

*Deeksha Suri & Md. Faizan Moquim*

The genesis of enquiries into trauma in academia can be traced back to the last few decades of the twentieth century where particular circumstances and implications of trauma were studied with reference to wars, postcolonialism, political and social tragedies as well as feminist studies. The etymology of the word trauma, from the root “*trau*,” refers to hurt through “twisting” or “piercing” that later comes to be associated with “a sense of psychic wound,” a self-shattering experience of violence or harm (Harper). The foundational claims of trauma’s conceptualizations primarily understand it as an experience that is overwhelming and yet fails to register itself as an “experience” in the first place. Caruth explains traumatic experience as something that “does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (151). It is unintelligible—“not yet fully owned”—because it cannot be integrated into consciousness and remains absent as the conscious memory fails to encode the traumatic event, thereby indicating an *elision*.

This unintelligibility of trauma, as an ambiguous gap that is left open after the event, sustains itself within modes of representation as the unrepresentable which implies a revision of everything understandable by our conscious memory about one’s being as well as one’s circumstances. It is the question of unrepresentability of traumatic experience within a discourse that allows for further engagements with matrix of questions in relation to victimhood, nature of violence, disrupted memory, and its effect on psyche. Retrospective responses to confront trauma through its articulation therefore throw into relief a void that is contoured by a sense of ensuing estrangement and absolute loss. These retrospective modes of confrontation serve the purpose of relieving the blockade imposed by the traumatic event by placing them within the familiar vocabulary of our self-constructed worlds. Narrative voices inscribed within these responses may have many facets: fractured, reflective, critiquing, or commenting on the different stages of narration that objectively evince the consciousness of a subject. While it is hard to reach a consensus over arguments concerning the authenticity of narrated experience or the extent of truth in a crafted narrative—owing to the possibilities of fractured and/or partial point of view of the author—the articulations of trauma through these individual acts of writing and recollection contribute creatively to the collective memory at epistemological, individual, social, and political levels.

The inadequacy of language in representing trauma impels renewed expressions of traumatic experiences through various symbolic, semiotic, and structural paradigms. These renewed expressions witness trauma either as a deferral in articulating extreme traumatic events—which Caruth, drawing upon Freud, interprets to be temporal delay and repetition, if not an absence of response altogether—or comprehend its expressions and responses by weighing in cultural and social factors, thereby contributing to the plurality of its representations. These representations of trauma are responsive to historical memory of culturally and socially specific violence, personal abuse and crisis, along with the oral and written codes of their expression.

Personal crises within geopolitical conflicts, ecological imbalances, political suppressions, and other such factors provide a pluralistic understanding of trauma and its effects on isolated individuals. Shared sympathies towards the survivors through these narratives help build a community that fosters a reintegration of the victims after their alienating experiences of trauma. Even though they are a seminal part of our mental constructs, these narratives of trauma can be voiced or grasped only through their causes or effects. This causal structure of a self-shattering traumatic event, as well as the gradual rendition of its individual articulations, manages to generate an intricate understanding of who we are and how we are transitioning through the recognition and acknowledgement of our experience. Susan Rubin Suleiman aptly claims: “trauma is not only a drama of past event, but also, even primarily, a drama of survival” (280). Writing trauma narratives, therefore, becomes a process of integrating the past with the present for the purpose of healing by registering the intensity of the traumatic event within one’s consciousness and regenerating an individual to look towards its future. This position critiques the premise that traumatic experiences resist narrativization owing to their unsayable elements by focusing on its therapeutic or healing potential through articulation.

Life writings have generated a new focus on trauma that allows for an understanding of the question of agency as well as its limits. Recognition and redescription of the traumatic episodes through writing get formulated both as personal recollections and collective cultural documentations of personal testimonies. Trends of narrativization and scholarship generally explore ideological contestations within political memory, forgetting, re-presenting history, and identity politics. First person accounts of trauma confront the issues of silence, resistance, shame, and activism, while narrative undertakings of collective suffering shift power dynamics, question the hierarchy, break the silence, and critically respond to socio-political structures. Therefore, attempts at their articulation are not merely contributions to particular moments in history but substantial moments in themselves. Readings of such narratives encourage relativity and consolidation as they appeal to the emotional and ethical sensibility of the readers who, situated in different social and cultural contexts themselves, are made to identify with these narratives of trauma.

The universalizing tendencies inherent in the critical discourses of trauma-theory in 1990s, are now being increasingly contested for their narrow Euro-American conceptual and historical frameworks. The concepts and cultural expressions originating beyond Eurocentric conventions are distinct from the already existing moulds of narrativization and theorization. They encapsulate nuances that remain particular to the issues of caste, class, gender, religion, migration, and militancy among others. This constituted duality of Western and non-Western narratives of trauma highlights the attempts of existing discourse to attend to the dynamics of traumatic experiences attached to variegated social backgrounds, peripheral groups, multiple levels of oppression, and transgenerational impact which are discussed as the conditions of their possibility. The present range of trauma studies, and its initial critical agendas surrounding Holocaust and Western diktats, thereby gets a breadth that navigates through historiographies, limits of self-representations, identity-formations, and self-reflexivity. The sense of aesthetics, experimented with and implemented by thinkers and writers across different

geographical regions, struggles to develop this space for narrative, non-narrative, descriptive, and non-descriptive forms of expression, which respond to culturally specific sense of both mourning as well as healing. Their styles of expression, and their focus on experiential testimonials along with the trauma of witnessing evolve new dimensions and frameworks that lie beyond Western traditions of writing.

This broadening of trauma theory also revolves around the problematic of scale and the agency of the survivors in its call to decolonize trauma by working within the spectrum of histories around “colonial traumas such as dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, slavery, segregation, racism, political violence and genocide” (Craps and Beulens 3). In addition to mounting a challenge to the assumed universal commensurability of first-generation trauma scholarship, scholars now seek to deconstruct the ethical imperatives of classical trauma theory by moving beyond the traumatic experiences of white westerners to those of Global South. Craps and Beulens argue that “the study of trauma has traditionally tended to focus on individual psychology. Colonial trauma, however, is a collective experience, which means that its specificity cannot be recognized unless the object of trauma research shifts from the individual to larger social entities, such as communities or nations” (4). Connected with the scale of trauma research is the question of agency of survivors. The problem with classical models of trauma is succinctly put by Balaev: “One result of trauma’s classic conundrum accordingly removes agency from the survivor’s knowledge of the experience and the self, which restricts trauma’s variability and ignores the diverse values that change over time” (6). In moving beyond the unrepresentability claim of early trauma thinkers we recognize the agency of survivors in the possibility of finding means and modes of recuperating from and representing trauma.

The field of Trauma Studies has shaped through shared intellectual concerns. The papers in this Issue showcase distinct interpretations of trauma. Drawing upon Arthur Frank and Rita Charon’s work, Shannon R. Wooden’s paper seeks to employ the close reading competencies with a view to read traumatic silence in George Saunders’s short story “Home.” Taking into consideration how classroom pedagogy can help train one in ethics of listening, Wooden demonstrates how literature enables us to read imaginative as well as real life stories in such a way that one may empathize with the suffering of others. Cristina Morales and Octavi Rofes’s paper analyses Lina Meruane’s writings on Palestine to develop a larger critique of world literature and the singularity of her discourse within it. The paper explores different aspects of autobiographical writing, such as collective autobiography and displaced autobiography, to trace her journey of personal and literary associations as well as dissociations. It explores the nature of a literary work as a dimension of life writing that contributes to the creation of a world instead of merely being a part of the general structure of world literature. The sense of becoming in her writings deals with the associations she forms with Palestine instead of simply returning to her roots. The aspect of ‘becoming Palestine’ thereby revises the dynamics of affiliation and evolution, which in turn introduces a new perception of world literature.

In the non-themed section of the journal, Noraedén Mora Méndez attempts to demonstrate the love and friendship between languages along with the loss of meaning in the process of translation with the example of the Spanish word ‘duelo,’ which means ‘mourning’ as well as ‘duel.’ By using the psychoanalytical theories of mourning,

melancholia, and crypt in the works of Sigmund Freud, Nicholas Abraham, and Maria Torok, two short stories by Jorge Louis Borges about the two different meanings of ‘duelo’ are closely read to argue for a cryptic translation, which strives for a friendship that acknowledges the alterity between languages. Benjamin Duke and Saumya Tewari’s paper attempts to analyze the UK’s trade negotiation with Commonwealth countries, especially India, in post-Brexit scenario. Positioning the discourse in the changing landscape of the UK’s relation with the European Union and its previous colonies, they employ a post-colonial lens to argue for better developmental opportunities for India in this scenario along with the UK’s attempts to absolve its colonial guilt.

This Issue continues Volume 5 with the theme of trauma within the purview of life writings. The next Issue of this volume will focus on Travel and Life Writing. This attempt towards a sustained discourse on Life Writing through this volume allows us to develop a critique based on multiple perspectives, ideas and experimental styles of writing. We are thankful to all our contributors for bringing this Issue to shape: our authors, peer reviewers, advisory editorial board, and team members have outstretched themselves to work towards this Issue and we appreciate their earnest efforts. We wish happy reading to all our readers.

## Works Cited

- Balaev, Michelle, ed. *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.
- Craps, Stef and Gert Buelens. "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 1–12.
- Harper Douglas, "Etymology of Trauma," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 24 May 2017, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/trauma>.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Judith Herman and Contemporary Trauma Theory." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 276–281.
- Visser, Irene. "Trauma in Non-Western Contexts." *Trauma and Literature*, edited by J. Roger Kurtz, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 124–139.