Iraqi Jews and the Farhud: Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in Ali Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper*

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Abstract

In The Tobacco Keeper, *Ali Bader delves into the harrowing experiences of Iraqi Jews during the Farhud, a violent pogrom that took place in Baghdad in 1941. The story not only chronicles the immediate physical and emotional toll of the violence but also examines the long-lasting psychological effects that such an experience has on the Jewish community in Iraq. The aim of this article is to examine the literary representation of psychic trauma which is provoked by exposure to a traumatic event in Ali Bader's* The Tobacco Keeper *and explore the post-traumatic stress disorders that the traumatized character suffers. The article, through close reading of the novel, attempts to trace and elucidate the myriad emotional, behavioural and psychological predicaments that the protagonist exhibits and experiences after being exposed to the Farhud. The study deploys trauma theory and post-traumatic stress disorders theory to examine the protagonist's altered perception of reality and the self and the mechanisms he employs to cope with the traumatic event and the extent to which he is able to overcome the impacts of those traumatic experiences.*

Keywords: *Farhud, Iraq, Jews, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder*

JEL classification: Y90

Introduction

The Farhud was a Nazi-inspired pogrom, a series of attacks and pillages, carried against Iraqi Jews on June 1–2, 1941. The term Farhud in colloquial Iraqi means "looting or robbing; it came to designate specifically the killing, wounding, and robbing of Jews in Baghdad on the first two days of June 1941" (Bashkin, 2012, p. 101). Sometimes the Farhud is translated as "violent dispossession" and at other times as "mass rape and killing" (Black, 2010, p. 4). It was a "violent dispossession of the Jews of Baghdad" (Black, 2010, p. xiii) and a "senseless orgy of violence," during which 139 Jews were killed and some 2,500 injured. Besides brute killing, Jews' shops, property and houses were looted; women were raped, and many others were kidnapped (Moreh, 2008, p. 6; Black, 2010, p. xiii). According to Sir Martin Gilbert (2010), the Farhud "is a moment of tragedy…a moment of savage violence that foreshadowed the end of a vibrant 2,600-year-old Jewish community" in Iraq (p. xi). It was the first pogrom in an Arab state during which Iraqi Jews were attacked by their fellow Iraqi citizens.

The roots of this pogrom go back to the violent rule of the British. After 1918, Britain ruled Iraq. However, their rule was "often far from benign" (Gilbert, 2010, p. xi). Thousands of Iraqis were killed by the British bombs. In 1920 *Sunday Times* published a letter from T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) calling the British administration "more bloody and inefficient than the public knows. It is a disgrace to our imperial record, and may soon be too inflamed for an ordinary cure" (Gilbert, 2010, p. xi). Furthermore, the British played a pivotal role in facilitating the immigration of European Jews to Palestine. Palestine became a haven for Jewish

communities under British protection, offering a refuge where they could rebuild their lives and lay the groundwork for the eventual establishment of a Jewish state. The national feeling was solidified by the arrival of Palestinian leaders, particularly Haj Amin al-Husseini, who arrived in Baghdad in 1936, along with a large group of Palestinian exiles (teachers, lawyers and intellectuals). These Palestinian exiles were given hospitality and support in Iraq and worked with Pan-Arab Iraqis and "projected their animosity toward Zionism onto Iraqi Jews, and supported Nazi Germany" (Bashkin, 2012, p. 104). Al-Husseini and his companions "spread anti-British as well as anti-Jewish animus" (Gilbert, 2010, p. xii). They had a tremendous influence on the Iraqi regime and called for the government and the people of Iraq to expel the Iraqi Jews (Moreh, 2008, p. 6). The Iraqi nationalists, along with Germany's consul in Baghdad, Dr. Fritz Grobba, and Palestinian leaders established a pro-Nazi government headed by al-Gilani in April 1941 (Moreh, 2008, p. 6). Al-Gilani instigated war against the British who, to ensure the flow of oil to the allies, won the battle at the end of May 1941, and this led to the pogrom against the Iraqi Jews known as the Farhud. Further, the hostile feelings against Jews grew with the spread of Nazi ideas through German radio in Arabic and the formation of Al-Fatwa. All these factors led to the outbreak of violence against Iraqi Jews in 1941 on the first day of the feast of the revelation of the Torah.

During the Farhud, the anti-Zionist sentiment of the Iraqis manifested itself as directed against the Iraqi Jews. Iraqis took to the streets searching for Jews, attacking them and burning them alive. The city Jewish population fell prey to barbarism. Many police took part in the robbery. Bellies were split open and foetuses were removed. Women, sometimes female children, were raped, and some had their breasts cut off. The savagery of 1941 rioters went on unimpeded for two days. Describing the event, Edwin Black (2010) writes:

> Infants were viciously bashed to death against the pavement and then thrown lifeless into the Tigris. Jewish women—hundreds of them—were mercilessly and openly raped in front of their husbands, in front of their parents, in front of their children, and in front of the wild Muslim mobs. If the woman was pregnant, sometimes she was first raped, and then sliced open to destroy the unborn baby; only then was she killed. Men who defended their women and children were killed and their homes plundered. Commonly, after murdering the defenseless Jewish men and women with hatchets, axes, and swords, the chanting throngs hacked their inanimate bodies to pieces, thus further defiling the infidels and—temporarily—sating the mob's blood lust. (p. 3)

It was a moment of horror in which "Cheers and jeers from the rioting Arabs crowds competed with the cries of horror and anguish as family after family were pulled from their vehicles or chased down the street" (Black, 2010, p. 3). For two days, slaughter and violation of Jews continued and the city of Baghdad turned into a burning madhouse. The horrors of this event would forever be seared upon the consciousness of Iraqi Jews. The Farhud incident changed the life of Iraqi Jews forever. It was a real turning point in the history of Iraqi Jews in particular and Iraq itself in general. It was one of the first civil riots against its own citizens. Many historians affirm that all "the subsequent civil strife in Baghdad may be traced back to what happened on that fateful day in 1941" (Bader, 2011, p. 90). Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* re-narrates the Farhud pogrom highlighting its traumatic impact on Iraqi Jews as represented by Yousef.

The aim of the present article is to analyze the literary depiction of psychic trauma which is provoked by the exposure of the novel's protagonist to the Farhud in Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* and to explore the post-traumatic stress disorders that the traumatized protagonist

endures. The article, through close reading of the novel, seeks to trace and elucidate the complex emotional, psychological and behavioural predicaments the protagonist undergoes following the Farhud experience. Employing trauma theory and post-traumatic stress disorder theory, the article examines the protagonist's altered perception of reality and self, the coping mechanisms he adopts to deal with the trauma, and the extent to which he succeeds in overcoming its effects. The article, therefore, examines trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders through the lens of literature, focusing on how literary texts can serve as a medium to portray, understand, and explore the complexities of traumatic experiences. This approach highlights the ability of literature to reflect, contextualize and humanize the experiences of those who have endured trauma, offering readers a deeper understanding of the subjective and multifaceted nature of such experiences.

Reading *The Tobacco Keeper* through the lens of psychoanalysis and trauma theory opens up nuanced perspectives and avenues of inquiry that differ entirely from other approaches such as those focused primarily on identity or liminality. For example, Alwuraafi (2023) investigates how "politics problematizes and destabilizes notions of identity construction, sense of belonging and life in the third space" as depicted in the novel (p. 44). While issues of identity are undoubtedly central to the novel and have been the focus of significant scholarly attention, the present study approaches shift the emphasis toward understanding the psychological dimensions of the protagonist's experiences, particularly the impact of trauma on his psyche and behaviour.

Conceptualizing Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSDS)

The term "'trauma" is derived from the Greek meaning "wound" or "injury". That is, the original meaning of the word is "an injury inflicted on a body" (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). Later on, however, the term was used in psychiatry with a new meaning: "a wound inflicted […] upon the mind" (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). The interest in psychological trauma started after WWI when soldiers who participated in the war showed traumatic symptoms after their return. Since then, many scholars have made attempts to define the term. Caruth (1995) defines trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (p. 4). Similarly, Waites (1993) defines it as "an injury to mind or body that requires structural repair" (p. 22). Waites asserts that "a main effect of trauma is disorganization, a physical and/or mental disorganization that may be circumscribed or widespread," and this disorganization causes "fragmentation of self, shattering of social relationships, erosion of social supports" (p. 92). Kalí Tal (1996) conceptualizes trauma as "a life-threatening event that displaces [one's] preconceived notions about the world" (p. 15). Tal emphasizes that the victim must experience the event first-hand. For Judith Herman (1997) trauma is any "threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (p. 33). All these definitions point to one fact: trauma is an event that involves a grievous stressor that evokes significant symptoms of distress in the individual. Trauma, hence, can refer to a state in which an individual suffers psychological harm following an experience which is perceived as predominantly grievous. The determining factor which makes such an experience traumatic is the individual's ability to emotionally deal with it. It is subjective and differs from one person to another, depending on various factors.

The early discussions of trauma are associated with Freud, who asserts that trauma is the main cause of hysteria amongst women because women were sexually abused in childhood.

Freud argues that trauma is the result of a sudden moment of "shock" or "fright" which the psyche is unprepared to deal with or process. He further elaborates that PTSD stays dormant for some time before surfacing when the women reach adulthood. He calls this delay "belatedness" and what strikes him is the delayed persistent recurrence or return of the event:

> It may happen that someone gets away from, apparently unharmed, the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which one can ascribe only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a 'traumatic neurosis.'…The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the 'incubation period,' a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease… It is the feature one might term *latency*. (Freud, 1939, pp. 109–10)

According to Freud, there is a period of "latency" during which no effects of the traumatic event are apparent. Many techniques such as dream interpretation and free association were used by Freud to explore the psychodynamics of "traumatic neurosis" and he found that nightmares or what he called anxiety dreams were common traumatic symptoms.

After WWI, soldiers who participated in the war showed traumatic symptoms after their return and, therefore, an unprecedented interest in psychological trauma started. Physicians came to realize that "their wounds were psychological rather than organic in nature" and the soldiers' condition was labelled as "shell shock" (Leys, 2000, p. 83). The interest continued throughout the twentieth century, particularly after WWII and Vietnam War. It was after the Vietnam War that those pathologies which have been identified for centuries as "*soldier's heart, battle fatigue, shell shock, combat neurosis, combat exhaustion,* and even *pseudo combat fatigue*" came to be classified as characteristic symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) (Ray, 2012, p. 454). It was in 1980 that the phenomenon was finally acknowledged officially by the American Psychiatric Association and acquired a new name – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Since then the term trauma has been used to refer to any experience of emotional distress. So, there has been a shift in its meaning from the physical to the psychological and nowadays the term is used "to refer to the psychological distress caused by a painful or stressful event that one internalizes but forgets or blocks in conscious life, only to revisit compulsively in nightmares or 'flashbacks' and to suffer additional symptoms, such as paralysis, amnesia, or other psychosomatic illness" (Starks-Estes, 2014, p. 18).

Closely related to trauma is post-traumatic stress disorder which can be defined as "persistent problematic biological and psychological adaptations following exposure to a traumatic stressor, including intrusive memories, avoidance and emotional numbing and hyperarousal and hypervigilance" (Ford, 2009, p. 6). PTSD is "the psychiatric syndrome that arises out of the experience of trauma" (Bubenechik, 2014, 29). It is an individual's response to "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" (Caruth, 1996, p. 57) and includes different mental disorders which result from experiencing a traumatic event including "reexperiencing symptoms, nightmares, and flashbacks; avoidance symptoms, the marks of psychic numbing; and the symptoms of heightened physiological arousal: hypervigilance, disturbed sleep, a distracted mind" (Brown, 1995, p. 100). In other words, PTSD is a severe mental disorder that develops after one's exposure to an exceptionally horrifying or threatening event. For many psychiatrists and psychologists, PTSD is the major consequence of a traumatic event; it is said to be the "only psychiatric disorder clearly induced by the exterior environment" (Pagel, 2021, p. 5). It affects individuals for years after their traumatic experience.

PTSD symptoms are usually grouped into four categories: avoidance, intrusive memories, negative changes in thinking, and changes in emotional and physical reactions. Avoidance symptoms include an individual's attempt to avoid talking or thinking about the traumatic event and avoiding people, places and activities that remind one of the traumatic event. Intrusive memories include recurrent, distressing memories of the traumatic event, flashbacks – reliving the traumatic event again – and upsetting nightmares or dreams. The negative changes in mood and thinking include helplessness and loss of hope or desperation, detaching oneself from family and friends, lack of interest in life and social activities. Symptoms of the changes in emotional reactions include being easily frightened or startled, always feeling in danger, and troubles in sleeping and concentrating. Post-traumatic stress disorders occur when a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with an event that involves an actual threat or serious injury to one's self. Such a person, in spite of a determination to evade and avoid anything that may bring the event to mind again, usually re-experiences or re-lives the traumatic event in their daily thoughts.

Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in *The Tobacco Keeper*

The present article focuses on Ali Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper*, a historical novel which re-narrates the horrific event of the Farhud and its ramifications from the perspective of Yousef, an Iraqi Jew, who lived through it. The novel was originally written in Arabic and published in 2008 and was translated into English by Amira Nowaira in 2011. *The Tobacco Keeper*, a groundbreaking work in the field of Arab fiction on Arab Jews, is the first work of fiction in Iraq to deal with Iraqi Jews. It is the story of violence, exclusion, confiscation, deportation and physical extermination. In this novel, the author does not only underline the cruelty, but also shows the terror of the Farhud event by subtle narratives and compositional manoeuvres. In other words, Bader does not shock the readers by presenting the cruelty but rather reveals the pervasive post-traumatic stress disorders that the protagonist experiences later in his life.

The Tobacco Keeper revolves around Yousef, a traumatized victim, who after the traumatic experience of the Farhud, starts showing PTSDs. The novel unfolds the traumatized life of Yousef, who, as a child, witnesses the horrifying violence of the Farhud and the awful death of his aunt. When he was a child, the burning of his aunt alive instilled fear and terror inside him. This traumatic event has been powerful enough to break through the shielding barriers of his consciousness. Throughout his life, he remembers her death and re-lives this horrible moment of crisis repetitively in his memory. The novel is narrated from a third person omnipresent point of view, which enables the reader to penetrate into the traumatized consciousness of the protagonist and discover his distinct response to violence that ensued during the Farhud and his aunt's dreadful death, after which, Yousef finds himself trapped in a horrendous world fraught with psychic struggles and tensions. Since the traumatic event of the Farhud, Yousef struggles with his surroundings in order to survive both emotionally and physically. In this regard, it can be claimed that the novel attempts to articulate the traumatized world of Iraqi Jews represented by the protagonist and explores in depth the impact of the Farhud on Iraqi Jews emotionally, psychologically, physically and socially. In other words, the novel, told in the form of a meta-narrative, reflects the traumatic experiences as well as the post-traumatic life and the symptoms resulting from those traumatic experiences.

Yousef Sami Saleh's story begins with his childhood. He was born in 1926 in a middle-class Jewish-Iraqi Qujman family which lived on Al-Rashid Street in the Al-Torah quarter, one of Baghdad's oldest quarters, which had been a home to many Jewish families. His father, Sami Saleh worked at Juri pharmacy in Al-Karradah and his mother was Huri bint Rahamin Dalal. His

mother's father worked in his early years at the Spice Market but later moved to work at the Grocers' Market and was fairly wealthy. After World War I, he fell on hard times. His other grandfather, Saleh, had a shop in which he sold sesame paste. He also worked in pruning palm trees at the Mamou date grove and in the interwar years, he worked in brokering the date trade. Yousef's family moved out of the self-contained ghetto in Al-Torah neighbourhood to Hassan Pasha district. The family's move from the small ghetto to the wide world outside is a real turning point in Yousef's life. He breaks "through its thick skin and reached for the sun" (Bader, 2011, p. 87) and starts experiencing the wider world, leaving the anxieties of the closed ghetto behind him. Life in the new neighbourhood seems ordinary and Yousef is able to take new roots and begins to feel that he is part of the new neighbourhood. He exchanges visits with his Muslim friends.

Though the Jews lived in their own neighbourhoods and quarters, which helped them to form a homogeneous group and maintain their Jewish identity and culture, Bader's narration of the family's life before 1941 shows confessional coexistence, communal harmony and religious tolerance that dominated Iraq at that time. The shift of Yousef's family to Hassan Pasha district demonstrates how Iraqi Jews have lived in close proximity to their Muslim neighbours, fostering a sense of coexistence and cultural exchange. Though Yousef's family is not apparently rich, they lead a happy and peaceful life and are engaged in various professions such as trade, commerce, crafts and farming. The family members are making significant contributions to the larger Iraqi cultural, economic and intellectual landscapes and participating in the social fabric of their society and building relationships with their non-Jewish counterparts. There are no restrictions imposed on Jews; they are able to work in any trade they like, a fact which can be attributed to the ancient historical bonds that have bound both communities together for centuries. It also illustrates that Iraqi Jews have a rich history and diverse experiences in Iraq which go back more than 3000 years.

The significant event that changes Yousef's life forever is the Farhud Incident, in which the Al-Torah Jewish neighbourhood is attacked by Muslim mobs. Yousef was fifteen years old. Jews are being beaten by the attackers and houses are being looted. Yousef watches "the crowds running in the pale and hazy light and heard the hoarse screams of Jews suffocating and dying" (Bader, 2011, p. 92). As he watches, he sees "cart drivers and coachmen with whips indicating their willingness to deliver the loot to the homes of the thieves" (Bader, 2011, p. 92). He sees men brandishing knives and swords as they run after Sabreya, a Jewish young woman. She runs with her hair flying loose, pursued by a group of assailants who manage to catch her by the hair before she could enter her house. They punch her on the ground and strip her of clothing. They place their feet on her head and stamp on it with full force. Two men remove her bracelets. Then the angry mob break down the doors and enter the houses of the terrified, trembling Jews who huddle together in the corners. The looters flee, carrying the furniture on their backs: they go from one room to another taking everything they can lay their hands on: bundles of clothes, carpets, rugs, quilts, cooking utensils, pots and even books.

During the Farhud a critical event which has a traumatic and devastating effect on Yousef's life happens: the burning of his aunt, Massouda Dalal, alive. Yousef's aunt, who leaves her larger house in the Muslim neighbourhood believing that the closed neighbourhood of Al-Torah will be much safer and may provide her with safety and security, is the first victim to lose her life in Al-Torah: "She had no idea that this area would be now swarming with strange, angry faces or that their houses would be looted by young men wearing caps and belts, whose bare and

muscular arms held palm branches, wooden canes and iron rods that they waved in the faces of the terrified Jews" (Bader, 2011, p. 92). The scene is described in detail by the author. Yousef

> was looking at the books curling in the fire, shifting and hissing...The flames rose higher and higher, consuming clothes and wooden objects…When the fire began to die out, he saw his aunt on the ground, on her bare knees. Her skin was burning, peeling and blackening. Her facial muscles were contracted and her bones cracked, while the flames consumed her hair. The crackling sounds of his aunt's body burning stifled his screams, which emerged only as quavering, incomprehensible sounds. The flames flickered around her body before reducing it to charred dust that lay scattered on the ground…When he opened his eyes, he felt as though it had all been a dream. His aunt lay a couple of metres away from him, her skin charred and her skull fractured. Her body had shrunk in size so much that it had become no heavier than her beautiful long black hair. (Bader, 2011, p. 93)

Yousef observes the scene of death that is all around and, like most trauma victims, experiences the traumatic event first hand. The horrors he goes through are improbable; he witnesses the violence that has consumed the Jewish neighbourhood and his aunt being burnt alive to death. As a child, he does not know how to handle and cope with these events and hence develops what is psychologically known as post-traumatic stress disorders which include horrific nightmares, feelings of fear, alienation, anxiety and persistent intrusive memories and loss of temporality.

Nightmares

One of the major traumatic symptoms or post-traumatic stress disorders is the recurrence of nightmares in which the traumatic subject relives the event. These nightmares, according to Freud (1955), "have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (p. 13). Freud is startled by the persistent returning of the traumatic dream because such persistent and inexplicable repetition cannot be explained in terms of a wish or a wish fulfilment. According to Herman (1997),

> traumatic dreams are unlike ordinary dreams. In form, these dreams share many of the unusual features of the traumatic memories that occur in waking states. They often include fragments of the traumatic event in exact form, with little or no imaginative elaboration. Identical dreams often occur repeatedly. They are often experienced with terrifying immediacy, as if occurring in the present. (p. 39)

Hence, there is a compulsive repetition of the traumatic event in the form of disturbing dreams and nightmares.

What happened to Yousef is perceived not as a finite incident that took place in the past; the event continues to exist in the form of horrific nightmares, affecting him throughout his life. The death of his aunt in that cruel and inhuman way is a traumatic and painful event of immeasurable repercussions and enormous scope that will leave a permanent wound in his psyche. The catastrophe that he experiences continues to resound powerfully in his memory and constantly surfaces during his sleep in the form of horrible nightmares. Besides being a witness to the gruesome and horrific burning of his aunt, Yousef, as a young child, experiences a real threat to his mental and physical wellbeing. The Farhud massacre, which has taken place before

his very eyes, "induced horrific images in his dreams…He began to see figures that seemed to come out of a Breughel or Bosch painting, with huge noses, deformed bodies, frightening smiles and cloven feet" (Bader, 2011, p. 91). The trauma suffered by Yousef is acute to the point that he, years later, wakes up screaming at night. Readers are told that he

> would often wake up screaming. Two or three times a week he was seized by nightmares. They came randomly…He tossed and turned in bed, then gave a loud scream. It was a sharp, high-pitched noise like the croaking of a man dying a violent death or one committing suicide by jumping off a building. It was the scream of a man hit by a speeding car. The whole house shook with the sound of his screams. Nadia would wake up and sit by his side. Every muscle of his body pulsed and his heartbeat thumped like a drum. He trembled all over and his voice rose high. His hands were cupped on his face. After the screaming had suddenly subsided, he opened his eyes and looked at Nadia with his eyes flashing. He then fell into a mysterious silence and lay back quietly on his pillow. She held onto him to make sure that he was still breathing and that his heart was pulsing with life. (Bader, 2011, p. 207)

Yousef is always haunted by horrifying nightmares. Though he is sleeping in his bedroom many years later, the fire of the Farhud and death continue to visit him in bed, or rather, burst on his bed in the form of nightmares and horrible dreams. In spite of the long time that has passed, Yousef is not able to forget the horrific scene; he is still mentally and nervously organized by the recurring event. At bedtime, the past invades him and the moments that he believes are the calmest and most tranquil turn out to be the worst. It is through these traumatic nightmares that readers come to know the turbulent inner world of this character.

Such obtrusive terrors and recurrent nightmares are the manifestation of Yousef's "compulsion to repeat or 'act out' the traumatic event" (Onega, 2011, p. 84). His nightmares speak "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us the reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Yousef, as a traumatized subject, acts out the traumatic event unconsciously and repetitively sustaining its impact in his psyche rather than reminiscing it as a memory that belongs to the past. The horrifying event of the Farhud "is still present in the mind like an intruder or a ghost" (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 499). Yousef's reliving of the traumatic experience, in the form of dreams and intrusive memories "carries with it the emotional intensity of the original event" (Herman, 1997, p. 42). Although, as will be seen later, nightmares emerge as flashbacks, they are far from being incoherent images, quite the contrary. In the novel, Yousef's dreams are ordered; that is, he gives us a coherent account of the past. And not of any past, but of the moments of traumatic events. The past literally returns to Yousef in his dreams; this is what Freud (1955) talks about when he writes: "dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bring the patient back to into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (p. 13). In this tension between Yousef's inner and outer world, the reader can understand and even empathize with him.

Fear and Startled Reactions

Another traumatic symptom that the traumatic subject experiences in his life is fear. According to Herman (1997), "In this state of hyperarousal, which is the first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly" (p. 35). Herman observes that Kardiner in her discussion of

post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by veterans of World War I observes that symptoms include "startle reactions, hyperalertness, vigilance for the return of danger, nightmares, and psychosomatic complaints" (p. 35). Nir (2018) affirms that "Post-trauma is most often accompanied by feelings of fear, anxiety, and helplessness, as well as intrusive memories of the event, efforts to avoid anything that might evoke the event, constant alertness, and difficulties achieving relaxation" (p. 38). As seen above, fear is one of the PTSD symptoms and an individual's feeling of vulnerability and likelihood of harm increase "when the traumatic events include physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death. In each instance, the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror" (Herman, 1997, p. 34). This is because such awful and traumatic "events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation" (Herman, 1997, p. 51).

Due to the Farhud experience, Yousef's life changes forever. Fear becomes his companion: "He feared the masses and regarded them as a source of danger. He was overwhelmed with apprehension every time he saw their faces and bodies moving with a uniformity that obliterated individual distinctions" (Bader, 2011, p. 131). His memories of the Farhud trigger in him a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity. And, hence, he has extreme startle responses to sudden and unexpected stimuli and is always on the alert for danger. He has an intense reaction to events and experiences associated with the traumatic event of the Farhud. Yousef's reliving of the traumatic experience carries with it the emotional intensity of the violent Farhud itself and, therefore, he is constantly buffeted by terror and anger which are different from ordinary fear and anger in the sense that they very easily aroused or provoked. Due to those harsh experiences, Yousef "felt suffocated and almost dead, for the country was like a ship sinking slowly while his fears spiralled. The world around him was receding and collapsing…His own existence was under constant threat" (Bader, 2011, p. 107). Ali Bader asserts that "fear never entirely left Yousef's heart" until his death (Bader, 2011, p. 94). In one of his letters to Farida years later, he writes that he went swimming in the river; the swimming has "erased the humiliating fear that had always dominated his life in Al-Torah…Fear had vanished completely from his heart because he had been strong enough to overcome it" (Bader, 2011, p. 94). This letter makes the narrator questions its truth; he asks many questions:

> did his fear really and truly disappear?...Could the water wash away the terror that had made him tremble for days on end at the sight of the slogans and swastikas written on the city walls?...Did he lose his fear of the sons of high-ranking army officers who wore uniforms with wide sashes and decorated their shoulders with the emblems of their ranks? Was he no longer afraid of the 'Boy Scouts' or the 'Youth Brigade' who paraded in their uniforms and searched Jews for wireless equipment and mirrors on the allegation of sending signals to British aircraft, and who, while searching the alleged culprits, would scream out, 'Exterminate the germs!' (Bader, 2011, p. 94)

These questions exhibit the extent to which fear has penetrated Yousef's psyche. He seems to fear everything. More than this, the narrator answers his own questions saying, "In fact, fear never entirely left Yousef's heart, for as soon as he found himself facing any of them, his eyes would fill with tears and he couldn't utter a word. He wished he could hide away in a deep, empty well. He would try hard to collect his courage but could only stutter, his power of speech gone" (Bader, 2011, p. 94).

Further, Yousef becomes highly anxious and hypervigilant for danger. The Farhud has a profound effect on Yousef's psyche, instilling life-long feelings of fear and vulnerability. The 1963 Baathist coup, for example, triggers in him the same feeling of fear and anxiety. One day he awakes to the clarion call of the coup, he "felt a vague anxiety. He had a strong sense of déjà vu as horrific images passed through his head. The country he was longing to return to reminded him once again of the events of 1941 when he was a child" (Bader, 2011, p. 136). Fear of populists and mobs terrorize him:

> [He] was absolutely terrified, for he never had any faith in the people. Something in them inspired fear in his heart and made him tremble. He was scared of the mob and tried to keep as far away from them as possible. He had very little confidence in angry popular fervour. Perhaps the Farhoud was the reason, when he'd seen the same ecstasy in the eyes of the mob, the ecstasy of sacrificial offerings, which turned individuals into a herd in a state of exhilaration. (Bader, 2011, p. 151)

Yousef loses his sense of safety and trust in people and the world. This sense of safety which is acquired in early childhood in one's relationship with his parents or the first caretakers and which "sustains a person throughout the lifecycle. It forms the basis of all systems of relationship and faith" (Herman, 1997, p. 51) is shattered during the Farhud. This trust is damaged by the violent or traumatic event; the world is no longer hospitable and safe. This life-long feeling of fear makes him question its longevity. In one of his letters to Farida, he writes, "How long can a man continue to be afraid? How old should a man be before he eliminates his fears? Here I am at fifty, and until now I'm as scared as I was at ten, or even twenty. How old should I be to be able to sleep without nightmares, tears or fear?" (Bader, 2011, p. 207). It seems that there is no answer for his question. Here, the novel articulates Yousef's incapacity to live peacefully amidst the endless flow of horrifying images and the ensuing fear. This is what Yousef experiences after the Farhud, living in constant fear until his death.

Alienation and Regression

One of the predominant effects of trauma is social and cultural alienation. Yousef pays a hefty price for being a Jew; the repercussions of the Farhud can be seen later in his life in his professional career as a violinist and in his relationships with people around him. Herman (1997) maintains, "traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others" (p. 51). Studies published by the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder affirm that a general feeling of detachment is also characteristic of the condition: "People who suffer from PTSD…feel detached or estranged…A person may feel strange or 'not himself' and feel disconnected from the world around him" (qtd in Hain, 2005, p. 147). Yousef is socially isolated and sinks deeper into an alienated world of his own making. Life becomes boring for him. It has not the beauty that it once had: "There was degeneration, regression and a sense of defeat and collapse. Eids became depressing and the festive spirit was almost gone. Society was no longer a beautiful presence but an intricate and frightening labyrinth. Everything had become much narrower in scope" (Bader, 2011, p. 107). Up until his death, Yousef has been constantly avoiding people. He spends long times contemplating in his study room and watching trees in the garden, as he slips deeper into fear and horrible memories. In his contemplation he is attempting to make some sense of the Farhud experience which he cannot contain or understand. During the last years of his life, he lives in constant anxiety and almost never leaves the house. These feelings of anxiety, fear and isolation

find their vent in music. Only when playing his violin does he forget the hell of his life. He retreats to his own world, a world that he has created with the help of music: "he withdrew into his inner world, dedicating himself wholeheartedly to music. He wrote dozens of musical scores and filled his notebooks; he analyzed and studied music" (Bader, 2011, p. 105).

Yousef's trauma does not only evince the destructive consequences of violence for children but also a deep mistrust of one's surroundings. In this sense, *The Tobacco Keeper* portrays how trauma leads the victimized to lose their connection with the outer world. Yousef escapes from reality and truth by confining himself to his claustrophobic world. His isolation from the outside world is an attempt to find and lead a peaceful life. He experiences a profound sense of estrangement in his own homeland, as though he no longer belongs to the place that once defined his identity. In one of his postcards to Farida, he writes "Isn't there more to life than finding oneself a complete stranger among other complete strangers?" (Bader, 2011, p. 73). This is a very significant question; it shows his total despair and his incapability to form relationships. Part of Yousef's alienation is resultant from his distrust of people around him: "When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living" (Herman, 1997, p. 51). That is, traumatic events shatter the sense of connection between the traumatic subject and community, creating a crisis of faith. Yousef's pervasive distrust of people around him could be due to the feeling of betrayal and animosity that he experiences at the hands of the larger Muslim community. Hence, the larger Muslim community looms dangerously on his wounded psyche and continues to maim him psychologically even after adopting a new identity and hiding behind a Muslim facade.

Besides avoiding all people and spending his time alone at home, Yousef has an inclination to avoid speaking either about the Farhud itself. Felman and Laub (1992) describe the silence of traumatized survivors as "a fated exile yet also a home, a destination and a binding oath…a double exile" (p. 58). Due to the horrifying scene which has been explicitly shocking, he finds words inadequate to express himself or describe the scene. Herman (1997) asserts that it is so difficult for witnesses and victims of trauma "to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen" (p. 2). Further, Yousef's silence can be evaluated as a defence mechanism by which he protects himself against the traumatic reality. Bader has depicted Yousef as an alienated and deeply wounded character, incapable of working through his feelings of terror and pain and unable of integrating with others. The Farhud has condemned Yousef to alienation, isolation and endless pain.

Apathy Syndrome

The apathy syndrome is characterized by "a loss of motivation, increased passivity, and feelings of lethargy and 'flatness'" (Hales et al, 2008, p. 1063). As a result of his traumatic experience during the Farhud, Yousef undergoes a profound psychological transformation marked by isolation and alienation. The violence he witnesses and endures leaves an indelible mark on his psyche, leading to a gradual erosion of his zest for life. He becomes mostly inactive, just sitting and contemplating in his room for hours throughout the day. Yousef's relatively high vitality and functionality are replaced by apathy and lethargy. He has no desire for working; just contemplating things and when he contemplates, he looks empty. Yousef suffers from many symptoms that show up in traumatized people such as apathy, lifelessness, inability to fantasize, weak notions of self and inability to act at all in real life. Describing his condition, Bader writes:

> Yousef didn't come up with any great ideas when he gazed at the objects around him. His view of things was profound but neutral. He captured things with his feelings but never questioned anything. This great musician…accepted the world

> quietly and serenely, accepted it for what it was, far from any metaphysical complexity. His life had no hidden agenda, he was a wide-eyed child among the infinite formations of nature. (Bader, 2011, p. 75)

The horrible experience of Farhud coupled with long years of alienation and isolation have a horrible impact on Yousef. They dim his vitality, exuberance and will. Yousef's cognitive abilities suffer from trauma and his perception of the surrounding world is nullified. The Farhud violence induces apathy, numbness and resignation in Yousef leaving him lifeless and drained of liveliness and vitality. The outcome of this is a shallow life and emptiness. Compliance and submission and numbness of spirit, loss of vitality and passivity seem to be important outcomes of the debilitating effects of his traumatic experience.

Yousef's double incapacity numbs him, in the sense that he becomes a living shell or a walking corpse, incapable of feeling anything. He is unable to feel hate, sadness or anger. His cold behaviour can be explained with reference to Caruth's definition of post-traumatic stress disorder. She mentions a process of "numbing that may have begun during or after the experience" as one of the most common behavioural aspects of trauma survivors (1995, p. 4).

Recurring Memories

According to Herman (1997),

> Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. (p. 37)

Herman adds, "Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work" (p. 1). Talking about the persistence of traumatic events, Freud remarks, "The patient is, one might say, fixated to his trauma" (1955, p. 13). Kardiner (1941) describes Freud's "fixation on the trauma" as a crucial feature of combat neurosis. Caruth writes "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1995, pp. 4-5). That is why trauma is sometimes defined as "the unconscious/unprocessed *remains* of the original event(s)" (Oliver, 2020, p. 12). In Yousef's case, he is possessed by the traumatic event of the Farhud which refuses to be buried. The reader is told that "the persistent images and nightmarish visions…had haunted his dreams and tortured him ever since the Farhoud" (Bader, 2011, p. 192). He is entirely possessed by the event until his death. For years, he has not been unable to shake off the image of his burning aunt. The event returns insistently and against his will. He is stuck in a repetitive process through which the death of his aunt is constantly revived in his consciousness. The violence he has experienced continues flashing back and his memories keep surfacing. Actually, for Yousef, the past, to use William Faulkner's frequently quoted words, "is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner, 1996, p. 85). The Farhud is neither dead, nor past; it continues to exist and evoke strange reactions.

Death Wish

Yousef's tragedy culminates in his death wish. He is dominated by the idea of death:

> The mystical feelings that dominated Kamal's [Yousef's] mind at that time were linked with the mysterious death wish within him. He didn't fear death, but considered it a kind of flight into the unknown…Death might perhaps free him, too, from the persistent images and nightmarish visions that had haunted his dreams and tortured him ever since the Farhoud. (Bader, 2011, p. 192)

Yousef's death wish is a sign of his surrender to a tragic end. When he is unable to work through his traumatic past, he wishes death to end his suffering. This persistent death wish is the outcome of his depression and distress which are, without doubt, related to the Farhud experience and the following posttraumatic nightmares. Due to the nightmarish life, he finds death an attractive alternative. This death wish, which was "a real fact that couldn't be ignored" (Bader, 2011, p. 192), surfaces over and again. He seems to feel happy in the thought of being freed by death from the despondency and misery of life. Loss of identity, community, home and family results in his abhorrence of and aversion to life itself.

PTSD and Defence Mechanisms

The Farhud, as discussed above, was an event of inconceivable cruelty, looting and violence. Yousef's aunt is burned alive in front of him. As a Jew, Yousef's exposure to the Farhud horrors makes him vulnerable and an easy target for anti-Jewish attacks. His identity becomes a heavy burden on him:

> He longed to dissolve and vanish into the ethereal. The weight of his identity was too heavy for him to bear. It pushed him towards the past, to vanish into forgetfulness. He wanted to get rid of his identity by fading away, by escaping or hiding. If it wasn't possible to do that, he had to hide behind another character, a new name and a whole new life. (Bader, 2011, p. 106)

He, therefore, invents a new way of survival. In other words, under the tremendous mental and emotional strain of the Farhud, Yousef is forced to find a way to survive. One of his strategies is to change his identity and so we see him experiment with several identities and various ways of behaviour. The life threat that he faces pushes him towards transforming his identity and acquiring a new non-Jewish identity. He finds the Muslim identity as an effective alternative for his Jewish one. Two times he manages to acquire a passport with a Muslim name, one with a Shia Muslim name and the other with a Sunni Muslim name. To survive in such horrible circumstances, he surrenders and wears the mask: "But he had to wear a mask, because the mask made it possible for him to regain his self-confidence. It calmed his fears, expelled his demons and quelled the violent cries in the depths of his heart, the depths that told of hell" (Bader, 2011, p. 106). He masters the mask art and, in addition to professionalism in wearing the mask, he physically and psychologically recreates himself as another person. The mask or the new identity partially clams down his anxieties and removes his fears. The novel demonstrates that Jews, as represented by Yousef, during those fateful years had their identities shaped and reshaped by a number of factors. It also highlights the fact that developing a specifically Jewish identity comes into utter conflict when faced with racial discrimination and persecution. Hence, Yousef's identity has been reshaped to cope with the newly born world at a time of entire reshaping of the geographical and political boundaries not only in Iraq but all over the world.

Moreover, changing identity becomes Yousef's apparent defence mechanisms to cope with the traumatic event and its symptoms which have proved to have healing effects on him. Acquiring a new identity and hiding behind a Muslim mask helps him overcome his traumatized perception of life and regain his self-composure and confidence. He manages to change his name, wife, religion and lifestyle. However, in spite of this recreation, he still holds on to his original identity: "We must not forget ourselves entirely, even if we surrender to a role we've invented, even when it is incompatible with our personalities, because we have chosen to play a role" (Bader, 2011, p. 162). Yousef's mask is a deliberate, full covering and enables him to erase his apparent identity altogether. He remains a Jew in disguise. His assuming of the Muslim name and identity is not the result of his conviction of Islam as a religion but rather a strategy to

survive in a hostile land. Yousef does not deny his Jewishness but rather conceals it. This concealment is prompted by a need to survive. In an attempt to assimilate in the larger society, he enters into relationships with Muslim women and marries twice. Hence, Bader's novel attempts to explore the role of forged and fraudulently constructed identities as a means of survival and a means used to cope with traumatic events. To put it another way, forging is seen as a commonly-employed technique, used for the sole purpose of survival.

Another defence mechanism is Yousef's resort to music. The trauma suffered by Yousef is acute to the point that he, as discussed above, wakes up screaming at night. These feelings of anxiety, angst and fear find their vent in music. In other words, amid these horrors and gruesome life, Yousef finds solace in music. He is not just a violinist but rather a worshipper of Music. Describing his attachment to music, Bader writes:

> Classical music for him was akin to worship or prayer. He passed the time in silence, his eyes fixedly following the melodies as they intertwined. From the moment the music started he paid no attention to what went on around him. He was hopelessly romantic, for he held on to art as the final thread that attached him to life. (Bader, 2011, p. 81)

He expresses himself in music, which greatly helps him overcome his fear and heals his traumatized self. Through music, he seems to relieve his grief by expressing his emotion in notes. Music seems to articulate Yousef's physical trauma, whose body responds to the traumatic events befalling the Jews and through which he is confronting the constant displacement and disorientation. He himself declares the comfort that music gives him: "As far as I'm concerned, I feel nothing. Music gives me a kind of comfortable oblivion that drives away all the fear and anxiety I have felt throughout my life" (Bader, 2011, p. 209). Only when playing his violin does he forget the hell of his life. He is transformed into something different by music. Though his traumatic experience has a huge impact on his life and he never takes pleasure in work or in doing things, he attempts to be strong and uses music as an exclusive haven where he loses himself and his terrifying memories. It can be assumed that his strength, fortitude and even survival can be attributed, at least partially, to the fact that he purged himself in music.

Conclusion

Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* deals with various themes including Jewish identity, history and religion and the communal conflicts that emerged between Jews and Muslims in Iraq in the first half of the twentieth century. However, reading Bader's novel through the lens of psychoanalysis and trauma theory leads to slightly different considerations and directions. The novel can be understood as an endeavour to explore the effects of traumatic events – here it is the Farhud – on a sensitive Jewish child. Going through the novel, it can be effectively said that Yousef is a traumatized character, and with him Bader allows himself to explore the trauma of Iraqi Jews that resulted from the Farhud. His trauma is caused by the awful violence that he witnesses during the Farhud and the burning of his aunt alive at the hands of mobs, an event that jeopardizes his physical and mental integrity. That is, the Farhud and the violence which accompanied it have been more than enough for Yousef to feel traumatized and, therefore, he suffers from various PTSD symptoms such as nightmares, alienation, fear and sense of powerlessness, vulnerability and persistent memories; symptoms that he is unable either to control or eradicate.

Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* provides a highly powerful vessel for expressing and conveying the trauma of Jews' lives which are fractured by horrific violence and unspeakable losses. By constructing the Iraqi Jewish community saga as the prime means of narrativizing

Arab Jews, Bader's novel *The Tobacco Keeper* rewrites notions of home, identity and belonging to present a critique of the victimization of Arab Jews in the early years of the twentieth century. The novel's representation of Yousef's trauma is in fact allegorical and replicates the communal trauma of the whole Jewish community of Iraq. Focusing on the atrocities of 1941, the Farhud, and final departure of the Iraqi Jews after 1948, the novel demonstrates how some Jews empowered by determination and hope, even in the worst possible situations, have been able to survive. They utilized various mechanisms for survival and one of these mechanisms is forged identities. Since the Farhud can be considered as a major national trauma in 1940s Iraq, its literary representations seem to be an apology for the Iraqi Jews and a warning that a similar accident may happen to other minorities.

To conclude, Bader's novel, besides problematizing identity and liminality, is embedded in various personal traumas that problematize the novel's simple and straightforward readings. It revolves around trauma and explores questions of mental stability, traumatized self and the psychological potentials of surviving trauma. As a groundbreaking work of contemporary Iraqi fiction, Bader's novel invites an engagement with trauma theories and studies. Hence, the novel can be read as a trauma narrative.

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