




Unconscious Repressed Memories in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*: A Psychoanalytical Perspective

Manar Gamal Mohamed

An MA Student at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Port Said University

angelmanora23@gmail.com

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Abstract

The war in Iraq had a profound impact on the Iraqi people and American soldiers after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. This research aims to explore the impact of repressed memories on the emotional and psychological struggles experienced by characters in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi and *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers. It also examines the key similarities and differences in how trauma is portrayed in both novels. The main research question asks: How do the characters' repressed memories influence their emotional and psychological struggle in both novels? The study also investigates why specific elements of trauma are more prominently depicted in one novel than the other? This research employs a psychoanalytical approach, using Cathy Caruth's theoretical framework on trauma to analyze the psychological impact of repressed memories on the characters. Focusing on these two novels, the study investigates how repressed memories shape characters' experiences of dehumanization, anxiety, depression, nightmares, and suicide. The study concludes that while both soldiers and civilians are affected by war, soldiers suffer more intensely from dehumanization, anxiety, and depression due to their direct involvement in violence. Civilians, particularly the Iraqi people, experience heightened feelings of helplessness. However, both groups share similar levels of suffering when it comes to recurring nightmares and suicidal thoughts.

Keywords: Ahmed Saadwai's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, The Iraq War, Trauma, Unconscious Repressed Memories.

الذكريات اللاواعية المكبوتة في رواية "فرانكشتاين في بغداد" لأحمد سعداوي و"الطيور الصفراء" لكيفن باورز: منظور تحليلي نفسي

مستخلص

كان للحرب في العراق تأثير عميق على الشعب العراقي والجنود الأمريكيين بعد الغزو الأمريكي للعراق في عام 2003. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف تأثير الذكريات المكبوتة على الصراعات العاطفية والنفسية التي يعاني منها الشخصيات في رواية *فرانكشتاين في بغداد* لأحمد سعداوي و*الطيور الصفراء* لكيفن باورز. كما يتناول أوجه التشابه والاختلاف الرئيسية في كيفية تصوير الصدمة النفسية في كلتا الروايتين. يتمحور السؤال البحثي الرئيسي حول: كيف تؤثر الذكريات المكبوتة للشخصيات على صراعاتهم العاطفية والنفسية في كلتا الروايتين؟ ويبحث هذا البحث أيضًا في أسباب بروز عناصر معينة من الصدمة بشكل أوضح في إحدى الروايتين دون الأخرى. يعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج التحليلي النفسي، مستخدمًا الإطار النظري لكاثي كاروث حول الصدمة لتحليل التأثير النفسي للذكريات المكبوتة على الشخصيات. من خلال التركيز على هاتين الروايتين، يستقصي البحث كيف تُشكّل الذكريات المكبوتة تجارب الشخصيات من حيث التجريد من الإنسانية، والقلق، والاكتئاب، والكوابيس، والانتحار. ويخلص البحث إلى أن الجنود والمدنيين على حدٍ سواء يعانون من آثار الحرب، إلا أن الجنود يعانون بشكل أكثر حدة من التجريد من الإنسانية، والقلق، والاكتئاب نتيجة مشاركتهم المباشرة في أعمال العنف. في المقابل، يعاني المدنيون، ولا سيما الشعب العراقي، من مشاعر متزايدة من العجز. ومع ذلك، يشترك كلا الطرفين في مستويات متقاربة من المعاناة فيما يتعلق بالكوابيس المتكررة والتفكير في الانتحار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، كاثي كاروث، الحرب العراقية، فرانكشتاين في بغداد لأحمد سعداوي، الطيور الصفراء لكيفن باورز.

Introduction

Trauma is an emotional reaction to a horrible occurrence such as an accident, crime, natural disaster, physical or emotional abuse, experiencing brutality, the death of a loved one, or war. Immediately following the terrible event, shock and disbelief are common. Furthermore, Trauma is a complicated response to unexpected or overwhelming violence, which can appear as nightmares, flashbacks, depression, suicide, and other persistent symptoms after the event. The Oxford English Dictionary originally defined the term "traumatic" in 1656. The word 'trauma' originates from Greek and means 'a wound'. Until the late nineteenth century, trauma was used to describe severe physical injuries in medicine. In psychology and psychiatry, trauma has been defined as a mental damage or injury to the psyche since the late nineteenth century. As a result, trauma can be physical or psychological.

In a world where wars are increasingly dominating the news, it is essential to reveal the traumatizing oppression and destruction. War, which is known for killing many people, disturbs people and has a significant influence on their mental health. War trauma is one of the most serious and long-lasting forms of psychological distress. Civilians and Soldiers on the fields of war often face violence, death, and destruction, leaving lasting emotional scars. These experiences can result in disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression years after the battle has ended. In both novels, the characters unconsciously bury their painful experiences because the emotional intensity is too overwhelming for them to handle directly. Instead of accepting their grief, they immediately suppress these memories as a psychological defensive strategy. Therefore, their buried trauma affects their behavior.

Repression is one of the most disturbing concepts in psychology. Something shocking occurs, and the mind pushes it into the unconscious. Later, the memory may come to consciousness. Repression does not delete the memory; rather, it allows it to remain hidden from awareness, frequently returning later through symptoms such as anxiety, flashbacks, dreams, or compulsive behaviors.

Unconscious repressed memories are memories of experiences, emotions, and situations that were too distressing for the person to cope with at the time. These memories aren't erased but are kept hidden from conscious awareness by the mind as a protective mechanism to shield the person from emotional pain.

Ahmed Saadawi is an Iraqi novelist, poet, screenwriter and documentary filmmaker. He published his book, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, in 2013. The novel received the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014, France's Grand Prize for Fantasy, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2018. Penguin Press published the novel in 2018. In 2010, Beirut 39 named him one of the top 39 Arab authors under 39 years old. In 2006, Saadawi worked as a journalist for the BBC Arabic Channel, covering the war and violence in Iraq as the occupation wreaked havoc on the country.

Kevin Powers is an American author and poet who also served as a soldier in the Iraq War. His debut novel, *The Yellow Birds*, draws heavily from his personal experiences during a year-long deployment in Iraq. From 2004 to 2005, he served as a machine gunner in Tal Afar and Mosul. The novel received widespread critical praise, earning the PEN/Hemingway Award, the Guardian First Book Award, and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and it was also shortlisted for the National Book Award.

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* both delve into the emotional and psychological consequences of war through powerful and unsettling narratives. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, set during the US invasion of Iraq, a junk dealer assembles together the body parts of bombing victims to make a creature seeking justice; the creature represents the broken and chaotic state of a war-torn society. In contrast, *The Yellow Birds* centers on a young American soldier who struggles with guilt, trauma, and haunting memories throughout and after his deployment in Iraq. Both works explore how violence dehumanizes people and how trauma, both personal and collective, continues to haunt the survivors.

Theoretical Framework

Trauma theory has evolved rapidly in academic contexts across the US and Europe. The term "trauma" originated in medicine and refers to a variety of physical and neurological disorders. It has now gained use in the humanities. Cathy Caruth claims that the most general definition of trauma is "describing an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Therefore, remembering a terrible experience might increase its impact. Cathy also described trauma as "a philosophical approach that people are effect because of unfamiliar action for an uncommon situation that led them to have the disability to control their decisions and behaviors as a result of frustration. Immediately after the events cause feelings of disorder, flashbacks, and Longer-term reactions include changeable emotions" (Caruth 5).

Trauma is generally described as a reaction to sudden or intense violence, whether from a single event or a series of experiences. These events are often difficult to fully process at the time they happen, but their impact tends to resurface later through recurring symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and other persistent responses. Caruth offers in *Unclaimed Experience* a 'general definition' of trauma, which she describes as 'the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (91). The person does not, however, immediately perceive and feel the occurrence. Its violence is not fully felt at the time it occurs, but instead rests in the unconscious and continually haunts victims through hazy memories, dreams, and vague worries.

She also regards trauma as an unrepresentable situations that highlight the tensions between language and experience. Trauma is defined as occurrences that disrupt consciousness and inhibit direct verbal expression. Therefore, according to Cathy Caruth, trauma is more than just a wound inflicted during an incident; it is an

experience that is not fully acknowledged or understood at the time. As a result, Survivors may endure recurring nightmares and repetitive behaviors to compensate for missing parts of their experience. According to Caruth (4), the source of trauma is not the traumatic occurrence itself, but rather an uncertain "unassimilated nature" that has been missed in the first instance. The unknown part of a traumatic event keeps returning and haunting the survivor, seeking to be acknowledged.

Caruth demonstrates how nightmares serve as a frightening replay of an incident that the psyche did not completely comprehend when it occurred. These dreams are more than just recollections; they are reflections of the unconscious mind's attempt to understand an experience that was too overwhelming to comprehend in real time. The past doesn't simply stay in the past, but continues to exist in the present, demanding recognition not through clear facts, but through powerful emotions and repetition.

According to Cathy Caruth, unresolved trauma can cause emotional responses such as anxiety and depression. Anxiety can develop as a result of the unconscious mind's attempts to cope with the overwhelming nature of trauma, whereas depression might develop as the individual struggles with the emotional weight of the traumatic event's delayed return in pieces, such as flashbacks or intrusive recollections. While Cathy Caruth does not directly address suicide in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, her examination of trauma's impact on the psyche sheds light on how unresolved trauma can cause profound emotional distress and, in extreme cases, contribute to thoughts of suicide.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth investigates how trauma can result in a strong sense of alienation and dehumanization. She contends that trauma, especially when overwhelming or inexplicable, affects an individual's ability to narrate or integrate the event into an overall perception of self. This dissociation from one's own identity can lead to a loss of humanity because the victim is unable to comprehend or make sense of their pain adequately. Caruth emphasizes that trauma can cause people to

feel voiceless or invisible, unable to communicate their experiences, which can lead to dehumanization.

To sum up, unconscious suppressed memories have long-term psychological consequences. When a traumatic experience becomes too overwhelming to process, the mind pushes it into the unconscious as a protective mechanism. However, these repressed memories frequently return indirectly, manifesting as nightmares, dreams, or intrusive thoughts. The continual attempt to repress or manage these unresolved events can result in persistent anxiety and depression. In severe circumstances, emotional agony and a sense of powerlessness can lead to suicidal thoughts. Long-term separation from oneself and one's emotions can lead to a sense of dehumanization, in which people feel numb, distant, or alienated from their identity and humanity.

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression are both classified as mood disorders, but they affect individuals in different ways. Depression is often characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a noticeable decrease in energy or motivation. People struggling with depression may also lose interest in activities they once enjoyed. Moreover, anxiety involves ongoing feelings of nervousness. Physical symptoms may include a rapid heartbeat, sweating, or restlessness. While these illnesses can occur independently, they frequently connect, resulting in a complicated mix of mental and physical issues that can significantly impact a person's overall well-being. The characters in both novels suffer from anxiety and depression.

A quote from *Frankenstein in Baghdad* illustrates Hadi's mental and emotional condition following the loss of his friend. Hadi made a huge change after his friend died. The loss has a profound impact on him:

The shock of Nahem's death changed Hadi. He became aggressive... He got into arguments with anyone who

mentioned Nahem and what had happened to him. He kept to himself for a while, and then went back to his old self, laughing and telling extraordinary stories, but now he seemed to have two faces, or two masks_ as soon as he was alone he was gloomy and despondent in a way he hadn't seen before. (27)

Nahem was not only Hadi's close friend but also his business partner. After Nahem's death, Hadi's behavior changed significantly. He becomes aggressive and expresses his dissatisfaction and anger. Furthermore, he insults, curses aloud, and even throws stones at passing American Hummers. He threw stones at the American Hummers out of anger and grief, blaming them for Nahem's death. Although Nahem was killed in an explosion, Hadi held the Americans responsible, believing that their presence and the war they brought to his country were the true cause. In his opinion, the Americans were responsible for everything falling apart. Hadi is overwhelmed by sadness and depression.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Bartle keeps track of the number of killed soldiers, and provides insight into their psychological struggles before they were killed: "We were sure that he'd walked as a ghost for years." (12-13) In *The Yellow Birds*, Bartle depicts dead soldiers as ghosts, wandering aimlessly and without emotion, as if their souls have already departed their bodies. The persistent threat of death damaged their brains, forcing them to bear the painful burden of loss, both of others and themselves. Bartle characterizes them as numb and separate, free of fear, because the horrors of war had worn down their brains and emotions. According to Bartle, all of the soldiers are practically dead on the inside, consumed by depression and emotional weariness. Their physical survival seems meaningless, as they exist in a state of spiritual emptiness. The emotional deterioration is a clear symptom of the significant psychological trauma he has experienced. Also, Bartle admits to experiencing a strange sense of relief, not sorrow, when others die since it means he is still alive. War not only killed soldiers, but it also stripped them of

their humanity. This unpleasant reality illustrates how profoundly the war has influenced his sense of morality and humanity.

Bartle finds Murph quietly kneeling near the dead body of a fellow American soldier, lost in a state of silent mourning: "It is possible that I broke my promise in that very moment, that if I'd gone to comfort him a second earlier, he might not have broken himself. I don't know. He didn't look distraught, he looked curious. He touched the body, straightened the collar, put the boy's head in his lap." (80) After the fellow soldier dies, Murph collapses next to the body, resting his head in his lap in silence. In that moment, the emotional weight of the war left Murph numb and filled with unbearable depression. Bartle, in this quotation, admits that he has broken his promise that he gave to Murph's mother. Bartle told Murph's mother that he would safely return her son home from the war. This promise becomes a terrible burden for Bartle. Bartle is overwhelmed with guilt for not reaching out to comfort Murph when he found him depressed. He believes that if he had taken the time to talk to him or simply been there, Murph might not have fallen so deeply into depression. This regret weighs heavily on him, especially when Bartle thinks about how isolated and hopeless Murph must have felt. This persistent, overwhelming presence of death and devastation, along with his losses and guilt, adds weight and justifies the severity of his depression.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Elishva tells Whatitsname about the death of her son Daniel:

Elishva hadn't agreed to go with them because her heart told her that her son wasn't dead. She didn't look at the grave until Tadros himself died and was buried next to the grave of his son. It broke her heart to read the name of her son on the limestone marker, and even then she wouldn't acknowledge that he was died, despite the passing of the years. (58)

Elishva is deeply depressed after losing her son in the war, and her sorrow is made even heavier by the fact that his body was never

discovered. Because of this, she refuses to believe that he is truly gone. Instead of his body, only his belongings were buried, leaving her with a sense of emptiness and unresolved pain. The sight of her son's name carved into the limestone shattered her heart, it was a painful reminder of a loss she couldn't fully accept. For years, she couldn't bring herself to visit the grave, as if going there would force her to confront the reality of his death. It wasn't until after her husband passed away that she finally visited the grave. She is still hoping that her son might return one day.

Hadi in *Frankenstein, Baghdad*, is astonished by the sudden appearance of armed American soldiers roaming his area, suspicious of everyone. Disturbed by the tight atmosphere, he decides to go home, where he spends the night drinking alone in an attempt to cope with his anxiety:

He spent the night hours drinking slowly and quietly, sitting on his bed, with the bottle of arak, his glass, and the plate of mezes on a high metal table. In a gloom lit only by a feeble, sooty lantern, he listened to the soft warbling from the radio. Raising his last glass high, as always, as if he was in a noisy bar, he toasted his companionship_ the ghosts of the people he knew who were gone and of others he had never met. And he toasted the darkness and the contents of his cluttered, rat-infested room. (80)

Haunted by depression and anxiety, Hadi turns to drink to numb his emotions and escape the harsh reality that surrounds him. In his drunk state, he begins to see ghosts of individuals he previously knew, such as friends and neighbors who have passed away. These illusion visions are a reflection of his loss and suffering, demonstrating that even in times of escape, he cannot fully escape the pain.

The following quotation from *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is spoken by Farid Shawwaf in response to a government official's broadcast announcement, in which the authorities claim to have

successfully stopped a suicide bombing on the bridge, even though the attacker escaped:

I'd go further and say that all the security incidents and the tragedies we're seeing stem from one thing—fear. The people on the bridge died because they were frightened of dying. Every day we're dying from the same fear of dying. The groups that have given shelter and support to al-Qaeda have done so because they are frightened of another group... It has created a death machine working in the other direction because it's afraid of the Other. And we're going to see more and more death because of fear.” (108)

He claims that people are dying not only as a result of violence, but also because of their continual fear of death. The everyday anxiety of wondering if they'll be the next victim destroys them emotionally. Living in a warzone, they are surrounded by death at every turn, bombings, shootings, and other acts of violence. As a result, this persistent terror causes a profound sense of helplessness. The Iraqi people are forced to live in survival mode, always wondering whether each moment will be their last. As a result, depression increases not only from what they've seen and lost, but also from the hard effort of avoiding death every day. It's a psychological load that steals life of its sense of calm and safety.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Bartle imagines his death while drinking whiskey in Al Tafari, as described in the upcoming quotation: “When I imagined my death that night...I imagined it all... I'd bleed, to be sure... I spoke out loud, slurring the words slightly.”(102) Bartle often finds himself imagining his death in the warzone. He pictures how it might happen, whether he will be gunned down, caught in an explosion, or left bleeding on the ground. He also imagines that Murph will be the one who finds his body. He begins to wonder whether he will simply become a full body. Furthermore, he thinks about the moment his blood drains, his skin turns pale and gray. The repeated mental portrayal of death has a tremendous toll. The depression he suffers isn't just caused by the horrors he has

witnessed, but also by the dark future he constantly imagines. Bartle's thoughts become consumed with fear, uncertainty, and the haunting question of whether he will survive or become part of the wreckage. This imagined death scene demonstrates the emotional impact war has on those who serve. Bartle is overwhelmed by the chaos and trauma of war. It demonstrates how profoundly fear and trauma remain in a soldier's consciousness, even in periods of calm. Because of their continual exposure to violence and tragedy, many soldiers continue to fight a mental struggle long after the physical one is over.

Dehumanization

Dehumanization of soldiers and civilians in war zones refers to the process by which humans lose their humanity, dignity, and individuality as a result of war's brutal and dehumanizing nature. People in these circumstances are frequently viewed as tools, targets, or barriers rather than persons with feelings and personalities. Both novels portray characters who lose their sense of humanity because of war.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Bartle describes his state after the death of Malik: "didn't shock me. Murph passed me a smoke." (13) Bartle confesses to feeling absolutely nothing after witnessing the death of Malik, the Iraqi translator who had worked alongside the American soldiers. The knowledge of how numb he has become severely disturbed him, forcing him to confront the violence he has grown to accept as routine. Malik's body lies crumpled and broken, a brutal reminder of the violence around them, yet the sight doesn't shock, grief, or even anger him. Instead, he simply lights a cigarette, and his reaction is disturbingly routine. This numb response reveals the deep psychological toll of war, where constant exposure to death strips away empathy and turns even the most horrific scenes into something ordinary. Surrounded by turmoil and loss, they come to accept death as a normal event rather than a tragedy. Bartle reflects on how death becomes an ordinary part of life in a combat zone, where they feel no emotional reaction when the enemy is killed. To him, those deaths are expected, almost meaningless. This relaxed

motion demonstrates how numb they've grown. It's another clear example of how war dehumanizes the soldiers.

The following quotation is from *Frankenstein in Baghdad* that describes Mahmoud's state after the explosion. Mahmoud appears emotionally disconnected and mentally traumatized. Instead of reacting with panic or obvious distress, he silently puts a cigarette in his lips, attempting to calm himself or escape the horrors surrounding him: "He took out a cigarette and put it in his lips but didn't light it. He felt strangely relaxed despite the disaster that had taken place before his eyes but didn't bother to examine this apparent contradiction." (50) The constant exposure to violence, chaos, and destruction has numbed his emotional responses. This moment is a powerful example of how war dehumanizes not only soldiers but civilians as well. When horrific scenes become part of daily life, people begin to lose their ability to feel or respond naturally. Mahmoud's passive calm in the face of devastation reveals the psychological scars left by prolonged conflict and the destruction of humanity in war-torn circumstances. The Iraqi people become emotionally numb after being constantly exposed to the sound of explosions. Over time, what once brought fear and panic turns into a normal part of their daily lives. The repeated trauma and constant threat of violence have desensitized them, pushing them into a state of emotional survival where reacting feels pointless. This numbness is a form of dehumanization, it strips them of the natural response to tragedy and death. Rather than mourning or feeling fear, they simply continue with their lives. This reaction demonstrates how severely war and violence have impacted both people and their emotions. The ability to feel emotion, fear, or grief disappears, leaving a disturbing sense of acceptance.

Bartle, in the following quotation, admits that he has lost his innocence due to the horror of the war: "I disowned the waters of my youth." (83) The soldiers' innocence, which they took into the war, is gone. Bartle fires at anything that moves, including men, women, or children. He admits that he did kill a guy, and that act has weighed heavily on him, indicating a point of no return. The experience has

completely transformed him; he is no longer the person he was before the war. The war has taken away his ability to see people; instead, he sees targets. Bartle's humanity is reduced by the constant need to keep alive. His actions reveal a significant psychological toll, demonstrating how war not only kills people but also destroys their mental health. As a result, Bartle's new version is shaped by brutality and cruelty. This loss of self-awareness is part of the tragedy of war because it transforms the soldiers so deeply that they are unable to recognize who they have become. Due to the destruction they cause, Bartle begins to see their very presence in the country as something brutal. In this way, he comes to see their role not as heroic, but as a brutal existence.

Nightmares

Nightmares are a frequent and particularly distressing symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These vivid, intense dreams often involve reliving the traumatic event or certain frightening aspects. For many individuals, these nightmares can feel incredibly real, triggering intense fear, panic, or helplessness even after waking. The characters in both novels suffer from nightmares.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Hasib Jaafar, a 21-year-old security guard of the Sadeer Novotel Hotel, is killed by a suicide bomber who explodes a stolen garbage truck:

Exhausted, every member of his family went to sleep dreaming of Hasib walking home with a cloth bag over his shoulder. They all dreamed something about Hasib. Parts of one dream made up for parts missing in another. A little dream filled a gap in a big one, and the threads stitched together to re-create a dream body for Hasib, to go with his soul, which was still hovering over all their heads and seeking the rest it could not find. Where was the body to which it should return in order to take its place among those who live in a state of limbo? (37)

After Hasib's death, every member of his family began having dreams about him. These dreams are strangely interconnected; what one person dreams, another continues, as if they are all stitching together a shattered memory. Their dreams turned into nightmares due to Hasib's scattered body. Each dream depicts Hasib's body, but it is usually incomplete, shattered, or distorted. The family is fixated on his body because it was never fully collected following the explosion; he was physically torn apart, leaving nothing whole behind. Hasib's soul is trapped between worlds, is unable to rest because he no longer has a whole body to keep him at peace. As a result, the dreams turn into terrifying nightmares, not only for his mourning family, but also for Hasib himself, whose spirit is tormented by the loss of identity and shape. The psychological weight becomes a shared trauma, connecting the living who are his family and the dead together in a cycle of suffering and memory.

In *The Yellow Birds*, after Bartle returns home from his service in Iraq, he tells his mother that he's exhausted and just wants to rest and sleep. As he falls asleep, he is haunted by terrible nightmares that transport him back to the horrors of the war, visions of Murph and the battlefield overwhelm his head, making him feel stuck in that distant and brutal place:

The sound of motors trilled ... My pulse fluttered up into my eyes. I exhaled hard whenever the noise rolled past, off toward some other target. I don't remember what I dreamed, but Murph was there, Murph and me and the same ghosts every night. I don't remember what I dreamed, but finally I slept. (75)

When Bartle returns home, he is unable to overcome the trauma of his wartime experiences. The memories stuck to him, heavy and unavoidable and influencing his thoughts and emotions. He begins to experience recurring nightmares that draw him back into the destruction of the battlefield, and the visions are so real that it feels like he has never left. These haunting dreams and flashbacks overwhelm him, making it hard to connect with others or find peace in everyday life. The war has ended, but inside him, it is still raging, making even the simplest parts of life feel like a struggle. The

nightmares for Bartle are the mind's way of processing the pain, guilt, and fear that they aren't able to fully deal with while he is awake and conscious. Because sleep decreases the brain's defenses, repressed memories are resurfaced more strongly, causing Bartle to relive the trauma as if it were happening all over again.

After coming back home, Bartle struggles with the weight of Murph's death and everything that followed. His mother notices his distress and urges him to open up to others. She suggests he reconnect with people, like his old friend Luke, who has invited him to spend time by the river. Bartle makes his way to the river, hoping to reconnect with his old friends. When he arrives, he sees them playing and enjoying themselves, but something inside him prevents him from joining in. Instead, he floats out into the river, overcome by depression and the emotional burden he bears. As he sleeps, he has a nightmare that seems real: "The river had a dream in it." (95) It's more than just a bad dream, it's a vivid and haunting replay of the trauma he's been trying to bury. In this dream, he sees his friend Murph, the memory of his death still vivid and painful. He finds himself naked and exposed, standing in the river where his friend's body was once buried. The water surrounds him, cold and cruel, and he is forced to confront the grief and guilt that continue to haunt him.

The following quotation is said by Nader to Elishva in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. He is attempting to persuade her to leave Iraq. He informs her that Matilda intends to travel to Iraq and take her abroad. Elishva swears she will never leave her house, but Nader uses the terror and violence sweeping the city to persuade the elderly lady to leave the country: "well you know, life's getting hard here. What use is the house if life is hard? Fear, death, anxiety, criminals in the street, everyone watching as you walk past. Even when you're asleep, it's nightmares and jumping in fright all the time. The whole country's starting to look like the Jewish ruin next door." (179) He provides a gloomy depiction of the country, claiming that it has been completely destroyed by the war. People are plagued by constant anxiety and depression. He adds that the violence is widespread, with killings occurring everywhere, and the streets are filled with

people who appear to be wandering in an unconscious state, like ghosts. Nader goes on to warn her that even when she tries to sleep, hoping to find some peace, the nightmares continue because the horror never fully goes away. It's as if darkness has absorbed the entire soul of the land, and the mind can't get away from the atrocities occurring outside.

Suicide

Suicidal ideation, defined as persistent thoughts of self-harm or ending one's life, is a major mental health condition that can have catastrophic consequences. Suicidal thoughts are usually related to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or terrible nightmares that occur in response to overwhelming events such as trauma. The characters in both novels experience severe psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and recurring nightmares, which ultimately lead to suicidal thoughts and, in some instances, suicide.

Hadi is greatly depressed in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* when the old man from Amirli informs him that the furniture has already been sold. Hadi, desperate for money, spends a long time convincing the man to sell at least a few pieces. But rejection strikes him terribly, causing him to wish to die:

For a while he sat on the sidewalk, smoking. He assumed a car bomb or other explosive might go off at any moment and this was a good place to get killed by one. He sat there till darkness fell, deep in thought about the possibility that dozens of bombs had either exploded or been defused during that day. No day passed without at least one car bomb. Why did he see other people dying on the news and yet he was still alive? He had to get on the news one day, he said to himself. He was well aware that this was his destiny. (93)

Hadi's days are characterized by a profound sadness. As he sits alone in the silence, the remains of explosions return in his

consciousness, like ghosts from the past. In continual explosions and destruction, Hadi believes that death is always around him. The sound of explosions has become a regular part of his life, and with each one, he gains confidence that will die shortly. As he watches others die, he wonders why he's still alive. Why did death take them, but not him? This rising sense of helplessness leads to intense emotional suffering. He wishes for death because the pain of living in a war zone has become too much to bear. Every day, he's surrounded by destruction, constant explosions, and the sight of bodies in the streets. Repressed memories cause psychological stress that promotes suicidal thoughts, especially when he believes he can't escape the suffering associated with what he has endured in Iraq.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Bartle admits that he wants to kill himself to end the catastrophic depression he has witnessed: "not wanting to wake up and wanting to kill yourself." (88) This quotation portrays a highly unpleasant state of mind, characterized by emotional exhaustion and depression. Bartle doesn't intend to commit suicide, but he wants to escape consciousness, to stop feeling, thinking, or existing for a while. The burden Bartle carries from the war is not just physical exhaustion, but a deep psychological weight born from guilt, loss, and helplessness. Witnessing the death of his close friend Murph and feeling powerless to prevent it leaves him haunted by a sense of failure that he cannot handle. The war has stripped him of his sense of control and identity, replacing it with memories he wishes he could forget but can't escape. Over time, the burden becomes so heavy that he starts to detach from life itself and seeks death.

In conclusion, repressed memories influence the emotional and psychological distress experienced by the characters in both novels. These memories, which are too painful to absorb consciously, are pushed into the unconscious mind as a protective strategy. They do not completely disappear; rather, they manifest in a variety of painful ways. Characters begin to experience terrible nightmares, feelings of dehumanization, depression, and severe anxiety. Over time, the weight of unresolved trauma becomes unbearable, leading

to self-destructive actions such as suicide. The inability to confront and integrate these traumatic experiences results in a broken sense of self, in which the past haunts the present. Finally, the trauma resurfaces not only emotionally but also physically, manifesting as somatic symptoms that the characters are unable to explain or control, demonstrating the profound and long-term influence of repressed memories on them.

The circumstances of their encounters during war determine how soldiers and civilians respond to trauma. The soldiers in *The Yellow Birds* experience a deeper sense of dehumanization due to the criminal acts they are forced to commit during war. On the other hand, the civilians are more heavily affected by depression and anxiety due to financial difficulties, social isolation, and they are also involved in violence and destruction of their own country. Despite these differences, both soldiers and civilians are deeply impacted by the trauma of war, leading to recurring nightmares, suicidal thoughts, and in some cases, suicide. As a result, certain symptoms are more common in one novel than in another, reflecting their distinct psychological loads.

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