, posits that physical pain eludes linguistic capture, relegating those in pain to an "invisible geography" where their cries reverberate like "intergalactic screams" for those who bear witness. The second hypothesis this anecdote brings into focus is Cathy Caruth's notion of unassimilated experiences of trauma. Here, the girl's memory and ongoing suffering exemplify the enduring impact of the traumatic event on her body and psyche, corresponding to both Scarry's notion of physical and Caruth's assertion of psychological pain's resistance to language.

This collection of articles is committed to exploring the confluence of pluralist/postcolonial critique and deconstructivist psychoanalysis, which represent the two primary theoretical frameworks for understanding traumatic experiences and their representation. Through this exploration, the collection aims to illuminate the limitations observed in non-Western portrayals of traumatic history while also addressing the complicity of Western colonial and imperial powers in perpetuating human suffering. By emphasizing the unspeakable experiences of individuals as the foundation for collective and socio-political engagement, the book challenges established postcolonial trauma theory. Such theory often places excessive emphasis on the collective nature of traumatic experiences, submerging individual narratives beneath ideological constructs of nationalism and self-determination. However, it is important to acknowledge the imperative of decolonizing trauma studies by

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), xi-xii.

examining the social and political factors that contribute to these individual experiences of trauma, particularly in relation to gender, in favor of dominant narratives and power structures.

Elaine Scarry, who has written extensively on topics such as beauty, pain, war, and the body, explores – in her 1985 influential work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* – the nature of physical pain and its social, cultural, and political implications. She has suggested that if one were to consider the range of emotional, perceptual, and somatic experiences associated with various objects or states, the list would be extensive. However, this list would come to an abrupt halt when encountering physical pain. Unlike other conscious experiences, physical pain lacks referential content and does not pertain to or signify anything external. It is precisely because physical pain cannot be objectified outside of the human body that it resists linguistic expression more strongly than any other phenomenon. Its elusive nature and inability to be fully conveyed through words make it uniquely challenging to articulate. Pain, as Scarry asserts, not only resists language but “actively destroys it.”<sup>2</sup> Its resistance to objectification leaves persons in pain, deprived of the resources of speech. Pain that occurs in other people’s bodies “flicker before the mind, then disappear,” making this “absolute split between one’s sense of one’s reality and the reality of another person.”<sup>3</sup>

The story of the young girl under the care of a medical team, however, extends beyond the realm of physical trauma to encompass the memory of an event, highlighting the complex nature of her experience. Furthermore, this is why Scarry’s profound insights into the limitations of language when confronted with physical pain find a compelling resonance in the work of the prominent literary trauma theorist Cathy Caruth. In her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth delves into a similar challenge of comprehending and representing traumatic experiences, albeit with a focus on psychological trauma. She emphasizes the inherent difficulty in truly listening, knowing and capturing the essence of such crises. Drawing parallels to Scarry’s argument on the resistance of pain to linguistic expression, Caruth acknowledges the elusive nature of trauma, which disrupts conventional narrative structures and eludes easy comprehension. She posits that the language employed to address psychological crises often assumes a literary quality, one that defies our understanding even as it seeks to convey the depths of trauma. Caruth’s exploration of trauma and its impact on storytelling enriches our understanding of the girl’s incommunicable pain and the difficulties encountered by Kleinman

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

and the medical team in truly apprehending her experience. It illuminates a fundamental challenge that emerges when striving to engage with and comprehend traumatic encounters.

Caruth's proposition that this language "defies, even as it claims, our understanding"<sup>4</sup> finds support in the psychoanalytic hypothesis put forth by the prominent psychiatrist of the late nineteenth century, Pierre Janet. According to Janet, there is a distinction between normal memory, which involves the act of constructing a coherent narrative, and traumatic memory, which manifests as a frozen fixation on an event that has not yet been comprehended and sorted as a linear and meaningful story. Normal memory, much like other psychological phenomena, is an active process specifically characterized by the act of narrating a story, as Janet explains. Its resolution is not complete until we achieve not only an outward response through our actions but also an internal response through the words, we speak to ourselves and the organization of the narrative we recount to others. It is through the integration of this recital into our personal history that a situation can be satisfactorily resolved. Therefore, strictly speaking, an individual who clings to a fixed idea of an event cannot be considered to possess a "memory" in the true sense. The term "traumatic memory" is used merely for "convenience."<sup>5</sup>

Drawing upon the psychoanalytic differentiation of normal memory and traumatic memory, Geoffrey Hartman's theoretical insights provide a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between language and trauma within the realm of literary theory. According to Hartman, trauma theory focuses on the "relationship of words and trauma," helping us to "read the wound" with the aid of literature. In an insightful observation, he states that there is "always a disjunction between experience and understanding of it" and that "literary theory/knowledge finds the 'real,' identifies with it, and attempts to bring it back [into focus]. The language of this literary construction of trauma is not literal; it is a different sort of statement that relates to that negative moment in experience that cannot be or has not been adequately experienced."<sup>6</sup> This definition sheds light on that moment of the extreme, the shock of a loss, witnessing a brutal blow, and extreme pain that defeats tolerance, comprehension, and, therefore, language. There is a reality that trauma and literary theory have helped to identify: a moment of experience "experienced

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<sup>4</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Janet quoted in Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 35.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (1995): 540.

too soon and too unexpectedly,”<sup>7</sup> as Cathy Caruth states before the subject is there to receive it consciously.

The concept of incommunicability and unspeakability surrounding traumatic experiences, as well as the challenges in comprehending the events and their aftermath for both the listener and the witness, has been closely linked to the deconstructivist Yale school of thought. Emerging in the 1990s, trauma theory drew upon Freudian concepts of repression, dissociation, disruption, and repetition compulsion. Pioneered by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman, these post-structuralist thinkers employed deconstructionist theory to examine trauma and its representation. Central to their investigations was the identification of dissociative symptoms experienced universally by trauma survivors. Caruth posited that trauma constituted an insoluble problem of the unconscious, exposing inherent contradictions within both experience and language.<sup>8</sup> This dissociation of consciousness arises from the terror and surprise encountered during specific events, rendering meaningful recollection and the normal integration of the original experience unattainable for the subject. The delayed nature of reflection, recurrence of symptoms, and reliving of the experience, among other manifestations, stem directly from the absence of consciousness at the moment of the traumatic event. This neurobiological and psychological response elucidates the sufferer’s inability to comprehend and articulate their experience, leading to belated recollections that indirectly and somewhat distortedly recall the past.

Caruth and Hartman offer a framework for understanding history through an examination of delayed responses and “other intrusive phenomena.”<sup>9</sup> They argue that exploring the manifestations of trauma in victims enables us to grasp the implications of trauma for the individual and contextualize it within the surrounding historical backdrop. Caruth perceives the testimonies of victims and survivors as markers of trauma’s effects, serving as acts of “departure,” signifying the act of walking away, surviving, and managing the repercussions of the experience. At the core of a trauma narrative, Caruth argues, there resides a form of dual storytelling characterized by the oscillation between a crisis of death and the corresponding crisis of life. It involves recounting the unbearable nature of the event itself alongside the equally unbearable nature of its survival.<sup>10</sup> This inherent doubleness contributes to the literary nature of

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<sup>7</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Balaev, *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

trauma discourse, reflecting the challenge of expressing not merely what occurred but rather how it was felt.

Contrasting the prevailing poststructuralist perspectives on trauma, Michael Balaev offers a more nuanced and pragmatic stance by challenging the asocial and apolitical nature of deconstructivist theories. While scholars like Caruth perceive trauma as an unsolvable issue rooted in the unconscious, Balaev raises concerns regarding the depiction of the past as a void for trauma sufferers and the ambiguity of language referencing absence.<sup>11</sup> Balaev's viewpoint aligns with that of postcolonial critics, including Laurie Vickroy, Kali Tal, Stef Craps, Irene Visser, and clinical practitioner Judith Herman, who emphasize the social, cultural, and political particularities of traumatic experiences. They argue against the Caruthian perspective, which they believe portrays trauma victims as devoid of autonomy and agency, thereby negating the potential for understanding history through trauma narratives.

In their critique of poststructuralist approaches to trauma narratives, Balaev asserts that the meaning of trauma can be located rather than permanently lost, as it is intertwined with larger social, political, and economic practices that influence violence.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Herman and Vickroy propose that trauma is socially induced, and they highlight the empirical foundations of trauma, including the ongoing connections to "global political movements for human rights" that facilitate the ability to articulate the inexpressible.<sup>13</sup> By challenging the decontextualized view of trauma, these scholars shed light on the social dimensions of traumatic experiences, emphasizing the significance of historical and political contexts. Their perspectives offer an alternative lens through which to examine trauma narratives, acknowledging the interconnectedness between personal experiences and broader socio-political forces.

In her groundbreaking 2015 article titled "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects," Irene Visser examines the emergence of a new wave in trauma studies. She argues for the development of a decolonized trauma theory in response to the influential special issue of *Studies in the Novel* published in Spring/Summer 2008. This special issue, edited by Gert Buelens and Stef Craps, focuses on decolonizing trauma theory and emphasizes the importance of including non-Western and non-European experiences, such as racism and the ongoing everyday suffering of marginalized groups.<sup>14</sup> Visser's

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<sup>11</sup> Balaev, *Contemporary Approaches*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Irene Visser, "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects," *Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2015): 250.

abstract highlights the need for an inclusive approach to trauma that incorporates non-Western belief systems, rituals, and ceremonies. She asserts that embracing these cultural perspectives is essential to achieving the remaining objectives of the long-standing project of decolonizing trauma theory.<sup>15</sup> Quoting Craps, Visser points out that trauma studies must take into account social and historical relations and situate the traumatic histories of subordinate groups within the broader context of socially dominant groups.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing from Luckhurst's critique, Visser examines Caruth's Freudian perspective on trauma, which tends to focus on the lasting effects of trauma and the maintenance of the post-traumatic condition.<sup>17</sup> Visser suggests that Dominick LaCapra's work provides steps toward overcoming the ahistorical grip of Freudian/Caruthian trauma theory. LaCapra challenges the notion that melancholia and fragility are defining and unchangeable characteristics of the post-traumatic stage. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of strengthening communal and individual identities to counteract the lasting effects of trauma.<sup>18</sup> Visser concludes that contemporary postcolonial studies recognize trauma as a complex phenomenon, extending beyond individual, acute events to encompass collective and chronic experiences. "Trauma can weaken individuals and communities, but it can also lead to a stronger sense of identity and renewed social cohesion."<sup>19</sup> Among those traumatic histories of subordinate groups that Visser wants to bring into the broader context of socially dominant groups are the experiences of racially differentiated women.

Pain and suffering are universal experiences, but the afterlife or memory of traumatic events differ for survivors according to their social position; women, ethnic or racial minorities, refugees, and people living in poverty are not afforded the same levels of understanding and protection that are granted to survivors with more social capital. The compounding impacts of gender and race for the women represented in this collection mean that their pain is too often overlooked in accounts of war and displacement. More importantly, it also reveals the ways in which their trauma is objectified or co-opted into larger national or religious narratives of suffering.<sup>20</sup> As the authors in this collection

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>20</sup> Although there is currently very little English-language scholarship on Arab and West Asian women's experiences of trauma, there is a growing body of research that addresses gendered pain in other postcolonial contexts. For instance, Zoë Norridge's *Perceiving Pain in African Literature*, Antjie Krog's *There Was This Goat*, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died that Night* all explore specific forms of violence against women in the

have pointed out, non-Western women's pain is rarely allowed to exist. Instead, it is twisted into a symbolic representation of patriotic duty, sexual desire, or the object of masculine "protection." In these cases, any potential for individual resistance or recovery is overshadowed by the political exigency of a particular narrative. However, the impulse to resist narrative subsumption is still evident in women's testimonies of their individual traumas, and it is a social and political imperative to unearth their experiences and refute the symbolic potential that others attempt to impose upon them.

Numerous theorists, including Judith Herman, contend that psychoanalytic understandings of trauma, particularly those put forth by Freud and his followers, gradually veered away from reality. According to Herman, "psychoanalysis became a study of the internal vicissitudes of fantasy and desire, dissociated from the reality of experience."<sup>21</sup> However, Geoffrey Hartman offers a nuanced psychoanalytic elucidation of the "real," which proves particularly valuable in the ongoing debate and our exploration of literary and artistic representations of trauma and post-traumatic suffering within this collection.

Hartman employs Lacan's concept of the real to illustrate that Freud did not entirely disregard empirical reality; rather, he pointed to the existence of a distinct form of reality. Hartman explains that "the real is not the real, in the sense of a specific, identifiable thing or cause; however specific it may be, it is also a burning idea or its own 'wake' of desire."<sup>22</sup> In relation to the representation of trauma explored in this collection, the real can be found "within the world of 'death-feelings, lost objects, and drives."<sup>23</sup> This approach is particularly valuable in highlighting that the specific moment of "unmediated shock" and the subsequent inner turmoil, overflow of emotions, recurring imagery and memories, or the agonizing longing for the departed loved one is no less real than external, identifiable causes. In these instances, the real is simply that which eludes linguistic elaboration, even though its historical origins can be traced, and it can be diagnosed based on its physical symptoms. For instance, the intense desire for death experienced by a female victim of the Iran-Iraq war is explored in the first chapter in the wake of her excruciating pain.

Hartman asserts that this understanding of the real leads us towards literary theory, as "the disjunction between experiencing (phenomenal or empirical)

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African context, while Kaiama L. Glover's *A Regarded Self* interrogates the narratives of women's pain and resistance in Caribbean literature and Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* covers the traumatic history of India's partition in 1947. For a more comprehensive and comparative analysis of women, literature, and trauma around the world, we recommend checking out *Trauma and Literature*, edited by J. Roger Kurtz.

<sup>21</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge," 539.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.



and understanding (thoughtful naming, in which words replace things, or their images) is what figurative language expresses and explores.”<sup>24</sup> Despite Dominick LaCapra’s critique of their post-structuralist approach, he shares a common ground with Caruth and Hartman in emphasizing the disconcerting and irresolvable impact of trauma on the victim. This shared viewpoint makes their arguments deserving of attention, especially in the context of colonialism’s wounds and the suffering endured by non-white populations.

In order to begin to understand the full impact of suffering in literary and artistic representation, trauma theory must account for both concepts of the Real: the deconstructionists’ emphasis on the failure of language and the power of the unconscious in naming trauma, *and* the postcolonial trauma theorists’ emphasis on the historical-material conditions that produce the context in which trauma occurs. When analyzed together, these two seemingly disparate approaches produce a more nuanced version of traumatic totality—one that begins to account for individual psychology and collective histories. The following chapters take both perspectives seriously, engaging with the histories of colonialism, racism, and sexism in order to make sense of individual experiences of loss and desire. While each chapter focuses on a unique case study or series of objects, they collectively demonstrate the importance of acknowledging the diversity of experiences and voices in representations of trauma throughout different historical and cultural contexts and offer forms of resistance to easy symbolic interpretation.

The first two chapters focus on the representation of women’s experiences of war in contemporary art, which has been dominated by male perspectives, eclipsing women’s accounts of their own experiences. The first chapter by Maryam Ghodrati delves into the embodiment of testimonies from the Iran-Iraq War, capturing both the institutional ecstasy felt by those in power and the individual agony endured by the survivors. Building upon Rothberg’s concept of traumatic realism, Ghodrati specifically focuses on visual representations of trauma in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, taking into account their gendered dimensions. She examines how these representations reveal the interconnectedness of bodies, state conventions, and national concerns, shedding light on the gendered consequences that arise in the wake of violence. By embracing a multidirectional memory and adopting a traumatic realist approach, this chapter explicitly challenges the tendency of postcolonial trauma theory to prioritize collective experiences and overlook individual narratives. According to Ghodrati, art acts as a challenge to dominant narratives of war and nation, inspiring critical engagement with women’s attempts to reclaim their stories from subsumption into nationalist ideology.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

Similarly, James Young's analysis of artistic depictions of women in the Holocaust (Chapter 2) emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive approaches to memory and experiences of trauma. However, unlike Ghodrati, Young's argument focuses on how art that represents women's experiences disregards or even negates the desires of its subjects. He points out that visual and literary depictions of Jewish women's suffering during the Holocaust often tend to objectify women's bodies and obfuscate their psychological pain and voices. Employing Susan Sontag's work on photography and pain alongside the large body of literature that explores gender and Holocaust memory, Young argues that the public gaze of photographers, curators, historians, and museumgoers continues to turn women into objects of memory, idealized casts of perfect suffering and victimization, and emblems of larger Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. The result of the interaction between artist, viewer, and subject means that even though women's pain is often held in high regard, it is also made a spectacle—converting the individual's suffering into cultural and even psychological objects full of symbolism.

The third and fourth chapters shift the focus away from visual art and focus instead on representations of Palestinian women's trauma in literature. These works explore how a retreat into the Lacanian concept of the Imaginary offers a sense of liberation, or at least resistance, to colonial frameworks of violence and control. Layla AlAmmar's chapter (Chapter 3) argues that the female protagonists of Ghada Samman's *Kawābīs Beirut* and Samar Yazbek's *Planet of Clay* react to the utter breakdown of their social realities by retreating into the fantasy-laden, visual field of the Imaginary. Both protagonists narrate their stories under conditions of escalating violence as the Lebanese Civil War and the Syrian Civil War, respectively, erupt around them. Consequently, they evince axiomatic aesthetics of trauma, such as compulsive repetitions and silence, which revert to Freudian understandings of trauma. However, by drawing on Jacques Lacan's register of orders, the analysis shifts from an individual, pathologizing view of the protagonists to the wider psychosocial implications of how the respective wars have ruptured the Symbolic and revealed the traumatic Real, which AlAmmar argues manifests as neopatriarchal hegemonic structures which continually generate war paradigms. In both narratives, a semiotic, pre-symbolic dimension allows the protagonists to articulate trauma in a way that eschews the violent discourse of men. However, despite finding some refuge in the Imaginary, both are ultimately made to confront the Symbolic. This reading of Samman and Yazbek's works challenges the "unspeakable" paradigm of trauma theory while simultaneously attending to individual experience and consciousness within systems of social hegemony.

Nora Parr, on the other hand, focuses her analysis in Chapter 4 on the relationship between individual trauma and the larger experience of Palestinians

who have been displaced. She takes the position that the understanding of trauma cannot be universalized, but the language associated with it can be productively used—and manipulated—for decolonial purposes. Parr argues that Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's novel *The Search for Walid Masoud* rejects the “working through or sense” – making goals of trauma theory by introducing terms of psychoanalysis, creating a critical distance from them, and ultimately transforming the vocabulary of trauma to fashion a unique schema of meaning that is symbolically valuable and unique to a particular community of Palestinian emigrants in Baghdad. Parr claims that though the novel offers no explicit or universal definition of trauma and refuses to address whether or not it can be fully decolonized, Jabra's work does suggest that psychoanalysis and trauma theory can, and have been, re-deployed by postcolonial authors to resist Western influence and hegemony.

The fifth and final chapter returns to the issue of traumatic representation and witnessing by problematizing Benh Zeitlin's portrayal of the gendered and racialized messianic figure in his 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. Concetta Principe argues that the putative Black savior fantasy on screen is riddled with the white American trauma that sustains America's racist history despite its hopeful message and seeming subversion of expectations. Using Lacan's understanding of the Real and Agamben's concept of the “messianic remnant,” Principe asks the question: whose trauma is being represented? Like Young's claim that visual art has failed to fully represent Jewish women's traumatic experiences in the Holocaust, Principe argues that Zeitlin's film and Doris Betts' short story struggle to account for the racial trauma of Black Americans, ultimately projecting a fantasy that attempts to assuage the guilt and frustration of white Americans instead. Her framework begs the audience to think critically about the social and political impact of traumatic representation, rejecting a simplistic association between the experiences of a specific subject and the trauma of the community at large.

Taken together, these chapters engage with issues of universality and specificity; they show that there is not one easy way to strike a balance between deconstructivist ideas about trauma and postcolonial or pluralist approaches. The authors in this collection demonstrate the necessity of embracing a dynamic and diverse approach to the representation of trauma that makes marginalized survivors visible while also recognizing the complexities of gendered and racialized experiences of trauma. By analyzing marginalized representations of trauma, the work in this collection establishes connections and methods for reading trauma within (and against) both the deconstructivist and postcolonial paradigms of trauma theory. Connecting the values of postcolonial and deconstructionist trauma theory is of particular importance in a globalized world, where the legacies of colonialism continue to impact

societies and cultures in complex ways—affecting individuals and communities. Rather than pitting them against one another, this volume presents diverse methods for how these approaches can inform and strengthen one another.

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