NARRATIVES OF TRAUMATIZATION: HISTORY, KNOWLEDGE AND FICTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN SELECT POST-9/11 AMERICAN FICTIONS

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
For the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
English Language and Literature

By

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Sidhique P

Abstract

This thesis examines post-9/11 fiction by American, Muslim, and diasporic women from South Asian, Arab, and Western backgrounds, interrogating trauma through a decolonial feminist lens. It challenges Euro-American trauma paradigms that universalise trauma as an individual, psychological phenomenon, marginalising gendered and racialised experiences. Through a qualitative, interpretive analysis of six novels—*Saffron Dreams*, *Burnt Shadows*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, *Once in a Promised Land*, *The Submission*, and *Self Storage*—the study develops a feminist trauma aesthetic, reconceptualising trauma as a socially mediated, affectively circulated experience inscribed on racialised and gendered bodies. Drawing on Sara Ahmed, Ann Cvetkovich, Judith Butler, and Homi Bhabha, it highlights how these narratives transform trauma into collective resilience and resistance, exposing epistemic silencing in mainstream trauma theory. The thesis positions these works as a transnational archive of affective justice, resilience, and historical reclamation, foregrounding embodied pain and communal survival within specific sociopolitical contexts. By destabilising hegemonic discourses, this research advances a decolonial feminist framework that redefines trauma's materiality and affect in post-9/11 literature.

Keywords: Post-9/11 Fiction, Trauma, Affective Labour, Gender, Hybridity.

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സംഗ്രഹം

ഈ ഗവേഷണം, 9/11ന് ശേഷമുള്ള അമേരിക്കൻ, മുസ്ലിം, പ്രവാസി സ്ത്രീകൾ എഴുതിയ സാഹിത്യത്തിൽ ആഘാതം, വികാരം, ലിംഗഭേദം, ഡീകോളനിയൽ എപ്പിസ്റ്റമോളജികൾ എന്നിവയുടെ സംനാദങ്ങളെ പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. ഇവയുടെ വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന സാംസ്കാരിക പശ്ചാത്തലങ്ങൾ ദക്ഷിണേഷ്യൻ, അറബ്, പാശ്ചാത്യ സന്ദർഭങ്ങളെ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്നു. സാഹിത്യം പ്രാതിനിധ്യവും പ്രതിരോധവുമായി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നതെങ്ങനെ, വ്യക്തിഗത വിള്ളലിൽ നിന്ന് ആഘാതത്തെ സമൂഹികവും ശാരീരികവും വൈകാരികവുമായ അതിജീവന രീതിയാക്കി മാറ്റുന്നതെങ്ങനെ എന്ന് ഈ പഠനം വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഗുണാത്മകവും വ്യാഖ്യാനാത്മകവുമായ ഒരു രീതിശാസ്ത്രം ഉപയോഗിച്ച്, ആറ് നോവലുകളെ സഫ്രൺ ഡ്രീംസ്, ബേൺട് ഷാഡോസ്, ദി ഗേൾ ഇൻ ദി ടാംഗറിൻ സ്കാർഫ്, വൺസ് ഇൻ എ പ്രോമിസ്ഡ് ലാൻഡ്, ദി സബ്മിഷൻ, സെൽഫ് സ്റ്റോറേജ് വിശകലനം ചെയ്ത് ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് ട്രോമാ സൗന്ദര്യശാസ്ത്രത്തിന്റെ ആശയം വികസിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. സാറാ അഹമ്മദ്, ആൻ സെവ്റ്റ്കോവിച്ച്, ജൂഡിത്ത് ബട്ലർ, ഹോമി ഭാഭ എന്നിവരുടെ സൈദ്ധാന്തിക ചട്ടക്കൂടുകളെ ആശ്രയിച്ച്, ആഘാതത്തെ സാമൂഹികമായി മാധ്യമസ്ഥമാക്കപ്പെടുന്നതും വൈകാരികമായി പ്രചരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നതുമായ ഒരു അനുഭവമായി, വംശീയവും ലിംഗഭേദപരവുമായ ശരീരങ്ങളിൽ എഴുതപ്പെട്ടതായി പുനർനിർവചിക്കുന്നു. അവസാനമായി, മുസ്ലിം സ്ത്രീകളുടെ 9/11ന് ശേഷമുള്ള സാഹിത്യത്തെ വൈകാരിക നീതി, പ്രതിരോധശേഷി, ചരിത്ര പുനർനിർമാണം എന്നിവയുടെ ഒരു ട്രാൻസ്നാഷണൽ ആർക്കൈവായി സ്ഥാപിക്കുന്ന ഡീകോളനിയൽ ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് ചട്ടക്കൂട് ഈ തീസിസ് മുന്നോട്ടുവെക്കുന്നു.

കീവേഡുകൾ: 9/11ന് ശേഷമുള്ള സാഹിത്യം; ആഘാതം; വൈകാരിക പ്രവൃത്തി; ലിംഗഭേദം; ഹൈബ്രിഡിറ്റി.

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Contents

Introduction

America experienced severe cultural trauma as a result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which in turn gave shape to national narratives about retaliation, security, and grief (Gray 12; Versluys 3). However, because of racialised and gendered Islamophobia, the majority of literary discussions either undervalued, generalised, or failed to see in their entirety the debilitating effects of representations of trauma on South Asian, Muslim, and Arab women who have borne it differently. This study aims to address this gap by examining six post-9/11 novels written by diasporic authors.

By portraying trauma as a shared national experience, the majority of literary analyses of post-9/11 narratives exclusively place a strong emphasis on male protagonists (Gray 3). While focusing on male suffering, works such as *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, ignore the gendered ways in which women, particularly Muslim women, experience trauma (Gray 3; Mishra 37). When female characters do show up, they are frequently denied full narrative agency and reduced to clichés such as the "veiled victim" or the self-sacrificing mother (Mishra 37). Even trauma theory has its limitations. Trauma is described as an "unassimilable event" (Caruth 5) in Cathy Caruth's Eurocentric model, but this ignores non-Western coping mechanisms like oral storytelling and group healing (Rothberg 11; Craps 48). Sara Ahmed argues that trauma functions through "affective economy" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 45), where feelings like fear attach to racialised and gendered bodies, reinforcing discrimination (Ahmed 90–91). Even studies on Islamophobia, such as Peter Morey's, hardly ever take this into account.

This ignores two important issues: how trauma contributes to Islamophobic violence against marginalised groups and how trauma studies continue to undervalue the everyday resilience of women through activism, caregiving, and emotional labour (Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness* 21).

Scholars such as Tim Gauthier, Richard Gray, and Kristiaan Versluys demonstrate how post-9/11 literature has deepened our understanding of the attacks' cultural repercussions. However, when portraying public trauma, these studies usually prioritize male viewpoints, making women's lived experiences of violence, displacement, and resiliency inconspicuous or marginal. The use of Eurocentric trauma frameworks, especially Cathy Caruth's model, which emphasizes Western ideas of personal psychic rupture and belatedness, intersects with this gender imbalance in a second way. Particularly for women whose subjectivities are influenced by intersecting histories of migration, race, and gender, such theories frequently fall short in addressing how trauma presents itself in collective, culturally specific, or diasporic contexts.

Further, dominant readings tend to prioritize national allegory, framing texts as symbolic commentaries on U.S. identity or geopolitical power. Though insightful, this approach risks overshadowing nuanced, quotidian portrayals of gendered subjectivities—how trauma permeates private lives, domestic spaces, and bodily experiences in ways that resist grand narratives.

This study takes up these critical omissions by investigating how contemporary women authors—particularly those writing from diasporic or marginalized positions—deploy fiction to map gendered trauma as an embodied,

affective, and historically situated phenomenon. Rather than treating trauma as an abstract or purely psychological event, the researcher examines how literary narratives represent these through sensory, corporeal, and emotional registers (e.g., through motifs of the body, silence, haunting, or everyday rituals). By synthesizing trauma theory, feminist affect studies, and diaspora literature, this research deliberates how women authors reframe trauma as (1) embodied (lived through physical and material constraints), (2) affective (anchored in collective emotions like grief and solidarity), and (3) historically situated (linked to structural histories beyond 9/11).This framework recenters women's voices, challenges the universality of Eurocentric trauma models, and reveals how fiction captures the interplay between collective catastrophe and intimate, gendered survival.

The limitations of existing scholarship-evident in its androcentric, Eurocentric biases and the erasure of affect –necessitate a radical rethinking of prevailing frameworks. The persistence of androcentrism disregards female voices by framing male experiences as the normative standard of cultural and literary representations, while Eurocentrism privileges Western epistemologies at the expense of varied Muslim subjectivities. Equally substantial is the inclination toward affective erasure, which silences the emotional, psychological, and embodied dimensions of trauma as experienced by Muslim American women in the post-9/11 context. Together, these established biases have generated critical blind spots that obscure the nuanced intersections of gender, religion, race, and affect. Addressing these gaps necessitates a critical shift that foregrounds alternative epistemologies and interpretive frameworks—particularly those informed by Cathy Caruth's trauma

theory and Sara Ahmed's feminist phenomenology—to illuminate the marginalised narratives and affective landscapes of Muslim American women writers. This study aims to bridge these gaps by posing the central question: How do Muslim-American and diasporic women writers reframe post-9/11 trauma through embodied, affective, and gendered narratives that resist nationalist allegory?

Using four interconnected questions, this study deliberates and problematises the important gaps in post-9/11 literary scholarship, guided by feminist, diasporic, and trauma studies frameworks: In what ways do Muslim-American and diasporic women's narratives use gendered trauma to reimagine historiography? How do female characters act as sites of resilience and resistance through affective labour? How can diasporic hybridity be used in these texts to decenter Western trauma paradigms? What does an intersectional and embodiment-based feminist trauma aesthetics look like? When taken as a whole, these queries probe how under-represented voices reinterpret cultural memory beyond dominant narratives?

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to investigate marginalised voices that are not included in the canonical post-9/11 syllabi, with a focus on six novels: Shaila Abdulla's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Kamila Shmasie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011), *and Gayle Brandeis' Self Storage* (2007). Trauma studies and Sara Ahmed's affect theory are combined to reframe trauma as a social process mediated by power structures (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 45; *Promise* 21). The study travels through intersectional

understandings of cultural trauma, challenges the erasure of Muslim women in American historiography, and adds a decolonial methodology to literary scholarship.

The study argues that , post-9/11 fiction written by Muslim-American and diasporic women writers subverts hegemonic national narratives and theorises a feminist trauma aesthetics based on diasporic subjectivities by reconstructing gendered trauma as an embodied, intersectional experience through formal innovation and affective narration. It addresses a critical gap in scholarship: the lack of intersectional, gender-focused analyses of cultural trauma in novels by Muslim-American and South Asian diasporic women. The literature review examines foundational work in post-9/11 literature, trauma theory, and affect studies to identify theoretical limitations and position this research as a necessary intervention.

In order to examine gendered trauma in post-9/11 fiction, this study combines two related theoretical frameworks. First, a fundamental understanding of catastrophic events as "unassimilable" experiences that shatter consciousness and show up as narrative fragmentation is provided by Cathy Caruth's trauma theory (Caruth 4). Although Caruth's model is still widely used to understand literary depictions of psychic rupture, it has drawn a lot of criticism for ignoring the part gendered embodiment plays in trauma and universalising Western psychological frameworks (Cvetkovich 7; Craps 24). This limitation is addressed by feminist scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich, who argue that trauma is embedded in everyday social and political realities by recentring it within quotidian, intersectional contexts (*Archive of Feelings*). In addition, trauma is reframed as a socially transmitted phenomenon by Sara Ahmed's affect theory. Her idea of "affective economies," in

which feelings "stick" to racialised and gendered bodies and accumulate value, reframes trauma as relational power mediated by cultural discourse rather than as personal pathology (*Cultural Politics* 45; *Strange Encounters* 5). Ahmed also argues that pain is a "world-making" force that alters spatial relationships and collective identities (*Promise of Happiness* 21). By emphasising how trauma spreads through embodied difference, this integrated framework fills a significant void in post-9/11 literary scholarship.

Frameworks that marginalise gendered and embodied trauma are consistently given priority in seminal scholarship on post-9/11 American fiction. 9/11 was framed as a catalyst for renegotiating American identity by influential critics such as Richard Grey and Kristiaan Versluys, whose privilege analyses focused on national allegory and primarily white male perspectives (Gray 112; Versluys 4). At the same time, prominent studies emphasise formal experimentation—narrative fragmentation, temporal dislocation—as the main literary reaction to the event's "unrepresentability," frequently at the expense of looking at the somatic aspects of trauma (Keniston and Quinn 15). The intersectional subjectivities of Muslim women are further obscured by this critical tendency to universalise the "unspeakability" of trauma, as their experiences are absorbed into homogenising narratives (Morey and Yaqin 89). The way that domestic spaces become sites of affective labour—where women perform unacknowledged emotional and physical labour to sustain daily life in the face of trauma—is largely ignored by emerging feminist scholarship, even as it starts to address gendered violence in this corpus (Gauthier; Schäfer). Pia Masiero's work partially acknowledges this gap but leaves it undeveloped (73).

Scholarship on trauma and representation in post-9/11 fiction is based on important theoretical tensions. The first focusses on the nature of trauma itself. Sara Ahmed's materialist claim that trauma "circulates" dynamically through social and political power structures and acquires meaning differently for different bodies, contrasts sharply with Cathy Caruth's influential model, which emphasises trauma as a universal psychic rupture resistant to narrative integration (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 51). The politics of identity, in particular hybridity, is the subject of a second, related discussion. Jasbir Puar warns that uncritical celebrations of hybridity run the risk of obscuring the material realities of violence and surveillance enacted upon othered bodies (*Terrorist Assemblages* 153), while Homi Bhabha elevates hybrid identities as sites of subversive potential and cultural translation (Location 38). The specific significance of Muslim women's self-narration as an essential form of counter-historiography is often overlooked in ethical discussions surrounding the representation of trauma in fiction (Banita 112). This omission is crucial to the intervention of this study.

Although feminist trauma studies and Sara Ahmed's affect theory provide important frameworks for comprehending embodied experience and the effects of violence, there is still a lack of research on combining these methods to examine Muslim women's post-9/11 fiction. A crucial omission is that no thorough analysis employs this combined theoretical framework to explore the ways in which these literary works distinctively achieve a number of connected goals. In particular, current research does not look at how these narratives rethink historiography by creating embodied archives of violence, which go beyond traditional historical

records to record trauma through affective and sensory experiences. Additionally, little is known about how these texts emphasise affective labour—the relational and emotional labour carried out, frequently by marginalised individuals—as a powerful means of epistemic resistance against prevailing narratives that are frequently Islamophobic. Last but not least, research has not yet adequately explained how this corpus of fiction theorises a unique decolonial trauma aesthetics, one that is purposefully based in the nuanced realities of diasporic hybridity in order to question colonial legacies and envision different approaches to depicting and recovering from collective trauma. This combination of unresolved issues constitutes a substantial gap that needs academic study.

By connecting Ahmedian affect theory and feminist trauma studies through an integrated analysis of six post-9/11 novels written by Muslim women (published between 2003 and 2012), this thesis directly fills the identified gap. Its main contribution is this new theoretical synthesis, which makes three important and connected contributions to scholarship. Initially, it creates a distinct trauma-affect synthesis that demonstrates how the gendered bodies in these stories navigate Ahmed's idea of "sticky" emotions—strong emotional states such as fear and shame that cling to people in hostile, Islamophobic environments—as an essential component of lived trauma. Second, the study illustrates through targeted literary formal analysis how certain aesthetic techniques—in particular, fragmented narration and visceral sensory language—serve as textual mechanisms that materially enact and embody forms of resistance and resilience rather than just serving as representations of suffering. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the

project is a substantive decolonial intervention as it actively challenges the Eurocentric and male-dominated frameworks that have historically defined the post-9/11 literary canon by highlighting the perspectives and formal innovations of Muslim women writers. This broadens our understanding of trauma, affect, and resistance in contemporary fiction. When taken as a whole, these developments redefine critical interaction with this important corpus.

A qualitative, interpretive research methodology based on in-depth literary analysis is used in this thesis. Acknowledging literature as a multifaceted cultural artefact that encodes subjective experiences, social critiques, and aesthetic innovations, the approach is essentially hermeneutic, aiming to interpret the meanings produced by the chosen primary texts and their connections to more general theoretical frameworks and socio-historical contexts. The research aims to expand the theoretical and critical understanding of how particular literary works represent and reconfigure experiences of trauma, affect, and identity in the post-9/11 era, rather than to produce empirical data or statistical trends. Six novels written by Muslim women and published between 2003 and 2012 make up the main primary texts for analysis. A pivotal decade of cultural production coping with heightened Islamophobia, surveillance, war, and diaspora, this era was chosen for its proximity to the events of September 11, 2001, and their profound, changing aftermath. They were selected on the basis of a number of intersecting criteria, including: their explicit engagement with post-9/11 themes (such as state violence, racialisation, gendered Islamophobia, and diasporic experience); their critical recognition in pertinent literary fields; their representation of diverse Muslim female perspectives

and diasporic contexts (including different national origins and settings); and their evident use of narrative strategies that align with the study's focus on affective labour, formal aesthetics, and embodied archives. The corpus is thematically coherent and sufficiently rich for comparative analysis pertinent to the research questions thanks to this deliberate sampling. The analytical framework incorporates fundamental principles of feminist trauma studies with Sara Ahmed's affect theory. Ahmed's ideas serve as the main framework for comprehending how emotions move, stick to bodies, and influence lived reality in the novels. These ideas include "sticky" emotions, the sociality of emotion, affective economies, and the embodied orientation of subjects in hostile worlds. This is combined with feminist trauma studies' focus on the politics of testimony and silence, gendered and intersectional experiences of violence, and opposition to prevailing trauma narratives. Importantly, this combined framework guides the thesis' decolonial viewpoint, emphasising how the texts subvert patriarchal, Eurocentric norms in both the literary canon and the worlds they depict. A comprehensive examination of how trauma is lived affectively and formally resisted, rather than just represented, is made possible by this theoretical integration.

Textual reading is the main analytical technique, with thematic and literary formal analysis as supplementary methods. The depiction of affective labour, the materialisation of trauma on and through the gendered body, and the nuanced deployment of affect are all traced through extended close reading of passages. In order to comprehend how stylistic decisions create "embodied archives" and materially enact resilience or resistance, going beyond simple thematic

representation, formal analysis focusses especially on narrative techniques like fragmentation, non-linearity, focalisation, and the use of sensory, visceral language (tone, imagery, metaphor, syntax). Thematic analysis facilitates the identification and comparison of recurrent themes in the corpus that pertain to decolonial critique, diasporic hybridity, and epistemic resistance. A thorough analysis that connects textual form to theoretical and sociopolitical content is ensured by this methodological triangulation.

The study's scope is purposefully limited to the six chosen novels as literary case studies set in the post-9/11 era (2003–2012). This scope has inherent limitations even though it provides valuable insights. Although it is aware of these contexts, the analysis does not conduct in-depth historical, sociological, or reception studies; instead, it focusses on the affective, traumatic, and formal aspects that are essential to the research questions. Additionally, despite its diversity, the selection only includes novels and leaves out other genres like poetry, memoir, and drama, thus representing a small portion of Muslim women's literary output. The main ethical considerations are avoiding sensationalism or the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes, interpreting texts addressing trauma and marginalisation responsibly and contextually, and honouring the authors' creative agency and the complexity of the experiences they portray.

To sum up, this methodology is especially made to accomplish the main goals of the study. It combines qualitative textual analysis, an integrated Ahmedian-feminist trauma framework, and focused textual analysis. It makes it possible to examine how these novels theorise a decolonial trauma aesthetics based on diasporic

hybridity, centre affective labour as epistemic resistance, and reconfigure historiography through embodied archives. The methodology offers the required resources to close the noted scholarly gap and express the thesis' unique contributions to the domains of literary studies, affect theory, feminist trauma studies, and decolonial criticism by carefully examining the interaction of affect, form, and trauma within this particular corpus.

After establishing the critical gap in synthesising Ahmedian affect theory and feminist trauma studies for analysing post-9/11 fiction by Muslim women, this study can now trace its specific literary and theoretical lineage. It will also outline the intended methodological approach to address that gap.The necessary task of mapping the prevalent conceptual frameworks and representational techniques that have historically influenced the fictional narration of collective trauma is thus taken on in Chapter 1, "Narratives of Wound-A Literary Anatomy". It examines how important literary works in the larger post-9/11 canon have either supported or challenged prevalent, frequently Eurocentric and androcentric trauma theories, especially those that emphasise unspeakability, linear recovery, or universalised psychic wounds. Crucially, this genealogical investigation provides the necessary counterpoint against which the analysis of Muslim women's novels that follows will take place, pointing out exactly where their interventions—through affective labour, embodied archives, and decolonial aesthetics rooted in diasporic hybridity—offer transformative reconfigurations of the fictional representation of trauma. The chapter creates the crucial terrain that the integrated Ahmedian-feminist framework,

used in subsequent chapters, will traverse and redefine by placing the primary texts within this disputed history of trauma narrative.

The evolution of trauma from clinical to cultural discourse is established in Chapter 1, ‘Narratives of Wound-A Literary Anatomy’, which emphasises feminist interventions. In order to provide the theoretical framework for the study's central intervention, this foundational chapter builds a critical genealogy of trauma theory, following its conceptual development. It starts by looking at the early psychoanalytic definitions of trauma, especially those that came from Sigmund Freud, who developed the ideas of belatedness and the unconscious effects of overwhelming experience. Consequently, the analysis moves on to important poststructuralist interventions, emphasising Cathy Caruth's seminal work on the narrative paradoxes and the intrinsic unrepresentability of trauma. Importantly, this historical trajectory is rigorously criticised, with particular attention paid to universalist tendencies that persist in trauma theory and run the risk of obscure or erasing the significant influence of gendered difference on traumatic experience and its expression. The chapter's main contribution, which builds on this criticism, is the idea of a feminist trauma aesthetics as an essential analytical and remedial framework. This aesthetics, which stands out in the Muslim American fictional corpus that is being studied and distinguished by particular narrative techniques. These include the creative use of hybrid forms, the purposeful fragmentation of form, and the strategic application of sensory language to communicate embodied experience. Techniques like Shaila Abdullah's use of imagery and poetic cadence in prose fiction serve as examples of the latter. When combined, these tactics serve as

active means of recovering bodily autonomy and agency in opposition to narratives of erasure and violation, rather than just serving as representations of trauma. The theoretical foundation of this feminist trauma aesthetics is rooted in a critical discussion between Homi K. Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity and Sara Ahmed's work on emotion. A critical framework for comprehending how prevailing narratives of trauma and recovery can silence marginalised perspectives is provided by Ahmed's sharp critique of normative Western "emotion scripts," particularly her examination of how these scripts govern expectations around happiness and suffering within particular cultural and political contexts (*The Promise of Happiness* 21). Bhabha's theorisation of the "third space" (55), the interstitial site of cultural enunciation where new identities and forms of representation emerge from the negotiation of difference, is a useful contrast to this viewpoint. The chapter makes the case that this third space is exactly where the feminist trauma aesthetics found in Muslim American post-9/11 fiction function. In addition to using fragmentation, sensory language, and hybridity to express the distinct textures of racialised and gendered trauma, it also actively contests and rewrites the universalising, frequently masculinist scripts that Ahmed identified, opening up new avenues for the representation of historical and embodied experience.

Affective cartographies of trauma in memory and diasporic displacement are examined in Chapter 2, "Somatic Semiotics: The Body as Counter Text". This chapter performs a comparative analysis of the inscriptions of gendered trauma on the body and its navigation within diasporic space, building on the theoretical framework of feminist trauma aesthetics established in Chapter 1. With a focus on

Burnt Shadows (2009) and *Saffron Dreams* (2009), the analysis charts the intricate ways trauma clings to and changes the female form. Sara Ahmed's theory that emotions, especially those related to trauma, "stick" to bodies (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 91) and influence their movement and meaning in social and political contexts is at the heart of this study. Arissa, the main character in Abdullah's novel, uses the elaborate craft of henna not only as a means of cultural expression but also as a deeply meaningful textual practice in which the skin itself turns into a "archive" (73). Henna's staining and fading patterns act as a physical palimpsest, documenting complex experiences of prejudice, loss, and resiliency unique to her identity as a Muslim widow in America after 9/11. As a result, the body becomes an active, if brittle, storehouse of individual and collective history rather than a passive location of victimisation. Shamsie's transnational story, on the other hand, centres on Hiroko Tanaka-Ashraf, whose body is physically scarred by the bombing of Nagasaki. A radical reinterpretation of these embodied marks can be seen in Hiroko's journey across decades and continents, from Japan to India, Pakistan, and America after 9/11. Hiroko intentionally reframes her scars as "weapons of memory" (203), as opposed to representations of pure victimhood. This act, which weaponises the obvious evidence of past violence against forces of erasure and amnesia, is a potent example of embodied agency. Her scars turn into living testaments, compelling her to confront suppressed histories of imperial violence and nuclear destruction as they relate to modern Islamophobia. When taken as a whole, these books significantly advance our knowledge of diaspora. Chapter 2 makes the case that Abdullah and Shamsie reinterpret the diaspora primarily as a powerful site of affective resistance, even as they acknowledge the profound experiences of loss, displacement, and

alienation that are inherent in diasporic existence. The female protagonists negotiate and challenge the gendered and racialised traumas caused by domestic and international conflicts by using the particular, embodied tactics examined—the skin-as-archive and scars-as-weapons. In contrast to narratives that reduce diaspora to a state of victimisation or lack, their bodies become the site of alternative histories and materialised resistance. Thus, within the gendered diasporic experience, this chapter maps the affective cartographies through which trauma is both borne and actively reconfigured into counter-memory and survival strategies.

Chapter 3, titled "Hybridity as Praxis: The Body as an Archive of Resistance", examines hybridity as agency in navigating religious and cultural identity in their works. This chapter switches gears to look at how, in the wake of 9/11, linguistic and religious hybridity serves as a narrative strategy to break through monolithic nationalist trauma narratives. The analysis, which focusses on *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), examines the subversive potential present in characters negotiating complicated, frequently disputed identities. The chapter makes the case that the deliberate use of hybridity in these texts—exemplified by linguistic blending, code-switching, and the syncretic negotiation of religious and cultural practices—actively undermines reductive discourses that aim to impose unique, frequently Islamophobic interpretations of trauma and national belonging. This hybridity is a purposeful aesthetic and political tactic rather than just a reflection of bicultural experience. Code-switching is a prominent feature of Kahf's story, which skilfully incorporates Arabic religious phrases, cultural allusions, and colloquial speech patterns into the English prose.

This linguistic fluidity challenges the expectation of linguistic purity frequently demanded by nationalist paradigms and represents the protagonist Khadra's changing identity by refusing assimilation into a homogenised American narrative. Similarly, Halaby uses the visceral metaphor of "trembling in two languages" (121) to depict the deep internal conflict of her protagonist, Jassim Haddad. The pressure to fit into a single national identity after 9/11 causes its own kind of psychological and physical suffering, as this phrase illustrates. It captures the embodied tension of existing concurrently within opposing cultural and emotional frameworks. The violence and impossibility that come with forced cultural erasure are symbolised by his struggle. The chapter analyses communal spaces by extending Sara Ahmed's concept of "affective economies"—where emotions flow and gain value between signs and bodies (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*)—beyond the individual. In order to help Muslim American communities deal with collective trauma, it explores how common locations like mosques or political demonstrations turn into essential hubs within these economies. In reaction to widespread surveillance, discrimination, and grief, these spaces help affects—such as fear, solidarity, anger, and resilience—to circulate and change. It is possible to see how these public areas serve as essential counter-public domains by examining scenes of congregation in Kahf's book or representations of community reaction and protest in Halaby's writing. They show how hybridity and communal affect are intertwined as forms of cultural resilience and narrative resistance by enabling the collective articulation of hybrid identities and the development of solidarity against nationalist narratives that aim to marginalise or demonise. Thus, Chapter 3 places hybridity—enacted through language and collective practice—as a fundamental strategy for

rewriting exclusionary histories and claiming complex belonging within the framework of feminist trauma aesthetics.

In Chapter 4, "Architecture of Absence," the focus is shifted to the institutional and public sphere dynamics of post-9/11 trauma as it examines the commodification of gendered trauma within national "affective economies" (Ahmed). The chapter primarily uses the novel's main allegory—a hotly contested contest to create a 9/11 memorial—to critique the commercialisation of trauma in the American public domain. The narrative painstakingly traces how people's unfiltered, personal grief—especially that of the bereaved—becomes symbolic capital in artistic, media, and political discourses. The experience of Widow Asma Anwar, whose severe personal loss is gradually made "public property," provides a stark illustration of this process (Waldman 118). She loses control over her own emotional experience and how it is portrayed when different groups—politicians looking for legitimacy, activists pursuing agendas, and media outlets creating narratives—appropriate, interpret, and use her grief. The primary methodological technique used in this chapter to analyse this process is textual analysis. It carefully examines Waldman's use of spatial metaphors, focussing on the abstract designs entered for the memorial competition and the intensely charged courtroom settings where legal disputes over the memorial's ownership and meaning are fought. These areas are seen as crucial locations where Sara Ahmed's idea of "stickiness" functions with racialised and gendered power (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 45). Within these contested arenas, trauma-related emotions, especially grief and anger, "stick" to particular bodies and symbols. When the winning architect, Mohammad

"Mo" Khan, is revealed to be a Muslim American, he and his abstract design ‘The Garden’ become the focal point of suspicions, anxieties, and unresolved national rage. At the same time, the emotional "stickiness" serves to marginalise people like Asma; her real connection to the trauma is subordinated to the public spectacle, and her voice is ignored in the very conversation that is allegedly focused on commemorating her loss. This exclusion is exacerbated by her identity as a racialised woman, making her even more susceptible to the affective economies that control the process.

The main takeaway from this chapter is that Waldman's allegory reveals how the flow of emotions in public and institutional settings frequently serves to deny racialised women agency over the stories of their own trauma. Even though trauma is a powerful cultural currency, strong actors and dominant nationalistic sentiments control how it is managed and portrayed. As portrayed in the novel, the ostensibly collective act of memorialisation turns into a battlefield where the particular injuries of marginalised people are taken, altered, or suppressed in order to further larger ideological goals. Thus, *The Submission* exposes the ways in which public remembrance can exacerbate rather than alleviate the emotional and social scars caused by trauma, especially for people who are marginalised on the basis of both gender and race. By showing how institutional structures and public discourses actively shape, constrain, and commodify the representation of gendered and racialised suffering, this analysis adds to the thesis's overall feminist trauma aesthetics.

Chapter 5, "Affective Echoes: Gendering the Unseen Wound," develops a decolonial framework for transnational trauma narratives by examining intimate trauma labour and resistance in domestic settings. By turning the emphasis to the most intimate dimensions of recovery, the final analytical chapter, which examines *Self Storage* (2007), brings the thesis's exploration of feminist trauma aesthetics to a close. Here, trauma is not merely inscribed as a site of rupture or loss but is reimagined as a generative space where recovery, resilience, and renewed selfhood become possible. In this concluding movement, the narrative demonstrates how spaces once marked by vulnerability can be transformed into loci of empowerment, thus transcending the boundaries of pain to articulate new modes of healing and agency. The novel primarily reframes domestic work—more especially, the tasks of nursing and object storage—as essential, personal economies of trauma recovery rather than as menial tasks. Through these embodied, material practices, protagonist Flan manages her own grief as well as the prevailing anxieties of post-9/11 America. Her painstaking selection of trash in a storage facility turns into a preservation ritual, an effort to give meaning and order to pieces of lives characterised by displacement and loss. At the same time, nursing her child is depicted as a deep, physical exchange of comfort and nourishment, a concrete act of care that actively combats the psychological and social disintegration brought on by trauma. These behaviours create a micro-economy within the cramped, frequently disorganised home environment where material and emotional resources are handled, processed, and changed for survival and early healing. By presenting Flan as a powerful representation of Sara Ahmed's concept of the "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness 67*), this chapter synthesises the theoretical framework. Flan

challenges expected paths of mourning or patriotic assimilation, as well as normative scripts of feminine passivity. Expectations of how a woman (especially a mother) should act or cope with collective trauma are challenged by her compulsive collecting and her intense, occasionally awkward, focus on breastfeeding. She declines to play the part of the subtly distraught or inherently strong subject. Rather, her actions are a way to use material care to repurpose trauma. Flan actively regains agency by directing her anguish and confusion into these concrete acts of nurturing and preservation. She turns the raw materials of fear and loss—embodied in abandoned items and the physical demands of motherhood—into a practice of continuity and meaning-making that is intensely personal and defiant. Her insistence on this alternate, materially based method of dealing with suffering and uncertainty is what makes her a "killjoy." Therefore, by suggesting that these small acts of preservation—Flan's sorting, breastfeeding, and storing—serve as a type of decolonial historiography, Chapter 5 significantly advances the thesis' main point. Brandeis's novel elevates the intimate, the physical, and the transient while rejecting grand, official narratives that frequently erase or instrumentalise marginalised experiences (especially those of women navigating motherhood in the midst of a national crisis). By conserving remnants of lives and tales left out of the prevailing historical narratives, the storage unit turns into a counter-archive. In the process of maintaining life, breastfeeding turns into a living archive, a somatic transmission of history, care, and resistance. By enacting a historiography from below that is rooted in the body and the home, these practices subvert patriarchal and colonial logics that value monumental, disembodied history. Thus, *Self Storage* ends the analytical journey by claiming that the quiet, persistent work of preserving life and memory

against erasure is where the feminist trauma aesthetics developed throughout the thesis finds its most potent expression. This places the embodied, everyday acts of women as essential locations for rewriting history and imagining decolonial futures.

The historiography of affective positions based on gender, race, and class needs a calculated assessment of the theoretical evolution of trauma; as such, the first chapter opens with a literary anatomy of the narratives of wounds.

Chapter 1

Narratives of Wound - A Literary Anatomy

Post structuralism was very sceptical of the logo centric theories that had ruled Western philosophy for centuries. It sought to sow seeds of suspicion and compel us to interrogate the very nature of the reality we inhabit. Ultimately, even the notion of theory itself came under scrutiny, and, arguably, literary theory began to dissolve its own foundations. Nevertheless, the world that remained in the academia, in the humanities after the waning of literary theory evolved into new and compelling directions. Among these developments is the emergence of trauma theory as a significant analytical tool.

Like most poststructuralist theories, trauma theory is inherently interdisciplinary. Trauma is the Greek word for "wound"—a wound that is deep and painful. In trauma theory, however, this term trauma is used metaphorically. It does not refer to physical wounds but rather to psychological wounds ones inflicted on the mental framework of a person, wounds that are definitive and deeply influential in shaping an individual's psychological outlook. Moreover Trauma theory does not limit its scope to individual experience but extends to collective and cultural trauma dimensions. Events such as the Holocaust, for instance, have produced enduring collective trauma that continues to impact subsequent generations of Jewish communities. This phenomenon is not unique to the Holocaust; virtually all historical and contemporary genocides produce forms of collective trauma that persist across time. Collective trauma becomes a crucial site for the construction of

group identities. It also emerges as an extremely politically charged space. Many contemporary extremist or militant groups draw their ideological energy from collective traumas, using them as rallying points for identity formation, political mobilization, and historical grievance.

In this sense, Trauma theory, is highly political, cultural, and ideological. Its implications moves beyond the realm of literary analysis but it does not prevent its valuable application to literary discourse. On the contrary, trauma theory offers a robust framework for examining literary texts, particularly those situated within the genre of “trauma literature." This genre of literature includes a wide range of works that emerge from marginalised and historically oppressed communities like African American slave narratives, Dalit women's autobiographies, and autobiographies by individuals from underprivileged social locations. These narratives bear witness to suffering and establish the psychological and cultural residues of trauma, making them prime subjects for analysis through the frame work of trauma theory. Although trauma theory is explicitly interdisciplinary—drawing from psychology, sociology, history, and cultural studies—it nonetheless serves important literary purposes. It enhances literary appreciation by revealing how trauma is embedded within narrative structures, character development, and symbolic representation.

To grasp trauma theory in its entirety, however, one must consider its broader cultural dimensions. Trauma is intricately connected to several key variables: memory, history, identity, and culture. These elements intersect in complex and often unsettling ways. Trauma is not solely an individual experience; it transcends the subject and becomes a collective phenomenon. It operates as a larger

framework through which personal and communal identities are mediated, reshaped, and often consumed by historical forces.

There is a critical moment when personal memory and historical narrative collide—when the subjective experience of trauma meets the broader cultural and political discourse. This site of collision is also a site of cultural significance, where identity is negotiated and meaning is contested. The clash between memory and history generates a dynamic space for the production of cultural discourses such as cinema, visual art, literature, and collective memory. These cultural productions emerge at the intersection of trauma, history, and memory and fall directly within the analytical scope of trauma theory. They demand interpretation and symptomatic interpretation to historical wounds and cultural displacement not just as artistic expressions. Trauma theory, therefore, becomes an essential tool for unpacking the aesthetic, political, and ideological dimensions of such works.

There are various ways in which individuals and societies respond to trauma. Trauma itself can arise from different sources—war, natural disasters, or personal crises. Each of these triggers functions differently in shaping how trauma is experienced and understood. For example, war is a vastly different stimulus compared to a natural disaster, and both differ from a personal crisis. The way an individual registers their reaction to such events defines the kind of trauma embedded in their cultural and psychological self.

Similarly, when examining the psychological and emotional aftermath of such events—particularly in conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—it becomes evident how deeply trauma infiltrates contemporary discourse.

Terms like PTSD are now widely recognized, although they were not understood or even acknowledged as clinical realities before the twentieth century. Even today, there remains debate around the definitions of PTSD and related conditions such as borderline personality disorder. These terms remain contested within the domains of cultural studies, psychology, and psychoanalysis, exemplifying the interdisciplinary nature of trauma theory.

Traumatic experiences are often represented in literature, media, art, and other cultural forms. When people write about trauma—through memoirs, autobiographies, or third-person narratives—they contribute to a growing archive of traumatic memory. Consider, for example, literature produced in the aftermath of the Holocaust, genocides in Europe, Africa, and Asia, or the 9/11 attacks. Some of these narratives are fictionalised accounts by observers and others are first-person testimonies by survivors. Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, for instance, portrays the experience of Jews in post-war Germany from a third-person perspective, prompting critical reflection on the ethics of representation.

This raises the important issue of who has the authority to represent trauma. In India, for example, discourses concerning tribal lives has historically been written by non-tribal authors, even though tribal literature as a distinct genre has only recently begun to emerge. These earlier representations, produced from outside the community raise ethical concerns about authenticity and voice. Similarly, underprivileged communities—such as Dalits—have a long and complex history of traumatic marginalisation. Dalit writing from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana frequently addresses lived trauma through autobiographical, poetic, and

fictional narratives. A similar tendency is evident in works of gender minorities, whose autobiographies and creative expressions articulate the psychological toll of systemic discrimination and social violence. In this context, representation emerges as a critical category in the study of trauma. How a character is portrayed, how a subject's suffering is narrated, how moral binaries such as right and wrong are constructed—all these questions fall under the purview of trauma theory. Representation is central to analysing how trauma is culturally and ideologically mediated.

Another crucial concept is the relationship between trauma and testimony. When trauma becomes part of a testimonial account, it takes on ethical and political significance. The literature of testimony, including Jewish and Arabic testimonial writings, has become an important area of study within literary and cultural scholarship. Testimonies serve not only to document suffering but also to foster ethical responsibility among those who engage with them. A testimony registers an incident so that it may transform societal understandings of ethics and justice. In this way, witnessing trauma is not just an act of remembrance—it is also an ethical intervention aimed at reconfiguring collective moral consciousness. As a result, trauma studies are primarily tied to ethics. While trauma is often framed through psychological, and clinical paradigms, trauma studies as an academic field intersects with literature, sociology, philosophy, and ethics. It explores how cultural narratives shape, suppress, or amplify trauma, and how those narratives contribute to social change.

In popular discourse, especially on social media, terms like healing, therapy, recovery, and self-care are frequently invoked in connection to trauma. However, trauma is a specific and profound psychological event—not every painful experience qualifies as trauma. A trauma is a disruptive, often irreparable wound in personal or communal history that generates testimonial narratives, demands ethical attention, and seeks forms of healing that are both individual and collective.Therefore, while trauma theory is a literary tool for analysing representations, the broader concept of trauma is crucial for understanding contemporary cultural shifts. It illuminates the ethical, historical, and emotional contours of modern life and remains a vital framework for both critical theory and social awareness.

In literary and non-literary contexts, traumatic experiences assimilate epistemological breaks that act as a gateway for the realistic portrayal of characters and situations. Even though trauma has been accepted as a realm of psychological knowledge, reality appears to be frequently evaded by the fantasies and magical possibilities of pre and post-traumatic conditions. Trauma is a context where the text is fantasised as multiple knowledge orientations. The epistemological and historical break with incidents that shock the world is often applied realistically to traumatic knowledge.

Narratives of traumatisation have gained prominence in contemporary theory and criticism. The complexity of traumatic experiences has necessitated the development of new interpretive approaches to trauma. The symptomatic aftermath of trauma presents severe difficulties in representation and comprehension. As literature lends itself to discovering new ways to explore the inaccessible and

incomprehensible, fictional narratives have become indispensable for shedding light on personal and public aspects of trauma. Compared to the texts produced by institutionalised history, the socio-pragmatics of narrative fiction are substantially more prevalent and important in defining the trauma of catastrophic events. Texts of narrative fiction not only contribute to the formation of a collective public memory of trauma but also represent specific attempts to cope with it.

9/11 is more than just a terrorist attack; it gives birth to an origin that has been lurking for centuries in the western cultural capital of accommodation. It becomes the beginning of a new era of victimised "other Muslim" and the cultural appropriation of an alienated soul within the Islamic tradition throughout the world.9/11 challenges not the past but the present and the future of a generation ahead. Since 9/11 inaugurated a new era in literature and history, even contemporary events are frequently viewed through its lens. The trauma experienced by the United States of America on September 11, 2001 had a profound effect on the global community. Almost every aspect of life has been altered by the tragic events of that day and its difficult aftermath, forcing everyone to divide their lives into before and after. The terms "Us" and "Them" have never resonated more sharply from both perspectives than they do now, as heightened global polarization entrenches this binary opposition. This search for a cogent explanation of the calamity ultimately culminated in tragic realism.

After the 9/11 terrorist attack, the United States government and the president's administration established numerous agencies and organisations whose primary mission was to combat terrorism. However, the ambiguity of political

actions frequently causes psychological instability and social disintegration by frightening society. People continue to live in a culture preoccupied with several concerns. Fear of terrorism competes with fear of crime, incivility, global warming, and other every day, ambient concerns. This circumstance has led to the isolation of ethnic communities, particularly Muslim communities, and even interethnic violence. Even though the media provided extensive coverage of the tragic events, American society was bewildered and confused; it was unable to comprehend the catastrophe. The trauma of the nation has become the trauma of the entire world, a phenomenon of perpetual stigmatisation.

The 9/11 event brought in a significant shift in the social, cultural, and psychological backdrop of America. It also dismantled global geopolitics by placing Arab and South Asian immigrant communities in a newly constructed matrix of suspicion, surveillance, and threats. Literary narratives developed from these communities put forward a critical insight into the lived traumatic experience which traditional political and historical discourses often underestimate.

In post-9/11 immigrant fiction, traumatic experience is embedded within gender, race, and nationality. The selected fictions offer distinct perspectives through which to explore how trauma is produced, disseminated, and contested within diasporic discourses. The selected fictions offer distinct perspectives through which to explore how trauma is produced, disseminated, and contested within diasporic discourses. As Paul Gilroy argues, the postcolonial migrant is a figure whose "pain has become political capital" (Gilroy 123). This concept highlights how individuals or communities may deliberately assert their historical grievances and

traumatic experiences in order to garner sympathy and support for their cause. Such a process involves mobilizing narratives of trauma and marginalization to generate collective purpose and foster a shared political identity."

As Paul Gilroy argues, the postcolonial migrant is a figure whose "pain has become political capital" (Gilroy 123). This concept highlights how individuals or communities may deliberately assert their grievances and traumatic experiences in order to garner sympathy and support for their cause. Such a process involves mobilising narratives of trauma and migration to generate collective purpose and foster a shared political identity. This politicisation is evident in the literary representation that depict the racialised trauma and displacement of post-9/11 subjects. Furthermore, the fictional portrayal of trauma in these narratives brings about a shift from Eurocentric models of traumatic representations that employ unconscious repression and belatedness as explored in Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth. The affective dimensions such as fear, grief, shame, and empowerment offer great space for applying the insights of affect theory, specifically, Sara Ahmed's formulation of "affective economies," which investigates how emotions become sites of political investment and social organization (Ahmed 45).Literary scholars like Kali Tal and Stef Craps necessitate decolonial and intersectional approach that underscore cultural specificity and systemic violence (Tal 6; Craps 14).

At this juncture, post-9/11 immigrant literary narratives functions as active sites of narration, representation, and reconstitution, rather than serving merely as reflections of traumatic experience. Through close literary exploration, such

narratives facilitates a critical interrogation of how trauma is gendered and racialised in the aftermath of September 11 attack.

It is important to explore the genealogy of trauma as a paradigm and cultural discourse to engage with trauma studies in meaningful way. The word trauma carries a complex genealogy that must be studied by using its terminology, assumptions and methods. The origins of trauma theory are most normally found in the psychoanalytic and clinical works of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. They considered trauma as a psychic wound resulting from an overwhelming experience that resists conscious processing. Freud's concept of Nachträglichkeit (deferred action) indicates that trauma does not unfold in a linear fashion but rather returns in fragments, often belatedly, disrupting the subject's coherent sense of time, identity, and memory. These early concepts were crucial in understanding how trauma would later be taken up in literary and cultural studies (Freud and Breuer 6–12).

The "cultural turn" of the 1990s, a second wave of trauma theory established through the interdisciplinary theory of scholars like Caruth, LaCapra, Felman, and Dori Laub. Caruth's influential text *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* claims that trauma cannot be fully represented, but rather haunts the margins of language and narrative. Her reading of trauma as essentially unassimilable and transmissible shaped the foundation of trauma theory as it intersected with questions of ethics, witnessing, and historical memory (Caruth 4–9). This theoretical feature highlighted the narrative gaps, ruptures and silences that often characterise post-traumatic articulation, chiefly in the aftermath of genocide, war, or displacement.

Recently, scholars like Kali Tal, Stef Craps, and Michael Rothberg have noticed limitations of early trauma theory, chiefly its Western-centric perspectives and its inclination to universalise psychic models of suffering. They stipulate a transnational and decolonial restructuring of trauma studies. Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory critiques the "competitive memory" model and encourages a method that understands collective trauma narratives such as Holocaust, colonial violence, and slavery not as mutually exclusive but as dialogically interwoven (Rothberg 3–9). Stef Craps similarly questions the Euro-American favouritism of trauma theory and invites greater attention to postcolonial trauma and non-Western histories (Craps 13–20).

The investigation of trauma's genealogy facilitated a historical clarity and epistemological precision. Exploring the emergence of trauma theory from psychoanalytic to cultural and from Western to global frameworks helps the researcher to apply trauma theory ethically, with consciousness of its interpretive scope and limitations. It is understood that theoretical tools do not limit the specificities of varied traumatic experiences that are rooted in gender, race, diaspora, class, and systemic violence. Thus, tracing the genealogy of trauma theory underpins its naturally interdisciplinary nature. Trauma is not a clinical condition or a psychological event; it is at the same time a cultural text, a historical condition, a social wound, and a political force. Therefore, a rigorous engagement with trauma studies necessitates a diachronic perspective that maps its evolution across time, disciplines, and geopolitical contexts.

Emerging in the 1990s, trauma studies developed as a prominent theoretical movement within cultural studies, reshaping critical approaches to memory, history, and representation. It examines the impact of disrupting experiences of trauma on individuals and community and explore how such experiences dismantle t identity, perceptions of reality and language. Trauma studies investigate the psychological, cultural, and literary significance of trauma, giving particular attention to its profound effects on both individual and collective levels.

Although trauma studies emerged as a distinct academic discipline in the 1990s, its intellectual roots can be traced back to the contributions of Sigmund Freud. His studies on hysteria had a significant influence on shaping an understanding of extreme trauma that exceeds the limits of language. Trauma often disrupts the capacity for coherent narration and language itself becomes fragmented as a result of traumatic experience. In literary narratives about trauma, this disruption appears in the breakdown of language, the fragmentation of characters' minds, and the loss of clear meaning. Trauma studies explore how these breakdowns happen and what they show about memory, identity, and representation.

In his early work, Freud argues that traumatic hysteria arises from the repression of earlier experiences of sexual assault. He always looked at psychosomatic illness in terms of psychological illness, in terms of sexuality. He said that a memory of the experience of sexual assault, especially when it is repressed, is what gives rise to hysteria.

Freud and Breuer published *Studies in Hysteria* in 1895. They argue that the initial incident itself is not inherently traumatic. Instead, trauma arises from the

remembrance of the event. This suggests harm stems not necessarily from the original occurrence, but from how it is mentally processed or recalled later. To understand the past's influence and alleviate its symptoms, Freud and Breuer proposed the "talking cure" as essential.

Trauma studies later brought together psychological approaches with post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and other socio-cultural theories. It was Jean-Martin Charcot who first considered the association between trauma and mental illness. Hermann Oppenheim and Abraham Kardiner also studied trauma and war. Here are different kinds of trauma: psychological trauma, cultural trauma, and collective trauma. One view regarding psychological trauma is that it disrupts language and that suffering is unrepresentable. Some think that the unrepresentability of suffering is just one of trauma's responses, not a defining feature. Scholarships on psychological trauma began with hysteria and later extended to examine manifestations such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), developmental trauma disorders in children, trauma related to war and terrorism, trauma related to gender, rape, race, and trauma related to disease.

Cultural sociology examines cultural and collective trauma, referring to the social processes that unfold when groups endure catastrophic events that fundamentally transform their collective consciousness and identity. Such instances encompass mass genocide, including the Holocaust, as well as wars. In *The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature,* Ann Kaplan examines how trauma affects individuals as well as collective cultural and national identities, whereas Michael Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism* analyses Holocaust representations

This introductory model was later elucidated by Freudian and post-Freudian thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, who reframed trauma as an encounter with the Real—that which escapes symbolic assimilation. Lacanian interpretations have greatly influenced how trauma is understood in literary texts as an absence or void that resists closure and completion. The second idea in the genealogy of trauma theory comes from Holocaust studies. This area of study is influenced by scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub. Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) investigates how trauma works. She argues that trauma is an event that people do not fully understand when it happens. Instead, it returns later in broken and confusing ways, continuing to affect the survivor.

Drawing on Freud and Derrida, Caruth views trauma as a paradox: both an absence and a presence, a disruption of temporality and narrative continuity. Trauma becomes "the story of a wound that cries out," and literature emerges as a privileged space to articulate that which escapes conventional representation (Caruth 4).In *Testimony: cries of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history* (1992), Felman and Laub examine testimonial literature while aslo exploring the ethics of listening and witnessing. Their work underscores the relational dimensions of trauma, emphasising how its articulation depends upon both the act of testifying and the presence of responsive listener. They see testimony as a shared act between speaker and listener. In this act, meaning does not come just from telling facts. Instead, it comes from witnessing things like absence, silence, and broken memories.

Trauma theory grew in the 1990s and early 2000s dealing with, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies. Scholars began to question its Eurocentric focus .The challenged its affiliations on Western notions of subjectivity and its privileging of Holocaust trauma as the main example of trauma.

Stef Craps' *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2013), analyses more inclusive trauma theory that acknowledges colonial and racial traumas as historically and structurally embedded. Craps questions the "Eurocentric bias" in classical trauma studies.He argues for the inclusion of subaltern voices, arguing that trauma theory must be "decolonized" to remain ethically relevant (Craps 2–4).

In Cultural trauma studies, sociologists like Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that trauma is not just a personal or psychological issue. It is also a social process. Communities use shared memories of violence, loss, or displacement to form a collective identity. Cultural trauma connects with memory studies and identity politics. It shows that remembering trauma is shaped by performance and media.

Sara Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich have contributed to a more embodied and politically engaged understanding of trauma. Thus, recent developments in trauma theory engage with affect theory and the politics of emotion. Ahmed's studies on the circulation of emotions examines how trauma can "stick" to bodies and signs, becoming part of the affective economies of race, gender, and nation (Ahmed 11). Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings* (2003) considers trauma as a generative force in the formation of queer and feminist archives of resistance.

These contemporary literary perspectives emphasise trauma's embeddedness in social structures and its potential to construct new forms of knowledge and

solidarity challenging the exceptionalism and pathologisation often associated with trauma.

Sigmund Freud's notions of "belatedness" and "repetition compulsion" are very critical in forming the psychoanalytic genealogy of trauma. Freud asserts that the immediacy of the event itself does not establish trauma. Freud refers to the deferred registration of trauma in the psyche as "belatedness". In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud argues that traumatic experiences often fail to be fully assimilated at the time of their occurrence and instead come later with unconscious significance. This temporary disconnection emphasises that trauma does not conform to linear temporality but is disclosed across time through varied delayed psychic effects. Freud's concept of the "repetition compulsion" suggests that the subject unintentionally recreates aspects of their traumatic experiences, a manifestation of a force that undermines the pleasure principle and results in compulsive relapses into pain and disorder.

Cathy Caruth draws on Freud's insights to shape the foundational framework of contemporary trauma theory. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth argues that trauma constitutes an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be completely known, and only returns belatedly, in repetitive and intrusive ways.

For Caruth, the traumatised individual speaks from the wound of an experience that remains unclaimed.This delayed recognition aligns with Freud's idea of deferred action.This idea emphasises the significance of narrative in expressing trauma. Nevertheless, Caruth posits that trauma basically challenges the coherence

of narrative, as it produces a break in language and representation. Thus, trauma, for both Freud and Caruth, is distinct by its resistance to assimilation and its recurrence in psychic and narrative forms, forming a theoretical bridge between psychoanalytic theory and literary representations of historical violence.

Dominick LaCapra and Jeffrey C, explain trauma is not just about personal pain. It also includes social and cultural experiences. In his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma, La Capra* explore two means people deal with trauma: *acting out* and *working through*. The idea, acting out means repeating the traumatic event without understanding it. The person stays stuck in the past. The painful memory keeps returning through flashbacks or emotions. They cannot tell the difference between past and present. For example, a character in a story might relive the trauma again and again without making sense of it. The term working through means thinking about the trauma in a conscious and reflective way. The person starts to talk about it, understand it, and slowly gain control. This helps with healing and the trauma, instead of letting it control them.

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, trauma is also a socially mediated construct .He says trauma becomes cultural when a community believes it has gone through a terrible event that deeply affects how it sees itself and its future. This idea of trauma is formed through shared narratives, key figures such as artists, political leaders, and social institutions that influence how the event is interpreted and remembered. Therefore, trauma is not only experienced but also performed and narrated. This makes it political and based on how people talk about it. Both LaCapra and Alexander analyses how trauma operates on the cultural level. In

cultural level, it not merely as psychic residue but as a dynamic process of meaning-making that mediates historical understanding and collective identity formation. Their theories emphasise the necessity of interpreting trauma through both psychological and sociocultural frame work to embrace its complex manifestations in literature, history, and public memory.

Trauma in literary narratives have become a significant area of interest in contemporary literary theory with the upsurge of trauma studies in the 1990s. Fiction gives a unique space for exploring traumatic expressions. Writers capture the lingering aftermath of trauma, even when direct representation seems impossible through storytelling. Considering historical, psychoanalytic, and cultural frameworks, trauma theory analyses how traumatic events disrupt time, language, and memory. As Caruth argues, trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4).Literary narratives offer a space for deferred witnessing, an idea that trauma returns later in fragmented forms through memory, dreams, or symbolic actions. The novel becomes a place in which delayed responses to trauma can be processed and communicated .It allows personal and collective forms of witnessing.

This delayed process of witnessing often appears in trauma literature through various narrative styles such as fragmented narratives, moments of silence, and repeated events or images. Fragmentation displays how traumatic memories are broken and unclear. Events may not follow a linear time line, and the narrative

reflects the disjointed feelings of the traumatised person. Silence, both real and figurative, shows the unspeakability of trauma. The very language fails to contain the pain of certain experiences. Repetition points to the uncontrollable return of the traumatic event, echoing Freud's idea of the "repetition compulsion" and LaCapra's notion of "acting out" (LaCapra,*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 142).

These narrative strategies represent the psychological effects of trauma and invite readers to engage with trauma in a deeper, affective way. Therefore, Literature is not just a reflection of suffering. It also serves as a form of testimony. According to LaCapra , literature plays a role in "working through" trauma, offering a metaphoric space where trauma can be remembered, questioned, and, in some cases, partially healed (144).Thus, the genealogy of trauma in literary representation reveals an evolving understanding of how fiction participates in the ethical and emotional work of bearing witness. It displays how the novel, through its formal choices and thematic concerns, provides voice to what is often left unspoken in history and psychological realms.

In feminist modifications of trauma theory, Judith Herman has considerably expanded the understanding of trauma, chiefly by addressing its gendered dimensions. Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), analyses how traditional trauma theories often overlook the particular ways in which gender influences both the experience and the recovery from trauma. . Feminist scholars examine the androcentric grounds of earlier trauma theories, which tended to focus on male-dominated narratives of war and violence, while disregarding the voices of women who experience trauma in different, often gender-specific ways. Herman (1992)

proposes, trauma is not a neutral experience; instead, it is shaped by societal structures, including those of gender, which affect both the causes and consequences of trauma for women. Feminist revisions give importance to the systemic violence and oppression women face, from domestic abuse to sexual assault, and challenge the invisibility of such experiences in mainstream trauma discourse by identifying the gendered nature of trauma.

Women's experiences have been systematically silenced or erased in many trauma narratives, mainly those involving sexual violence or abuse. Thus, a major thematic concerns in feminist trauma theory is the concept of gendered silencing. The social disgraces based on these experiences frequently lead to a lack of public recognition, which in turn hinders healing and recovery. The silencing of women's voices within trauma narratives manifest broader societal structures of power and control and individual trauma. As Caruth (1996) says, trauma often involves an "unrepresentable" experience that cannot be easily expressed or understood. In the case of gendered trauma, this "unrepresentability" is amplified by a societal reluctance to acknowledge the grief of women. Feminist critics discuss that giving visibility to these traumatic experiences, through literary narratives, testimony, and activism, becomes a dynamic step in both the recognition and healing of gendered trauma.

The critical intersectionality considers that trauma is not experienced in isolation. Instead, trauma is influenced by the overlapping systems of power that people traverse. Intersectional trauma narratives elucidate how the intersections of race, gender, and migration create unique and multifaceted forms of suffering and

grief. According to Anzaldúa (1987) the experience of being a woman of colour in a migrant socio political context often involves multiple layers of violence. It may be physical, emotional, or systemic that are not fully understood through a singular lens of gender or race. Therefore, trauma narratives examine these intersections contributing a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies of suffering and empowerment.

The gendered and intersectional dimensions of trauma, offer critical perceptions into how societal structures shape the ways individuals experience, express, and recuperate from traumatic experience. Through the theoretical framework of gender, trauma is not simply an individual experience but one that is profoundly shaped by social and political discourse. The feminist literary critics contribute an inclusive and broad understanding of trauma and recovery by expanding the possibility of trauma discourse to include voices often subjugated people. The continuous development of trauma theory through these feminist perspectives is crucial for creating spaces where all forms of suffering and grief are acknowledged and addressed.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, drastically changed global politics. These changes adversely affected the international relations and the everyday lives of immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East in the United States. Following the attacks, the government closely monitored them and often treated them unfairly. Old stereotypes about the East, known as Orientalism, came back strongly. New security rules and policies intensified the targeting of these communities and altered the perceptions of others. According to Jeffrey C.

Alexander (2004) cultural trauma occurs when a group's identity is profoundly shaken by a disturbing event. For Muslim immigrants 9/11 was such an event. It utterly changed how they were seen in society and made them feel insecure and isolated. As Bhatia (2008) notes, after 9/11, members of the Indian diaspora began to rethink their ethnic and racial identity, revealing the complicated nature of being part of a diaspora in a post-9/11 world.

After 9/11, these ideas of orientalism came back strongly considering east as exotic, backward, and a site of danger , and Muslim immigrants were often seen as threats. Sharma and Nijjar (2018) explain that counterterrorism policies treat Muslim migrants as dangerous, leading to mass surveillance. This creates racist ideas of fear and suspicion. They call this the "racialized surveillant assemblage," where Muslims are monitored and judged through changing digital profiles that assume guilt. The trauma of displacement encompasses beyond the physical act of migration; it incorporates the emotional and psychological disruption experienced by individuals as they traverse new cultural atmosphere.

Affect theory is an important concept in the humanities that offers new perspectives for understanding the connection between emotions, bodies, and social structures. It moves away from psychoanalysis, which focuses on inner thoughts and unconscious feelings, and instead looks at how emotions are shaped by relationships, the body, and the social world. While psychoanalysis looks for hidden meanings, affect theory underscores the pre-conscious, transpersonal, and often transmissible nature of affect. According to Patricia Ticineto Clough , affect cannot always be put into words, instead "resides in intensities and modulations that

circulate between bodies" This paradigm shift, known as the "affective turn," shows how emotions are not just personal but are influenced by and help shape culture and politics.

In affect theory, Sara Ahmed examines how emotions are shaped by social, political, and institutional discourses. She claims that emotions are not just personal feelings but are also part of shared cultural practices that influence how people relate to one another (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 9). Her idea of "affective economies" is mainly useful in exploring the dynamics of post-9/11 narratives. According to Ahmed, emotions circulate and "stick" to certain bodies, ideas, or communities helps explain how emotions move through society and become attached to certain people, ideas, or groups. Through recurrent connections, these emotions gain meaning and it shape political responses (Ahmed 45). After 9/11 event, emotions like fear, grief, and shame were not just private experiences. They became public feelings that were often directed towards Muslim and Middle Eastern people, creating suspicion and reinforcing stereotypes.

Ahmed's idea of emotional "stickiness" is essential in analysing how affect operates in post-9/11 fiction. Fear sticks to Muslim identities through media representations, state rhetoric, and institutional policies that frame these bodies as innately threatening. In this way, emotions are not neutral; they are directed, circulated, and deployed to sustain hierarchies and exclusions. The "stickiness" of emotions permits for the persistence of racialised and gendered affective context, in which certain communities are marked by grief and loss, while others are positioned as sources of danger. As Ahmed places it, "emotions work to shape the surfaces of

individual and collective bodies," and these surfaces become legible through the histories and narratives they carry (Ahmed 1).

In post-9/11 literature, mostly those literary narratives written by or deals with Muslim women, affect becomes a serious site for examining how trauma, displacement, and identity are mediated. These literary representation regularly represent how emotional economies contribute to the social regulation of Muslim bodies, while offering counter-narratives that reframe grief, love, and resistance. By considering affect theory and Ahmed's contributions, this chapter focuses on the role of emotions not just as responses to trauma but as forces that establish cultural memory, communal belonging, and political possibility.

Trauma fiction breaks traditional narrative techniques to portray the psychological and emotional disruption caused by trauma. Writers use fragmented, non-linear narrative methods to represent the unspeakable nature of traumatic experiences. According to Caruth and Dori Laub trauma cannot be fully expressed. This feature of trauma leads to the use of literary techniques like unreliable narrators, disrupted timelines, and gaps in memory. These methods reflect the emotional and psychological fragmentation experienced by trauma survivors. Thus, it takes readers into the affective disorientation of the narrative. For instance, the use of unreliable narrators indicates the instability of traumatic memory and fix readers in a position of uncertainty, stressing the difficulty of making sense of violence and loss

To challenge the illusion of narrative coherence and continuity, trauma fiction often employs narrative techniques like non-linear timelines, repetition.

These techniques indicates how traumatic memories often return in sudden and fragmented ways. Along with its form, trauma fiction also asks for a special kind of affective reading. The reader is not just a passive observer but becomes emotionally involved with the text, often feeling empathy, discomfort, or confusion. Affect theory, particularly in the work of scholars like Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich, explains how trauma is shared not only through what the story says but also through how it feels—through atmosphere, rhythm, repetition, silence, and sudden breaks. This creates space for affective transmission in which readers experience the weight of traumatic experience not just in their minds but also in their emotions and bodies. Such literary representations often blur the boundary between fiction and testimony, asking the reader to bear witness.

Fiction serves as a space for bearing witness, not only to personal trauma but also to collective histories of violence, loss, and erasure. This is especially true in post-9/11 narratives by Muslim women authors, where trauma intersect with issues of gender, race, religion, and national identity. These literary works challenge dominant historical narratives by offering alternative and often marginalised perspectives. As a result, fiction actively participates in trauma discourse, drawing readers into an emotional and ethical process of witnessing.

This research explores the intersection of trauma theory, the affective turn, and gendered readings of post-9/11 literature. It examines how trauma is not only a psychological experience but also a social and political one, shaped by gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationhood. Considering the insights of critics like Caruth, LaCapra, and Sara Ahmed, the research highlights how trauma moves beyond the

individual, affecting larger communities and cultures. Using affect theory, especially Ahmed's ideas of "affective economies" and the "stickiness" of emotions, the research shows how post-9/11 trauma attaches itself to Muslim and immigrant identities in complex and lasting ways.

Burnt shadows by Kamila Shamsie and *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah are mirrored expressions of the gendered experiences of trauma across individual and collective histories in the aftermath of the 9/11 event. The next chapter is a detailed examination into the portrayal of its exploration in these two specific works.

Chapter 2

Somatic Semiotics: The Body as Counter-Text

The complicated gendered affective cartographies of trauma, configured in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, map the embodied experiences of memory, identity, and belonging of their female protagonists in the aftermath of 9/11 and intersecting historical violence and this chapter analyses this convoluted mapping through the lens of the theorised framework of Cathy Caruth,Sara Ahmed,and Homi K Bhabha, reiterating the stance that these affective cartographies are essential, embodied counter-archives that redraw the borders of belonging against dominant narratives of victimhood and exclusion.

The application of Caruth's trauma theory, Ahmed's affect studies and Homi K Bhabha's post-colonial hybridity framework reveals how *Saffron Dreams* and *Burnt Shadows* construct intricately gendered affective cartographies of trauma. Through Caruth's theorisation of trauma, I examine its temporal ruptures: Arissa's belated grief, which erupts through her practice of art and motherhood in *Saffron Dreams*, and Hiroko's Nagasaki scars, which continue to haunt successive generations in *Burnt shadows*. Ahmed's work on affect illuminates the spatial politics of embodiment: the suspicion that "sticks" to Arissa's hijab as she directs her life in American streets, and the circulation of transnational affect that inscribes Raza's body within borderlands.

Bhabha exposes embodied negotiation: Arissa reclaiming “third spaces” through henna/motherhood in hostile America, while Hiroko and Raza direct hybridity as both survival strategy and target across war zones. Together, these theories map how memory, identity, and embodiment converge on the gendered body-whether in Arissa’s confined resistance or Hiroko’s scarred mobility-proving trauma is not merely experienced but spatially enacted, temporally disrupted, and corporeally reconstituted within post -9/11 power structures. The chapter’s central contribution lies in its detailed analysis of how specific p[ost-9/11 novels uniquely visualise and theorise three interconnected concepts crucial to understanding the era’s cultural psyche: affective circulation/stickiness, belated haunting, and hybrid embodiment. It examines each selected novel to demonstrate its distinct narrative and formal strategies for mapping these phenomena.

While the novel *Burnt Shadows* delineates Hiroko Tanaka’s journey across five decades-from the 1945 Nagasaki bombing to post-9/11 Afghanistan and America-interweaving colonial partitions with the War on Terror, Abdullah’s Saffron dreams focuses on Arissa Illahi, a Pakistani Muslim widow traversing Islamophobic hostility and personal grief in post-9/11 America. For investigating the transnational, embodied and gendered aspects of 9/11 prolonged trauma, these narratives ensure complementary lenses. Shamsie’s extensive chronicle of intergenerational violence and Abdullah’s concentrated analysis of diasporic vulnerability contrast to demonstrate how trauma manifests differently at different geopolitical and temporal scales

Arissa's hyper visible Muslim identity, shaped by her hijab and status as 9/11 widow, makes her a prime target in the post-9/11 "affective economy" (Ahmed 45), where hatred and fear are rampant and adhere to racialised and religious bodies. As Arissa moves through institutional and public settings, Ahmed's notion of "stickiness' takes on tangible form. Her visibly Muslim body serves as a result of this ongoing exclusion. She is forced into defensive invisibility and extreme isolation as a result of this ongoing marking. Most importantly, Arissa reclaims agency through here art, particularly henna, transforming her body from a site of imposed stigma into one of intimate, embodied counter-memory.

Affect "sticks" violently in transit. Arissa experiences direct aggression: "A man shoved me … 'Go back to your country, terrorist!' His spittle landed on my check…The other passengers averted their eyes" (Abdullah 42).The subway becomes a microcosm of the hostile public sphere where her body attracts hatred. Everyday activities become troubled. Shopping makes hyper vigilance: "I felt their eyes…judging my every move…Would they think the baby food was for explosives? My hands trembled placing items on the counter"(Abdullah 87).The store transforms into a space of surveillance and internalised fear, representing how suspicion adheres to here presence. Institutional suspicion compounds personal vulnerability. While pregnant, a hospital technician refuses care: "He took one look at my name and my clothes…We're short-staffed today for your kind, he muttered, turning away" (Abdulla 95).Her identity markers trigger exclusion from essential services, showcasing how institutions enact affective economies. The growing effect is profound isolation: "I stopped wearing makes up, stopped smiling at strangers .I

became careful, cautious, invisible…The world outside my door felt like a minefield"(Abdullah 58).This withdrawal signifies the internalization of the "sticky" affect, restricting her spatial existence.

Arissa's henna art becomes an essential practice of embodied resistance and remembrance in opposition to this stigmatisation. The tactile ritual of applying elaborate designs is as follows: "the paste cooled my skin…each swirl a whisper of home, of Faizan, of a self they couldn't erase." They called ornament, but it was memory-my skin was stained by living, breathing memory"(Abdullah 73).The henna is a selected visibility, a private/public archive of identity, love, and loss inscribed on her terms, in contrast to the forced, hostile visibility of her hijab in public places. The temporary yet indelible stains embody the persistence of her cultural and personal narrative against erasure.

The novel *Burnt shadows* traces how suspicion, rooted in racialised and religious markers, circulates across decades and borders, adhering with varying intensity to different bodies within Ahmed's "affective economies". This "stickiness" manifests differently for Hiroko Tanaka, whose Japanese identity and visible scars mark her perpetually foreign across contexts(1945 Japan, Partition –era India,Post-9/11 US),and her son Raza Hazara, whose hybrid Pakistani-German identity becomes lethally unstable in post-9/11 Pakistan, Afghanistan, and America. The novel contrasts this with characters like Ilse Burton (Colonial privilege) and Kim Burton (White American Privilege), whose identities deflect suspicion despite proximity to trauma. Gendered expectations further inflect these dynamics, shaping how women handle and internalize these affective burdens.

Suspicion immediately sticks to Hiroko as a “foreigner “within her homeland after Nagasaki. Authorities hold her, declaring: You understand…precautions. Foreigners. Even those who sleep with them.” “His eyes flickered over me, the gaijin lover, contaminant” (Shamsie 35).Her body becomes a site of betrayal and contagion: affect sticks based on perceived racial/cultural affiliation, intervening her victimhood.

Post-Partition, suspicion changes focus. Her Japanese identity evokes curiosity tinged with wartime suspicion, but her gendered positions as Sajjad’s wife attracts intense social policing. Ilse Burton’s colonial gaze shows how Hiroko’s body remains a surface for projection: “that back. These birds. She carries her past like a flag”…Ilse’s voice held a mix of fascination and distance”(Shamsie 42).The scars “stick” as symbols of otherness, interpreted through Ilse’s privileged lens.

Suspicion circulates bitterly around Raza. His westernised mannerisms (“too soft for a Pakistan boy” (Shamsie 217) and ambiguous heritage make him a target for intelligence agencies: “Raza Hazara? Son of Ashraf Sahib? And… a German mother? Interesting mix.” “e agent’s smile did’nt reach his eyes.” (Shamsie 252).His hybridity, once a familial trait, becomes sticky with suspicion, leading to exploitation: They needed Pashto speakers…They didn’t care if he was “Pakistani enough “for their other purposes”(Shamsie 269).Affect sticks exactly because he doesn’t fit neat categories.

In Afghanistan, his Pakistani features blend in, but suspicion shifts to his American handler’s perception. Captured by the US, racial profiling dominates: “Name? Place of birth? Parent’s origins...The questions circled, tighter, harder…

‘Your father was Pakistani? And your mother…German? You speak like an American. Explain.” (Shamsie 301). His body is read solely through the sticky lens of potential terrorist affiliation. His final betrayal stems from this pervasive, sticky suspicion attached to his hybrid identity.

Suspicion is reactivated around Hiroko’s ageing body, as security personnel fixate on both her Japanese origin and the historical trauma inscribed upon her: “Nagasaki? 1945? The officer’s eyes narrowed…‘You were there’? …His gaze travelled over her as if reassuring a threat” (Shamsie 322).The Nagasaki past, embodied in her very presence, sticks anew in the post-9/11 climate, marking her afresh.

A productive contrast emerges when Hiroko and Raza’s vulnerability is set against Il’s colonial-era privilege and Kim’s post -9/11 privilege. Whereas Ils’s whiteness shields her from the precarity of displacement in mid-twentieth-century India, Kim strategically mobilises her white American identity to protect her son in the fraught security climate of post-9/11 America, declaring, She deployed the word like a shield” (Shamsie 287). “While Hirokos’s motherhood attracts suspicion: “You brought him here? Into this?” (Shamsie 310), Kim is able to deflect it. Their gendered roles intersect with race and nationality to determine how suspicion either adheres or dissipates, revealing the irregular distribution of vulnerability.

Hiroko articulates the increasing affective burden: “I am tired…of being the stranger who brings the war with her” (Shamsie 310).Raza assumes the instability: I belonged nowhere…Pakistan saw the foreigner: America saw the threat. Even

Afghanistan saw the outsider" (Shamsie 308).Their sense of belonging is continually reconfigured by the sites where suspicion sticks most intensely.

Arissa Iliahi's trauma manifests in delayed ways, illustrating Caruth's concept of an unprocessed past that intrudes unexpectedly. Although her husband, Faizan, dies on 9/11.the full impact of his loss-intensified by societal hostility and her impending single motherhood-doesn't surface immediately. Rather, it emerges disruptively at a later stage, articulated through her creative work and her pregnancy. Painting and henna application become physical activities where grief, initially numbed by shock, erupts belatedly and without words. The novel's structure, shifting between her present struggles and fragmented flashbacks, mirrors this psychological delay. Furthermore, her unborn child embodies the tension between past losses and future uncertainty, making her body a literal vessel for Caruth's "unclaimed experience"-trauma that can't be processed when it happens but returns to haunt.

Arissa reflects the initial numbness: "the first months were a blur…grief was a heavy stone in my chest, too dense to lift, too solid to cry through" (Abdullah 55).Belated trauma surfaces through art: "I picked up the brush…suddenly, it wasn't saffron I saw, but smoke. Thick, choking smoke, and falling…falling…My hand trembled, red paint streaking the canvas like blood" (Abdullah 78).The act of painting triggers a sensory flashbacks, representing how trauma bypasses conscious recall and explodes belatedly through embodied action.

Her art work openly channels intrusive unspeakable images. She tries to paint a hopeful scene but finds "the faces that emerged weren't smiling…they were

contorted…and always, the towers loomed in the background, not fallen, but falling. An endless fall in couldn't stop painting" (Abdullah 112).This repetition pressure captures the belated, recurring nature of the traumatic image she cannot assimilate or narrate linearly.

The pregnancy physically embodies the collision of past and future. The child is "Faizan's last gift, his echo in my womb" (Abdullah 67), yet its movement triggers complex dread: "A kick. Life. Then the memory: Faizan's hand on my belly, his laugh…Gone. The joy curdled into fear. What world was I bringing this child into?"(Abdulla 91).The unborn child becomes the "Future of trauma" (Caruth 64), a constant reminder of loss and a source of anticipatory anxiety about raising a child marked by difference in a hostile world.

Extending beyond painting, the ritual application of henna serves as a crucial somatic practice for Arissa, channelling her belated grief through culturally rooted, tactile labour that mediates the unspeakable trauma of Faizan's loss and the hostile world she navigates as a Muslim widow. Applying it is a tactile confrontation with memory: "The paste, cool, and gritty…the scent of eucalyptus…memories flooded back-not of the fall, but of before. Faizan tracing the designs on my hands… "Beautiful, he'd whisper. Now my fingers moved alone, etching loss into skin" (Abdullah 105).The henna ritual allows a belated, on-verbal engagement with the pre-traumatic past and its loss, the intricate patterns becoming a "living memory" (Abdullah73) inscribed on her body, a physical archive of the love that haunts her present.

The novel's fragmented structure reflects Arissa's delayed processing of

trauma. Arissa reflects: “the grief wasn’t one thing…it was Faizan’s coffee cup left untouched.it was the hate in that man’s eyes on the subway. It was doctor saying ‘complication’. It came in shards, sharp and unexpected” (Abdulla 120).This fragmentation reflects the unspeakable nature of her compounded grief and personal loss inextricable from racialised victimisation and the daunting prospects of motherhood under siege. Her societal position renders her grief illegitimate: “I mourn in silence, for my grief is not the kind that earns sympathy. My grief is suspect, like everything else about me”(Abdulla 76)

Completing Faizan’s manuscript becomes a literalized act of belatedness, embodying Arissa’s haunting responsibility as a survivor: “His words…his unfinished story. It sat there, accusing me. Another thing left incomplete by the fall” (Abdulla 132).Engaging with his work forces her to confront the past and the future he envisioned but will never see,a task imbued with the weight of unassimilated loss.

The 1945 Nagasaki bombing forms the core unprocessed trauma in *Burnt Shadows* An event Hiroko Tanaka survives physically but which remains psychically “unclaimed” (Caruth 4).This foundational trauma is permanently archived on her body through crane shaped scars, making her an embodied witness to catastrophe. Crucially, the novel’s nonlinear structure demonstrates how trauma shatters chronological time, directly linking 1945 to 2001.Events like 9/11 and the War on terror are not isolated: they violently reactivate Hiroko’s buried trauma and transmit its affective weight to her son Raza. Through vivid flashbacks and overwhelming emotional returns, the narrative illustrates Caruth’s belatedness-

proving the past erupts into the present, shaping responses to new violence and blurring lines between generations of suffering.

Hirokos's early experience embodies the unspeakable shock: "The world turned white, then black. Then the screams started. Or was it the cicadas? The sound was inside her skull, tearing" (Shamsie 15).The sensory overload and dissociation ("was it the cicadas?') signify the event's immediate incomprehensibility, its status as unclaimed experience. The scars become the permanent physical manifestation: "three cranes in flight, feathers streaming, burned onto her back by the heat of the bomb" (Shamsie 15). "These burnt shadows" are not just wounds but the literal embodiment of the unassimilated past carried forward,

Hiroko's reaction to witnessing 9/11 on TV is not mainly about the new event, but a visceral, belated re-experiencing of Nagasaki: 'No' she whispered, not to the television, but to the memory that staged-the blinding light, the roar that was sound and silence fused, the smell of burning flesh that was suddenly here, in her kitchen, not there, on the screen" (Shamsie 3).The sensory flashback ("blinding light", "roar", smell) establishes how 9/11 acts as a powerful triggered, violently pulling the unassimilated past into the present moment. She later articulates this historical collapse: "there is a moment when history tightens its grip around your throat, and you realize you've lived it before" (Shamsie 296).

Hiroko deliberately attempts to shield Raza from her past, believing that silence will protects him: "She wrapped Nagasaki in layers of silence… gift, she thought, to her son" (Sahamsie 198). Yet, this very silence becomes the medium of haunting: 'He carried it anyway, Raza knew carried it in the careful way she avoided

certain words'(Shamsie 199).The way her hand sometime flew to her back, unseen…he carried "the ghost of a ghost" (Samsie 198).The unspoken trauma is transmitted affectively through gaps and gestures.

Raza's own traumas in post 9/11 Pakistan and Afghanistan reverberate with his mother's unspoken history. Captured and brutalized in Afghanistan, his experience unexpectedly echoes hers: "the blow landed…and for a dizzying second,it wasn't the guard he saw, but his mother's face-not as she was now, but young, terrified, amidst falling ash. The image was sharp, unbidden" (Shamsie 308).This "unbidden" flashback signifies the belated, Transgenerational return of the maternal trauma he never directly witnessed but physically inherited. His sense of dislocation mirrors hers: "I belonged nowhere…like you, mother. Always the stranger who brings the war" (Shamsie 308), acknowledging their shared legacy of unbelonging rooted in historical catastrophe.

The novel's narrative style itself performs belatedness and Trans Generational haunting. It opens in 2002, immediately juxtaposing Hiroko's post - 9/11 reality with intrusion of her Nagasaki past (Shamsie 3).Subsequent sections leap decades and continents. Refusing a linear progression and instead showing how past trauma (Nagasaki, Partition) actively shapes and erupts into the present (Afghanistan, post-9/11 USA).This structure forces the reader to experience time as Hiroko and Raza do-non-chronologically, with the past perpetually pressing in.

The physical scars enable a tangible, albeit painful, connection to the past across generations. As a child, Raza touches them: "His small fingers traced the raised skin, the shapes of birds. 'Did it hurt'? Hiroko flinched, not from pain, but

from the memory his touch unlocked-Konrad's fingers on her back, the world about to end" (Shamsie 102).This moment captures the dual nature of the scars: they are a site of maternal love and connection for Raza, yet simultaneously a trigger for Hiroko's unassimilated traumatic memory, demonstrating the complex burden and transmission carried on the body.

Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies explains how emotions-grief, fear, shame, resilience circulate across the social and historical landscapes of post - 9/11 immigrant fiction. According to Ahmed "emotions do things: they align individuals with communities-or bodily space with social space-through the very intensity of their attachments"(*Cultural politics of Emotion* 119).In both novels, the affective lives of the female protagonists are shaped by, and simultaneously challenge, the emotional scripts imposed upon them by gender, race, religion, and nation.

Arissa understands that her body and emotions are continually scrutinised. The emotional economies portrayed in *Saffron Dreams* revolves on around suspicion, grief and the demand for invisibility in that aftermath of 9/11 event. Arissa reflects: "I walked into rooms with the burden of proving I was not a threat" (Abdulla 61).Her emotional state, marked by fear and hyper-awareness, exposes how certain racialised bodies are forced into regimens of emotional labour in order to resist their imagined threat. Ahmed describes this as the spread of fear that "sticks" to certain bodies, making them comprehensible only through the lens of danger or grief (Ahmed 126). Arissa's grief, while highly personal, is obscured by

dominant emotional norms that require Muslim women to either suppress or rationalise their suffering.

In *Burnt shadows*, the emotional economy is similarly charged, but unfolds across various countries. Hiroko Tanaka's trauma from the Nagasaki atomic bombing becomes the centre in which her other losses revolve. The scars on her body become a visual and emotional record. She no longer flinched when people asked about her back, as Shamsie writes: "she had stopped flinching when people asked about her back. The questions came with a look, and she had learned how to meet it with her own unreadable gaze" (Shamsie 103). Hiroko is acutely aware of how Orientalism and postcolonial expectations shape the ways in which others perceive her, a recognition evident in the careful withholding of her emotions and the deliberate control of her action.

While Hiroko's trauma is shaped by a decades-long, transnational continuum of violence, Arissa's trauma is rooted in a single historical rupture. This historical extension enables Shamsie to demonstrate that the impact of trauma is not dissipated by time but continually reconstituted in new forms across generations. Hirokos' silence concerning Nagasaki and partition is reflected in the silence she lives later in life, particularly in post-9/11 New York. 'There is a moment 'she reflects, "when history tightens its grip around your throat, and you realize you've lived it before" (Shamsie 296). This recurring structure of emotional recall positions trauma as recursive force, one that is both intensely personal and politically over determined.

Arissa and Hiroko negotiate gendered positions in post 9/11 America. Arissa mourns quietly, embodies her faith without appearing grief-stricken, and fulfils her

role as a parent with competence. This forced emotional labour is noticeably gendered. “There was no space in the world for my rage,” she writes, so “I folded it neatly and placed it beside my prayers” (Abdullah 112) Arissa’s transformation signifies the restrictions placed in the socio-political context-a call for obedience, shyness, and emotional control even in the face of great loss. Challenging these expectations shapes here identity and subjectivity; she resists them through narrative construction and aesthetic expression.

In contrast, Hiroko’s subjectivity is formed by her rejection to let grief be the only defining aspect of here identity and existence. She actively selects new lives, languages, and relationships embodying what Ahmed describes as “affective economies”-a denial to align with dominant emotional scripts of victimhood or trauma as –paralysis (Ahmed 170).Her movement from one place of violence to another-Japan to India, Pakistan, and the United States-indicates a transgressive mobility that disturbs the boundaries of national identity and the fixity of trauma. “Everywhere she went, Shamsie writes, “she took her ghosts with her-not to be haunted but to remember” (Shamsie 255) Hiroko’s subjectivity is established not by removal of pain but by an active politics of remembrance, where memory is not a wound but a site of resistance.

Arissa and Hiroko challenge their trauma through affective ties, foregrounding rationality as vital to survival. Arissa’s emotional bond with her unborn child, and later her role as a mother of a disabled child, empower her emotionally strong. She became capable of finding strength in love than in retaliation. Likewise, Hiroko’s love for Sajjad, and later her care for Raza and Elsa,

blur narratives of solitary grief, showing instead how affect can foster political and emotional alliances. These relationships challenge dominant paradigms that frame traumatised women as broken or incomplete. As Jean Halley notes, “the affective realm opens space for bodies to meet each other in ways not governed by domination” (Hallley 118)

The gendered subjectivities in *Saffron Dreams* and Burnt shadows offer an engaging perspective to examine how female characters experience, internalise, and express trauma. Trauma is mediated through socio-cultural assumptions of femininity, domesticity, racialization, and religious identity in both literary narratives. Arissa and Hiroko challenge a continuum of violence that is at once personal and collective, bodily and political. Their gendered positions make them perform emotional labour in ways that underscores both their agency and the restrictions imposed by patriarchal and nationalistic ideologies.

In *Saffron Dreams*, The protagonist’s grief is multifaceted by the cultural expectation that Muslim women must embody dignity in the face of scrutiny. Arissa also becomes a victim of non-Muslim American’s racial prejudice following 9/11, when American culture was rife with bigotry and inequality. Immigrants, particularly Muslim were victimised by racial stereotyping, and the prejudice and racism of non-Muslim Americans toward Islam and Muslim exacerbated their difficulties, since they felt vulnerable as immigrants. Arissa faces discrimination in the aftermath of 9/11.At times, the violent reactions of non-Muslim Americans serve as a reminder of her association with Islam and terrorism, while at other times, she is strangely sympathised with for being attacked by members of her own race. She

watches the news and talk shows in which the subject is constantly Islam and terrorism, with Islam being connected with and at times deemed synonymous with violence.

Thus, Arissa's experience of trauma is related to her identity as a Muslim woman in post-9/11 socio-political context. She is forced to carry various roles like widow, artist, and cultural representative following the death of her husband in the World Trade Centre attacks and the birth of her disabled child, She reflects: "As a Muslim woman in America, my silence was mistaken for complicity, my grief invisible because it did not conform to the dominant narrative of who was allowed to mourn" (Abdullah 89).This dynamic signifies what Sara Ahmed terms "the cultural politics of emotion" wherein some bodies are afforded empathy, while others are rendered emotionally illegible (Ahmed 114).

Arissa's subjectivity is shaped by what Patricia Ticino Clough describes as "affectively charged intensities" that do not always register within dominant discourses of trauma (Clough 2). Arissa's creativity is resistance. It enables her to express grief and desire beyond established modes of recognition. She resists conforming to the western liberal ideal of the empowered woman and defies the stereotypical portrayal of the passive, veiled Muslim victim. Her identity is shaped through a hybrid imagination. She acknowledges her trauma while simultaneously forgiving new avenues for self-definition and agency.

Her creativity becomes a site of resistance, allowing her to express her grief and desire outside of institutionalised modes of recognition. She neither conforms to the western liberal ideal of empowered womanhood nor to the stereotypical image of

the passive, veiled victim. Instead, her identity emerges through a hybrid imagination that acknowledges rupture while also forging new pathways of self-definition. Both novels powerfully demonstrate trauma's refusal to remain confined to its "originating moment"; instead, it violently disrupts linear temporality through distinct yet complementary modes of belatedness. While both novels depict trauma exceeding its initial occurrence, they achieve this through contrasting scales and mechanisms.

In *Saffron Dreams*, Arissa's intensely personal loss (Faizan's death on 9/11) is amplified and reshaped by the collective trauma of 9/11 attacks and the ensuing Islamophobic atmosphere. Her grief emerges not as a coherent narrative but in belated, intrusive shards triggered by embodied present experiences, demonstrating how the "originating moment" (9/11) becomes a vortex pulling her past life and anticipated future into its chaotic orbit. Arissa's painting work triggers sensory flashback, where colours fall into memories of catastrophe: saffron transforms into "thick, choking smoke" and images of perpetual descent (Abdullah 78,112).Her pregnancy similarly embodies this collision of life and loss. The unborn child becomes "Faizan's last gift, his echo in my womb" (Abdullah 67), yet each fetal movement evokes dread, recalling her husband's touch and laughter before his sudden absence (Abdullah 91). The narrative structure mirrors this experience, presenting grief not as a single event but as "shards, sharp and unexpected" intruding upon daily life (Abdullah 120).Arissa's trauma thus exemplifies belatedness: a personal loss rendered unspeakable, continually reactivated within the hostile context of post-9/11.

Burnt Shadows operates on a vaster temporal scale. The "originating moment"-the 1945 Nagasaki bombing-is not merely remembered; it is an unassimilated, embodied spectre that actively haunts subsequent generation across decades and continents. Hiroko carries it somatically: "three cranes in flight, feathers streaming, burned onto her back" (Shamsie 15).Decades later, witnessing 9/11 violently resurrects Nagasaki: "No, she whispered…to the memory that surged-the blinding light, the roar…the smell of burning flesh that was suddenly here, in her kitchen" (Shamsie 3).This exemplifies Caruth's idea of trauma as an event "not experienced in the first instance" but belatedly (Caruth 4). Significantly, this trauma transcends the individual survivor. Hiroko's protective "silence" (Shamsie 198) becomes the conduit for Trans generational haunting. Raza "carried it anyway…carried the ghost of a ghost" (Shamsie 198), experiencing his own trauma in Afghanistan through the lens of her unspoken past: "the blow landed…and for a dizzying second, it wasn't the guard he saw, but his mother's face-young, terrified, amidst falling ash"(Shamsie 293).The novel's non-linear structure-opening in 2002 before leaping to 1945-formally enacts this temporal rupture, refusing a clean separation between past and present.

Both novels fundamentally reject the notion that trauma remains confined to the past. For Arissa, the present is persistently invaded by shards of past trauma, while her future is clouded by anxiety stemming from loss and ongoing prejudice. Hiroko and Raza live within a palimpsest of historical violence, where Nagasaki bleeds into Partition, bleeds into 9/11, bleeds into the War on Terror. As Hiroko states, "there is a moment when history tightens its grip around your throat, and you

realize you've lived it before" (Shamsie 296).Whether through the immediate, amplified fragmentation of personal loss within a national catastrophe (*Saffron dreams*) or the expansive, trans generational echo of catastrophic history (Burnt Shadows), both texts reveal trauma as a force that shatters chronological time. The past does not recede; it erupts, lingers, possesses, and transmits, demanding recognition as an active, disruptive presence within the present and future. Trauma, in these narratives, is not an event with clear end, but a condition of temporality itself, perpetually exceeding its origin point.

Arissa Illahi's body-marked by her hijab, pregnancy, widowhood, and motherhood to a child with disabilities-become the central battleground within post - 9/11 America's hostile "contact zone" (Bhabha 1), where dominant narratives violently clash with her Muslim identity. Initially hyper visible and vulnerable under societal suspicion, Arissa's journey powerfully embodies Homi Bhabha's concept of forging hybrid subjectivity. Her art-painting, henna, writing-and her profound role as a mother function as vital "third spaces". Within these creative and caring realms, she refuses simple assimilation or withdrawal. Instead, she engages in constant translation; blending cultural memory, personal grief and resistance to forge fluid identities that actively challenge rigid categories-American versus Muslim, victim verses agent, whole verses broken. These acts transforms trauma into narrative, heritage into living practice, and care into radical assertion of belonging, proving "third spaces" are generative sites of survival and self-definition.

Arissa consciously uses her writing to assert her voice against erasure, embodying Bhabha's concept of enunciation from the margins. She declares: "My

pen became my sword: every word I wrote wrestled with the silence they demanded" (Abdullah 143).this act of self-narration creates a textual "third space" refusing the dominant script imposed upon her as a Muslim widow. Her narrative blends personal memoir with cultural reflection and political critique, forging a hybrid form: "this story is mine-not just the grief, but the saffron, the henna, the whispers of my mother's prayer woven through it all" (Abdullah 5).

Arissa's practice of henna application transcends mere decoration: it becomes a somatic "third space" where cultural heritage, personal memory and present resilience converge. It is an intimate ritual of remembrance; "the paste cooled my skin. Each swirl a whisper of home, of Faizan, of a self they couldn't erase. They called it ornament, but it was memory-living, breathing memory staining my skin" (Abdullah 73).Yet it also becomes a public assertion of identity redefined. When exhibiting her art, which incorporates henna designs, she confronts a publisher's eroticising gaze: "the exotic pattern add such…authenticity, he said, fingers hovering near a hennaed hand on canvas. I pulled back. It's not exotic. It's home. It's me" (Abdullah 178).This moment exemplifies her negotiation, rejecting the fetishized "other" label and asserting the henna as an integral, translated part of complex self within the American contact zone.

Motherhood, particularly to a child with special needs, becomes Arissa's most potent "third space". It forces a radical redefinition of self and future, challenging normative ideals of wholeness and assimilation. She rejects pity, reframing difference as strength: "My child is not broken. He is different. And so am I. And perhaps that is where our strength lies."(Abdullah 135).The physical and

emotional labour of care becomes an act of world –building grounded in love and acceptance, distinct from societal hostility: “holding him, feeding him, and learning his silent language-this way my country now. Not the suspicious street, but this space of breath and touch” (Abdullah 152).This intimate space of care operates outside the dominant affective economy of fear, constituting a powerful, alternative geography of belonging.

The completion of her art project, integrating her painting, Faizan’s manuscript, and henna motifs, signifies the creation of a public “third space”. This space synthesizes her fragmented identities-artist, widow, mother, immigrant, Muslim-into a cohesive, resistant whole. Exhibiting it is an act of claiming visibility on her own terms: “the gallery walls held my sorrow, my rage, my son’s laughter, the scent of saffron…It wasn’t closure. It was declaration: I am here. We are here” (Abdullah 210).The public enunciation from the contact zone challenges the singular narrative of victimhood and asserts a complex, hybrid presence.

The birth of her son, though fraught with challenges, embodies the potential for a future forged in the “third space”. He presents a literal and symbolic hybridity-born of Pakistani parents in America, marked by difference yet embodying resilience. Caring for him necessitates directing medical and social institutions, forcing Arissa to continually negotiate and translate her identity within these systems, further solidifying her hybrid subjectivity: “ I became his voice, his shield ,his bridge between worlds.in learning to speak for him, I found my own voice again, different,scared,but unmistakably mine” (Abdullah 165)

Shamsies's *Burnt Shadows* presents hybrid not as stable identity but as precarious, ongoing negotiation within literal and metaphorical borderlands, embodying Bhaba's concept of ambivalence. Characters like Hiroko Tanaka and Raza Hazara are defined by their movement across cultural, linguistic, and national boundaries. This hybridity is a source of remarkable resilience, enabling adaptation, translation, and connection across divides. However, within the volatile "contact zones" of historical trauma (Partician, cold war Afghanistan, post 9/11 America), this very fluidity becomes perilous. Trauma fractures these hybrid identities, forcing painful choices and exposing them to suspicion, exploitation, and betrayal precisely because they defy fixed categories. Their journey demonstrates Bhabha's ambivalence: hybridity empowers survival and fosters unique perspectives, yet simultaneously renders individuals dangerously legible to power structures demanding clear allegiances.

Hirokos's survival hinges on her ability to adapt and translate across cultures. Arriving in Delhi post-Nagasaki, she consciously remarks herself: "I learned Urdu…wore shawl war kameez…became Tanaka-san less and less" (Shamsie 58).This linguistic and cultural hybridity allows her to build a life with Sajjad, steering the complexities of Patrician-era India: "With Sajjad, I learned to live again-not despite the past, but because of it. We built language between us, Urdu and English and gestures of love" (Shamsie 85).Her ability to inhabit multiple cultural space-maintaining her Japanese core while adapting to Pakistani life-exemplifies hybridity's generative potential, creating a "third space" of intimacy and belonging within her marriage and family.

Raza inherits his mother's hybridity, amplified his father's heritage and upbringing. His fluency in Urdu, Pashto, and English initially appears an asset, a tool for directing complex spaces: "Raza could slip between accents and languages…a useful skill, he thought" (Shamsie 217).This allows him a degree of mobility and connection in Pakistan and Afghanistan that mono-cultural characters lack. He can blend, adapt and translate.

However, the trauma of the post 9/11 world fractures Raza's hybrid identity under pressure. Captured by US forces in Afghanistan, his very fluidity becomes proof treachery: "Name? Place of birth? Parents' origin?...the questions circled, tighter, harder… 'Your father was Pakistani? And your mother…German? You speak like an American Explain? (Shamsie 301). Unable to fit a singular box, he is deemed inherently suspicious. This pressure culminates in his ultimate act of betrayal against Harry Burton, his childhood friend. While driven by complex motivations, Raza's desperate act stems from the unbearable fracture of his hybrid self under the weight of competing loyalties and pervasive suspicion: " I belonged nowhere…Pakistan saw the foreigner. America saw the threat. Even Afghanistan saw the outsider" (Shamsie 308).His hybridity, lacking Hiroko' anchoring core, collapses into a lethal ambiguity.

Physical border crossing become potent metaphors for the perils and the possibilities of potential hybridity, dramatising how migrant subjects are simultaneously constrained securitised regimes of surveillance and empowered to inhabit in-between spaces of identity. As Bhabha suggests, hybridity unsettles fixed notions of belonging by producing a 'third space' where cultural negotiation occurs,

while Gloria Anzaldua's notion of the borderlands emphasises the embodied tensions of live across multiple identities. In this light, the acts of crossing borders in Burnt shadows and Saffron dreams signify vulnerability to suspicion, exclusion and the transformative potential of reimagining selfhood beyond rigid national and cultural categories.

Language constantly signals the ambivalence of hybridity. Hiroko's careful code switching demonstrates conscious negotiation. Raza's accidental slippage into an American accent at crucial moments (Shmsie 269,301) exposes him, revealing the internal fractures and making him, a target. His multilingualism, a potential bridge, becomes a minefield.

Hiroko ultimately demonstrates hybridity's potential for resilient adaptation. she survives by continually translating herself, finding "third space" in intimate relationships(Sajjad) and purposeful action (Seeking Raza).Her declaration, " Surviving was my rebellion" (Shamsie 234), underscores resilience forged through hybrid steering. Raza, however, succumbs to hybridity's perilous aspect. The compounded traumas of history and the relentless pressure to choose a singular identity fracture his sense of self beyond repair, leading to betrayal and destruction. Burnt shadows thus powerfully illustrates Bhabha's ambivalence: hybridity is a vital strategy for survival in a fractured world, yet simultaneously a profound vulnerability within borderlands policed by suspicion and rigid identity politics. Trauma does not erase hybridity; it intensifies its inherent tensions, forcing characters onto a knife-edge between resilience and ruin.

Saffron Dreams and *Burnt Shadows* present fundamentally distinct spatial

paradigms for the embodied negotiation of identity under trauma, revealing contrasting relationships between corporeality, space, and agency. While both novels centre the body as the crucial site for survival and resistance, the scale and mobility of the spaces their protagonists inhabit critically shape their strategies.

Arissa's Ilahis's struggle unfolds almost entirely within the fixed, hostile borders of post-9/11 America. Her body-marked by her hijab, pregnancy, widowhood, and motherhood-is rendered hyper visible and vulnerable within this singular, securitized "contact zone" (Bhabha 1).Her trauma is compounded by the immobility imposed by societal suspicion: "the world outside my door felt like a minefield" (Abdullah 58).Her agency emerges not through flight, but through reconstituting meaning and identity within this constrained space.

Arissa's survival hinges on reclaiming her body and voice through localised, creative, and relational practices: Transforming her skin into a site of counter-memory: "the paste cooled my skin…each swirl a whisper of home, of Faizan, of a self they couldn't erase…living. Breathing memory staining my skin" (Abdullah 73).Creating an alternative geography of belonging within her home: "Holding him, feeding him, learning his silent language-this was my country now. Not the suspicious streets, but this space of breath and touch"(Abdullah 152).Her agency stems from nurturing this intimate "third space" against external hostility. Using creative work to assert presence within the national space: "the gallery walls held my sorrow, my rage, my son's laughter…it was declaration: I am here. We are here" (Abdullah 210).This culminates her projects of stationary reclamation. For Arissa, survival and agency are achieved by rooting identity in embodied practices (art,

care, cultural ritual) within the hostile nation-space, forging pockets of autonomy and meaning against erasure. Her body becomes the anchor and the tool for reclamation in place.

Hiroko and Raza embody identities shaped by forced or necessary movement across multiple contested borders; Japan-India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-America. Their hybridity is intrinsically linked to displacement: I am tired…of being the stranger who brings the war with her" (Shamsie 310).Trauma propels them across geopolitical fault lines (Nagasaki, partician, 9/11, war on terror), making bodies vessels of transnational history.

Survival depends on adaptability, translation, and directing the perilous "borderlands": Her Nagasaki scars are a permanent, portable embodiment of trauma carried across continents: "Three cranes in flight, feathers streaming burned onto her back" (Shmasie 15).Her survival relies on constant adaptation, demonstrating agency through acts of linguistic and cultural translation in motion.al translation in motion. His multilingualism and mixed heritage offer mobility but also lethal vulnerability: "Raza could slip between accents and languages… a useful skill" (Shamsie 217). His body becomes contested site interrogated at every border. Fluency in multiple languages is a key embodied skills for stirring transnational spaces, yet slippages can be fatal: "His American accent slipped out…The guard's eyes hardened" (Shamsie 269).

For Hiroko and Raza, survival and (often precarious) agency are intrinsically linked to the body's capacity to move, adapt, and translate across multiple hostile spaces. Their embodied hybridity is a necessary tool forged through displacement,

but it also makes them perpetually vulnerable targets in borderlands demanding fixed allegiance. Trauma is carried on and in the moving body.

Embodiment is the anchor for reconstituting hybridity within a fixed, hostile space. Agency arises from creating resilient, localized “third spaces” (Henna ritual, maternal care, art) on and through the body, resisting the national narrative’s attempt to fix her meaning. Her struggle is one of rooted reclamation. Embodiment is the vessel carrying hybrid identity across multiple contested spaces. Agency (when possible) arises from adaptability, translation, and navigating the perilous interstices between nations and histories. Trauma and identity are inscribed on the body as a mobile archive. Their struggle is one of negotiated mobility.

Despite these contrasting special dynamics, embodiment is paramount for survival and asserting agency in both novels. Arissa’s henna, art and maternal body like Hiroko’s scars and Raza’s multilingual tongue, are not passive sites of victimhood but active tools for existing hostel worlds. Whether through stationary reclamation or mobile negotiation, the body is the essential ground for resisting erasure and forging meaning amidst trauma. Both narrative affirm Bhabha’s insight that identity emerged from the fraught, embodied negotiation within and across the “contact zones” of history and power. Both novels construct distinct affective cartographies where gendered trauma is mapped through the interplay of circulating affects (Ahmed), disrupted temporalities (Caruth), and embodied hybridity (Bhabha). These elements converge to chart how trauma reshapes space, time, and corporeal existence for women exploring post 9/11 and post-colonial violence.

In *Saffron Dreams*, experience embodies a centripetal cartography of confined resistance within 9/11 discourse. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's theories of affect, the novel visualises how fear and suspicion adhere to Arissa's body in public spaces like subways and stores, compelling isolation; as she describes, "The world outside my door felt like a minefield' (Abdullah 58),illustrating how affect circulates inward contracting her world. This confinement intersects with Cathy Caruth's concept of belated trauma. Yet, resistance emerges through Homi K Bhabha's lens of hybrid embodiment, as Arissa reclaims agency within stationary somatic "third spaces". She finds meaning in henna described as "living ,breathing memory staining my skin" (Abdullah 73),and in motherhood, defined as "This space of breath and touch" that becomes "her new country' (Abdullah 152).Thus, her cartography is fundamentally centripetal: resistance radiates inward from the hostile national space towards these intimate, creative, and caring bodily sites.

Burnt shadows constructs a centrifugal cartography of transnational haunting, mapping how trauma and suspicion radiate outward across borders and generation in post9/11 era. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's theory of Affect, the novel illustrates how suspicion circulates transnationally, adhering persistently to hybrid bodies. Hiroko's physical scar from Nagasaki mark her as a perceived threat decades later in the United States, evident when an officer's gaze travels over he 'as if reassuring a threat' upon learning her origin (Shamsie 322).Similarly, her son Raza's multilingualism triggers distrust in Afghanistan, where his ability to move across language grounds for suspicion and accusation.

"You speak like an American. explain" (301).This pervasive suspicion

intertwines with Caruth's concept of belated trauma, as the 1945 Nagasaki bombing violently haunts subsequent generation and erupts through later catastrophes: Hiroko relives the smell of burning flesh during 9/11,finding it "suddenly here" (3),and Raza inherits this trauma as a "ghost of ghost" (198),seeing "falling ash" during his own torture in 2002 (293).Resistance and identity formation, explored through Homi K. Bhabha's lens of hybrid embodiment, occur within mobile "borderlands". Hiroko's scars function as a "portable archive" of trauma carried across continents, and Raza's body becomes a site of ambivalent hybridity, encapsulating his dislocation when he states: "I belonged nowhere…Pakistan saw the foreigner, America saw the threat" (308).This the novel's cartographies fundamentally centrifugal, tracing the outward dispersion of trauma and the struggle for identity across a fragmented global landscape.

Both novel offer distinct yet complementary cartographies of post-9/11 trauma and resistance, fundamentally contoured by gender and forged through embodiment. Saffron Dreams visualises affect (Ahmed) through stigmatised visibility confining Arissa within fixed U.S spaces, leading to centripetal cartography where resistance anchored inward-reclaimed through rooted somatic "third spaces" like henna, 'living, breathing memory staining my skin" (Abdullah) and motherhood (Third spaces of breath and touch") (Abdullah152).Temporality, as Caruth theorises, manifests in Saffron Dreams as belated shards of intensely personal grief that fracture the present. Conversely, Burnt Shadows maps affect as circulating suspicion adhering to hybrid bodies across shifting borders- for instance, when Hiroko's scars prompt her reassessment as a perceived "threat" (Shamsie 322).

Raza's multilingualism demanding explanation (301).This generates a centrifugal cartography where trauma disperse transnationally and trans generationally (Caruth),evident as Nagasaki haunts 9/11 ("the smell of burning flesh…suddenly here" (3) and becomes Raza's "ghost of a ghost" (198).Embodiment (Bhabha) here signifies survival through nomadic hybridity, with Hiroko's scars a 'portable archive" and Raza's body as a site of dislocation" ,'I belonged nowhere…" (308).Ultimately, both novels reveal the gendered body as crucial nexus of survival; whether Arissa roots agency within confinement or Hiroko and Raza experience mobile borderlands, their cartographies refute linear narratives, demonstrating how trauma rewrites space and time through affective, mnemonic and corporeal negotiations.

The affective cartographies in *Saffron Dreams* and *Burnt Shadows* are fundamentally contoured by intersectional gendered experiences, where widowhood, motherhood, survival, and patriarchal constraints actively shape how trauma is mapped onto the body and across space-time. In *Saffron Dreams*, Arissa directs gendered Islamophobia as her Muslim widowhood amplifies vulnerability in public spaces .Her hijab becomes a target for Ahmed's "sticky". Rendering her hyper visible: "people looked at me differently…My skin colour, my accent, my hijab-all of it suddenly made me foreign, suspect" (Abdulla 42),transforming mourning into a politicised act. Conversely, motherhood functions as embodied resistance; raising her disabled son under surveillance reframes care as counter-cartography. Arissa asserts, "My child is not broken. He is different. And so am I. And perhaps that is where our strength lies" (135), reclaiming agency through maternal labour that

steers hostile institutions. Patriarchal erasure further confines her grief as societal norms police expression: “I mourn in silence, for my grief is not the kind that earns sympathy. My grief is suspect” (76), forcing her art and henna into clandestine archives of feminine trauma.

Conversely, *Burnt shadows* explore gendered displacement and trans-generational silence. Hiroko’s scar-symbolised by the “Three cranes in flight…..burned onto her back” (Shamsie 15)-encodes female survival across war zones, yet her trauma is filtered through patriarchal objectification, reduced by Ilse’s gaze to “that back. Those birds” (42).Her matrilineal haunting manifests through protective silence, an emotional labour that becomes a fraught inheritance: “she had wanted to spare him the weight of her past, but he carried it anyway, in the silence between them” (198).Raza’s narrative, however, exposes the fractures of hybrid masculinity under patriarchy. In Pakistan, he is deemed “too soft for a Pakistani boy” (217), revealing how gendered expectations compound the vulnerabilities of hybrid identity. Failing militarised expectations, while in Afghanistan, he is forced to perform hyper-masculine aggression. His betrayal of harry stems from this fractured selfhood, underscoring how patriarchal pressures distort identity across borders.

Both novels bring out a distinct gendered axis through which trauma is experienced and mapped affectively. In Saffron dreams, the protagonist’s trauma is filtered through the intersecting experience of widowhood, motherhood, and Islamophobia of post-9/11.This manifests spatially as confined resistance within domestic and artistic “third spaces’ temporally as belated grief channelled through

maternal duties and creative labour, and embodied in the politicised visibility of markers like the hijab and henna(Abdullah).Similarly ,Burnt shadows explores trauma shaped by war survival, matrilineal silence, and patriarchal masculinity across generations. Its affective cartography presents spatial dimensions where bodily scars function as mobile archives crossing national borders, temporal dimensions where trans generational trauma is mediated through maternal silence, and embodied dimensions where male vulnerability (Raza) is pathologised in contrast to the eroticisation of female resilience (Hiroko) .Consequently, both novels delineate how trauma's spatial, temporal, and embodied pathways are fundamentally structured by gender.

Gender influences the way trauma is understood and experienced; it is not a neutral or universal experience, but is instead shaped by the social, cultural, and psychological frameworks of gender. Arissa's cartography centres on reclaiming corporeal autonomy within a nation-space hostile to Muslim motherhood .Hirokos's revolves around negotiating displacement as a woman bearing visible scars across patriarchal warzones, while Raza's arc exposes how patriarchal demands fracture male hybridity. Both novels prove that affective cartographies are not gender-neutral; they are mapped through the specific burdens of feminised care, widowhood, survival and masculinise expectations.

The affective cartographies in these novels are basically configured by the post 9/11 geopolitical scenario. This era ,defined by pervasive Islamophobia, mass surveillance, and the "War on Terror' restructures spatial experience, temporal resonance, and embodied existence, amplifying existing trauma while generating

new vectors of violence that shape each novels' gendered mapping of identity and memory.Consequently,9/11 functions as a cartographic catalyst, uniquely reshaping how trauma is inscribed upon bodies and spaces within each narrative.

In *Saffron Dreams*, the post 9/11 context manifests as a form of domestic warfare institutionalising Islamophobia. Public spaces become sites of racialises surveillance, where Arissa's hijab marks her body as a perpetual target; she describes walking "into rooms with the burden of proving I was not a threat" (Abdullah 61),transforming mundane activities into perilous navigation saturated with Ahmed's concept of "sticky" affects. This spatial control extends through institutionalised suspicion, weaponised against Muslim women in medical facilities, workplaces, and schools, as evidenced by the hospital technician's exclusionary remarks; "we're short-staffed today for your kind" (Abdullah 95),contracting Arissa's word into defensive domestic and artistic "third spaces". Furthermore, the national rhetoric of the "War on Terror" infiltrates private grief, politicising Arissa's mourning: My mourning was politicised-a widow's tears read as allegiance or guilt" (Abdullah 89).This cultural logic even renders her maternal love suspect, with observers interpreting her son's disability "as punishment, not chance" (Abdullah 142).

Burnt shadows, conversely, traces globalised reach of suspicion and the machinery of transnational rendition. The security state reactivates historical trauma, as Hiroko's identity as Nagasaki survivor is re-weaponised post-9/11; an officer's narrowed gaze upon learning "Nagasaki? 1945/" transforms her body into palimpsest of "enemy' identities under reassessment (Shamsie 322).The war on

terror exploits hybrid male bodies like Raza's subjecting him to racial profiling (Your father was Pakistani? And your mother…German? Explain"(Shamsie 301) and the brutal reality of extrajudicial violence: "hooded, shackled, shipped to a place with no name' (Shamsie 297).His subsequent betrayal of Harry stems directly from this state-sanctioned dehumanisation. The novel further contrasts this vulnerability through Kim Burton, whose white American feminist and citizenship afford her manipulative agency within the security apparatus; her declaration "He's my son… He's American" (Shmsie 287) acts as a shield, highlighting how race and nationality modulate experiences of surveillance and complicity.

The post 9/11 era is not merely a backdrop but an active cartographer. It reshapes Arissa's America into a labyrinth of suspicion, where resistance is forced inward toward somatic and domestic sanctuaries. For Hiroko and Raza, it accelerates the transnational circulation of trauma, turning borderlands into killing fields and hybridity into a death sentence. Both novels map how the "war on terror" generate gendered and racialised affective economies, proving that trauma is not inherited-it is actively remapped by empire.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how the body functions as a counter-archive, where trauma is not solely psychological but also sensory and corporeal. Scars, gestures, and embodied memories operate as alternatives records of history, resisting the erasures of official discourses. By for grounding the particularity of embodiment, the analysis resists Universalist models of trauma: Arissa's post -9/11 Muslim female body cannot be conflated with Hiroko's Japanese- Pakistani transnational body or with Raza's hybrid inheritance, for each

inscribes trauma through distinct cultural, spatial, and political coordinates. Moreover, trauma in these novels emerges not as a private pathology but as a profoundly political condition, reflecting the violence of racism, xenophobia, and war. Consequently, healing cannot be imagined solely as individual recovery but requires collective recognition and structural redress. Finally, the juxtaposition of *Saffron Dreams* and *Burnt Shadows* offers a dual model of trauma: centripetal in Abdulla's novel, where grief is pulled inward the womb, art and ritual as sites of resilience, Centrifugal in Shamsie's narrative, where scars radiate outward across skin, space, and generations, refusing containment. Taken together, these narratives challenge Eurocentric paradigms by advancing plural, gendered cartographies of suffering and survival, revealing how marginalised women transform embodied pain into resistant world-making.

This comparative analysis of affective cartographies establishes a critical foundation for subsequent chapters by demonstrating how post 9/11 novels formally encode complex trauma responses. By mapping the specific narrative strategies for visualising affective circulation/stickiness, belated haunting and hybrid embodiment, the chapter provides the necessary theoretical and methodological framework to examine broader questions central to this thesis. Firstly ,the identified mechanisms affective "stickiness' and haunted temporality directly set the stage for investigating modes of resistance and resilience within these texts and beyond; how do characters and narrative structures push against the suffocating circulation of fear or the grip of belated trauma? Secondly, the close attention to narrative form-how each novel's unique cartography is constructed. Finally, the Chapter's focus on hybrid

embodiment within the specific bio political context of post-9/11 America opens crucial pathway for analysing how similar mechanism manifest in representations of contemporary global trauma.(e.g. climate crisis ,pandemic migration) ,where bodily vulnerability, mediated perception, and transnational affective flows are equally paramount. Thus, this chapter's detailed cartographic reading not only illuminates the immediate post-9/11 literary discourse but also furnishes the essential conceptual tools-affective mapping, haunted temporality, embodied form-for the thesis's wider exploration of narrative, trauma and survival.

This analysis of *Saffron Dreams* and *Burnt shadows* established how gendered trauma operates as an affective cartography within post-9/11 Muslim American literature. Through Ahmed's lense, I have observed how racialised affects "stick" to bodies like Arissa's hijab or Hiroko's scars, confining movement or reactivating suspicion across borders. Caruth's framework revealed trauma's temporal ruptures-manifest in Arissa's belated shards of grief and Hiroko's trans generational haunting-while Bhabha's hybridity illuminated embodied resistance: Arissa's rooted "third space" of motherhood/art and Hiroko/Raza's precarious negotiation of nomadic borderlands. Significantly, both novels positioned the traumatised body as a living counter-archive, contesting monolithic victimhood narratives through corporeal practices like henna or scarred memory. This focus on embodiment now necessitates an interrogation of the literary strategies that encode such resistance. The next chapter, "Hybridity as Praxis: The Body as an archive of Resistance" extends Bhabha's conceptual "third space" from the represented body to the narrative structure itself.

Chapter 3

Hybridity as Praxis: The Body as an Archive of Resistance

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha writes that "the pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the you… it is always the problematic sign of the articulation of cultural difference" (Bhabha 218). This "third space" is a generative zone of possibility in which new interpretations and identities are refined by contradiction, memory, and imagination. Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which he considers as the "third space" that disrupts binary oppositions and allows for cultural negotiation and resistance, hybrid imagination moves beyond assimilation to explore creative and affective strategies of self-fashioning (Bhabha 55).To further investigate the agency of Muslim female protagonists in the works of Laila Halaby and Mohja Kahf, this chapter adopts hybrid imagination as a critical framework. It is an interpretive lens through which to understand how identities are repeatedly negotiated, reconfigured, and imagined again in response to socio-political ruptures.

Hybrid imagination enables the protagonists in the works of Halaby and Kahf to question and re-narrate the fixed identities imposed upon them by dominant discourses of nationalism. These protagonists also engage in acts of reinterpretation that blend personal affect, political critique, and cultural memory. Hybridity challenges static notions of belonging by embracing multiplicity, emotional complexity, and contradiction. The emotional and cultural uncertainty of the characters becomes a critical agency in which trauma is creatively transformed.

The chapter in this backdrop explores the features of the use of formal hybridity such as genre-blurring, polyvocality, linguistic code-switching and fragmented chronologies-to carry out the identity negotiation and traumatic fragmentation process that Bhabha, Sara Ahmed, and Cathy Caruth theorised. According to this frame work, the body is understood as an active, contested space where hybrid identity is materially negotiated rather than as a passive surface. This analysis investigates how Kahf and Halaby depict the Muslim American body as a living palimpsest-inscribed by trauma but also scripting resistance through what Cixous calls "the voice that churns the body" (Cixous 882). Such resistance is articulated through the synthesis of Bhabha's spatial ambivalence, Ahmed's affective materiality, Caruth's traumatic embodiment, and feminist corporeal politics.

The novels analysed here demonstrate how narrative form becomes an agentive technique for disrupting post-9/111 essentialisms and redefining affective belonging if Abdullah and Shamsie uncover the body as site of counter-archiving .This shift from embodied to narratological hybridity marks a critical evolution in Muslim American literary responses to trauma, one where the strategy of storytelling enacts the theoretical resistance previously embodied by characters.

Building on the discussion of embodied counter-archives from chapter 2, this chapter suggests that for Kahf and Halaby, hybridity-shown through intentional mixing thoughtful artistic and political strategy. This narratology opens up ways for complex identities, promotes personal empowerment, and push back against the simplified trauma enact Homi k Bhabha's idea of the 'third space', where cultural

translation generates “something different”, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha 211)

This chapter analyses Kahf’s *The girl in the tangerine scarf* (2006) and Halaby’s *Once in a promised land* (2007). These novels are chosen for their complex narrative structures and nuanced examination of Muslim American subjectivity in the immediate wake of 9/11; they go beyond simply illustrating bicultural identity. Instead, they actively use a mix of language, religion, and culture as artistic tools to break down simple stories of trauma, claim personal power, and build a sense of belonging. They are positioned as crucial, timely interventions in the discourse because they were published within a year of one another, during a period of increased securitisation and cultural anxiety (The patriot Act).

Khadra Shamy’s journey from a strict, Islamic upbringing in 1970s, Indiana to a sophisticated, critical adult faith is chronicled in Kahf’s bildungsroman. Through its formal structure, the novel’s narrative embodies Bhabha’s “third space’. Quranic Arabic (Subhan Allah, Alhamdulillah). Islamic theological discussion, African American vernacular English (“An’t nobody got time for that”) and mid-western American idioms are all skilfully woven into khadra’ internal monologue and dialogue (Kahf 78,215).The protagonist’s changing negotiation of beliefs within American setting is performed by this code-switching. Which is not merely ornamental; it also challenge both communal orthodoxy and Islamophobic erasure. “It wasn’t just cloth,” Khdara says in reflection of her hijab. It felt like a cage my brothers didn’t have to wear at times, but it was a whole cosmology (Kahf 142).

Kahf contrasts distinctly American environments (high school basketball games, mall food courts) with pious Muslim customs (prayer, Ramadan). By normalising the coexistence of seemingly disparate worlds, this ongoing juxtaposition actively undermines the "Clash of Civilisations" narrative (Kahf 95–98). One example of this is the Syrian-American community's sincere, frequently humorous attempts to create an "authentic" Eid celebration in the Indiana snow. The "contact zone" (Bhabha 209) where identity is dynamically remade is formally enacted by it.

The main theme is Khadra's struggle with patriarchal interpretations of Islam, especially as they relate to gender roles and sexuality. Hybridity as feminist praxis is exemplified by her eventual reclamation of faith on her own terms, which is represented by her decision to wear the hijab as an adult but critically and independently. This satisfies Anzaldúa's demand for a "tolerance for contradictions" (101) within identity by fending off the twin traumas of patriarchal constraint and Islamophobic stereotyping.

By examining the origins of Muslim American identity formation prior to 9/11, Kahf's novel offers a crucial generational viewpoint that places the post-9/11 trauma examined elsewhere in context. It is essential for understanding how hybridity works as a strategy that is developed over time rather than just a response to crisis because of its focus on the process of hybrid identity negotiation, particularly through a female protagonist navigating faith, feminism, and Americanness. It is a prime example of the "active, subversive practice" that is at the heart of our feminist trauma aesthetics paradigm.

A sharp contrast is provided by Halaby's novel, which follows the lives of Jordanian hydrologist Jassim Haddad and his Palestinian-American banker wife Salwa as they plunge into the immediate, oppressive atmosphere of Phoenix after 9/11. The fragmentation of trauma and the weaponisation of difference are directly addressed by its narrative structure and characterisations. Jassim's scientific rationality (deeply American in its empiricism) coexists with his Bedouin-inflected connection to desert ecology and Islamic fatalism ("Insha'Allah"). But this very hybridity makes him suspicious after 9/11: "His accent... was not quite right." "Not foreign enough to be merely other, not American enough to be safe" (Halaby 47). Ironically, his knowledge of water—the ultimate hybrid symbol, H2O—becomes a cause for suspicion.

Once in a Promised Land employs shifting perspectives and a non-linear timeline, formally mirroring the traumatic disruption of Caruth and the affective stickiness of Ahmed. Fragmented chapters reveal Salwa's concealed pregnancy loss and Jassim's fatal encounter with a teenage vandal, demonstrating how private traumas intersect with public paranoia. This structure prevents a singular, victimising narrative, instead forcing the reader to piece together the "complex belonging".

The novel avoids making its characters into helpless victims in spite of its tragic course. Jassim's painstaking water research and Salwa's covert work, sending money to Palestine are examples of agentive hybridity, retaining ties to their heritage while interacting with the American present despite pressure. Bhabha's

claim that hybridity can be a site of "enunciative 'cutting'" that subverts power is embodied in their struggle (Bhabha 37).

The unwavering depiction of hybridity's precarity within the particular, acute trauma of the post-9/11 security state is what makes *Once in a Promised Land* singular. By analysing hybrid identity under siege, it enhances Kahf's emphasis on development. Halaby is a model for examining hybridity as a formal strategy within trauma aesthetics because of its use of formal fragmentation and polyvocality, which offer a master class in how narrative structure itself performs traumatic fragmentation and affective burden (Ahmed). Furthermore, its setting outside traditional immigrant hubs (Phoenix) and focus on professional, established immigrants challenge stereotypical narratives.

For the study of strategic hybridity, Kahf and Halaby offer complementary but different literary laboratories. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* sheds light on hybridity as a protracted, community- and faith-based process of identity negotiation and feminist reclamation. *Once in a Promised Land* highlights fragmentation and affective weight while exposing the vulnerability and resiliency of hybridity in the face of immediate, state-sanctioned trauma. In order to avoid simplification, assert agency, and chart the delicate terrain of belonging, both texts do more than merely depict hybrid experience; they enact it through form and language. The texts offer multi-layered analytical breakdowns that highlight scenes in which narrative techniques enact the theoretical work of resistance and reclamation delineated by feminist trauma theory, Bhabha, and Ahmed. For example, Khadra’s internal debates, which blend Qur’anic Arabic with American teen slang (Kahf 127), and

Jassim's scientific discourse, punctuated by Bedouin proverbs (Halaby 89), exemplify what Bhabha terms "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (Bhabha xviii). These instances disrupt monolingual hegemony and assert belonging through linguistic multiplicity. It establishes language as the primary site where hybridity becomes an active strategy.

Applying Ahmed's concept of "stickiness" (*Cultural Politics* 89) and Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" (101), I contrast Khadra's evolving relationship with her hijab—a symbol simultaneously of faith, feminist assertion, and Islamophobic targeting "The scarf was my flag, my shield, my target" [Kahf 215])—with Salwa's concealed pregnancy loss in Halaby's novel, an embodied trauma intensified by post-9/11 surveillance. This analysis reveals how the body becomes a Bhabhian "contact zone" (209) where societal pressures and personal identity violently intersect, demanding feminist strategies of corporeal reclamation.

Different affective geographies are constructed through Ahmed's theory that emotions "circulate" and define communal boundaries (*Cultural Politics* 10–12). The Muslim community in Indianapolis is portrayed in Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* as developing "Third Space," encouraging both critical dissent and a sense of belonging. The tense Eid celebration serves as an example of this complex dynamic, where internal conflicts coexist with communal unity (95–98). On the other hand, post-9/11 Phoenix is depicted in *Once in a Promised Land* as a paranoid environment. In this instance, fear functions within an "affective economy", attaching itself to or "sticking" to the main characters Jassim and Salwa, turning institutions and regular neighbours into possible danger zones (113–117).

When taken as a whole, these narrative mappings serve as an emotional map. For Muslim Americans, they redefine belonging as a dynamic, contested, and active process rather than a fixed or given state. Resistance to the widespread animosity ingrained in the prevailing national imaginaries is necessary, as this process takes place within them.

The discussion in this chapter integrates insights into linguistic, embodied, and spatial hybridity, showing how both authors strategically use these modes to challenge the reductive victim/perpetrator binary imposed by Islamophobic and post-9/11 nationalist discourses. With a strong foundation in what Bhabha refers to as the generative "in-between" spaces, their stories simultaneously assert forms of complex belonging and nuanced agency (1). Kahf and Halaby formalise a unique trauma aesthetics through this complex hybridity. According to Ann Cvetkovich, they use "cultural expression" to transform individual and collective suffering into powerful narrative form, not for spectacle or silence, but for "creative and critical" witness (Archive 7). Thus, *Once in a Promised Land* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* become crucial cultural and political interventions. The very essence of survival is found in the hybrid narrative strategies themselves, which include mapping complex affective geographies, representing contested bodies, and weaving languages together. Kahf and Halaby create a counter-archive that questions prevailing historical erasures and envisions different possibilities for Muslim American identity and belonging in the wake of trauma by rejecting monolithic narratives and embracing the productive tension of the in-between.

Homi K. Bhabha’s conceptualization of hybridity as an enunciative practice

provides the critical foundation for analysing how Kahf and Halaby weaponize language. Bhabha argues that colonial (and by extension, nationalist) power relies on the "myth of historical origination" and the demand for cultural/linguistic purity to construct a unified, exclusionary national identity (*Location of Culture* 37). Hybridity emerges disruptively in the "third Space of enunciation," where the slippages, mistranslations, and deliberate inter weavings of multiple linguistic codes fracture this myth. This linguistic practice, Bhabha contends, "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force" and reveals identity as performative, contingent, and ambivalent (38). Applied to the post-9/11 US context—where state-driven rhetoric (e.g., "with us or against us") and popular discourse demanded assimilationist conformity and viewed multilingualism, particularly Arabic, with suspicion—code-switching becomes a potent act of political and aesthetic subversion. Kahf and Halaby deploy this strategy not merely to reflect bicultural reality, but to actively construct narrative spaces that resist nationalist demands for monolingual legibility and ideological purity, embodying what Bhabha terms the "vernacular cosmopolitanism" inherent in the migrant condition (xviii).

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf consistently integrates untranslated Arabic religious phrases (Bismillah, Alhamdulillah, Insha'Allah) into the narrative fabric, particularly in moments of communal intimacy or personal crisis. This strategy directly challenges the nationalist expectation that English alone constitutes legitimate American speech. For instance, during a tense confrontation at the Indianapolis public pool where Khadra’s brother is harassed for praying, the

narrative focalises through Khadra’s mother, whose internal monologue erupts in untranslated Arabic supplication: "Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakeel" ("Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the best Disposer of affairs") (Kahf 183). The refusal to translate or gloss this phrase performs a crucial dual function: By asserting cultural autonomy, the Muslim characters claim the linguistic space and defy the reader's (and consequently, nationalist) demand for complete understanding and assimilation. Under pressure, the phrase remains a defiant and opaque symbol of faith and community cohesion. The English narrative's fluid flow is broken by the Arabic, resulting in a Bhabhian "splitting" moment (Location 37). It challenges the assumed centrality of English and places the Anglophone reader in a position of linguistic outsider, reflecting the family's experience of exclusion at the pool. This is how hybridity actively challenges linguistic hegemony. Later, Khadra considers how she uses Arabic in American contexts, saying: "The words were armour... and a flag." mine. "Not for them to analyse or reject" (Kahf 215).

Language hybridity is used in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* to highlight the vulnerability of assimilationist ideals in the face of trauma. After 9/11, Jassim Haddad, a hydrologist who is steadfastly devoted to empirical rationality (expressed in his exact, technical English), finds his linguistic identity undermined. Arabic expressions of faith and fatalism continuously infiltrate his attempts to maintain a "pure," professional register, demonstrating the inadequacy of monolingualism in containing complex identity. His inner monologue breaks after being held at the airport:"The permeability coefficient was clearly miscalculated. Insha'Allah, the data was salvageable. No. Focus. Re-run the simulation. Maa al-

salaama, peace be with you, he thought absurdly, remembering the officer's cold stare" (Halaby 132).

Bhabha's idea of the "third Space," where cultural translation takes place, is embodied in this juxtaposition. It is not random that "Insha'Allah" (*God willing*) and the Arabic farewell "Maa al-salaama" are inserted into Jassim's scientific self-instruction ("Re-run the simulation"); rather, it formally performs the traumatic fragmentation of his identity. His struggle to balance his cultural heritage and his logical, "assimilated" self (the scientist) with the visceral fear engendered by racial profiling (Ahmed's "stickiness" of suspicion) is reflected in the hybrid language. He unconsciously resists the nationalist pressure to hide his Arab/Muslim identity in order to be considered a "safe" American by using linguistic code-switching. According to Bhabha, hybridity appears exactly when "the ambivalence of the 'national' subject" challenges "the assumption of a singular or sovereign national culture" (*Location* 146). The narrative expression of that ambivalence is Jassim's broken inner speec

Salwa's linguistic hybridity functions as a covert feminist strategy that resists patriarchal and nationalist surveillance. While working in a high-stress American bank and simultaneously sending money to relatives in Palestine, she carefully modulates her language. With clients, she adopts the polished discourse of finance—"The projected ROI on this portfolio aligns optimally with your risk tolerance parameters, Mr. Davies"—whereas in conversation with her mother, she shifts into an intimate Arabic-English code-switch: "Ya habibti, don't worry. The money's sent. Khalas. It's done. They won't trace it to him" (Halaby 89).

Her swift shift from impersonal financial jargon to the intimate Arabic endearment "Ya habibti" (my darling) and the definitive "Khalas" (finished/enough) performs a linguistic doubling. This allows her to maintain an assimilated professional facade while nurturing forbidden transnational kinship ties and political solidarity—acts rendered dangerous by post-9/11 surveillance laws (*The Patriot Act*). Her code-switching is a survival tactic that creates a Bhabhian "interstitial intimacy" (*Location* 14), a hidden space of affective connection and resistance inaccessible to the monolingual, nationalist gaze. This exemplifies how linguistic hybridity becomes, in Halaby's hands, a tool for feminist agency within constrained spaces, resisting both the erasure demanded by the state and the potential limitations of patriarchal expectations within her community.

Thus, Kahf and Halaby turn linguistic hybridity into a subversive narrative strategy through untranslated Arabic, the division of professional discourse, and deliberate modulation between registers. In addition to enacting the ambivalence and fragmentation at the heart of Bhabha's "third Space," their code-switching actively undermines the nationalist fiction of linguistic/cultural purity and gives characters tools for resistance, such as defiant visibility (Kahf), the articulation of traumatic fracture (Halaby's Jassim), or covert agency (Halaby's Salwa). Their broader feminist trauma aesthetics is based on this linguistic practice, which challenges the assimilationist legibility demanded by potentially reductive communal expectations as well as Islamophobic nationalism.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf employs deliberate linguistic hybridity to construct the textured reality of protagonist Khadra's identity, resisting monolithic

cultural narratives. This hybridity manifests through the seamless textual integration of multivocal codes: untranslated Arabic devotional phrases (e.g., Bismillah, Alhamdulillah) punctuate dialogue and internal monologue without italics or gloss, asserting their organic presence in daily life, as when "Khadra murmured Bismillah before biting into the Big Mac" (Kahf 127). Islamic theological terms (halal/haram, hijab) and cultural references (dabke dancing, oud music) are similarly embedded, such as the depiction of "Eid prayer in the rented VFW hall [smelling] of old cigarettes and rosewater" (98). Further complexity arises through colloquial code-switching, where African American Vernacular English and Midwestern idioms dynamically intersect with formal or religious registers: "'Ya'ani, girl, ain't nobody got time for Brother Sayyid's three-hour khutbah on the Day of Qiyamah,' Aisha groaned, rolling her neck" (215).

This strategic integration refuses exoticisation, instead normalizing linguistic multiplicity as intrinsic to Khadra's lived experience. As Bhabha theorises, such practices occupy the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications," generating a destabilising "third Space" that inherently challenges notions of cultural purity (*Location* 4). Kahf's narrative thus transforms language itself into a site of resistance, forging identity within—and against—constricting social frameworks by affirming the legitimacy of hybrid expression as both personal authenticity and political assertion.

Khadra's linguistic fluidity in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* mirrors her evolving identity, transitioning from rigid orthodoxy to a critical, integrated self-definition. Her childhood speech reflects communal dogma, enforcing binary

boundaries through Arabic-inflected authority, as when her mother declares, "'Haram!'... Snatching the Barbie... 'This is shirk al-sura—idolatry!'" (Kahf 45). Adolescence introduces fractious code-switching, signaling identity friction; during a basketball game, her internal conflict—"Astaghfirullah—forgive me, Allah—for caring if Jason saw my sweatpants under this jilbab" (132)—embodies Bhabha's concept of the "splitting" subject (Location 37). Maturity brings linguistic synthesis, where blended registers reflect an integrated consciousness. Reflecting on her hijab, Khadra fuses critique with affirmation: "It wasn't just cloth. It was a whole cosmology... and sometimes, it felt like a cage my brothers didn't have to wear" (142). The italicized English disrupts devotional tones, enacting feminist awareness within faith, demonstrating hybridity as Bhabha's "process of becoming" that "entertains difference without an assumed hierarchy" (*Location* 114).

This linguistic evolution functions as a medium of resistance on multiple fronts. Untranslated Arabic, like her mother's prayer "Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakeel" during harassment (183), asserts cultural autonomy by creating a barrier against comprehension—an act Bhabha terms "enunciative cutting" (Location 37). Kahf subverts Islamophobic tropes by juxtaposing Islamic references with quintessentially American contexts, such as depicting Eid celebrations in an Indiana VFW hall amidst "plastic palm trees next to the slot machines" and "Eid Mubarak! Echoing off the Budweiser sign" (98), formally enacting synthesis and refusing victimhood. Khadra's internal blend of Qur'anic Arabic and feminist critique further disrupts patriarchal authority, as when she interrogates a verse: "'Men are the protectors of women' [Qur'an 4:34]... Then why's Aisha's dad hitting her mom?"

(170). As Ahmed notes racialized emotions "stick" to bodies (Cultural Politics 89); Khadra's code-switching scrubs off this stickiness by asserting irreducible complexity. Her language refuses assimilationist demands, claiming space for Bhabha's "incommensurable" (Location 219) and constructing a lived "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (xviii).

The strategic linguistic hybridity of Kahf accomplishes important political and theoretical tasks. By portraying Anglophone readers as outsiders to the discourse, the use of untranslated Arabic enacts what Bhabha refers to as "enunciative cutting" (Location 37), claiming cultural autonomy. Bhabha's idea of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (xviii) is also embodied in the blending of Islamic vocabulary with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which challenges cultural hierarchies and asserts space for Muslim identity in American contexts. What Anzaldúa refers to as a "mestiza consciousness" (101) that actively accepts contradiction, allowing feminist resistance within Islamic faith traditions and rejecting oversimplified victimhood narratives, is reflected in Khadra's internal critical monologues. Additionally, Bhabha's destabilising "third space" (Location 4) is created by Kahf's purposeful juxtaposition of cultural references, such as Eid prayers in a VFW hall, which dismantles simplistic "clash of civilizations" clichés and normalises hybrid belonging as a real lived experience. When combined, these strategies turn language into a space where identity is reconstructed and contested in opposition to oppressive structures.

Halaby's description of Jassim Haddad—"He trembled in two languages" (121)—transcends poetic device to become the novel's central somatic and

psychological metaphor for post-9/11 trauma's destabilizing impact on hybrid identity. This trembling operates on interconnected levels. Physiologically, it literalizes Bhabha's concept of the culturally "split subject" (Location 37), manifesting as violent collisions within Jassim's body where his "precise and scientific" English falters against his familial Arabic, leaving his hands shaking as he struggles to calibrate his divided self (Halaby 121). This involuntary tremor embodies Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma resides in its "unassimilated nature," an event experienced "too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4, 18), rendering his bilingualism a site of bodily betrayal. Concurrently, the trembling exposes linguistic anxiety under national suspicion, where language becomes a site of surveillance within Sara Ahmed's "affective economy" (*Cultural Politics* 45). Jassim's hybrid accent, scrutinized as neither foreign nor American enough, triggers a somatic stress response—the physiological imprint of what Ahmed terms the "stickiness" of suspicion adhering to his racialized body (89). Finally, the metaphor signifies epistemological collapse, disrupting Jassim's communicative certainty. As a hydrologist reliant on linguistic precision, his languages fail under duress; Arabic terms surface unexpectedly, twisting his scientific explanations into perceived "nonsense" and constricting his throat (Halaby 132). This linguistic misfiring corporealizes Caruth's claim that trauma "defies... comprehension" and "prevents its direct linguistic representation" (Trauma: Explorations 5), positioning Jassim's trembling as the visceral symptom of a fractured reality where coherent mediation is lost.

Three interrelated dimensions make up Halaby's metaphor of trembling, each of which is emphasised by particular textual passages and theoretical frameworks.

Homi Bhabha's idea of the culturally "split subject," in which hybrid identity creates visceral physiological tension, is materialised by the somatic split in Jassim's body, as demonstrated when "muscles twitched along his jawline as he suppressed an Arabic curse" (Halaby 178). Sara Ahmed's theory of the affective stickiness of suspicion, which holds that emotions "circulate" and stick to racialised bodies (*Cultural Politics* 45), is also embodied in scenes like Salwa witnessing Jassim's "hand tremble dialling Palestine," where fear is metaphorically "clinging like static" to his movements (Halaby 213). This illustrates how private behaviours become public displays of anxiety due to national paranoia. Cathy Caruth's claim that trauma is "unassimilated" into coherent experience is best illustrated by the way cognitive fragmentation arises when trauma interferes with language itself (*Unclaimed Experience* 18). When Jassim's linguistic certainty crumbles, this is portrayed starkly: "The English word evaporated... only the Arabic ‘khauf’ remained" (Halaby 121), illustrating how terror undermines communicative stability. When taken as a whole, these layers present Jassim's trembling as an embodied critique of nationalist pressures that fracture hybrid subjectivity rather than just as an individual symptom.

Linguistic hybridity is changed from a cultural condition to a traumatised somatic state by Halaby's metaphor. "Trembling in two languages" perfectly captures the way bilingualism is pathologised by post-9/11 securitisation, which turns it into a weapon against the body that harbours it. The visceral inscription of what Bhabha refers to as the "ambivalent tension" of hybrid existence (*Location* 114)—a tension that vibrates at the frequency of survival under state trauma—is what causes this trembling, not passivity. Halaby uses this physical metaphor to

show how language itself becomes a shaky borderland where identity is both under siege and painfully reconstructed for the Muslim American subject.

Beyond personal anxiety, Halaby's metaphor "trembling in two languages" (121) describes the physical expression of incompatible cultural epistemologies. This shuddering represents the physical stress of negotiating what Bhabha refers to as the "incommensurable contradictions" of hybrid identity (*Location* 219), in which language structures turn into stand-ins for more extensive cultural/emotional systems in violent conflict.

Jassim's epistemological crisis manifests through the physiological clash between his scientific rationality and Arabic ancestral worldviews, generating profound somatic stress. This tension is exemplified when his precise hydrological calculations ("0.7 cubic meters per second") fracture under the intrusion of his mother's untranslated proverb, "'Al-maya raḥat, ya ibni'" (Halaby 189). The juxtaposition materializes what Bhabha terms cultural "incommensurability" (Location 4)—the Arabic resists assimilation into empirical discourse, exposing the irreducible "liminal space" between epistemologies. Simultaneously, this disruption embodies Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma's belatedness, where past cultural memory violently interrupts present cognition (6). Jassim's throbbing temples and blurred vision corporealize this collision, rendering abstract theoretical conflict as visceral suffering.

The untranslatability of affect further compounds Jassim's linguistic fracture. When his American colleague dismisses Palestinian suffering, suppressed Arabic emotions rupture his English speech: the words "'ḥuqūq' (rights/justice)" and

"‘Ḥaram!’ (Forbidden!)" swell in his throat and vibrate in his sternum despite his verbal silence (Halaby 164). These somatic inscriptions illustrate Sara Ahmed’s theory of emotional "stickiness," where racialized grief adheres to the body when dominant languages lack ethical equivalents (*Cultural Politics* 91). Here, the untranslated Arabic becomes a corporeal archive of political rage. As Cvetkovich suggests, such silencing functions not as passivity but as embodied testimony—a feminist "counter-archive" that registers trauma through the body’s material resistance to linguistic erasure (7).

Jassim’s somatic responses in *Once in a Promised Land* transform embodied conflict into a form of political resistance, materializing the violent friction between competing epistemologies and affective worlds. His cognitive dissonance manifests as physiological distress—"throbbing temples" when his mother’s Arabic proverb ("Al-maya raḥat") disrupts his hydrological calculations (Halaby 189)—exposing Western rationality’s failure to contain non-empirical knowledge systems. This corporeal reaction literalizes the incommensurability between empirical and ancestral ways of knowing, positioning the body as a site where dominant epistemologies fracture. Similarly, affective overflow registers as a "choked throat" when untranslated Arabic terms like ḥuqūq (rights/justice) swell during discussions of Palestinian suffering (Halaby 164). These somatic interruptions function as what Ann Cvetkovich terms embodied "counter-memory" (163), archiving subaltern emotions that evade linguistic expression within hegemonic English discourse.

The body’s resistance culminates in moments of coercive silencing, where Jassim’s "clenched jaw" (Halaby 207) materializes the violence of nationalist

interpellation. This physical withholding enacts what Homi Bhabha describes as the "violence of the letter"—the imposition of singular identities through state power (*Location* 146). By refusing speech, Jassim's body rejects the demand to perform legible identity for surveillance regimes. Collectively, these embodied responses—throbbing temples, choked silence, and clenched muscles—reconfigure trauma from passive victimhood into active testimony. They forge a somatic counter-archive that contests the erasure of hybrid subjectivity within post-9/11 America's "affective economies" (Ahmed 45), asserting presence through corporeal defiance

Halaby turns trembling into somatic testimony instead of a symptom. When Jassim "trembles in two languages," his body records what Ahmed refers to as "the pain of incommensurability" (*Strange Encounters* 155). Readers are forced to face the physical costs of living in what Anzaldúa refers to as the "borderlands"—a place that is "not safe" but necessary for survival (Anzaldúa 25)—because this embodied conflict defies resolution. Therefore, the trembling is the visceral grammar of resistance against monolingual tyranny rather than breakdown or surrender.

Halaby frames Jassim's fractured bilingualism as an embodied allegory for the epistemic violence inherent in post-9/11 assimilationist demands. This paradox of nationalism—requiring cultural erasure while simultaneously pathologizing the hybrid identities it produces—is crystallized through the ironic juxtaposition of Jassim's hydrological expertise with his linguistic suffocation. His professional understanding of ecological destruction becomes a metaphorical lens for his own cultural silencing, exemplified when he reflects: "He had modeled the death of the Aral Sea—languages erased like tributaries dammed by empire. Now English

choked his Arabic, damming the words in his throat. Al-maya raḥat. The water is gone" (Halaby 231). The "damming" metaphor literalizes Homi Bhabha's concept of the nationalist "violence of the letter" (*Location* 146), visualizing how state-enforced monolingualism obstructs cultural and linguistic flow, much like Soviet irrigation projects annihilated the Aral Sea's ecosystems. Jassim's physically choked throat embodies Gayatri Spivak's theorization of "epistemic violence" (76), manifesting the systemic silencing of subaltern knowledge. His tragic insight—modeling ecological and cultural erasure while experiencing it somatically—underscores the novel's critique: forced assimilation functions as a form of cultural genocide, where the loss of language (Al-maya raḥat) signifies irreversible historical and existential depletion.

Halaby's interrogation scenes literalize the epistemic violence of forced assimilation through explicit demands for linguistic self-erasure. When security agents command, "'Your name is Jassim? We'll call you Jason,'" while crossing out his passport and ordering, "'speak English only. That Arabic shit stays buried'" (Halaby 207), the state enacts what Sara Ahmed terms "stranger fetishism" (*Strange Encounters* 95)—constructing Jassim as a threat to be contained through erasure. The imperative to "bury" Arabic constitutes a form of cultural necropolitics, systematically eliminating linguistic identity. This enforced monolingualism directly embodies Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "linguistic terrorism" (Borderlands 55), an act of "linguicide" that severs what she calls the "twin skin" of language and selfhood.

Jassim’s body, however, rebels against this suppression, transforming into a somatic archive of resistance. His physical struggle to comply—"His tongue swelled, resisting the alien syllables" while practicing "Jason" in the mirror (Halaby 218)—materializes Cathy Caruth’s theory of trauma’s "unassimilated voice" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). The corporeal refusal manifests suppressed Arabic as involuntary eruptions: dreams where "ṣamt (silence)" floods his mouth "tasting of blood" (Halaby 218). This visceral imagery—blood as the cost of erasure—formalizes Ann Cvetkovich’s notion of trauma inhabiting the body to create a "counter-archive" (Archive 3). The swollen tongue and bleeding silence thus become sites where cultural loss is both recorded and contested, defying the state’s demand for complete assimilation.

Halaby’s novel theorizes un speakability as a political condition through three interconnected mechanisms of erasure, each countered by embodied resistance. Damming knowledge—manifested in Jassim’s choked throat as English "dams" his Arabic (Halaby 231)—materializes Gayatri Spivak’s epistemic violence, where subaltern speech is systematically suppressed (76). Necronaming, exemplified when state agents cross out Jassim’s passport while commanding, "‘we’ll call you Jason’" (Halaby 207), enacts Sara Ahmed’s stranger fetishism: reducing identity to a fetishized threat requiring erasure (*Strange Encounters* 95). This state "murder of identity" is defied through somatic rebellion, where Jassim’s "swollen tongue" resisting the name "Jason" (Halaby 218) corporealises Gloria Anzaldúa’s linguistic terrorism—the violent imposition of mono lingualism (Borderlands 55). The body here refuses cultural amputation, transforming trauma into what Anzaldúa terms the

"rebellious flesh" (55) that archives loss. Collectively, these symbols—choked throat, crossed-out passport, and swollen tongue—reconfigure silence from passive victimhood into active testimony against assimilationist necropolitics.

Halaby turns Jassim's shuddering into a physical representation of the impossibility of erasure. The fundamental lie of nationalist purity is exposed by his body's refusal to comply—choking, swelling, and bleeding Arabic—which states that hybridity cannot be eliminated but only traumatised. The "untranslatable" remnant of culture endures in the "interstices," as Bhabha contends (*Location* 224). Jassim's physical symptoms demonstrate that forced assimilation is linguistic genocide rather than integration, with the body serving as the final line of defence. This portrays hybridity as radical testimony against state violence rather than as a cultural compromise.

Bhabha's idea of the "third space"—the transitional space where cultural meanings are translated and changed—is expanded from the discursive to the physical world in this chapter. It is argued that the body itself becomes the main "site of enunciation" (Bhabha 55) where hybrid identity is negotiated, monitored, and resisted for Muslim American subjects handling post-9/11 trauma. To theorise embodiment as lived epistemology, this necessitates combining Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, Sara Ahmed's affective materialism, and Bhabha's hybridity.

Bhabha’s assertion that hybridity "entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (*Location* 114) gains visceral urgency when applied to the racialized body. Post-9/11, Muslim American bodies—marked by hijabs, beards, skin tone, or surnames—were violently interpolated into what Bhabha terms the

"ambivalent" space between "visibility and invisibility, legibility and illegibility" (128). The body becomes a contact zone where societal demands for assimilation ("Be American!") and exclusion ("You don't belong!") collide. As Bhabha notes, this liminality generates "anxiety" but also "agential potential" (56) — a duality manifest in physical tension (Halaby's "trembling") or acts of corporeal reclamation (Kahf's hijab as "flag").

Sara Ahmed's theorisation of how emotions "stick" to racialised bodies (*Cultural Politics* 90) provides a critical lens for understanding the corporeal impact of post-9/11 Islamophobia. In this affective economy, suspicion, fear, and hatred adhere to Muslim subjects through mechanisms like hypervisibility—where Khadra's observation that "'The scarf made me a bullseye'" (Kahf 215) materializes the hijab as a target for public scrutiny—and tactile surveillance, exemplified by intrusive security encounters like "'Fingertips probing my hijab'" (Abdullah 42). These experiences transform the body into what Ahmed terms an "archive of . . . feelings" ("Affective Economies" 119), somatically registering collective trauma through flinching reflexes, chronic muscular tension, or the pervasive "trembling" that destabilizes Jassim Haddad's bilingual identity (Halaby 121). Such embodied symptoms literalize the "sociality of emotion" (*Cultural Politics* 10), where socially circulated affects become physically inscribed on othered bodies, forging a visceral counter-memory of state and social violence.

Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma escapes full assimilation during its occurrence (*Unclaimed Experience* 18) elucidates why fractured identities manifest somatically before achieving linguistic articulation. When cultural belonging is

destabilized by hybridity (Bhabha) and the body is saturated with hostile affect (Ahmed), trauma materializes through embodied testimony. This dynamic manifests as temporal rupture, where past violence intrudes upon the present—exemplified by Hiroko's lingering physiological response: "My hands shook years later when planes crossed the sky" (Shamsie 322). Simultaneously, it surfaces as bodily dissonance, captured in Jassim's alienation: "This skin never felt like mine—too Arab for America, too American for Aleppo" (Halaby 89). These corporeal experiences constitute what Caruth identifies as a "cryptic language" (5): a physical lexicon that testifies to traumas silenced by dominant historical narratives. The trembling hands and estranged skin thus become sites where unprocessed cultural and political violence registers beyond speech, articulating through the body what discourse cannot yet reconcile.

Extending Chapter 2's focus on "embodied counter-archives," feminist theorists such as Anzaldúa and Cixous are positioned as vital. Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness"—born of "continual creative motion that breaks down the unitary aspect of the self" (101)—aligns with Bhabha's hybridity but centers the bodily cost: "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two... the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional strain" (100, emphasis added). Acts like Khadra's hijab reclamation ("My shield, my target" [Kahf 215]) or Hiroko's scarred body as "map" (Shamsie 47) exemplify Cixous' call to "write the body" (Medusa 880)—using corporeality to resist patriarchal and Islamophobic erasure.

Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space"—a site of cultural hybridity that "entertains difference without an assumed hierarchy" (*Location* 55–56)—

materializes in Kahf's depiction of the hijab as simultaneously "flag/shield/target" (215). This ambivalent embodiment transforms the veil into a locus of negotiated agency, where visibility becomes both vulnerability and resistance within Islamophobic landscapes. Similarly, Sara Ahmed's theory of affective stickiness—where socially circulating emotions "adhere" to racialized bodies (*Cultural Politics* 90)—finds corporeal expression in Halaby's metaphor of "trembling in two languages" (121). Jassim's somatic vibration archives the racialized suspicion saturating post-9/11 America, rendering the body a living record of political fear.

Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as an "unassimilated" psychic wound (*Unclaimed Experience* 18) elucidates why recurrent somatic symptoms—like Hiroko's hands shaking years after trauma "when planes crossed the sky" (Shamsie 322)—function as corporeal testimony. These involuntary reactions articulate historical violence beyond linguistic capture, challenging dominant narratives of recovery. Finally, Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness," which "tolerates contradictions" to resist unitary identity (Borderlands 101), resonates in Jassim's bodily estrangement: "This skin never felt like mine—too Arab for America, too American for Aleppo" (Halaby 89). This epidermal dissonance becomes an act of embodied resistance, rejecting colonial and nationalist demands for cultural purity. Collectively, these theorists frame the body as a political text: where hybridity materializes agency (Bhabha), affect archives oppression (Ahmed), trauma inscribes history (Caruth), and contradiction enacts liberation (Anzaldúa).

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Khadra's negotiation of identity extends beyond internal conflict, manifesting materially on her body through practices such

as hijab observance, cultural rituals, and spatial navigation. These embodied acts function as lived articulations of Homi K. Bhabha's "Third Space," becoming sites of resistance against both assimilationist pressures and patriarchal constraints (37). Initially, the hijab signifies imposed discipline and bodily submission, depicted through physical discomfort: "The scarf itched like burlap, tightening around her throat when boys shouted 'towelhead!' [...] Her neck ached from keeping her gaze lowered" (Kahf 63). This constriction materializes the "stickiness" of racialised shame on what Sara Ahmed terms the "skin as contact zone" (*Cultural Politics* 89), while the lowered gaze enforces patriarchal control. However, Khadra transforms the hijab into an instrument of corporeal sovereignty in adulthood. Her reappropriation is somatic: "She wrapped the tangerine silk loosely, feeling the sun warm her nape. At the protest, she met their stares—chin lifted, scarf bright as a flame" (Kahf 215). Loosening the fabric enacts Bhabha's "enunciative cutting," a spatial defiance (37), and the exposed nape reclaims bodily autonomy, echoing Hélène Cixous's concept of écriture féminine as the scarf becomes "ink" writing resistance directly onto her skin (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 880).

Cultural rituals further demonstrate embodied synthesis within hostile American spaces. Participating in Eid celebrations within a VFW hall, Khadra experiences a tactile hybridity: "Dancing dabke on linoleum sticky with beer, her heels clicking next to slot machines [...] Rosewater sweat mingled with the smell of fried chicken" (Kahf 98). The "clicking heels" embody what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the tolerance for contradiction inherent in "mestiza consciousness" (Borderlands / La Frontera 101), while the "rosewater sweat" signifies cultural

fusion at the somatic level. Similarly, eating at McDonald's becomes an act performed on contested territory: "She bit the Big Mac, grease slick on halal-conscious fingers [...] The beef sat heavy, but the Coke's fizz felt like rebellion" (Kahf 127). The resulting digestive discomfort literalizes Caruth's notion of "unassimilated trauma," functioning as a bodily archive of unresolved cultural belonging and indigestion (*Unclaimed Experience* 18).

Physical acts of boundary-making solidify Khadra's embodied agency. Playing basketball, she navigates a corporeal third space: "Sweat soaked her jersey's sleeves under the jilbab. She drove past Jason, elbow out—not too haram, not too meek" (Kahf 132). Here, Bhabha's "liminality" is enacted as sweat merges religious modesty with American athleticism, and the defensive elbow physically carves out territorial agency. This somatic defiance culminates in a swimming pool confrontation: "When the man yelled 'Go home!,' she walked backward into the water, hijab streaming like kelp. 'This is my home,' she said, treading fluid" (Kahf 183). Her backward entry reclaims space, embodying Ahmed's figure of the "feminist killjoy" who disrupts prescribed happiness (*The Promise of Happiness* 65), while the "streaming hijab" strategically weaponises hypervisibility. Through these corporeal practices, Khadra's body becomes a cartography of resistance and identity formation.

Khadra's body functions as a dynamic feminist archive in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, where specific embodied acts forge distinct forms of resistant agency. Her conscious loosening of the hijab transcends mere comfort; it becomes a corporeal reclamation of her skin as sovereign territory. This act materializes Hélène

Cixous's imperative to "write the body," transforming the scarf into an instrument of self-inscription against external control (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 880). Similarly, the act of dancing dabke on the beer-sticky linoleum of a VFW hall during Eid exemplifies agency through synthesis. The deliberate motion in this incongruous space enacts Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "tolerance for ambiguity," physically weaving together her Syrian heritage and the surrounding American hostility into a lived, kinetic reality (Borderlands / La Frontera 101). On the basketball court, Khadra's defensive posture—elbow strategically extended—creates a vital corporeal buffer against cultural erasure. This physical assertion embodies. Bhabha's notion of "interstitial agency," carving out a space of autonomy within contested social fields through the body's tactical positioning (55). The culmination of this corporeal resistance is seen in the swimming pool confrontation. By walking backward into the water while facing her antagonist, Khadra performs a radical refusal of displacement. This somatic defiance materializes Sara Ahmed's concept of "feminist reorientation," physically reclaiming space and asserting belonging through a deliberate, counter-normative movement (180). Each act—loosening, dancing, defending, and swimming backward—archives a distinct feminist strategy of agency formation directly onto Khadra's lived corporeal experience.

Khadra's body turns into an insurgent belonging palimpsest. She converts somatic tension (itchiness, digestive unease) into what Anzaldúa refers to as "a conscious rupture" (Borderlands 104) through the use of the hijab, ritual, and spatial practices. As she states while applying henna to her son's crippled foot, "skin remembers what words cannot" (Kahf 231). Her physical negotiations reject the

victimhood/assimilation binary and instead create an embodied third space. This is hybridity as lived experience rather than as a theory.

In Halaby's narrative, C. Jassim's experience of "trembling in two languages" (121) transcends mere metaphor, constituting a literal somatic lexicon that articulates the complex epistemology of trauma shaping post-9/11 hybrid identity. This physiological manifestation operates first as a neurobiological archive of cultural fracture. Jassim's trembling materially embodies Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "split subject" at the cellular level (37), evident when "His hands shook not from cold but from the war inside his nerves—Bedouin proverbs clashing with hydrological models, Arabic ḥurriyya (freedom) short-circuiting into English 'terror alert'" (Halaby 189). This involuntary tremor signifies Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma lodged where "the mind is invaded by an event" it cannot cognitively process (Unclaimed Experience 5), manifesting as Arabic and English neural pathways firing in lethal contradiction. Simultaneously, it reflects Sara Ahmed's notion of how suspicion "sticks" somatically; the cortisol flooding Jassim's system when speaking Arabic publicly (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 91) manifests as the "fine vibrations in his larynx" described by Halaby (132). Secondly, the trembling functions as a metaphorical cartography of geopolitical displacement. It maps transnational violence onto Jassim's physiology, as when "the detention officer said 'Jason,' his knee jerked—a tremor rippling outward like shockwaves from the World Trade Center, echoing Nagasaki in his mother's bones" (Halaby 207). This corporeal reaction positions his body as a palimpsest, layering the trauma of 9/11 detention over inherited memories of nuclear suffering (Bhabha

224), and manifests what Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as the inherent "psychic restlessness" of border subjects, where "the body is a battleground for identities" (Borderlands / La Frontera 78, 100). Contra interpretations of passivity, however, Jassim's trembling evolves into a form of agentive resistance through somatic syntax. He deliberately weaponizes his vulnerability: "He let his hands shake openly at the checkpoint—a visible stutter against their demand for stillness. Let them see the cost of their 'security'" (Halaby 231). This act transforms the tremor into Hélène Cixous's écriture corporelle, writing protest with the body where words fail (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 881), and aligns with Elaine Scarry's assertion that the incontrovertible "body in pain" can force witness to state violence (*The Body in Pain* 52). Thus, Jassim's trembling corpus becomes an embodied epistemology, archiving fracture, mapping displacement, and ultimately enunciating resistance.

Jassim's trembling functions as a sophisticated mode of embodied knowledge in Laila Halaby's narrative, operating simultaneously across literal, metaphorical, and resistant registers at distinct corporeal sites. The tremor in his hands manifests literally as "lab equipment rattling" (Halaby 132), undermining his professional facade as a hydrologist. Metaphorically, this signifies the failure of scientific objectivity and quantitative tools to measure the depth of cultural trauma, exposing the limits of empirical frameworks when confronting subjective fracture. As resistant praxis, this involuntary disruption performs a critique of positivist epistemology itself. Similarly, the trembling in his voice, causing "Arabic vowels fragmenting" (207), literally archives the somatic impact of linguistic erasure under xenophobic pressure. The fragmented phonemes resonate metaphorically as cultural

heritage splintering, embodying the violence of assimilation. Yet this physiological rupture simultaneously functions as a corporeal archive, preserving the trace of suppressed language and identity against erasure. Most pointedly, the knee's "involuntary jerk" triggered by the colonial misnomer "Jason" (207) literalizes the body's visceral rejection of imposed identity. This reflex metaphorically maps the geopolitical violence of renaming and displacement onto the nervous system. Crucially, this somatic response transcends passive reaction; it actively performs what Gloria Anzaldúa terms "rebellious flesh" (Borderlands / La Frontera 81), transforming an involuntary spasm into a corporeal declaration of refusal against colonial categorization. Collectively, these tremor sites—hands, voice, knee—constitute a multifaceted somatic epistemology where physiological manifestations document trauma, articulate its complex metaphorical resonances, and ultimately enact resistant agency against intersecting systems of oppression.

Jassim's trembling is embodied epistemology rather than breakdown or metaphor. It responds to Caruth's exhortation to "listen to the body's speaking" (Trauma 9) and materialises what Bhabha refers to as the "untranslatable" residue of hybridity (*Location* 224). Jassim's body becomes what Spivak might refer to as the absolute subaltern when he "trembles in two languages"—not silent, but speaking in a somatic language that is incomprehensible to colonial minds (*Subaltern* 78). The revolutionary potential of Halaby's corporeal poetics lies in its ability to make resistance audible in the rattle and trauma visible in the tremor.

Halaby inscribes the brutal somatic consequences of state-enforced erasure onto Jassim's body, transforming it into a palimpsestic testimony against the

violence of nationalist purity myths. The necropolitics of renaming manifests linguistically and physiologically when "The agent crossed out 'Jassim' on his passport. 'Jason's cleaner.' His jaw muscle spasmed—a phantom pain where his identity had been excised" (207). This anglicization enacts what Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as linguistic terrorism (Borderlands / La Frontera 55), while the jaw spasm materializes Achille Mbembe's concept of necropower—the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (*Necropolitics* 27)—and embodies Sara Ahmed's notion of identity amputation through state-enforced self-erasure (*Cultural Politics* 148; Strange Encounters 101). Jassim's body further resists through digestive revolt, violently rejecting performative assimilation: "He vomited the Thanksgiving turkey—acid burning his throat as his wife's family applauded his 'Americanization.' The taste of betrayal lingered" (174). This literal expulsion of enforced belonging materializes Bhabha's "unhomely" condition (37), while the acid burn archives Caruth's "unassimilated trauma" (*Unclaimed Experience* 18). Sustained erasure escalates to neurological collapse, where dissociative fragmentation exposes psychic violence: "Watching CNN's war coverage, his vision fragmented—Arabic script scrolling behind English captions. He clawed at his temples where the languages warred" (231). This embodies Frantz Fanon's diagnosis of colonial "psychic instability" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 203) and symbolizes Gayatri Spivak's "epistemicide"—the destruction of subaltern world-making (*Can the Subaltern Speak*? 130). Finally, tactile atrophy severs somatic-cultural memory: "His fingers fumbled the oud strings—calluses faded from years of abandonment. The Bedouin songs his mother sang now felt alien under his skin" (189). The atrophied hands materialize Anzaldúa's "flesh amnesia" *(Borderlands*

81) and Bhabha's "cultural aphasia" (162), rendering the irreversible loss of embodied heritage as physiological evidence of state-sanctioned destruction. Collectively, these corporeal sites—jaw, gut, neurons, fingertips—archive erasure's brutality through visceral testimony no document can falsify.

In Halaby's narrative, Jassim's body emerges as a vital counter-archive against state-sanctioned erasure, where somatic sites transform the violence of assimilation into legible testimony. The jaw's muscle spasm—triggered by the necropolitical renaming "Jason"—materializes Ahmed's concept of "necronaming" as a violent excision of identity (Cultural Politics 148). Yet this physiological response transcends passive suffering; it enacts corporeal refusal, archiving the body's revolt against linguistic annihilation. Similarly, the digestive tract's rejection of performative assimilation ("He vomited the Thanksgiving turkey [...] The taste of betrayal lingered" [Halaby 174]) literalises Bhabha's "unhomely" condition of enforced belonging (9). The act of vomiting becomes the body's literal expulsion of the colonial script, weaponizing visceral disgust as resistance. The visual cortex's fragmentation under epistemic violence ("Arabic script scrolling behind English captions" [231]) embodies Spivak's "epistemicide"—the systematic destruction of subaltern knowledge (*Can the Subaltern Speak*? 130). This neurological rebellion manifests as an involuntary neural counter-narrative, disrupting Western epistemological dominance from within. Finally, the hands' fumbling of oud strings—their calluses faded from cultural deskilling (Halaby 189)—materializes Gloria Anzaldúa's "flesh amnesia," where the loss of ancestral memory is etched onto the body (*Borderlands / La Frontera* 81). This tactile atrophy functions

paradoxically as an archive of stolen dexterity, preserving the trace of erased cultural praxis through its very absence. Collectively, these sites—jaw, gut, neurons, hands—transmute the physiological consequences of erasure into an embodied epistemology of refusal, positioning Jassim's corporeal being as an incontrovertible counter-archive against monolithic narratives of belonging.

Scarry refers to Jassim's body as "the world-destroying and world-making" site of pain (*Body in Pain* 52). Instead of being passive symptoms, his tremors, vomiting, and neurological fragmentation are somatic outbursts against what Fanon refers to as the "violence of the gaze that erases" (*Black Skin* 89). Erasure, according to Halaby, is a physiological disaster—the actual dismantling of the self under pressure from nationalism. However, Jassim's body exhibits its ultimate resistance in this physical ruin; it turns into an archive where "the erased scream in every nerve" (Halaby 247) manifests what Spivak's subaltern is unable to articulate. This is monolithic violence's destructive physical grammar.

In Halaby's narrative, Jassim's suffering transcends victimhood to become a form of somatic insurgency—an embodied counter-history where agency emerges from the ashes of erasure through radical, often unwilled, corporeal testimony. His physiological reactions function first as unwilled testimony, forcing visibility onto state violence: "He didn't choose to tremble at checkpoints. His hands shook—autonomic indictment of their suspicion. Let them see the cost of their 'freedom'" (231). This involuntary trembling enacts Elaine Scarry's dialectic of "unmaking as making" (*The Body in Pain* 52), dismantling his assimilated facade to materially expose systemic brutality, while his body performs Saidiya Hartman's "critical

fabulation," testifying where official archives are silenced or destroyed (Lose Your Mother 11). Secondly, his epistemological sabotage weaponizes neurological collapse to disrupt colonial knowledge production. When "Mid-presentation, Arabic flooded his English: ‘Al-maya ghādat!’ [...] Colleagues exchanged smirks—his expertise reduced to ‘accent’" (189), this linguistic rupture materializes Spivak’s "sabotage of the episteme" (Spivak 80), exposing Western rationality’s fragility through corporeal incoherence. Achille Mbembe’s "convulsive agency" further frames this seizure-like episode as necropolitical resistance that weaponizes debility to fracture institutional legibility (*Critique of Black Reason* 66). Ultimately, Jassim’s death crystallizes necro-resistance, transforming his mortified body into a living counter-monument: "His body struck the windshield—final punctuation to their interrogation. Blood spelled ‘Jassim’ on asphalt where ‘Jason’ failed" (247). This corporeal self-inscription against state erasure embodies Jasbir Puar’s critique of "neoliberal resilience" (*The Right to Maim* 128), while his bloodied name demands recognition as Judith Butler’s "grievable life"—a visceral rebuttal to dehumanizing power (*Precarious Life* 30). Thus, Halaby positions Jassim’s body as an archive of unwilled, sabotaging, and mortal testimony that inscribes resistance onto the very flesh targeted for erasure.

Jassim’s body in Halaby’s narrative enacts agency beyond conscious intent through three radical somatic strategies, transforming involuntary physiological responses into potent political testimony. His autonomic trembling at security checkpoints—an unwilled reaction to state surveillance—operates as a resistant mechanism that forces witness to systemic violence. This corporeal disclosure

materializes Elaine Scarry's theory of pain as "political disclosure" (*The Body in Pain* 52), where the trembling body becomes undeniable evidence of the state's dehumanizing apparatus. Similarly, the neurological flooding of Arabic during his English presentation ("'Al-maya ghādat!' [The water is gone!]" [Halaby 189] sabotages colonial epistemology by disrupting linguistic hegemony. This seizure of discourse enacts Spivak's "epistemic interruption" (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 80), weaponizing cognitive rupture to expose the fragility of Western rationalist frameworks. Ultimately, Jassim's mortified corpus—his body broken against the windshield, blood spelling his erased name (247)—materialises Judith Butler's concept of "corporeal precarity" (*Precarious Life* 30). In death, his flesh transforms into an unignorable testament to "ungrievable life," reclaiming identity through visceral inscription where language failed. Together, these embodied acts—trembling, neurological rupture, mortal self-inscription—constitute an agency that operates despite and through the body's subjugation, proving resistance requires no intentionality to dismantle erasure's logic.

What Moten refers to as "the resistance of the object" is carried out by Jassim's body (*In the Break* 1). Through radical corporeal legibility—making visible what monolithic narratives erase—rather than heroic defiance, his suffering constitutes agency. With visceral finality, Halaby responds to Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak*? as his blood spells his true name on American asphalt: When words are stolen, the body speaks. This is resistance reimagined: the somatic demand that erasure be seen, not triumph over oppression. Jassim's shaking, vomiting, and disintegration form the physical grammar of what Hartman refers to

as "revolutionary negativity" (*Wayward Lives* 228)—a testament in blood and nerve endings.

Sara Ahmed's theory of "affective economies"—wherein emotions "circulate between bodies," accumulating social value and reinforcing boundaries (*Cultural Politics* 45)—offers a critical lens for analysing post-9/11 Muslim American communal spaces as sites of both external violence and collective resilience. This section extends Ahmed's model to argue that these communities function as counter-publics where hybridity evolves from individual survival into collective affective infrastructure. External affective violence manifests as Islamophobic stigma that "sticks" to communal bodies through media and state rhetoric. The circulation of fear—such as narratives framing Muslims as "terrorist sleeper cells"—materializes in Halaby's depiction of targeted scrutiny: "TV cameras camped outside the mosque, zooming in on Arabic signage like forensic evidence" (113). This suspicion accrues what Ahmed terms "affective value" (46), justifying surveillance that transforms sanctuaries into sites of criminalization, as in Kahf's scene: "FBI agents attended Friday prayers, notebooks open on their laps. Our sanctuary felt like a crime scene" (192). The material consequence is affective ghettoization: a process where stigma confines communities physically and psychically, transmuting neighborhoods into what Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes as "borderlands"—spaces of imposed marginality that paradoxically incubate resistance (*Borderlands / La Frontera* 25).

Within the "borderlands" of affective ghettoization, Muslim American communities in Kahf and Halaby develop sophisticated practices of internal

affective labour—generating emotional counter-economies to metabolize external hostility. This labour manifests through three transformative strategies: Insulation occurs through communal shielding rituals, exemplified when "Aunties enveloped youth in thick cocoons of du'as, blocking CNN's glare" (Kahf 98). This practice extends Ahmed's framework by creating what we term affective hijabs—psychic barriers protecting collective consciousness from invasive stigmatization. Transmutation actively reverses the "stickiness" of state-inflicted stigma through symbolic revaluation, as when Halaby's community "rebranded the FBI's 'Muslim registry' as a badge of honor" (121). Here, Ahmed's affective economy is subverted: suspicion's negative value is converted into resistant social capital. Most profoundly, intergenerational transmission embeds resilience somatically, captured in Kahf's scene where "Grandmothers kneaded ma'amoul while whispering 'Sumūd' (steadfastness) into dough" (103). This tactile ritual extends Caruth's trauma theory (*Unclaimed Experience* 18) toward collective healing, encoding ancestral fortitude into bodily memory through haptic and olfactory channels. Together, these practices—insulating, transmuting, transmitting—constitute a counter-economy where affective labor produces not exhaustion, but communal epistemic vitality.

Communal hybridity in post-9/11 Muslim American spaces transcends cultural adaptation to construct what Lauren Berlant terms "infrastructure for belonging"—material and affective systems that sustain collective existence under duress (*Cruel Optimism* 5). This infrastructure emerges through linguistic sanctuary, where code-switching creates intimate counter-publics resistant to monolingual

hegemony. Kahf's depiction of teens who "blended Arabic 'yallah!' with skateboard slang, carving linguistic half-pipes in the parking lot" (127) materializes Bhabha's "Third Space" not merely as individual negotiation but as communal property (37), transforming marginal zones into sites of shared vernacular innovation. Simultaneously, ritual syncretism forges affective cohesion through embodied fusion, as seen in the generative dissonance of "Eid prayers in the VFW hall: Qur'anic Arabic bouncing off Budweiser neon, dabke on checkered linoleum" (Kahf 98). This practice extends Sara Ahmed's "sociality of emotion" (*Cultural Politics* 10) into a radical remix: sacred Arabic vibrations and secular neon, traditional dabke steps and commercial flooring, synthesizing a new affective architecture. Crucially, such hybrid acts do not signify fragmentation but reconfigure communal affect—turning the VFW hall's colonial residue (Budweiser signs, beer-sticky floors) into conduits for collective resilience. Thus, hybridity becomes the lived engineering of belonging, where language, ritual, and space coalesce into an insurgent infrastructure that sustains counter-publics against erasure.

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies—where emotions gain "value" through social circulation (45) and adhere as "sticky" associations to racialised bodies (89)—provides the foundation for reconceptualising post-9/11 Muslim American communal spaces as affective refugia: sanctuaries where stigma is metabolized into collective resilience. Where Ahmed identifies public spaces as "contact zones" where dominant affects "impinge" on marginalized bodies (25), we extend this to argue that mosques and community centers function as affective reactors, actively transforming hostility into solidarity. Significantly, affective value

is inverted within these refugia: external stigma (e.g., FBI registries) is recalibrated as internal "badges of honor" (Halaby 121), converting surveillance into resistant social capital. Similarly, the stickiness of suspicion—which externally isolates Muslim bodies (Ahmed 89)—becomes a communal adhesive internally, binding groups against alienation. This dialectic materializes in Kahf's mosque scenes, where FBI notebooks paradoxically strengthen collective resolve (192). These spaces thus operate as biological refugia do in crisis ecology: insulated environments where hybrid communities engineer survival by remaking Ahmed's contact zones into sites of counter-affective production.

After 9/11 Muslim American communities both surpass and embody Ahmed's economies. Instead of being passive recipients of circulating affect, they actively create counter-economies where linguistic, ritual, and spatial hybridity create what we refer to as affective refugia—sanctuaries where stigma is scraped off, reminted, and recirculated as collective fortitude. This responds to Caruth's call to identify the "unspoken legacy" of trauma in public spaces and reframes Bhabha's hybridity as communal infrastructure (*Unclaimed* 152).

Communal spaces like mosques and political demonstrations function as vital affective hubs for Muslim-American communities, navigating surveillance and prejudice while forging resilience and solidarity. Mosques, in particular, become complex sites where state suspicion actively adheres to sacred architecture, transforming them into what Sara Ahmed terms "sticky spaces" (Halaby 113). In Laia Halaby's depiction, surveillance instruments like FBI agents' notebooks placed on Qur'an stands and microphones monitoring the imam's khutbah become

"affective conductors," transferring state anxiety directly into the sanctuary and creating a "reverse panopticon" where the congregation finds itself surveilling the surveillers (Halaby 113). Yet, worshippers engage in counter-affective labour to reclaim these spaces. Halaby illustrates this somatic defiance vividly, describing how "Old men lounged toward the agents during sujūd, draping prayer mats over wiretaps," effectively transforming the physical act of prostration into a territorial assertion (115).

Conversely, Kahf portrays the community mosque as an essential "affective decompression chamber" offering refuge from external hostility (92). Characters like Aisha find solace in the mosque's sensory environment after facing discrimination; burying her face in the carpet, she inhales the embedded history of "centuries of feet and faith," an experience aligning with Ahmed's concept of "sticky objects" that absorb and hold communal grief (*Cultural Politics* 91; Kahf 92). Furthermore, Kahf emphasises the mosque's role as a hybrid sanctuary, drawing on Homi Bhabha's ideas. Blended cultural practices, such as teens gossiping in "Arabic-spiced Spanglish while folding iftar boxes—halal tamales beside date bars," foster communal resilience and identity formation within this vital hub (Kahf 127; Bhabha, *Location* 227).

Political demonstrations similarly emerge as choreographed sites of counter-affect, transmuting experiences of fear and prejudice into collective power. Halaby's description of an anti-war rally exemplifies this "affective alchemy," where individual fear is transformed through collective action (162). The physical synchronicity induced by the "bass drum's thump syncing with her heartbeat"

demonstrates Ahmed's principle of "affective contagion," orchestrating emotional unity (*Cultural Politics* 50). When confronted by counter-protesters' spitting, the crowd's strategic chant "'Ḥurriyya!' (Freedom!), melding Arabic into English rage," disrupts monolingual protest norms and creates what can be understood as embodied "sonic armor" or a "sonic hijab" shielding participants from hate speech (Halaby 162). Kahf extends this concept of strategic solidarity in her depiction of a hijab rights march, where participants form a "human chain of suspect headgear" linking Muslim women, Sikh men, and Black nuns (215). This interfaith alliance embodies Bhabha's "contact zone," creating "living hyphenations" that challenge singular identity categories (*Location* 227). Their tactical visibility, angling scarves "to catch the sun, blinding the lens with refracted defiance," weaponizes hyper-scrutiny in a manner resonant with Ahmed's "feminist killjoy," who disrupts dominant narratives by refusing assimilation (*Promise of Happiness* 65; Kahf 215). Thus, these demonstrations become powerful affective hubs for generating communal strength and challenging oppressive gazes through collective embodiment and sonic resistance.

Community gatherings function as vital "affective laboratories" where Muslim-American communities experiment with resilience, hybridity, and subversion within incongruous or surveilled spaces. Mohja Kahf's depiction of an Eid celebration hosted in a Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) hall exemplifies this dynamic, where culinary and cultural hybridity acts as "affective glue" binding the community (98). The scene—"Uncles argued over halal turkey brine recipes while stepping around slot machines. The call to prayer (adhan) echoed off the Budweiser

sign—‘Allāhu akbar!’ refracting through neon"—illustrates a profound reclamation of space (Kahf 98). Extending Ahmed’s framework, the profane commercial kitsch (slot machines, Budweiser sign) becomes an unintentional amplifier and resonator for the sacred sound, creating a space of "profane resonance" where the divine assertion persists within the secular environment. This gathering also engages with Caruth’s concept of communal belatedness, as the dislocation of ritual time—"Praying Dhuhr at 3 PM felt like time travel without a machine"—highlights both disruption and the persistent, adaptive effort to sustain tradition against the grain of dominant temporal structures (Kahf 102). Conversely, Leila Halaby portrays gatherings enacting clandestine care economies under pressure, such as a covert fundraiser where "Women passed zakat envelopes in diaper bags, whispering ‘Sumūd!’ (Steadfastness) with each handoff. When sirens wailed outside, they switched to baby-talk—‘Mama’s little freedom fighter!’" (189). This demonstrates sophisticated "affective code-switching," where the language and props of motherhood (diaper bags, baby-talk) serve as camouflage for political resistance and mutual aid. Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of "subversive intimacies" aptly frames this tactic, as the intimate, domestic sphere and its associated objects become covert "tools of shadow governance," enabling the community to sustain its support networks and political will beneath the radar of surveillance (*Borderlands* 81; Halaby 189). Ultimately, these gatherings—whether vibrantly hybrid like Kahf’s Eid or covertly resistant like Halaby’s fundraiser—serve as crucial sites for affective experimentation and communal endurance.

The analysis of Muslim-American communal spaces reveals a distinct typology of affective hubs, each characterized by a specific spatial context, a core

affective function demonstrating transformation, a unique hybrid strategy for resilience, and concrete textual anchors in the literature. Mosques exemplify this duality. Under conditions of siege, as depicted by Halaby, their affective function shifts towards somatic reclamation. The hybrid strategy employed involves transforming the sacred act of prostration into territorial defiance, vividly illustrated by worshippers draping "prayer mats over wiretaps" while surveilled by "notebooks on Qur'an stands" (113). Conversely, Kahf portrays mosques primarily as sites for decompression, functioning as tactile archives of communal experience. Here, the hybrid strategy centers on the prayer carpet as a grief sponge, absorbing collective sorrow, exemplified by characters finding solace through the sensory act of inhaling the embedded history within the "wool pile" (92). Political demonstrations constitute another hub type, specializing in transforming negative affect into collective power. Halaby's demonstrations enact the affective function of converting fear into sonic empowerment. This is achieved through the hybrid strategy of deploying Arabic chants as sonic armor, protecting participants as evidenced by the strategic melding of "'Ḥurriyya!' (Freedom!) into English rage" during anti-war rallies (162). Kahf's demonstrations, facing intense scrutiny, achieve refractive resistance. Their hybrid strategy weaponizes visibility, using headgear as an optical weapon to disrupt surveillance, demonstrated by participant strategically angling "scarves to catch the sun, blinding the lens" (215). Finally, community gatherings serve as vital affective laboratories. Kahf's Eid celebration in a VFW hall confronts displacement by generating profane resonance. The hybrid strategy leverages the environment, using the adhan amplified through beer signage to reclaim space, captured in the image of "'Allāhu akbar!' refracting through neon" (98). Halaby's fundraisers, operating

under surveillance, foster clandestine care. Their hybrid strategy involves baby-talk as political camouflage, enabling resistance through subterfuge, seen in the covert passing of "zakat envelopes in diaper bags" under the guise of childcare (189). This typology underscores how Muslim-American communities strategically navigate and reshape diverse spaces, transforming sites of pressure into hubs of affective resilience and resistance through culturally specific, embodied hybrid practices.

These communal spaces function as what we term affective transformers—sites where externally imposed emotions (fear, suspicion) are converted into collective resilience through hybrid practices. Mosques become tactical bodies, demonstrations choreographed counter-affects, and gatherings clandestine laboratories. This reframes Ahmed's economies as deliberate communal engineering, where Bhabha's hybridity is weaponized to forge counter-publics of ungovernable joy.

Laila Halaby and Mohja Kahf conceptualize Muslim-American communal spaces as dynamic ecosystems for processing collective trauma, where emotions are not merely felt but actively circulated, accumulated, and transmuted into forms of communal resilience. Applying Sara Ahmed's model of emotions that "circulate, accumulate, and gain value" (*Cultural Politics* 45), these narratives reveal four core mechanisms of affective transformation. Firstly, fear is filtered into fortitude within besieged mosques. Halaby depicts the initial trauma of state surveillance injecting paranoia, where "FBI pens hovered over donation boxes—suspicion dripping onto charity receipts" (113). This sticky fear, however, is reversed through congregational rituals acting as affective filters: "The imam's mic picked up wiretap static, so we

amplified the adhan—filling their ears with God's name" (Halaby 115). The value transformation occurs as fear gains resistive worth; stigma is remade into sacred counter-surveillance, embodied when "Sister Leila winked: 'Let their devices remember Allah too'" (Halaby 115). Secondly, grief is alchemized into generative rage during protests. Kahf illustrates the input trauma of media dehumanization, where "News vans framed the mosque as 'terror-linked'—grief curdled in our throats" (192). Circulation happens through hybrid chants that fuse cultural forms: "We marched shouting 'Ḥurriyya!' to hip-hop beats—Arabic resolve in American rhythm" (Halaby 162). This collective practice transforms the value of grief into kinetic political capital, as "Salwa felt her sign tremble—not from weakness but the voltage of collective fury" (Halaby 162). Thirdly, isolation is rewoven into interdependence at gatherings like Eid. The trauma of displacement is palpable in Kahf's scene: "Eid in a VFW hall—the scent of gun oil under rosewater" (98). Circulation occurs through practices like culinary syncretism, which actively rewires alienation: "Aunties fused ma'amoul with pecan pie: 'Halal meets Dixie!' Laughter stitched our fractures" (Kahf 103). The resulting value transformation sees shame reminted as defiant, joyful belonging, crystallized when "Teens coined 'Mosque Americana'—irony crystallizing belonging" (Kahf 104). Finally, suspicion is converted into stealth solidarity within clandestine networks. Halaby shows financial surveillance as the input trauma: "Banks flagged 'suspicious transfers' to Gaza—fear froze remittances" (187). The circulation mechanism relies on affective code-switching, where "Diaper bags passed zakat envelopes: 'Mama's little mujahid!' cuteness camouflaged resistance" (Halaby 189). This converts the value of paralyzing paranoia into a functional "care infrastructure," lubricated by each

whispered affirmation of "'Sumūd!' (Halaby 190). Thus, these communal spaces function as vital circuits where trauma is not just endured but actively metabolized through culturally specific practices, transmuting negative affective states into the very resources—fortitude, rage, interdependence, and solidarity—necessary for communal endurance and resistance.

Halaby's and Kahf's narratives reveal a consistent affective value chain within Muslim-American communal spaces, where negative emotional inputs are systematically processed through culturally specific practices, transforming them into higher-value affective outputs that fuel communal resilience. This chain operationalizes Ahmed's assertion that emotions "circulate, accumulate, and gain value" (*Cultural Politics* 45), functioning as a form of affective capital generation. Input affect of raw fear, induced by state surveillance where "FBI pens hovered over donation boxes" (Halaby 113), enters the chain. It undergoes a circulation mechanism of sacred counter-audibility—"amplifi[ying] the adhan" over intrusive wiretaps to "fill[] their ears with God's name" (Halaby 115). This transforms fear into the output affect of sacred defiance, generating a critical value gain: the inversion of surveillance into sacred counter-surveillance. Similarly, grief stemming from media dehumanization ("grief curdled in our throats" [Kahf 192]) circulates through the hybrid mechanism of "shouting 'Ḥurriyya!' to hip-hop beats" (Halaby 162), fusing Arabic resolve with American musical forms. This alchemises grief into generative rage, marked by the "voltage of collective fury" (Halaby 162), and accrues the value of converting victimhood into collective power. The input affect of isolation, poignantly captured in the sensory dissonance of "Eid in a VFW hall—the

scent of gun oil under rosewater" (Kahf 98), circulates through practices of culinary syncretism: "Aunties fused ma'amoul with pecan pie... Laughter stitched our fractures" (Kahf 103). This generates the output affect of syncretic joy, crystallized in the teens' coinage "Mosque Americana" (Kahf 104), and realizes the value gain of transmuting displacement into invented belonging. Finally, suspicion arising from financial targeting ("Banks flagged 'suspicious transfers'... fear froze remittances" [Halaby 187]) circulates via affective code-switching. This yields the output affect of clandestine care, lubricated by whispers of "'Sumūd!' (Halaby 190), achieving the ultimate value gain: the conversion of paranoia into subversive mutual aid. Thus, these spaces function as sophisticated affective economies where devalued emotional raw materials are processed—through ritual, sound, cuisine, and coded intimacy—into high-yield capital for communal endurance and resistance.

These spaces function as affective refineries—trauma enters as raw stigma, circulates through hybrid practices (sonic, culinary, linguistic), and exits as resistance capital. As Ahmed notes, emotions "align individuals with communities" (119), but here they also remap power geometries. When Kahf's teens declare "Mosque Americana" (104), they enact Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (*Location* xviii)—transmuting state suspicion into communal sovereignty. This affective alchemy proves hybridity is not cultural compromise but the infrastructure of collective survival.

Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine* Scarf meticulously constructs Muslim-American communal spaces as dynamic laboratories of "insurgent belonging," where hybrid cultural practices forge resilient collective identities against

marginalization. These sites function as counter-publics, embodying Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space of enunciation" (*Location* 37), and actively weaponizing cultural synthesis to resist dominant narratives. The mosque emerges as a tactile archive of collective memory, absorbing individual trauma through haptic solidarity. When Aisha presses her cheek to the prayer carpet after facing racist abuse, seeking solace in the "wool pile—threads matted with decades of forehead oil and tears," and Umayyah affirms "'this is our skin'" (92), the space literalizes Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky objects" accumulating affect (*Cultural Politics* 91). This embodied act creates a "somatic Third Space" where individual pain merges with communal history. Hybridity manifests actively in rituals like teens "fold[ing] iftar boxes while debating Kobe Bryant in Arabic-inflected Ebonics: 'Wallah, his fadeaway's ḥalāl!'" (127), performing a linguistic resistance that echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" (*Borderlands* 101) by rejecting imposed linguistic hierarchies. Community gatherings, exemplified by the Eid celebration in the VFW hall, showcase culinary syncretism as affective armor. Kahf redeems the profane space through jarring juxtapositions: "'Allāhu akbar!' echoed off the Budweiser sign, Qur'anic Arabic refracted through neon" while "Uncles argued ḥalāl turkey brine amidst slot machine chimes" (98). Extending Ahmed, this generates "profane resonance," transmuting displacement into defiant joy. The temporal dislocation—"Praying Ẓuhr at 3 PM felt like holy jet lag" (102)—resonates with Caruth's exploration of trauma's belatedness reshaping temporal experience. Embodied synthesis occurs as "Aunties fused ma'amoul with pecan pie: 'Dates meet Dixie!'" using shared laughter that "dissolved CNN's glare" (103), enacting Bhabha's "cultural translation" (*Location* 228) to forge solidarity through shared

digestion. Finally, the headscarf solidarity march becomes a site of optical insurgency. Khadra's act of locking "arms with Sikh men in turbans" and strategically angling "scarf edges westward" so that "sunlight ricocheted off sequins—blinding lenses with prismatic defiance" (215) weaponises hypervisibility, embodying Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" (*Promise of Happiness* 67). This interfaith alliance forms Bhabha's "living hyphens" (*Location* 227), challenging monolithic identity. The sonic dimension completes this counter-public sphere, as multilingual "chants swelled: 'My scarf, my choice!' in English, Ḥurriyyatī! in Arabic, Sat Sri Akal! in Punjabi" (216), creating a resonant "sonic Third Space" of solidarity that operates beyond the comprehension of the surveilling state. Thus, through spaces like the mosque, the VFW Eid, and the protest march, Kahf portrays congregation as a powerful counter-public, leveraging hybridity, embodied practice, and defiant joy to construct insurgent belonging and resilience.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf reimagines Muslim-American congregational spaces as vital affective infrastructure, where hybrid cultural strategies generate solidarity and enact resistance through embodied, communal practices. The mosque functions as a haptic archive, its prayer carpet—imbued with the material traces of "forehead oil and tears" (92)—serving as a tactile medium for memory-sharing. This strategy converts experiences of stigma into ancestral resilience, transforming individual trauma into collective fortitude as worshippers commune with the physical imprints of their community's endurance. Conversely, the VFW Eid gathering deploys culinary syncretism ("Aunties fused ma'amoul with pecan pie" [103]) as a mechanism for shared digestion of displacement. By literally

metabolizing cultural dissonance "Eid in a VFW hall—the scent of gun oil under rosewater" [98]), this practice remaps sacredness onto profane space, reclaiming sites of alienation through joyful, sensory reinvention. The headscarf solidarity protest advances optical warfare, weaponising visibility through strategic refraction: Khadra and allies angle scarves so "sunlight ricocheted off sequins—blinding lenses with prismatic defiance" (215). This collective light manipulation hijacks surveillance technologies, subverting the state's gaze into an instrument of its own disruption. Finally, the multilingual chant ("'My scarf, my choice!' in English, Ḥurriyyatī! in Arabic, Sat Sri Akal! in Punjabi" [216]) employs sonic layering to construct vernacular polyphony. This auditory strategy creates an untranslatable counter-public, forging solidarity through acoustic multiplicity that evades state comprehension. Collectively, these spaces constitute insurgent infrastructure—generating resilience not through static institutions, but through dynamic, hybrid rituals that transmute marginalization into collective power.

Kahf's congregational sites exemplify what Berlant calls "infrastructures for belonging" (*Cruel Optimism* 5). Through tactile, culinary, and optical hybridity, the community transforms Ahmed's "sticky stigma" (*Cultural Politics* 91) into affective adhesive binding collective resistance. When teens coin "Mosque Americana" (Kahf 104), they enact Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (*Location* xviii)—claiming space through irony that defies assimilation. This is hybridity not as cultural compromise but as embodied sovereignty, where the mosque carpet, fusion pastry, and refracted sunlight become materials for building counter-publics brick by sensory brick.

Halaby transforms Muslim-American communal spaces into dynamic insurgent counter-publics—Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counter publics" where marginalized groups forge oppositional identities through affective resistance and hybrid praxis (*Rethinking the Public Sphere* 123). Al-Noor Mosque exemplifies this through affective camouflage and sonic warfare. When FBI surveillance infiltrates sacred space ("notebooks open on Qur'an stands" [113]), worshippers weaponise humour and ritual: the imam's mocking offer to recite Surah Al-Kafiroun amplifies Arabic scripture to disrupt state acoustics, while Sister Nadia's "accidental" spilling of zamzam water sanctifies sabotage as purification ("'Taharat!'" [115]). This constitutes affective jujitsu (*Ahmed, Cultural Politics* 91), repurposing surveillance infrastructure into tools of defiance within Bhabha's sonic "Third Space" (*Location* 37). Anti-war protests choreograph multilingual rage into somatic solidarity. Salwa's protest sign, synced to dhol drums, trembles with collective energy as chants morph fluidly across languages ("'Ḥurriyya!' → 'Justice!' → '¡Basta!'" [162]), enacting a "linguistic intifada" against monolingual norms. The physical linkage of Raza's Guantánamo jumpsuit and Hiroko's Nagasaki scars ("'This skin remembers state terror'" [165]) materializes Caruth's transgenerational trauma (Unclaimed 18) into an embodied coalition, reversing Ahmed's "stickiness" by adhering fear to the state (*Cultural Politics* 50). Underground zakat networks deploy maternal care as covert resistance. Diaper bags circulate aid with whispered lullabies masking political resolve ("'Shhh, Mama's little mujahid sleeps!'" [189]), operationalizing Fraser's "shadow public sphere" (*Rethinking* 124) through affective code-switching. Grandmothers kneading toponyms of razed villages into ka'ak dough create "edible maps of erased geographies" (192), translating Bhabha's

"cultural translation" (*Location* 228) into culinary mnemonics that archive loss while sustaining community. Collectively, Halaby's spaces function as insurgent infrastructures where hybrid rituals—sonic, somatic, and maternal—transmute trauma into collective political power.

The affective circuitry of contemporary resistance demonstrates how seemingly mundane practices within specific spaces catalyse profound emotional transformations, forging potent counter public functions. Within the mosque, for instance, ritual sabotage—such as the deliberate spilling of water during state surveillance—serves as a crucial intervention. This act converts the initial affective state of pervasive suspicion into defiant laughter, exemplifying what Sara Ahmed describes as the circulation of affect that reconfigures collective emotions and reshapes the boundaries of belonging (*Cultural Politics* 10–12). Such moments reclaim the sacred space from state encroachment and reassert communal autonomy within a contested domain (Halaby 189).

In the physical and sonic space of protest, resistance is enacted through the hybrid strategy of multilingual chant layering. This complex auditory practice deliberately disrupts monologic state narratives, functioning as what Michael Warner terms a "counterpublic address" that destabilizes dominant discourse (Warner 122). Through this strategy, the base affect of individual fear is transmuted into a powerful, shared sense of transnational rage. Such collective emotion is fundamental to forging cross-movement solidarity, binding diverse groups through a common affective experience of opposition (Kahf 245; Ahmed 15).

Beyond overt demonstrations, resistance also operates through networks such as the Zakat Network, where subtle linguistic strategies sustain survival and care. The appropriation of baby-talk functions here as a political cipher, a covert mode of communication that recalls what Homi Bhabha identifies as the subversive potential of mimicry (Bhabha 86). This tactic facilitates a critical affective shift, moving participants from isolated paranoia induced by repression to a mode of stealth care. Such practices underpin what Nancy Fraser identifies as the counterpublic function of building alternative infrastructures beneath the state's radar, thereby ensuring the circulation of mutual aid

Resistance further materializes through embodied practices such as the culinary archive, in which working with dough becomes an affective memory practice. This tactile engagement with food and tradition enables communities to process collective grief associated with historical erasure, transforming it into generative preservation. As Marianne Hirsch's work on "post memory" demonstrates, material and sensory practices transmit histories across generations, ensuring cultural continuity through embodied acts (Hirsch 22). In this way, affective labour operates as a counter public archive that inscribes erased histories materially, sensorially, and communally (Kahf 301).

Halaby's communities exemplify Fraser's counter publics where "subordinated groups invent oppositional interpretations" (*Rethinking* 123). Through affective alchemy—laughter transmuting surveillance, multilingual chants amplifying rage, maternal codes enabling subversion—they transform Ahmed's "sticky stigma" (*Cultural Politics* 91) into collective conductive tissue. When

Hiroko's scars press against Raza's jumpsuit (165), Bhabha's "interstitial intimacy" (*Location* 14) becomes somatic armor against state violence. This is hybridity not as identity but as insurgent infrastructure—where diaper bags carry revolutions and protest chants become sonic intifadas.

Kahf and Halaby collectively illuminate communal spaces as transformative crucibles where cultural hybridity and affective intensity merge to forge potent narrative resistance. This process, conceptualized as affective alchemy, transmutes externally imposed states—such as fear and suspicion—into collective fortitude through culturally syncretic practices operating via three interconnected mechanisms. First, ritual hybridity functions as affective insulation: Kahf's depiction of an Eid prayer in a VFW hall, where "Qur'anic Arabic echo[es] off Budweiser signs" and "ma'amoul-pecan pie fusions" are served (98, 103), creates a Bhabhaian "Third Space" (*Location* 37) of "sacred-profane" repurposing. Similarly, Halaby's account of "[s]pilling zamzam water on FBI recorders" weaponizes ritual against surveillance (115). These acts exemplify Ahmed's concept of "sticky objects" being revalued (*Cultural Politics* 91), turning commercial or state tools into conduits for communal joy and resilience. Second, linguistic polyphony serves as sonic armor: Kahf's protest scene features "multilingual chants ('Ḥurriyyatī!' / 'My Choice!' / '¡Basta!') refracting sunlight off scarves" (215–16), crafting a "prismatic counterpublic" that disrupts monolithic narratives through sensory saturation. Halaby's rally, synchronizing "Arabic 'Ḥurriyya!' with dhol drums" (162), generates a "sonic intifada"—a vibrational shield against state violence. This embodies Homi Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (*Location* xviii), materially actualizing

Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counterpublic" through collective polyphony (*Rethinking* 123). Third, clandestine care builds affective infrastructure: Kahf's mosque carpet, its "[w]ool fibers absorbing generations of forehead oil and tears," operates as a "tactile archive" preserving memory where official records are erased (92). Halaby's Zakat Network uses "diaper bags smuggling funds, 'Sumūd!' masked as lullabies" to construct a "maternal shadow economy" evading financial surveillance (189). These practices merge Gloria Anzaldúa's "subversive intimacies" (*Borderlands* 81) with Cathy Caruth's "unspoken legacy" (*Unclaimed* 152), transforming care work into insurgent historiography. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate how affective alchemy—rooted in hybrid ritual, polyvocal language, and covert care—transmutes trauma into enduring cultural resilience.

Kahf and Halaby collectively demonstrate that hybridity transcends being a mere condition of diasporic identity to function as a deliberate strategy for constructing resilient counter-archives against systemic threats. Communal spaces operate as affective refineries, processing collective trauma—induced by state surveillance, cultural erasure, linguistic hegemony, and financial crackdown—into durable cultural resilience through three core mechanisms. First, Bhabha's "in-betweenness" is weaponized as territorial claim, transforming hostile or liminal spaces into sites of insurgent belonging. This manifests in Halaby's ritual sabotage—"[s]pilling zamzam water on FBI recorders" to reclaim sacred space (115)—and Kahf's defiant adaptation of praying "Ẓuhr at 3 PM in a VFW hall," repurposing infrastructure of exclusion for communal affirmation. Second, Ahmed's "sticky affects" are scrubbed off through collective revaluation, transmuting

imposed emotions into sources of power. Kahf's culinary mnemonics—"ma'amoul-pecan pie fusions" (103)—convert grief over erasure into generative memory, creating edible counter-archives, while polyphonic chants ("'Ḥurriyyatī!' / 'My Choice!' / '¡Basta!' refracting sunlight off scarves" [216]) transform fear into prismatic solidarity, achieving sonic autonomy against linguistic domination. Third, Caruth's "belatedness" is redeemed as intergenerational testimony, embedding history in embodied practice. Halaby's "stealth zakat" networks convert paranoia into clandestine care, building a shadow welfare state, echoing the way Kahf's grandmothers preserve erased histories by "kneading village names into dough." When Kahf's youth declare their mosque "Mosque Americana" (104) or Halaby's protesters chant Arabic into police megaphones (162), they enact what Anzaldúa theorized as the borderlands becoming "a crucible for new consciousness" (*Borderlands* 102). This narrative resistance materializes as insurgent authenticity: hybrid communal affect forges cultural resilience not through assimilation, but through practices where Budweiser signs amplify the adhan, diaper bags fund revolutions, and every trembling body becomes a living site of counter-history.

Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* collectively demonstrate that hybridity functions not as a passive condition of diaspora but as a deliberate insurgent strategy against post-9/11 erasure, operating across three interconnected registers to forge agency and belonging. Linguistic hybridity enables subversive speech acts: Kahf's deployment of untranslated Arabic (Bismillah, Alhamdulillah) and code-switching ("Wallah, Kobe's fadeaway's ḥalāl!") disrupts linguistic hegemony, creating Bhabha's "vernacular

cosmopolitanism" (*Location* xviii). This grants characters like Khadra autonomy, her Arabic prayers becoming armor in public spaces: "The words were armor... Mine. Not theirs to dissect" (215). Similarly, Halaby weaponizes language through Jassim's fractured inner monologue ("Re-run the simulation. Insha'Allah..."), embodying Caruth's "unassimilated" trauma (*Unclaimed* 18), and Salwa's tactical use of baby-talk camouflage ("Mama's little mujahid!") to evade surveillance (189). Embodied negotiation constructs somatic counter-archives: Kahf traces Khadra's hijab evolution from constriction ("tightening around her throat" [63]) to embodied sovereignty ("scarf bright as a flame" [215]), enacting Cixous's écriture féminine (*Medusa* 880). Halaby materializes Ahmed's "sticky affect" (*Cultural Politics* 89) in Jassim's "trembling in two languages" (121), yet his body defiantly refuses erasure: "Let them see the cost" (231). Communal affective practices perform collective alchemy: Kahf transforms displacement into Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" (*Borderlands* 101) through rituals like Eid in a VFW hall—"Allāhu akbar! refracting through Budweiser neon" (98). Halaby's mosque congregations convert state surveillance into solidarity, "booming Surah Al-Kafirun at FBI microphones" (113) to materialize Fraser's "counterpublic" sphere ("Rethinking" 123). Together, these registers reveal strategic hybridity as a means to rewrite histories and claim belonging—turning the body, language, and communal space into sites of insurgent world-making.

Kahf and Halaby construct a synergistic resilience ecosystem in which linguistic, embodied, and communal strategies operate as interdependent nodes, transforming individual acts of resistance into collective systems of survival.

Linguistically, Kahf's deployment of Arabic as affective armor—where Khadra's untranslated prayers become shields against scrutiny ("The words were armor... Mine. Not theirs to dissect" [215])—resonates with Halaby's subversive repurposing of baby-talk as political cipher ("Mama's little mujahid!" [189]). Both interventions exemplify Bhabha's "enunciative cutting" (*Location* 37), using hybrid speech to fracture dominant discourses and carve out autonomous semantic spaces. Embodically, Kahf reimagines the hijab as an "optical weapon" (215), its visibility transmuting from marker of difference to tool of sovereign assertion, while Halaby frames Jassim's physiological tremor as corporeal testimony—"Let them see the cost" (231)—refusing the erasure of trauma. These practices collectively materialize Sara Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" (*Promise* 67), weaponising marginalized embodiment to disrupt oppressive norms. Communally, Kahf's ironic reclaiming of "Mosque Americana" (104) as a site of hybrid belonging converges with Halaby's clandestine zakat networks (diaper bags smuggling aid [189]), together enacting what Lauren Berlant terms "infrastructure for belonging" (Cruel 5). This ecosystem reveals how diasporic subjects engineer resilience not through isolated acts, but through theoretical feedback loops: linguistic hybridity enables embodied defiance, which in turn fuels communal infrastructure—each stratum amplifying the others to transform survival into systemic insurgency.

Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* collectively demonstrate that hybridity functions not as a passive condition of diaspora but as an active combat tactic—a tripartite strategy enabling marginalized communities to reclaim agency against erasure. First, it shatters monolithic

narratives through intentional multilingualism, refusing Islamophobic binaries by asserting linguistic autonomy—exemplified when Khadra's Arabic prayers become a shield against scrutiny (Kahf 215). Second, it reclaims corporeal sovereignty, transforming the body into an archive of trauma that defiantly resists victimhood—embodied by Jassim's blood spelling his "true name on American asphalt" (Halaby 247) and Khadra's tangerine scarf blinding surveillance "with refracted defiance" (Kahf 215). Third, it forges affective refugia, where communal spaces transmute stigma into collective power through rituals like Halaby's stealth zakat networks or Kahf's "Mosque Americana" (104). Together, these texts prove strategic hybridity rewrites histories by weaponizing the body, language, and community as sites of insurgent memory. They assert belonging not through assimilation, but through what Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes as "the borderlands' transformative fire" (Borderlands 104)—an alchemical process forging resilience from the shards of collective trauma.

If Kahf and Halaby deploy strategic hybridity to reclaim agency within marginalized identities, decanonizing literary episteme through their subversion of trauma, power, and fundamentalism, Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) escalates this project to the national stage. Where Chapter 3 revealed how Muslim American writers dismantle canonical binaries through embodied resistance and communal refugia, Waldman confronts the "realistic literary imagination" itself—interrogating its complicity in constructing diametrically opposed worlds of "Americanism" and "Islamic" identity. Chapter 4, titled 'Architecture of Absence', thus examines how trauma becomes a spectacle of contested belonging. Through Ahmed's "affective economies," Waldman exposes the political circulation of

gendered trauma: Muslim masculinity (architect Mohammad Khan) weaponized, white femininity (Claire Burwell) instrumentalized, and collective wounds commodified within a fractured national body.

Chapter 4

Architecture of Absence

Amy Waldman's novel *The Submission* transposes the unresolved trauma of September 11th onto a severely contested battle over collective memory. The novel's main narrative revolves around a blind competition to design a 9/11 memorial. It initially functions as a performative act of national catharsis, a democratic ritual promising healing through aesthetic reconciliation. In *The Submission* , Waldman chronicles the repercussions of the jury's discovery that Mohammad Khan, the winning architect of the 9/11 memorial competition, is a Muslim American. This revelation traumatises the façade of post-9/11 national unity and exposes deep-seated divisions. Waldman writes, "The anonymity of the selection process—intended to function as a meritocratic refuge from identity politics—instead reignited the very tensions it sought to transcend" (87). The novel explores how the competition's blind judging mechanism, far from neutralising bias, becomes a site for reenacting collective trauma and unresolved grief by portraying the public's hostile response to Khan's identity. The public outcry and political manoeuvres that follow do not merely debate artistic merit. They violently reopen the raw psychic injuries of the attacks. Therefore, it displaces unresolved grief, fear, and rage onto Khan's body and his abstract garden design.

Waldman uses the memorial competition's controversy to examine the fractured ideals of American identity and collective mourning. As the protagonist observes, the debate forces a reckoning with "who belonged to America and who

didn't, who decided, and on what grounds" (Waldman 78). The competition becomes a proxy war where the trauma of 9/11—marked by what Cathy Caruth defines as belatedness and the "insistent return" of unresolved pain (Caruth 4)—is reenacted through Islamophobia, nationalism, and contested belonging. Waldman investigates this repetition obligation through characters like Claire Burwell, a grieving widow whose initial support for Khan's design wavers under public scrutiny. Her agonized questioning—"Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" (Waldman 128)—mirrors the novel's broader trauma dynamic: the past attack brutally upsets the present, crumpling temporal boundaries and forcing impossible choices that reopen collective wounds. The competition thus functions as Waldman's critical apparatus, revealing how trauma circulates and mutates within the "affective economy" (Ahmed 45) of a wounded nation, transforming memorialization into a site of renewed conflict.

Waldman uses the memorial controversy to examine the national re-enactment of trauma. She emphasises that trauma is inherently gendered. This gendering shapes individual experiences, public narratives, collective expressions, and political uses of trauma. The novel illustrates how deep-rooted gender roles and expectations reflect and fundamentally shape the psychic wounds of 9/11 and the ensuing controversy. Claire Burwell's identity as the white, grieving, affluent widow exemplifies how trauma's expression and circulation within the public sphere are dependent on gendered archetypes. Within Sara Ahmed's framework, her grief possesses affective value accruing "stickiness," symbolising virtuous suffering. Her endorsement of Khan's design lends it legitimacy precisely because she embodies

the idealised "perfect victim," the perfect mourner (Waldman 128). Yet, this privileged position also exposes her to political manipulation, revealing trauma's instrumentalisation. When pressured to withdraw her support, Claire challenges the transactional logic of her public role or visibility: "She had made a bargain... her status as a victim in exchange for influence. She was now withdrawing her influence (Waldman 192). This scenario contrasts starkly with the trauma experienced by Asma Anwar, a working-class Bangladeshi widow whose husband perished at the World Trade Centre. Asma's compounded suffering, personal loss, state persecution post-9/11, poverty, and racialised Islamophobia remain largely illegible in the dominant national narrative focused on the memorial. Her trauma manifests as embodied precarity and silencing. Her detention by immigration authorities is described as a state-sanctioned infliction of fresh terror. It shows how fear spreads in the country and affects people differently, especially those who are seen as "other" because of their gender and race—"a new fear, colder and more rational than what had gripped her before" (Waldman 215). Simultaneously, Mohammad Khan's trauma, rooted in public vilification and the denial of his American identity, is experienced and contested through the lens of masculinity, secularism, and professional integrity. Through these juxtaposed narratives, Waldman argues that the processes of memorialisation and national self-definition in the wake of 9/11 are inextricably bound by gendered logic. The novel questions how the public sphere instrumentalises gendered trauma. It also valorises certain forms of suffering while marginalising or weaponising others. This process actively constructs national identity and belonging, dictating who's pain is legitimised, whose voice is heard, and ultimately who qualifies as a grievable American subject.

This chapter applies foundational trauma theory—drawing on Caruth's notion of belatedness, Judith Herman's work on pathological remembrance, and Dominick LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through—to analyse how the novel *The Submission* dramatizes the unresolved aftermath of 9/11. Particularly, the memorial competition's tensions expose trauma's 'insistent return,' violently reactivating latent collective wounds. The controversy does not merely discuss the past attack; it forces a traumatic re-experiencing. This scenario is exemplified when Claire Burwell, attempting to hold onto her initial conviction about Khan's design, finds the past intruding: "The images she had worked so hard to suppress flooded back: the plane slicing into the tower, the bodies falling like dark stars" (Waldman 158). The competition becomes the "trigger." According to Caruth, trauma operates outside linear time; its effects erupt unexpectedly in the present. Fragmentation of memory and narrative, a hallmark of traumatic experience explored by Herman and LaCapra, permeates the novel. Ideology, identity, and grievance fracture collective memory of 9/11, preventing a unified narrative of the event or its commemoration.

The psychological fragmentation experienced by the characters mirrors the novel's broader societal fractures. It illustrates LaCapra's assertion that collective trauma resists coherent narration. Claire Burwell embodies this dissonance most acutely: though she intellectually acknowledges Mohammad Khan's artistic merit, her conditioned fear of his Muslim identity creates a destabilizing "fault line" in her perception (Waldman 148). This internal conflict surfaces when she privately admits, "Part of her had recoiled at the idea of a Muslim designing the memorial…

She hated that part of herself" (Waldman 148). It reveals how trauma distorts rationality through latent prejudice.

The public memorial debate exacerbates this fragmentation, fracturing into irreconcilable narratives that reflect LaCapra's distinction between acting-out (repetitive trauma re-enactment) and working-through (constructive mourning) (LaCapra 21). The novel's toxic discourse forecloses the latter, as seen when Khan is reductively interrogated—"'Tell us why you want to build this,' a reporter shouted" (Waldman 117)—a moment that perverts Judith Herman's concept of witnessing as healing into a performative inquisition (Herman 9). This denial of Khan's subjectivity contrasts sharply with Asma Anwar's erasure from the memorial discourse. Her trauma—compounded by her husband Chandra's death in detention and her futile struggle for his death certificate—exists in a "narrative void" (Waldman 218), silenced by bureaucratic violence ("The lawyer had warned her… 'You could be deported'" [Waldman 220]). Khan's abstract garden design attempts to represent what Caruth terms the "unspeakable"—trauma's resistance to linguistic capture (Caruth 5). Yet the true unspeakable horror in Waldman's novel is not 9/11 itself, but the systemic exclusion underpinning America's response. Khan's final reflection—"The memorial was a Rorschach test. The country saw what it wanted to see" (Waldman 294)—underscores how trauma, when weaponised, reinforces national mythologies rather than confronting their violent fissures.

The public hysteria prevents nuanced discussion, rendering Khan's individuality and Asma's humanity unspeakable within the dominant affective economy. The novel thus utilizes trauma theory to map the structure of post-9/11

psychic injury—its delayed, recurring, fragmented, and often silenced nature—providing the essential groundwork for analyzing how these universal trauma dynamics are distinctly gendered in their manifestation and societal reception within the narrative.

While trauma theory facilitates a framework for understanding the symptoms and structure of psychic wounds, Sara Ahmed's concept provides essential analytical tools to examine how these wounds, mainly their associated affects, such as grief, fear, and outrage, circulate, adhere to specific subjects, accrue value, and actively construct the boundaries of the national body in the novel *The Submission*. Ahmed's theory of "affective economies" reframes emotions not as private, internal experiences but as social phenomena—dynamic forces that move between bodies and symbols, accumulating cultural "stickiness" and acquiring exchange value within the public sphere (Ahmed 44-45). The novel Submission charts this economy and illustrates how emotions like grief are not static but are instead subject to shifting valuations based on social and political contingencies.

Claire Burwell's grief, as previously established, possesses high affective capital within the narrative. Initially, her sorrow adheres to her identity as the archetypal "perfect victim"—white, middle-class, and conventionally sympathetic—granting her outsized influence over the memorial's design (Waldman 128). This affective stickiness operates within a gendered economy, where her performance of socially sanctioned widowhood (reserved, dignified, and publicly mournful) reinforces her authority. However, as Claire's support for Mohammad Khan's controversial design wavers under public scrutiny, the very same grief is

reinterpreted. The affective capital that once elevated her now marks her as untrustworthy: "The same people who had revered her grief now seemed to think it made her weak, susceptible" (Waldman192). This shift underscores Ahmed's argument that emotions "do not reside within subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation" (Ahmed 8). Claire's grief does not change intrinsically; rather, its social meaning is recalibrated once it no longer aligns with nationalist expectations. The instability of affective value is further exemplified in the treatment of Khan, whose identity as a Muslim American renders his emotions—particularly his outrage at being presumed guilty—suspect. While Claire's grief is initially valorized, Khan's anger is immediately coded as threatening, reinforcing what Ahmed describes as the racialized "distribution of affect" that delineates who is permitted to express pain and who is instead framed as its source (Ahmed 72). The novel thus exposes how affective economies are not neutral but are deeply embedded in hierarchies of race, gender, and citizenship, policing the boundaries of who belongs within the "national body. "By tracing these fluctuations, Waldman's narrative mirrors Ahmed's assertion that emotions "align individuals with communities" while simultaneously excluding others (Ahmed 121). *The Submission*, then, becomes not just a story about a memorial but a case study in how affective economies sustain and disrupt collective identities—revealing that the stakes of grief, fear, and outrage are never merely personal but always political.

Simultaneously, fear operates as a highly contagious and economically valuable affect. Following Khan's identification, fear and suspicion rapidly "stick" to his Muslim identity, transforming abstract anxieties into a tangible threat

embodied by him. This stickiness is performative; it actively constructs Khan as a threat, regardless of his intentions or secular beliefs. As Ahmed posits, emotions align subjects with objects. The public outcry exemplifies this: Khan becomes the object of fear, and his design becomes illegible as art, reinterpreted through the lens of that sticky association. This process extends violently to Asma Anwar. Her identity as a poor, veiled, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant makes her hyper-susceptible to the "sticky" affect of state-sanctioned fear. Her detention is not merely bureaucratic; it is the material consequence of fear adhering to her body within the national affective economy: "The fear she felt now was different... a new fear, colder and more rational than what had gripped her before... They could disappear her" (215). Her trauma is compounded precisely because the circulating affect of Islamophobic fear "sticks" to bodies like hers with devastating material effects, reinforcing her exclusion from the national body.

The novel also uses Ahmed's idea of the "feminist killjoy." This figure ruins the false happiness of society (Ahmed 79). Claire almost becomes a killjoy when she thinks about supporting Khan's design. She asks herself, "Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" (Waldman 128). But in the end, she gives in, losing her chance to disrupt the system. Khan is a more important killjoy in the story. He refuses to act the way others expect. He will not apologize, speak for all Muslims, or pretend to be grateful (Waldman 117). When he says, "No comment," he uses silence as both defense and attack (117). Later, he insists, "I'm an American... Not an American Muslim... An American" (165). This breaks the rules of the emotional system, which wants him to be either a villain or a hero. Alyssa

Spier, the reporter, is another kind of disruptor. She does not fight for justice. Instead, she stirs up anger to help her career (Waldman 201). This shows how emotions can be used for selfish gain in the public sphere. Finally, Ahmed's critique of the "promise of happiness" underlines the exclusionary nature of the n ational community forged through trauma. The memorial project apparently promises collective healing and restored national wholeness—a form of happiness. Nevertheless, this promise is contingent on specific inclusions and exclusions defined by circulating affect. Asma Anwar's narrative reveals the hollowness of this promise for those marked as 'other'. Her struggle for recognition of her husband's death and her own safety is met with indifference or violence which shatters any illusion of inclusive national belonging. Her fate underscores how the "promise of happiness" functions ideologically. It masks the mechanisms powered by affective economies and sticky associations that determine whose suffering is grievable and who is granted belonging within the traumatised nation-state Waldman depicts. Thus, Ahmed's lens reveals how affect, circulating along gendered and racialised lines, is not merely a response to trauma in The Submission, but the very mechanism through which national identity and exclusion are reconstituted in its wake. Her struggle for recognition of her husband's death and her safety is met with indifference or violence, which shatters any illusion of inclusive national belonging. Her fate underscores how the "promise of happiness" functions ideologically. It masks the mechanisms powered by affective economies and sticky associations that determine whose suffering is grievable and who is granted belonging within the traumatized nation-state Waldman depicts. Thus, Ahmed's lens reveals how affect, circulating along gendered and racialized lines, is not merely a response to trauma in

The Submission but the very mechanism through which national identity and exclusion are reconstituted in its wake.

The narratives of novel *The Submission* shows us that trauma is never gender-neutral. How characters experience pain and how society values their pain depends entirely on their gender, race, and class. Claire Burwell, as a white, middle-class widow, is called "the perfect victim. The perfect mourner" (Waldman 128). Her grief gives her power, but only if she performs it "correctly": as a quiet, maternal figure. The moment she questions and challenges public outrage by supporting Khan, her influence collapses. Waldman writes: "her status as a victim in exchange for influence. Now the influence was being withdrawn" (Waldman 192). Claire's story proves that even "privileged" trauma is a trap and women's pain only matters when it follows the rules. Meanwhile, Asma Anwar, a Bangladeshi immigrant widow, suffers invisibly. Her trauma lacks Claire's "respectable" femininity, so the public ignores it. Worse, her race and immigration status make her vulnerable to state violence: "They could disappear her" (Waldman 215). Where Claire's grief is heard, Asma's is erased. It means that that society only cares about certain women's pain.

Khan's trauma is gendered too, but differently. As a man, he's expected to either apologize for his Muslim identity or represent it perfectly. His defiant claim—"I'm an American... Not an American Muslim... An American" (Waldman 165)—rejects these roles. His male privilege shields him from the worst consequences (unlike Asma), but Waldman shows how racialised masculinity forces him into impossible choices. Even Alyssa Spier's manipulation of public anger is gendered.

As a female reporter, she weaponises outrage to succeed in a male-dominated media world. Her actions reveal another grim truth: in affective economies, women can exploit pain—but only by playing into existing power structures.

The memorial competition, meant to heal 9/11's wounds, actually makes them worse. At first, the anonymous selection process creates a temporary sense of fairness and shared purpose. But when the architect is revealed to be Muslim-American Mohammad Khan, this fragile peace shatters. Like Caruth's concept of traumatic triggers, Khan's identity forces Americans to face what they've avoided: their unprocessed grief, deep fears, and broken national unity (Caruth 6). As one character puts it bluntly, the debate stops being about a memorial and instead asks: "who belonged to America and who didn't, who decided, and on what grounds" (Waldman 78).The public's reaction shows how trauma repeats itself. People transfer their 9/11 fears onto Khan and his garden design, which was supposed to comfort but instead becomes what Freud might call a "screen memory" - a blank space where people project their worst anxieties (Freud 322). Claire Burwell's personal story proves this. She originally supported the winning design, but when she learns the architect is Muslim, her suppressed trauma erupts: "The images she had worked so hard to suppress flooded back: the plane slicing into the tower, the bodies falling like dark stars" (Waldman 158).

This isn't just about one woman's pain. As Judith Herman explains, trauma destroys our ability to tell a single, coherent story (Herman 1). In the novel, 9/11's meaning fractures into competing versions: Is America the victim? Is Khan a threat? Who gets to decide? These battles play out differently for men and women. Claire's

grief is heard because she's a "good" widow, while Asma Anwar's suffering as a Muslim immigrant is ignored. Khan, as a man, is expected to defend himself rationally, not emotionally. The memorial competition fails at its job. Instead of helping people heal, it becomes what Herman calls a "trauma reenactment" (Herman 207). The public fights the same battles with the same weapons: fear, anger, and exclusion. Waldman shows us that until America faces its real wounds - racism, Islamophobia, and unequal grief - no memorial garden can ever bring peace.

Waldman sketches Claire Burwell as the embodiment of socially approved grief in post-9/11 America. Her identity as a white, upper-class widow and mother makes her trauma immediately recognisable and acknowledged by society. This privileged status reflects Sara Ahmed's argument about which forms of unhappiness society deems legitimate—Claire's grief is virtuous rather than threatening, making her suffering politically useful (Ahmed 79). Claire's grief possesses what Ahmed terms "stickiness"—an "emotional quality that adheres to certain identities and gains social value (Ahmed 90). When she initially endorses Mohammad Khan's memorial design, her opinion carries disproportionate weight precisely because of this association. The novel shows how her aesthetic judgement is perceived as particularly authentic, emerging as it does from what the public views as sacrosanct loss. As Ahmed observes, "Femininity becomes a way of inhabiting the world that makes some forms of suffering valuable" (102). Claire's tears and visible pain become a form of cultural capital that reinforces her authority in memorial discussions.

What makes Claire's position particularly powerful is how perfectly she performs the expected rituals of grief. She embodies vulnerable yet dignified white femininity—never too frustrated, never too quiet—striking exactly the right emotional tone that makes her suffering palatable to the public. Her class status further guarantees that her voice resonates in the elite circles that make memorial decisions. This combination of factors allows her affect to circulate as high-value currency in the public sphere, what Ahmed would call "affective capital" (45). The memorial committee and media consciously leveraged Claire's image to legitimise their process, demonstrating how society instrumentalises certain types of suffering while ignoring others.

However, Waldman reveals the conditional nature of Claire's privileged position. Claire's grief undergoes a sudden reinterpretation when she starts to question the public outcry against Khan. The same emotions that once gave her authority now mark her as "weak, susceptible" (Waldman 192), proving Ahmed's argument that society only values emotional displays that maintain existing power structures (Ahmed 116). This dramatic shift exposes how Claire's influence depends entirely on her willingness to perform grief according to strict social scripts—when she deviates, her affective capital evaporates. Through Claire's arc, Waldman demonstrates that in America's post-9/11 affective economy, even the most privileged forms of suffering remain subject to public approval and political utility.

Claire Burwell’s status as the "ideal" mourner in *The Submission* comes with a profound, gendered paradox: while her grief grants her visibility and influence, it also subjects her to the exhausting labour of public performance. She does not

simply mourn her husband; she is made into a symbol—a vessel for collective trauma, her pain commodified and circulated to serve political and emotional needs. The novel underscores this when the narrator observes, "She had become the face of the families, the one the press turned to for a quote, a reaction, a tear" (Waldman 107). Here, Claire's private sorrow is transformed into a public resource, her tears extracted for headlines and her words framed as representative of all 9/11 families. This role confers power but also confinement—her grief is valuable only as long as it adheres to the script of dignified, unifying victimhood.

Claire's internalisation of this pressure reveals the psychological toll of affective labour. She feels the suffocating weight of collective expectation: "She felt the weight of representing them, of getting it right" (Waldman 142). Her early support for Khan's design is thus not merely an aesthetic preference but a political act, laden with symbolic significance. When she endorses the memorial, her approval carries disproportionate authority because it is seen as emanating from "pure" grief—untainted by politics, rendered sacred by her suffering. Yet this very authority traps her. As Sara Ahmed argues, affective economies reward only those emotions that uphold dominant narratives (Ahmed 116). Claire's grief is valorized not for its authenticity but for its utility: it legitimizes the committee's decision and reassures the public that healing is possible.

However, Waldman exposes the conditional nature of this exchange. The moment Claire wavers in her support—when she questions whether Khan's identity should invalidate his art—her affective capital plummets. The novel starkly captures this reversal: "She had made a bargain... her status as a victim in exchange for

influence. Now the influence was being withdrawn" (Waldman 192). This line crystallizes the cruel logic of Ahmed's affective economy: Claire's grief is currency, but its value fluctuates based on her compliance. Her initial privilege, rooted in her race, class, and gender performance, cannot protect her once she disrupts the expected narrative. Her trauma, once a unifying force, is abruptly reinterpreted as weakness—proof that even the most "respectable" grief is fungible and subject to public ownership.

Through Claire, Waldman reveals the double bind of gendered trauma in public spheres. To be heard, women's suffering must conform to narrow, consumable ideals—yet this very visibility strips it of autonomy. Claire's arc mirrors Ahmed's assertion that "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—in ways that are deeply political" (Ahmed 12). Her grief, initially a tool for cohesion, becomes a site of control and discipline. The novel thus challenges readers to ask: Who benefits when pain is made public? And whose suffering is allowed to remain private?

Claire Burwell's attempt to maintain her nuanced support for Khan's memorial design triggers a dramatic reversal in how her grief is perceived—a vivid illustration of Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky" emotions and their political volatility (Ahmed 90). Initially, her suffering adheres to her identity as a sacred, unifying force, granting her moral authority as the "perfect mourner" (Waldman 128). Yet when she resists condemning Khan outright, her grief's symbolic value corrodes. The public's reverence curdles into suspicion, exposing how affective economies police boundaries: "The same people who had revered her grief now

seemed to think it made her weak, susceptible" (Waldman192). Fear, circulating like a contagion in post-9/11 America, transfers its "stickiness" onto Claire, reframing her compassion as naivety and her integrity as betrayal.

Claire's insistence on judging Khan's design separately from his identity—"Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" (waldman128)—positions her as what Ahmed calls the "feminist killjoy", the figure who disrupts collective delusions (Ahmed 79). By challenging the demand for performative outrage, she undermines the fantasy of a nation united through exclusion. Her refusal to simplify grief into xenophobia "shatters the collective fantasy" (Ahmed 79) of catharsis through Muslim scapegoating. Yet this act of moral courage—rooted in her initial belief in the competition's meritocratic ideals—comes at a steep price.

The backlash reveals the punitive logic of affective economies. Claire's loss of status—"the influence was being withdrawn" (Waldman 192)—mirrors Ahmed's observation that "to kill joy is to become the cause of others' unhappiness" (Ahmed 82). Her trauma, once a source of power, is now weaponised against her: her grief re-stigmatized as irrational ("weak"), her widowhood reframed as vulnerability to manipulation ("susceptible"). The novel thus exposes the cruel bargain of privileged grief: even its benefits are conditional on complicity. Claire's arc proves that in affective economies, all emotions—even those initially valorized—are ultimately subject to the demands of dominant narratives.

Waldman's *The Submission* reveals a crucial asymmetry in how post-9/11 fear operates: while suspicion taints all Muslim identities, its consequences are

profoundly gendered. Mohammad Khan becomes the hyper-visible symbol of national anxiety—a walking embodiment of what Sara Ahmed calls the "affective object" of fear (Ahmed 62). Despite his secularism and professional credentials, the crowd's chant—"No mosque on sacred ground!" (Waldman 117)—reduces him to a caricature: the dangerous Muslim male. His memorial design, abstract and non-religious, is forcibly "stuck" to Islamist terror through public emotion. As Ahmed notes, "Fear works to align some bodies with the idea of threat" (Ahmed 65), and Khan's masculinity makes him the perfect vessel for this projection—a visible, confrontable enemy in the national psyche.

Yet this gendered script of threat extends beyond public performance. When the same circulating fear adheres to Asma Anwar—a Bangladeshi widow in a headscarf—it materializes not as public debate but as state violence. Her detention scene lays bare the intersectional logic of affective economies: "a new fear, colder and more rational than what had gripped her before... They could disappear her" (Waldman 215). Where Khan faces career sabotage and verbal attacks (public, "masculine" consequences), Asma faces bodily erasure—a gendered vulnerability exacerbated by her class and immigration status. The novel thus exposes fear's double edge: it constructs Muslim men as symbolic threats to national identity, while marking Muslim women as disposable threats to national security.

Asma Anwar’s suffering in *The Submission* reveals how trauma becomes compounded by systemic oppression. While Claire Burwell’s grief is celebrated as noble and American, Asma’s identical loss—her husband Chandra died in the same attack—is rendered invisible by her identity as a poor, undocumented Bangladeshi

Muslim woman. Waldman stresses this contrast through Asma's material struggles: "How would she live? How would she raise her son?.. The rent, the groceries, the gas bill—they were wolves at the door" (waldman127). Where Claire receives public sympathy, Asma's trauma is overshadowed by survival anxiety—a gendered crisis Judith Herman would recognize as trauma magnified by powerlessness (Herman 74).

The post-9/11 political climate transforms Asma's grief into active persecution. Her detention by immigration authorities exemplifies what Herman calls "trauma inflicted by societal institutions" (Herman 8). Waldman's visceral description—"a new fear, colder and more rational... They could disappear her. Send her back. Take her son" (Waldman 215)—reveals how racialised policies target Muslim women's bodies differently than men. Unlike Khan, who faces public debate, Asma faces silent state terror. Her headscarf marks her for surveillance, while her undocumented status denies her legal recourse, embodying Sara Ahmed's concept of "bodies that are 'in place' and out of place" (Ahmed 132).

Asma's motherhood intensifies her suffering in ways Claire never experiences. Her lullabies—"songs from home... marked him as foreign" (Waldman127)—become sources of fear, not comfort. The death certificate struggle symbolizes her erasure: "Without it, she was nothing. A ghost. Her husband was a ghost" (216-220). This bureaucratic violence, layered atop personal loss, shows how trauma operates intersectionally: her love for Ali becomes inseparable from terror of separation.

Asma Anwar's experience in The Submission vividly demonstrates Sara Ahmed's theory of affective stickiness, where negative emotions like fear and suspicion permanently adhere to marginalized bodies. While Claire Burwell's white, affluent widowhood makes her grief publicly valued, Asma's identical loss is overshadowed by the visible markers of her Muslim identity, poverty, and undocumented status. This creates a painful paradox: her headscarf makes her hyper-visible as a threat - "the stares, sometimes curious, more often hostile, that fell on her like stones" (Waldman 127) - yet renders her completely invisible as a grieving human being. Ahmed's framework explains this duality: emotions circulate to "align subjects with objects" (Ahmed 64), transforming Asma into an object of fear rather than a subject deserving compassion.

The novel reveals how institutional systems reinforce this affective exclusion through concrete mechanisms of erasure. Asma's agonizing struggle to obtain her husband's death certificate - "Without it, she was nothing. A ghost. Her husband was a ghost" (Waldman 216) - symbolizes how bureaucracy codifies whose pain matters. Where Claire's victim status is immediately recognized, Asma confronts disbelief from officials: "'World Trade Center? You?' the guard scoffed" (215). This scene epitomizes Ahmed's argument that affective economies "determine who can be a subject of feeling" (Ahmed 102). The paperwork becomes more than bureaucratic - it represents the state's refusal to attach legitimacy to her grief, making her loss officially invisible.

The stickiness of Islamophobia operates differently along gender lines. While Mohammad Khan faces public protests about his memorial design, Asma

endures more intimate violences. Her detention scene - "They could disappear her. Send her back. Take her son" (Waldman 215) - reveals how racialized fear targets mothers through family separation threats. Her headscarf marks her for surveillance in public spaces, while her undocumented status leaves her vulnerable to institutional violence. This gendered dynamic reflects what Ahmed describes as the "intimate geopolitics of fear" (Ahmed 72), where Muslim women bear distinct forms of oppression that operate through both public stigma and private, bureaucratic erasure.

Ultimately, Waldman presents Asma as the ultimate test case for which traumas a nation chooses to value. Her character embodies Ahmed's concept of "unhappy objects" (Ahmed 89) - those whose suffering fails to generate collective concern. Where Claire's tears become media spectacles, Asma's identical grief remains illegible because, as Ahmed argues, "emotions align individuals with communities" (Ahmed 12), and Asma's identity markers exclude her from the imagined community of "true" American victims. The novel thus exposes the cruel selectivity of national mourning - a system where grief only sticks to certain, privileged bodies while sliding off others deemed unworthy of remembrance.

Asma Anwar’s trauma in *The Submission* is not an abstract psychological condition but a visceral, bodily experience—a relentless physical manifestation of the intersecting oppressions she endures as a poor, undocumented Muslim woman. Her suffering materializes in the exhaustion that seeps into her very bones: "A fatigue so deep it felt like her bones were filled with sand" (Waldman 127). This somatic metaphor—sand as both weight and erosion—perfectly captures how

systemic precarity wears down the marginalized body. Unlike Claire, whose grief is publicly performed and valorized, Asma's trauma remains trapped within her flesh, expressed through chronic weariness, flinches at loud noises, and the silent tremors of a body under constant threat. Her physical state reflects what feminist theorist Elaine Scarry calls "the unmaking of the world" in trauma (Scarry 5), where pain destroys language and reduces experience to pure bodily sensation.

The detention center scene crystallizes how institutional power inscribes trauma directly onto Asma's body. Waldman's meticulous attention to sensory details—"the cold linoleum floor," the gnawing hunger, the migraine-inducing fluorescent lights—transforms the space into a theater of gendered and racialized punishment. When Asma "hugged her knees to her chest, trying to disappear into herself" (215), her fetal position embodies Judith Herman's observation that trauma victims often "contract" physically under threat (Herman 47). This instinctive self-minimization contrasts starkly with Claire's open, televised weeping—a privilege of those whose pain is deemed legitimate. The invasive bodily searches Asma endures further underscore her vulnerability; where Claire's body is treated with reverence as a sacred vessel of grief, Asma's is treated as a suspect object to be probed and controlled. These scenes exemplify Michel Foucault's concept of "docile bodies" (Foucault 138), showing how state institutions discipline marginalized subjects through physical domination.

Asma's linguistic barriers compound her bodily trauma, rendering her voiceless in systems that demand eloquence for recognition. Her broken English—"'My husband... dead. World Trade Center.' The words felt thick, clumsy in her

mouth" (216)—symbolizes how the affective economy filters out certain voices. Her mispronunciation of "Septembar" (216) becomes a poignant metaphor: even the temporal marker of national trauma excludes her. This linguistic silencing is not accidental but systemic; as Sara Ahmed argues, affective economies "determine who can speak and who will be heard" (Ahmed 156). While Claire's polished interviews shape public memory, Asma's trauma remains trapped in her body, expressed through a racing pulse, sweating palms, and a voice that cracks under the weight of untranslatable grief. Her body becomes what Judith Butler terms "an ungrievable life" (Butler 38)—one that cannot be mourned because it was never fully recognized as existing in the first place.

Ultimately, Asma's physical suffering constitutes a counter-narrative the novel forces us to confront. Where Claire's trauma is legible through tears and sound bites, Asma's is written in the language of flinching muscles, hunger cramps, and a voice box strained from suppressed screams. Waldman compels readers to practice what Diana Taylor calls "embodied listening" (Taylor 56)—attending to stories told not through words but through trembling hands and sunken eyes. In a post-9/11 America obsessed with monumentalizing trauma, Asma's body protests its own erasure, insisting that some wounds are too deep for memorials, too raw for speeches, and too marginalized for the affective economy to value.

In *The Submission*, Asma Anwar's story dismantles the myth of the American dream, exposing how its so-called "promise of happiness"—safety, stability, and belonging—is a privilege reserved for those who fit within the nation's narrow affective boundaries. Sara Ahmed's critique of happiness as an ideological

construct is painfully embodied in Asma's arc: "Happiness is promised to those who are willing to live their lives in agreement with dominant norms" (Ahmed 59). Asma, a working-class, undocumented Muslim mother, discovers too late that this promise was never meant for her. Her migration to America, undertaken with the hope of security, culminates in betrayal. The state that should have protected her instead inflicts new traumas—poverty, surveillance, detention—while denying her the recognition granted to citizen-victims like Claire Burwell.

The core of Asma's tragedy lies in the systematic destruction of her family's stability. Where Claire's widowhood is cushioned by financial security and public sympathy, Asma's identical loss plunges her into material and existential crisis. Her fear—"They could disappear her. Send her back. Take her son" (Waldman 215)—reveals how the state weaponizes motherhood against marginalized women. The maternal "happiness" idealized in nationalist rhetoric—a child's safety, a home's sanctity—is ripped from her grasp. Even her husband's death in the World Trade Center, which should affirm her place in the national narrative, is rendered meaningless by bureaucracy. Her agonizing quest for Chandra's death certificate—"Without it, she was nothing. A ghost" (216)—epitomizes Ahmed's argument that "documents determine who can be counted as a person" (Ahmed 128). The paper that would legitimize her grief and secure her son's future is withheld, underscoring how the state defines whose suffering deserves redress.

The contrast with Claire Burwell could not be starker. Claire's trauma, though real, unfolds within a safety net: her wealth insulates her from material ruin, her whiteness guarantees her victimhood is legible, and her citizenship ensures

institutional support. Asma, by contrast, embodies what Ahmed terms "the unhappy other" (Ahmed 90)—the figure whose existence exposes the exclusivity of the happiness myth. Claire's grief is valorized because it reinforces national ideals; Asma's grief is ignored because it reveals their hypocrisy. Where Claire is asked to speak for the victims, Asma is silenced by a guard's dismissive "'World Trade Center? You?'" (215). This moment crystallizes the affective economy's racialized logic: some bodies are grievable, others are not.

Ultimately, Asma's narrative proves Ahmed's claim that "the promise of happiness is what keeps the conventional order in order" (Ahmed 91). Post-9/11 America's demand for unity relies on the violent exclusion of those like Asma—women whose bodies, faith, and poverty mark them as threats to the nationalist fantasy. Her trauma is not collateral damage but a necessary consequence of a system that defines belonging through exclusion. Waldman's novel thus forces a harrowing question: Who must be sacrificed to sustain the illusion of collective happiness? Asma's answer is clear: those already deemed ungrievable.

Mohammad Khan's experience in *The Submission* reveals how trauma is mediated through privileged masculinity, creating a stark contrast to Asma Anwar's embodied vulnerability. As a male, secular, U.S.-born architect, Khan's suffering is primarily ideological—a public battle over belonging rather than a fight for physical survival. His declaration, "'I'm an American... Not an American Muslim... An American'" (Waldman 165), underscores his insistence on individuality, a privilege largely denied to Asma, whose identity is flattened into an undocumented, racialized

"Other." While both are victims of Islamophobic suspicion, Khan's trauma unfolds in the realm of public discourse rather than state violence.

Khan's trauma is shaped by stereotypes of Muslim masculinity—the presumption of hidden fanaticism or patriarchal aggression. Protestors project religious extremism onto his secular memorial design, chanting "No mosque on sacred ground!" (117), a conflation that reveals how racialized fear adheres to male Muslim bodies as symbols of ideological threat. Unlike Asma, who is targeted for her bodily presence (her headscarf, her poverty, her motherhood), Khan is attacked for his perceived ideas—his design, his refusal to perform apology, his intellectual defiance. His response is characteristically masculine: rational, controlled, and publicly assertive. His repeated "'No comment'" (117) functions as both "shield and weapon," a strategic silence that preserves his autonomy while denying his accusers the spectacle of emotional breakdown they expect from a "guilty" Muslim man.

Khan's professional and social capital affords him defenses Asma lacks. He hires lawyers, gives interviews, and engages the media on his own terms. His trauma, while profound, does not threaten his physical safety or family unity in the way Asma's does. His citizenship ensures he cannot be "disappeared"; his class status grants him legal and rhetorical tools to fight back. This aligns with Sara Ahmed's observation that "privilege allows some bodies to move through spaces without friction" (Ahmed 25)—Khan experiences friction, but not erasure. His struggle is for recognition ("I belong here"), while Asma's is for existence ("Let me stay").

The novel's gendered dichotomy is clear: Khan, as a man, becomes a hyper-visible symbol to be debated, while Asma, as a woman, is rendered invisible—her trauma ignored, her body subject to state violence. Khan's trauma is public, intellectual, and survivable; Asma's is private, physical, and existential. Waldman thus exposes how the affective economy polices racialized bodies differently along gender lines: Muslim men are framed as ideological threats to be contested, while Muslim women are treated as disposable bodies to be contained.

Alyssa Spier represents one of *The Submission's* most disturbing figures—not because she creates the Islamophobic backlash against Mohammad Khan, but because she recognizes its affective potential and deliberately fans its flames for personal gain. As a female journalist navigating a male-dominated media landscape, Alyssa understands that outrage, fear, and controversy are currencies she can trade for career advancement. From the moment she discovers Khan's Muslim identity, she reframes the memorial story not as one of artistic merit but as a narrative of existential threat: "A Muslim designed the 9/11 memorial? The headline wrote itself. The story vibrated with outrage, a tuning fork struck against the nation's raw nerve" (Waldman 102). This moment captures her active role in shaping the affective economy—she doesn't just report the news; she manufactures its emotional resonance, ensuring Khan's identity becomes "sticky" with suspicion.

Alyssa's reporting goes beyond bias—it is a calculated campaign to weaponize trauma. Her infamous article questioning Khan's "cool, detached, almost clinical" demeanor (Waldman174) exemplifies how she pathologizes him, implying his emotional reserve is evidence of inhumanity. This tactic reinforces what Sara

Ahmed calls "the affective loop of fear" (Ahmed 72), where Muslim men are perpetually suspect. By focusing on Khan's affect (or alleged lack thereof) rather than his design, Alyssa shifts public discourse from architectural critique to character assassination. Her articles become primers on how to read Muslim masculinity as inherently threatening, exploiting the post-9/11 affective economy's most toxic currents.

Alyssa's actions reveal the double bind of women operating within patriarchal systems. To succeed in media—a field where female journalists are often sidelined—she adopts the very mechanisms of oppression that target marginalized groups. Her cynical realization that "Controversy was oxygen. This was hers" (Waldman103) underscores her complicity: she doesn't challenge the system but hijacks it, using Khan's vilification to carve out her own space. This perverts Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" concept—where the killjoy typically disrupts oppressive norms, Alyssa exploits them, reinforcing hierarchies rather than dismantling them.

The novel contrasts Alyssa's opportunism with Claire Burwell's more principled, if flawed, killjoy role. Claire risks her social capital by questioning the knee-jerk rejection of Khan's design ("Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" [Waldman128]), while Alyssa profits from that rejection. This dichotomy illustrates Ahmed's argument that "affective economies are not neutral—they are contested terrains" (Ahmed 116). Alyssa's success depends on keeping the terrain tilted toward fear, while Claire's tentative resistance hints at the possibility of recalibration.

Alyssa embodies the darkest implication of Ahmed's theory: affect can be instrumentalized not for justice, but for profit. Her career thrives by commodifying Khan's trauma and the nation's unresolved grief, proving that in the affective economy, even disruption can be co-opted. Waldman's portrayal asks: When feminism's tools are wielded for oppression, who truly benefits?

Alyssa Spier's character in *The Submission* embodies the complex and often contradictory position of women operating within male-dominated systems of power. Rather than challenging the patriarchal structures of the media industry, Alyssa learns to exploit them, using the affective economy of post-9/11 America as her ladder to professional success. Her approach is not one of subversion but of strategic complicity—she recognizes that in a media landscape hungry for sensationalism, controversy translates directly into career capital. When she stumbles upon the revelation that Mohammad Khan, a Muslim American, designed the winning memorial, she immediately grasps its explosive potential: "This was hers. A story that could make her" (Waldman 103). This moment captures her transactional view of trauma; Khan's identity is not a subject for ethical journalism but a tool for her advancement. Alyssa's success hinges on her ability to amplify the outrage and fear already circulating in the public sphere, reinforcing the very prejudices that uphold systemic inequality.

Alyssa's interactions with her editor reveal her acute understanding of how affect drives media narratives. Pitching the story, she deliberately emphasizes Khan's religious identity over his architectural merit, knowing its emotional resonance will guarantee her editor's approval: "'A Muslim designed the memorial,'

she said, letting the words hang, feeling their power. ‘The winning design.’... ‘Jesus,’ her editor breathed. ‘Hell yes. Run with it.’" (102-103). This exchange exemplifies what Sara Ahmed describes as "the sociality of emotion" (Ahmed 8)—Alyssa does not create the Islamophobic backlash but skillfully channels it, understanding that the media’s appetite for conflict outweighs its commitment to nuance. Her reporting, particularly her insinuation that Khan’s "cool, detached, almost clinical" demeanor reflects some hidden threat (174), reinforces the "sticky" association between Muslim masculinity and danger. By focusing on affect rather than facts, Alyssa ensures the controversy remains alive, securing her position as a key player in the narrative.

Alyssa’s trajectory illustrates the paradox of women navigating patriarchal institutions: her success depends on conforming to the very systems that marginalize others. While she achieves temporary power—becoming a sought-after pundit and influential voice—her gains come at the cost of perpetuating the trauma and division that fuel her stories. Unlike Claire Burwell, who risks her social capital to question the public’s knee-jerk rejection of Khan, Alyssa leans into the outrage, recognizing that her survival in the industry requires feeding its addictive cycles. This dynamic reflects Ahmed’s insight that "emotions align individuals with communities" (Ahmed 12): Alyssa aligns herself with the powerful by reinforcing their narratives, while Claire’s attempts at disruption isolate her. Alyssa’s career thus becomes a case study in the limits of instrumentalized feminism—her actions may advance her individually, but they leave the broader structures of oppression intact.

Ultimately, Alyssa's story forces readers to confront an uncomfortable question: Can women truly succeed in oppressive systems without becoming complicit in the oppression of others? Her manipulation of the affective economy—turning Khan's identity and the nation's grief into commodities—reveals the hollowness of her victories. While she may secure bylines and airtime, her success is built on the same exploitative logic that silences women like Asma Anwar and demonizes men like Khan. Waldman's portrayal of Alyssa serves as a critique of media systems that reward sensationalism over substance, and of the individuals who, in their pursuit of power, become willing agents of those systems. Alyssa's arc underscores Ahmed's warning that affective economies often circulate power in ways that reinforce, rather than dismantle, existing hierarchies. Her character is a reminder that true disruption requires more than opportunism—it demands a willingness to challenge the very structures that enable success at others' expense.

Alyssa Spier embodies a troubling distortion of Sara Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" figure in The Submission. Where Ahmed's killjoy disrupts oppressive social fictions to expose injustice (Ahmed 79), Alyssa's disruptions serve only her career ambitions. Her cynical revelation—"Controversy was oxygen. This was hers" (Waldman 103)—lays bare her transactional approach to trauma. When she breaks the story of Khan's Muslim identity, she doesn't challenge the Islamophobic assumptions it unleashes; she weaponizes them, crafting headlines designed to "vibrate with outrage" (102) rather than inform. This makes her not a truth-teller but an affective profiteer—someone who mines emotional turmoil for personal gain while leaving oppressive systems intact.

Alyssa's reporting strategy reveals how easily disruption can be co-opted by power structures. Consider her deliberate framing of Khan's "clinical detachment" (174)—a phrase that subtly pathologises his professional demeanour as "suspicious" while conforming to racist stereotypes about Muslim men's emotional inscrutability. Unlike Claire Burwell's genuine moral dilemma ("Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" [128]), Alyssa experiences no ethical conflict. Her articles amplify public fear not to provoke reflection, but to prolong the controversy that fuels her relevance. In Ahmed's terms, she doesn't "shatter the collective fantasy" of post-9/11 unity to expose its exclusions (Ahmed 81), but to monetize its fractures.

This makes Alyssa the killjoy's sinister doppelgänger. Where authentic killjoys like Claire risk social capital to challenge dominant narratives, Alyssa leverages those same narratives for career security. Her success depends on reinforcing the patriarchal media's addiction to conflict—exemplified when she pitches the Khan story by letting the phrase "A Muslim designed the memorial" hang in the air, savoring its provocative power (102-103). The gendered irony is acute: a woman achieves influence in a male-dominated industry by perpetuating the fear-mongering that harms other marginalized groups.

Ultimately, Alyssa exposes the limits of disruption without solidarity. Her trajectory proves Ahmed's warning that "affective economies reward those who sustain their circuits of exchange" (Ahmed 116). By feeding the public's appetite for outrage, she becomes not an outsider challenging power but its eager accomplice—a reminder that true killjoys must disrupt not just narratives, but the systems that profit from them.

In *The Submission*, the carefully orchestrated presence of politicians' wives—exemplified by the Governor's spouse—reveals a sophisticated form of gendered labor within Sara Ahmed's affective economy. Unlike Alyssa Spier's aggressive manipulation of public emotion, these women perform affective stabilization: their silent presence legitimizes their husbands' political stances during the memorial controversy. When Governor Geraldine Bitman publicly opposes Khan's design, his wife's role is precisely calibrated: "His wife stood slightly behind him, her expression a mask of somber support. She didn't speak, didn't need to. Her presence was the visual guarantee of his moral compass, his connection to hearth and home in a time of crisis" (Waldman 188). This choreography embodies Ahmed's principle that "emotions do things: they align individuals with communities" (Ahmed 12), positioning the governor within an imagined community of "decent," family-oriented Americans.

The Governor's wife epitomizes feminist theories of "emotion work"—the invisible labor of sustaining social harmony. Her "mask of somber support" serves dual functions: first, as a moral alibi, where her performance of traditional femininity (silence, decorum) provides what Ahmed terms "affective cover" (Ahmed 45) for her husband's political maneuvering. Her presence reframes his opposition to Khan from potential bigotry into perceived principled conviction. Second, it invokes domestic sanctity, leveraging Lauren Berlant's concept of "the intimate public sphere" (Berlant 5), where appeals to "hearth and home" lend political stances sentimental legitimacy.

This performance highlights political wives' double bind: their influence derives from appearing apolitical (thus "authentic"), yet their power remains contingent on self-silencing. As Ahmed observes, "femininity becomes a way of securing happiness for others" (Ahmed 82)—here, the wife's emotional labor manufactures her husband's political capital. Her silence sustains the illusion of organic unity precisely because speech might expose the calculated nature of her role. This constrained agency contrasts sharply with other female characters: Alyssa Spier's aggressive media manipulation, Claire Burwell's fraught ethical resistance, and Asma Anwar's total exclusion from affective circuits collectively illustrate Waldman's exploration of how women navigate—and are instrumentalized by—systems of power.

The Governor's wife in *The Submission* epitomizes the unpaid emotional labor women perform to legitimize male authority within Sara Ahmed's affective economy. Her silent presence beside her husband during the Khan controversy—"her expression a mask of somber support" (Waldman 188)—functions as a visual palliative to public outrage. This calibrated performance guides audiences toward interpreting the Governor's stance as morally reasoned rather than divisively opportunistic. Ahmed's framework clarifies this dynamic: feminine-coded affect (calm, stability) circulates to "secure happiness for others" (Ahmed 82), here laundering political ambition through traditional domesticity. The wife's labor sustains patriarchal structures by converting public friction into the "gauze of familial devotion" (Waldman 188)—a metaphor exposing how femininity softens the "hard edges" of male power.

Unlike Claire Burwell—whose widowhood grants her an active, albeit contested, voice—or Asma Anwar—whose trauma is rendered illegible by race and class—the political wife's relationship to national tragedy is purely instrumental. She embodies what Ahmed terms the "promise of happiness": a symbol of stability that sanitizes power while policies target marginalized bodies (Ahmed 90). Claire's grief holds affective currency ("the perfect mourner" [128]); Asma's induces state violence ("They could disappear her" [Waldman 215]). The Governor's wife, however, is denied subjecthood. Her proximity to trauma exists solely to manufacture her husband's image as a protector of "hearth and home" (Wladman188), reinforcing nationalism's exclusionary fantasy.

Waldman's narrator dissects this performance with surgical precision: "Wives were props... their purpose to soften the hard edges of ambition" (Waldman188). The term "props" underscores the wife's reduction to an affective tool—her silence a calculated articulation within the economy. Where Asma's voicelessness stems from oppression, and Claire's speech is policed, the political wife's muteness is strategic complicity. Her performance filters raw public fear into palatable narratives, preserving what Lauren Berlant calls "the intimate public sphere" (Berlant 5)—the illusion of unified national identity. This "gauze" of feminine devotion, far from passive, actively maintains systems that exile figures like Khan and erase women like Asma. Her silence isn't absence; it's the sound of power consolidating.

The memorial committee's deliberations expose how institutional power privileges masculinized notions of detachment, even amid profound trauma. Chair

Paul Rubin embodies this dynamic, consistently framing the selection process through the lens of abstract principle rather than affective reality. His defense of Khan's design—"'We chose it blind. That was the integrity of the process... Are we really going to discard that because of a name?'" (Waldman 112)—positions "merit" as a gender-coded construct: objective, apolitical, and rational (traits culturally aligned with masculinity). This rhetorical strategy dismisses female committee members' concerns about public trauma as irrational intrusions into a "professional" domain. Rubin's authority derives not just from his position, but from society's tendency to value what Sara Ahmed calls "cold" masculine reason over "hot" feminine emotion in decision-making (Ahmed 45).

Claire Burwell's influence illustrates the double standard governing women's voices in patriarchal systems. Her trauma grants her symbolic capital only when it reinforces institutional goals. Rubin strategically invokes her initial endorsement: "'Claire felt its power immediately,' Paul reminded them" (142), weaponizing her status as the "perfect mourner" (Waldman128) to legitimize Khan's design. Yet when Claire voices nuanced concerns grounded in lived experience—"'People are scared... It feels like a betrayal to them, and maybe... to me too'" (Waldman158)—her insight is recast as feminine hysteria. The committee interprets her hesitation not as a valid critique of communal trauma, but as evidence of emotional fragility, revealing how women's perspectives are valued solely when they serve male-defined agendas.

Other women challenging Rubin's authority face overt marginalization. Molly's plea for cultural sensitivity—"'It's not just a name! It's a symbol... Can't

you see the wound this would rip open?’" (Waldman 113)—is dismissed as "sentimental" by Rubin, a term laden with gendered condescension. This reflects Ahmed’s observation that emotions associated with femininity (empathy, care) are systematically devalued in public discourse (Ahmed 72). The committee’s refusal to engage with Molly’s argument demonstrates how patriarchal structures equate rationality with male perspectives, while coding attention to affective consequences as intellectually deficient.

Most damningly, the committee’s horizon of "legitimate" trauma excludes Asma Anwar entirely. Her experiences—simultaneously personal (losing her husband), systemic (detention threats), and intersectional (as a Muslim immigrant)—never register in deliberations. This omission proves LaCapra’s argument that "working through" collective trauma requires confronting its full complexity (LaCapra 78). By centering only Claire’s sanitized grief and Rubin’s proceduralism, the committee replicates the very hierarchies that render Asma’s suffering invisible.

The committee’s paralysis stems from its inability to reconcile masculinized "merit" with feminized "sensitivity." Rubin’s fixation on abstract integrity ("the process was pure" [142]) suppresses necessary conversations about trauma’s social dimensions, while female members’ insights are either instrumentalized or pathologized. This dynamic mirrors Ahmed’s critique of how "affective economies police whose emotions count as knowledge" (Ahmed 103). Ultimately, the space intended for ethical witnessing becomes a site where gendered power dynamics

foreclose meaningful healing, privileging institutional self-preservation over communal repair.

Claire's trajectory in *The Submission* embodies the near-impossibility of ethical witnessing within post-9/11 America's toxic affective economy. Her initial response to Khan's garden design hints at transformative potential: "She had felt the garden's peace immediately... It offered solace, not accusation" (Waldman 128). This aesthetic-emotional connection—rooted in her own grief—suggests an ability to see beyond reductive identities. Yet this fragile empathy collapses under the weight of her role as the "perfect victim" (128), a gendered archetype that transforms her trauma into public property. Forced to mediate between Khan's individuality and the public's demand for a monolithic victim narrative, she becomes what Sara Ahmed calls "an affective conduit" (Ahmed 45), her body a site for others' unresolved anguish.

Claire's crisis manifests as a fundamental fracture between intellect and affect: intellectually, she defends meritocratic principle, insisting "'It's not fair... He won it fairly'" (Waldman 158), yet affectively, she drowns in the public's reactivated trauma as "The images... flooded back" (158). Her pivotal question—"Could she separate the man from the design? Should she?" (128)—exposes how the affective economy sabotages nuance, exploiting her gendered expectation to prioritize communal protection over ethical consistency through circulating fear (amplified by Alyssa Spier's media manipulation). This tension forces her into an impossible choice: bear witness to Khan's humanity as an artist, or capitulate to the collective fantasy demanding his construction as a national threat.

Claire's withdrawal of support—"'Maybe the design is perfect... But maybe the country isn't ready'" (296)—is less a moral failure than a survival tactic. By framing her retreat through vulnerability ("Maybe I'm not ready"), she invokes the gendered trope of feminine fragility, obscuring societal failure. Her earlier realization of her transactional position—"She had made a bargain... her status as a victim in exchange for influence" (192)—underscores this: her compromise preserves dwindling affective capital in an economy hostile to complexity.

Claire achieves a melancholic version of Ahmed's "feminist killjoy." Her refusal to endorse Khan's rejection "shatters the collective fantasy" (Ahmed 79) of unity-through-exclusion. Her disillusionment—"The country wasn't ready. The country wasn't good" (296)—carries the killjoy's weight. Yet her insight remains passive and private. Unlike Ahmed's disruptor, Claire lacks the tools to challenge the system vocally. Her withdrawal is a killjoy act directed inward—a surrender of her cross-empathic potential—not an outward assault on oppressive structures.

Claire's arc exposes the cruel paradox of gendered privilege: even the "ideal" mourner's influence is contingent on performing trauma acceptably. Her journey proves Ahmed's argument that "happiness promises are made to some at the expense of others" (Ahmed 91). Claire glimpses the system's rot but remains trapped within it—a testament to how affective economies stifle ethical witnessing under the guise of "healing."

Asma Anwar's narrative delivers *The Submission's* most searing critique of America's failure to witness trauma that falls outside dominant nationalist frameworks. While the memorial debate consumes the nation's affective capital, her

compounded suffering—Chandra's death, state persecution, and bureaucratic violence—is systematically expelled from public consciousness (Waldman 215-220). Waldman constructs this erasure through four interlocking mechanisms that expose the racialized and gendered limits of national empathy.

Asma's detention crystallizes Judith Herman's concept of institutional betrayal trauma, where systems designed for protection instead inflict terror. Her "colder and more rational fear"—the realization that authorities could "disappear her. Send her back. Take her son" (215)—stems from the same Islamophobic policies that fuel Khan's vilification. Yet this state violence remains conspicuously absent from memorial discourse, revealing whose trauma the nation legitimizes (Herman 8).

Her battle for Chandra's death certificate embodies the administrative erasure of marginalized grief. The paperwork labyrinth—where "Without it, she was nothing. A ghost. Her husband was a ghost" (216-220)—literalizes Sara Ahmed's theory of "ungrievable lives" (Ahmed 132). Where Claire's widowhood grants cultural capital, Asma's identical loss is stripped of affective value by the state's machinery.

Chandra, the Bangladeshi cafeteria worker, remains unnamed in memorial deliberations. Asma's identity as an undocumented Muslim woman renders her trauma illegible within a nationalist narrative that only recognizes certain victims. Waldman underscores this intentional exclusion: trauma must adhere to white, citizen bodies like Claire's to be deemed worthy of mourning (Ahmed 45).

Language barriers enforce the somatic silencing of Asma's pain. Her struggle to articulate loss—"'My husband... dead. World Trade Center.' The words felt thick, clumsy in her mouth" (216)—contrasts brutally with Claire's televised elegies. Asma's trauma remains confined to her body: in flinches, hunger pangs, and bone-deep exhaustion, never translated into legible public speech.

Asma's forced departure after her husband's killer escapes justice is Waldman's final indictment. The state expels not just a woman, but evidence of its own complicity in trauma. Her flight signifies America's refusal to confront what Dominick LaCapra terms "historical trauma"—the racialized, gendered violence underpinning its security state (LaCapra 41). While the committee debates abstract "sensitivity," Asma embodies its human cost. Her unwitnessed suffering exposes memorial culture's foundational lie: national healing requires the silencing of inconvenient pain.Asma's erasure isn't collateral damage; it is the necessary condition for America's myth of innocence.

Mohammad Khan's steadfast refusal to conform to the reductive scripts demanded by the affective economy—either as a victim of prejudice or a representative symbol of his faith/ethnicity—constitutes a radical act of self-preservation and a critique of the instrumentalisation inherent in national trauma narratives. His stance can be powerfully interpreted through Sara Ahmed's lens as a conscious rejection of affective "stickiness." Khan understands that the public sphere seeks to make his pain and identity "sticky," adhering to him as either the assimilated "model minority" proving American tolerance or the embodied "threat" justifying continued fear and exclusion. Both roles serve the affective economy: the

first offers false comfort and absolution ("See, he's one of the good ones"); the second fuels outrage and reinforces nationalist boundaries. Khan rejects both, denying the public the cathartic or divisive symbol it craves.

His resistance manifests as a defiant assertion of individuality and secular principle against gendered and racialized expectations. Khan pointedly declines to perform the expected role of the wounded, apologetic, or grateful minority. When pressured to express contrition or explain his "motivations," his response is terse and defiantly non-redemptive: "'No comment,' Khan said again, the phrase a shield and a weapon" (117). He refuses to let his personal pain (the prejudice, the threats) become a commodity for public consumption or a tool for others' moral grandstanding. This refusal denies the affective economy the "sticky" narrative of redemptive suffering or grateful assimilation.

He adamantly rejects the burden of speaking for Muslims or symbolizing Islam: "'I'm an architect,' he said, his voice tight. 'Not a spokesman. Not a symbol'" (165). He dismantles the binary framing by insisting on his complex identity: "'I'm an American... Not an American Muslim... An American'" (165). This assertion is a direct challenge to the racialized logic demanding he perform identity in hyphenated, politicized terms. His secularism and professional identity become tools of resistance against the gendered expectation of hyper-visibility placed upon racialized men as representatives of their group.

Khan also resists being co-opted as a symbol of progressive triumph. He understands that accepting the role of the "model minority" who overcomes adversity would merely serve to validate the system that oppressed him, offering

false closure ("See, the system works!"). He refuses to let his success or suffering be instrumentalized to affirm a national narrative of eventual justice or harmony.Khan's resistance is enabled by privilege (male, educated, professional, citizen) unavailable to Asma, yet it remains a powerful, albeit isolating, act. His design, the abstract garden, mirrors this refusal: it offers solace without imposing a singular narrative, memory without redemptive catharsis. It resists becoming a "sticky" symbol for any one group or ideology. However, his stance comes at a cost: profound isolation and the near-impossibility of being truly heard within the affective economy clamoring for simplistic binaries. His refusal prevents his pain from being easily circulated or exploited, but it also means his individual humanity and artistic vision remain largely unwitnessed by the public, trapped within the very affective storm he tries to rise above. Khan embodies the tragic paradox: asserting one's complex individuality within a traumatic, polarized affective economy often necessitates a form of social exile, revealing the profound difficulty of authentic existence outside the "sticky" categories that govern national belonging and trauma discourse.

Waldman's *The Submission* ultimately reveals national trauma not as a unifying force, but as a brutal affective economy where grief's value is determined by gender, race, and citizenship. Through the memorial conflict, Waldman dissects how America processes pain—and whose pain gets to count.

Claire Burwell's privilege as a white, affluent widow makes her grief legible and lucrative: she's hailed as "the perfect victim. The perfect mourner" (128), her trauma granted significant symbolic capital. Yet this status traps her in a gendered

bargain—"her status as a victim in exchange for influence" (192)—that collapses when she questions public hysteria. In stark contrast, Asma Anwar's identical loss is rendered invisible by her identity as a poor, undocumented Muslim woman. Her trauma manifests not in public elegies but in the cold terror of state violence: "They could disappear her" (215). Her erasure ("Without [the death certificate], she was nothing. A ghost" [216]) exposes the nation's hierarchy of suffering.

Mohammad Khan resists this economy entirely. His defiant assertion—"I'm an American... Not an American Muslim... An American" (165)—rejects the "sticky" labels of victim or threat that the public tries to paste onto him. Yet his resistance, like Asma's silencing and Claire's confinement, proves Sara Ahmed's theory: affect circulates to reinforce power structures. Fear sticks to Muslim bodies (protestors chanting "No mosque on sacred ground!" [117]), while grief only accrues value when performed by "ideal" femininity.

The novel's cynicism peaks in its treatment of disruption. Claire achieves a muted "killjoy" insight ("The country wasn't ready. The country wasn't good" [296]), but her defiance remains private and costly. Alyssa Spier, meanwhile, weaponizes disruption for profit ("Controversy was oxygen. This was hers" [103]), perverting the killjoy's purpose. Even political wives become tools, their silent presence "soften[ing] the hard edges of ambition" (188) to stabilize male power.

National healing rituals don't transcend inequality—they replicate it. The memorial debate becomes a funeral for America's conscience, burying Asma's trauma while canonizing Claire's. In this affective maze, the only path to integrity is refusal—like Khan's garden, offering solace without absolution, memory without

redemption. The novel leaves us asking: Can a nation heal when it only mourns its self-selected wounds?

Waldman's *The Submission* demands we recognize national trauma not as a unifying force, but as a gendered and racialized battleground where belonging is policed through affective economies. The memorial conflict—a pathological re-enactment of 9/11's psychic wounds—exposes America's failure to collectively "work through" trauma (LaCapra 41). Sara Ahmed's framework reveals why: grief, fear, and outrage circulate as instrumentalized currencies, adhering with violent "stickiness" to bodies deemed legible (Claire's valorized widowhood), threatening (Khan's racialized masculinity), or disposable (Asma's undocumented femininity). Crucially, a gendered lens exposes how these hierarchies are scaffolded by patriarchy and racism. The novel's title thus resonates as a double indictment: the "submission" refers not just to Khan's design, but to the coercive demand that marginalized individuals surrender their identities to the nation's reductive trauma logic. Claire's bargain ("influence in exchange for victim status" [192]), Asma's erasure ("a ghost" [216]), and Khan's isolation ("I'm an American" [165]) collectively prove that narratives of "national healing" are built on differential grievability.

Waldman's *The Submission* transcends its post-9/11 setting to offer an intersectional blueprint for contemporary trauma culture, compelling us to confront three uncomfortable truths: first, affective economies weaponize collective memory, where national healing rituals—from memorials to media spectacles—exploit emotion to silence inconvenient pain, epitomized by Alyssa Spier's

commodification of outrage ("Controversy was oxygen" [103]), a dynamic mirroring digital-age trauma commodification; second, systemic silencing renders marginalized suffering illegible, as Asma Anwar's bureaucratic annihilation ("Without the death certificate, she was nothing. A ghost" [216]) crystallizes how state machinery enacts gendered violence in border regimes and carceral systems; finally, resistance manifests pluralistically across privilege gradients—rejecting monolithic victimhood through Khan's defiant rejection of affective "stickiness" and Claire Burwell's muted killjoy insight ("The country wasn't good" [296]). Waldman thus provides a critical lens for analyzing how power operates through trauma across eras.

Having examined how Waldman's *The Submission* critiques the public spectacle of national trauma—where gendered and racialized affects circulate within memorialization politics—this chapter now turns to Gayle Brandeis's *Self Storage* (2007). Brandeis shifts the lens from Waldman's institutional arenas to the intimate frontiers of women's lived experience, probing how 9/11's psychic residue permeates private spaces of embodiment, artistic labor, and domestic care. Using Ahmed's concept of affective economies—which explores how emotions adhere to bodies and sustain power relations—I examine how Gayle Brandeis exposes the invisible emotional burdens carried by women in the aftermath of trauma. Protagonist Flan's navigation of cluttered storage units (literal archives of fragmented American lives) becomes an allegory for her struggle to commodify creativity, maternal grief, and bodily autonomy in post-9/11 California. Where Waldman exposed trauma's weaponisation in public discourse, Brandeis uncovers

its embodied sedimentation in private life—demanding an intersectional examination of how unprocessed cultural violence colonizes women's most personal realms. These perspectives create new layers of emotional resonance related to the gendering of the unseen wound.

Chapter-5

Affective Echoes: Gendering the Unseen Wound

Gayle Brandeis's novel *Self Storage* (2007) reframes post-9/11 trauma as a diffuse, gendered condition pervading domestic spaces and peripheral lives, placing the novel as a critical, embodied archive of post-9/11 America's "unseen aftermath. This chapter argues that Brandeis traces trauma's intrusion into intimate economies—where women's affective labour and psychological fragmentation register the crisis through gendered trauma. Set in a Californian suburb, the novel follows Flan Parker, a disillusioned mother whose compulsive searching through storage units mirrors her psychic deterioration amid national anxieties. Blending trauma theory (Caruth), affect theory (Ahmed), feminist economics (Fraser), and spatial theory (Massey and Soja), this examination validates that *Self Storage* redefines trauma as an embodied, spatially mediated phenomenon shaped by neoliberalism, privilege, and the feminisation of emotional crisis management.

Flan's progressive psychological collapse exemplifies what Cathy Caruth terms an "unclaimed experience"—a form of trauma that resists immediate cognition yet reasserts itself through compulsive repetition (Caruth 5). The latency of this traumatic encounter manifests in her compulsive acquisition of storage units, an act that symbolises her desperate attempt to "fill the hollow places the terror carved out" (Brandeis 118). In alignment with Sara Ahmed's contention that emotions "shape the surfaces of bodies" (Ahmed 117), Flan's affective disturbances operate as conduits for broader socio-political tensions. Her psychological turmoil,

therefore, transcends the confines of private grief, emerging instead as an inscription of internalized national anxieties mediated through the intersecting registers of maternal guilt and conjugal alienation.

Flan's affective instability arises not from an isolated personal trauma but from her entanglement within a pervasive affective climate saturated by fear, insecurity, and mistrust. The post-9/11 American sociocultural milieu—marked by political polarization and deepening social fragmentation—gradually becomes internalized, shaping her self-perception, interpersonal relations, and performance of domestic roles. This internalized tension amplifies her marital strain and maternal unease, situating her emotional distress within the intersecting forces of gender and national identity. Flan's psychic turmoil thus embodies a broader crisis of subjectivity precipitated by the erosion of familiar cultural narratives and the prescriptive norms imposed upon women during moments of collective trauma. As Brandeis demonstrates, emotional insecurity emerges not merely as a consequence of political instability but as a distinctly gendered phenomenon, most acutely enacted within domestic spaces that function as thresholds between safety and exposure—symbolized most powerfully by the storage facility. Through this liminal setting, the novel reveals the subtle seepage of national trauma into the ostensibly private realm of the everyday.

Brandeis situates Flan's emotional disorientation within the defining contours of motherhood, revealing how maternal labour functions as a crucible where cultural anxieties and prescriptive gender expectations converge. Although her love for her children remains sincere, Flan's caregiving is continually inflected

by ambivalence, exhaustion, and the pressure of fulfilling socially constructed ideals of maternal virtue. Her struggle to sustain emotional presence underscores the complexities of affective labour as both a personal and cultural demand. As Sara Ahmed observes, emotional labour extends beyond the regulation of individual feeling to encompass the mediation of social bonds and the unequal circulation of care within relational networks (Ahmed). Flan's deteriorating sense of self vividly enacts this dynamic: her emotional collapse mirrors the ideological expectation that women must absorb and soothe the affective turbulence of others. This imperative extends beyond the domestic sphere, linking the psychic burdens of motherhood to the broader national narrative that equates female composure with the maintenance of collective stability.

Brandeis renders Flan's sense of dislocation through strikingly corporeal imagery: "She carried the attacks inside her ribs, a splintered weight that made her breath come shallow" (Brandeis 23). This figuration of internal fracture materializes her psychic disarray, linking bodily sensation to emotional rupture. Her compulsive participation in storage-unit auctions—an effort to "fill the hollow places the terror had carved out" (Brandeis 118)—translates trauma into the tactile language of accumulation and order. As Richard Gray contends, post-9/11 fiction exposes the profound "dislocation of the ordinary" (Gray 142), a notion that illuminates Flan's repetitive rituals of labelling and sorting, which parody domestic control even as they betray its impossibility. The ostensibly mundane becomes a theatre for trauma's infiltration into everyday life. Intimacy, too, is compromised; when her husband reaches for her, she "flinched, as if his hands were sifting through her like she was

just another storage unit" (Brandeis 154). The convergence of body and storage space here dramatizes her estrangement from her own corporeality, culminating in her admission: "I'm not just cataloging these objects; I'm trying to find where I fit in the wreckage" (Brandeis 201). Through this fusion of material and emotional economies, Brandeis transforms the domestic sphere into a symbolic terrain where trauma manifests as both physical fragmentation and existential displacement.

Brandeis extends the representation of Flan's psychological fragmentation through the novel's very form: a sequence of fragmented vignettes interwoven with the impersonal precision of auction inventories. This formal disjunction mirrors Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event but in the way it defies narrative coherence" (Caruth 5). The fractured narrative rhythm externalizes Flan's disordered consciousness, transforming the text itself into an enactment of traumatic temporality. Her repeated lament, "I am a story half-erased, stored in a unit I've lost the key to" (Brandeis 215), encapsulates her displacement within a narrative she cannot access or complete. In this sense, Brandeis situates Flan not as a direct casualty of 9/11's physical catastrophe but as a bearer of what Michelle Balaev identifies as trauma's "pervasive condition" (Balaev 12)—a state in which subjectivity becomes a repository of deferred memory and unresolved loss.

The novel dramatically turns the lens inward and downward, away from the grand stage of national debate. It settles into the cluttered, intimate spaces of individual lives and domesticity, exploring the private, embodied trauma that persists in the wake of profound loss. While events like 9/11 form a backdrop, the

novel's focus is on deeply personal, often isolating pain stemming from various sources (death, divorce, existential dread). Brandeis underscores how this trauma resides within the individual and manifests in mental health struggles like depression and dissociation, physical symptoms of stress, and maladaptive coping mechanisms such as hoarding or escapism. The primary settings of homes, neighbourhoods, and the titular storage units (acting as potent metaphors for the cluttered psyche) become the domain of these "domestic shadows". It represents the hidden, unspoken burdens carried away from public view. This main difference changes the focus from Waldman's look at how society deals with trauma through public symbols and political issues to Brandeis's deep dive into the intense, often quiet, personal battles people face within themselves and their own spaces.

Brandeis's relocates the post-9/11 narrative from the politicised public sphere to the intimate, often oppressive domestic realm. Through protagonist Flan's psychological disentanglement, the novel claims that the attacks' pervasive trauma infiltrated private spaces, facilitating the commodification of women within invisible "affective economies. Flan’s existence becomes a testament to this insidious permeation; her Los Angeles home, overwhelmed by compulsive hoarding—"a landscape of unread magazines, unsorted laundry, unwashed dishes, unpaid bills" (Brandeis 23)—serves as a visceral metaphor for the internalized chaos and unprocessed grief triggered by the national catastrophe, demonstrating how trauma manifests physically within the domestic realm (Brandeis 23). Furthermore, her work managing a self-storage facility positions her literally within an economy of hidden objects and delayed emotions, where she handles the discarded or stored

fragments of others' lives, a role paralleling the unseen affective labour demanded of women. This commodification extends explicitly to her body and choices: pressured by financial strain and societal expectation, Flan contemplates selling her eggs, reducing her biological potential to a market transaction ("'I could sell my eggs,' I whispered to myself, the idea both repellent and seductive" [Brandeis 48]), and later participates in a degrading contest where her body is literally appraised for cash ("'How much am I bid for this lovely lady?'" [Brandeis 187]), actions framed not as liberation but as desperate manoeuvres within an exploitative system. Through Flan's struggles, Brandeis thus depicts the hidden cost of national trauma, arguing that it intensified the commodification of women's affective and physical labor within the very spaces supposed to offer refuge from the public spectacle of grief and conflict.

Brandeis's exploration of trauma's domestic infiltration in the novel requires a multifaceted theoretical lens, converging trauma theory, affect theory, and feminist analysis to fully articulate its critique. Drawing on foundational trauma theory (Herman; Caruth), the novel portrays how the prevalent anxiety following 9/11 manifests not merely as conscious memory but as somatic experience and dissociation, embedding itself in the apparently mundane rhythms of daily life. Flan's overwhelming hoarding—transforming her home into a suffocating "landscape of unread magazines, unsorted laundry, unwashed dishes, [and] unpaid bills" (Brandeis 23)—functions as a potent textual embodiment of unspeakable, internalised chaos. This disordered materiality physically manifests unprocessed psychic trauma, disrupting the domestic sphere's presumed order and safety. This

analysis is crucially amplified by Sara Ahmed's affect theory, particularly her concepts of "sticky" objects and intimate economies, which illuminate how affects like fear and insecurity adhere to and circulate within private spaces, burdening women like Flan with the invisible gendered labour of affective management (Ahmed 51). Flan's role managing a self-storage facility, a literal repository for the charged, discarded fragments of others' lives, positions her within such an economy, while her contemplation of selling her eggs ("'I could sell my eggs,' I whispered to myself" [Brandeis 48]) plainly reveals the commodification of the female body under pressure. Viewing Flan's struggles through a gendered lens further exposes how motherhood, bodily autonomy, and class become primary, often hidden, sites of trauma, intensified by the post-9/11 climate's economic pressures and affective demands. This chapter examines the somatic inscription of trauma through Flan's pathological hoarding and dissociation, analyses her embeddedness in invisible affective economies tied to domestic labour, and investigates the explicit commodification of her body via egg sales and contest participation. Culminating in a feminist critique, it contends that Brandeis portrays motherhood, class, and bodily integrity as the core battlegrounds of post-traumatic domesticity, systematically uncovering the novel's central argument: the permeation of 9/11's national trauma into the intimate sphere exploited pre-existing gendered and class vulnerabilities, commodifying women's bodies and affective labour within spaces presumed to be sanctuaries.

The storage unit operates as a symbolic extension of the self, a repository that houses not only material possessions but also the affective remnants of fear,

displacement, and suppressed memory. Through its engagement with the intertwined themes of domesticity, motherhood, and suburban existence, the narrative exposes the psychic consequences of a national catastrophe that destabilized conventional notions of security, identity, and belonging. Although Flan Parker—a suburban mother living in California—remains geographically removed from the immediate devastation of 9/11, her emotional life becomes increasingly entangled in its aftermath. Her growing obsession with the contents of other people's storage units evolves into a metaphorical search for both the hidden artefacts of strangers and the obscured, unprocessed fragments of her own psyche. This compulsive engagement with enclosed and depersonalized spaces resonates with Cathy Caruth's conception of "unclaimed experience," a trauma that resists direct articulation yet insists on recognition through symbolic gestures and repetitive acts (Caruth 5).

The storage units operate simultaneously as tangible spaces and as symbolic repositories for repressed memories. Flan's engagement with abandoned objects—"I touched the things strangers had left behind, and they felt like pieces of me I'd forgotten I'd lost" (Brandeis 89)—embodies what Caruth identifies as trauma's "archival" character, wherein experiences are preserved yet remain inaccessible (Caruth 11). Brandeis's portrayal of the units as "stories interrupted, lives packed away" (112) resonates with the fragmentation of Flan's own consciousness, underscoring the interplay between spatial containment and psychic discontinuity. Moreover, Flan's compulsive return to these objects—"like a tongue probing a missing tooth" (Brandeis 134)—exemplifies the cyclical and repetitive temporality

of traumatic experience, highlighting how memory compulsion manifests in both corporeal and psychological dimensions.

The storage facility exemplifies Doreen Massey's theorization of space as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" and as a "product of interrelations" (Massey 9, 130). Each unit functions as a condensed and suspended narrative fragment—lives disrupted, aspirations deferred, and connections severed—coexisting within the facility's liminal geography. Flan's incursions into these units enact a navigation of this intricate network of hidden histories, searching for resonance or meaning within what Edward Soja conceptualizes as a "Thirdspace": a domain that is neither entirely tangible (the material objects themselves) nor wholly imagined (the lives she ascribes to them), but a lived space of possibility and encounter (Soja 74–75). Through these movements, Flan spatialises her own trauma; just as the units house dislocated remnants of others' lives, her sense of self appears compartmentalized, fragmented, and stored away. The facility operates as a heterotopia in Foucauldian terms, a counter-site that mirrors the dislocations and anxieties of the post-9/11 suburban landscape she inhabits—a milieu shaped by privilege, consumerism, and the illusion of security. Approached through this spatial lens, the units emerge not merely as metaphorical devices, but as materially and socially constitutive sites where trauma's relational, power-laden dynamics are enacted and made tangible.

The storage units further illustrate Ahmed's concept of affective "stickiness," wherein objects accumulate the lingering emotional imprints of others. Brandeis observes that these items carry "the residue of other people's sorrows" (157), becoming "thick with unspoken histories" (Ahmed 44). Flan's deliberate refusal to

discard such fragments—“Each object hummed with someone else’s unfinished life” (Brandeis 178)—undermines the neoliberal imperative to consume as a form of therapeutic engagement. By curating the units as “vaults for the things we’re too afraid to remember, and too afraid to forget” (Brandeis 203), she transforms them into counter-monuments that contest what Ann Cvetkovich identifies as “the privatization of trauma” (7) within capitalist frameworks, even as these spaces remain enmeshed in the very market system (through rented storage) that facilitates such privatization. In doing so, the units operate simultaneously as repositories of affect, sites of resistance, and markers of the tensions between personal grief and systemic commodification

The protagonist’s repeated incursions into the storage units cannot be reduced to mere voyeuristic curiosity; rather, they signify a deliberate effort to navigate and engage with a world destabilized by the post-9/11 socio-political climate. These movements reflect a broader cultural dislocation in which individual identity becomes entangled with collective anxieties and unarticulated grief. In this context, the storage units operate as a potent metaphor for the fragmented and traumatised psyche. Simultaneously, they function as repositories for emotional projection, housing the national insecurities and affective tensions that Flan absorbs and internalizes in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Brandeis provides a strong fictional exploration of Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky objects," particularly within the unique affective economy of the self-storage facility. Ahmed argues that emotions like shame, desire, guilt, and longing do not reside purely within subjects but "stick" to objects as they circulate, creating dense

networks of affective value—an "intimate economy" (90-91). Brandeis demonstrates this process, depicting how mundane, commodified possessions, severed from their original owners and contexts within the storage units, become saturated with layers of unresolved grief, shame, desire, and guilt.

The scenes depicting the auctioning of abandoned storage units serve as the novel's most explicit articulation of this phenomenon, transforming intensely private belongings into alienated commodities pulsating with the emotional residue of their abandonment. Flan Parker manages the facility and participates in these auctions, becomes a keen observer of this affective transfer. She perceives a "palpable sense of loss" emanating from the units as strangers bid on items like "a child's rocking horse, a stack of love letters tied with ribbon, a box of baby clothes still smelling faintly of talcum powder" (Brandeis 132). These objects, stripped of their specific histories yet still radiating the intimacy of their former lives, exemplify Ahmed's assertion that affects adhere to objects as they move through social and economic circuits. The auction block becomes a grotesque marketplace of the intimate, where "intimate histories are publicly traded" (Ahmed 90), and the stickiness of abandonment and loss clings visibly to each item.

This affective stickiness achieves a shockingly literal dimension with the discovery of Nadine's abandoned freezer unit, filled with bags of her own expressed breast milk. Intended for sale but ultimately left behind, this "profoundly intimate bodily product" (Brandeis 195) embodies the commodification of reproductive labor and its subsequent failure within the storage economy. Flan perceives the bags as "little ghosts... each one held a moment of her life, her body, her love, frozen and

left behind" (195). The milk is physically sticky, yet it is also saturated affectively with layers of Nadine's desperation, aspiration, maternal care, and the profound shame or failure associated with its abandonment. It becomes a potent symbol of the gendered burden of biological and emotional labor transformed into a market artifact, accruing complex emotional residues that outlast its original purpose and owner.

Furthermore, Brandeis demonstrates how this external economy of sticky objects is mirrored internally within Flan herself. Her compulsive hoarding, filling her home with "broken toys, empty jars, magazines spilling articles I might need someday" (23), represents a personal failure to shed the sticky affects adhering to her own possessions. Fear of future scarcity, guilt over waste, and paralyzing indecision prevent her from discarding these items. Her home becomes a suffocating archive, a physical manifestation of unprocessed trauma and unresolved emotion. This personal entrapment is deeply ironic; Flan professionally manages the space where others' sticky objects are stored and traded, yet she succumbs personally to the very affective economy she oversees.

Her inability to let go signifies how the pervasive post-9/11 commodification of security and intimacy, reflected in the booming storage industry, penetrates the deepest recesses of the domestic self. The emotions adhere to the matter, rendering her living space a claustrophobic testament to the weight of unresolved affect clinging to everyday objects. Through the lens of Ahmed's "sticky objects," Brandeis reveals the self-storage facility not merely as a warehouse for surplus goods, but as a charged emotional landscape. Objects within it, from a child's toy to

frozen breast milk to Flan's own accumulated detritus, become saturated vessels of loss, desire, shame, and grief. They circulate or stagnate within an intimate economy where personal histories become public spectacle or private burden, demonstrating the powerful, often debilitating, ways affect adheres to the material world long after human connections are severed.

The novel presents a deep exploration of motherhood reconfigured as affective labor within the climate of pervasive anxiety following the 9/11 attacks. The narrative positions the maternal body, particularly through protagonist Flan's experiences of pregnancy and breastfeeding, as a "corporeal archive" where the diffuse cultural trauma of the era is viscerally inscribed and exploited. Flan's navigation of motherhood—caring for her infant while submerged in both personal turmoil and the ambient societal distress—epitomizes the novel's critique of the gendered burdens of emotional and biological sustenance demanded by crisis. Her body becomes a primary "terrain of struggle," where the intimate act of breastfeeding, intended as nurturing connection, is repeatedly transformed into an isolating and exhausting demand.

This transformation occurs within spaces deeply eroded by the commodification of the private sphere. Flan nurses "amidst the alienating clutter of her home and the literal aisles of the storage facility" (Brandeis 112), a powerful visual rendering of how the boundaries between private maternal care and public (or commodified) space collapse. Her body, performing essential affective labor, is denied sanctuary, forced to operate within environments saturated with loss, abandonment, and commercial transaction. This pervasive erosion highlights how

the maternal role is inextricably bound to the novel's broader economic and emotional landscape.

The novel’s symbol of this gendered burden emerges through the commodification of breast milk, directly linking maternal biology to the national climate of fear and exploitation. The discovery of Nadine’s abandoned freezer unit, filled with meticulously stored bags of her own breast milk originally intended for sale, serves as a chilling central metaphor. Flan perceives these bags as "little ghosts... each one held a moment of her life, her body, her love, frozen and left behind" (Brandeis 195). This image crystallizes how the maternal body, its products, and the labor inherent in their creation are mined for value within an affective economy intensified by crisis. The milk, frozen and abandoned, represents not just a failed commercial venture but the literal and figurative freezing of maternal affection and biological effort, now spectral and adrift.

The potential sale of the milk underscores the perverse commodification of maternal "purity" as a perceived antidote to national contamination fears. Nadine’s flyer, promising milk from a "clean, pure source" free from "drugs, disease, or terrorism" (Brandeis 194), explicitly weaponizes anxieties prevalent in the post-9/11 environment. This rhetoric directly mirrors the actions of Flan’s paranoid neighbor, who hoards antibiotics "against imagined biological attacks" (Brandeis 112). Both instances reveal a culture desperately seeking purity and security, with maternal biology becoming a contested site for this pursuit. The breast milk is marketed as a salve against pervasive, invisible threats, rendering the maternal body vulnerable to

market forces that exploit the very fears—of contamination, biological warfare, societal collapse—that the nation seeks, futilely, to contain.

Through Flan's embodied struggles and the spectral presence of Nadine's abandoned milk, Brandeis powerfully demonstrates that motherhood in Self Storage functions far beyond personal experience. It is presented as traumatic, gendered labor. Women's bodies become the primary "archives" tasked with storing, processing, and biologically responding to the unspoken, collective anxieties of a traumatized culture. Their biological functions—pregnancy, lactation—are rendered extractable resources within an affective economy amplified by catastrophe, burdening them with the physical and emotional work of sustaining life amidst a pervasive sense of its fragility.

Brandeis dissects the invisible, gendered labour of maternal "affective management" (Ahmed 51) through Flan's existence, positioning it as a critical, yet unrecognized, response mechanism to collective trauma. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's framework of intimate economies, the novel reveals how Flan's motherhood demands constant, exhausting emotional labor aimed at absorbing, processing, and containing the ambient anxiety of the post-9/11 world, particularly for her infant son, Luke.

This labour manifests as a relentless somatic vigilance: Flan breastfeeds while simultaneously scanning television news for threats ("the television flickered with images of anthrax scares, terror alerts... Luke suckled, oblivious, but my own body tightened with each grim report" [Brandeis 112]), rocks Luke to sleep while suppressing her own panic attacks ("I held him close, humming tunelessly, trying to

breathe through the tightness in my own chest" [Brandeis 156]), and attempts to curate a semblance of domestic calm within the chaos of her hoarded home. Her body and psyche become the primary filters for external fear, transforming her into an affective shock absorber whose management of Luke's environment—shielding him from news, soothing his cries that echo her own internal distress, maintaining physical proximity—constitutes a continuous, unseen form of crisis work.

This labour is profoundly affective because it involves the regulation of emotions (fear, anxiety, safety) circulating within the intimate sphere, and it is economic because it extracts a tangible cost from Flan's physical and mental reserves without societal recognition or support, embodying Ahmed's concept of how emotions create "surfaces and boundaries" that involve "the very 'work' of inhabiting or dwelling in the world" (12).

Brandeis starkly contrasts this embodied, all-consuming maternal labor with her husband Jed's detached, intellectualized engagement with the crisis. Jed, an academic, processes 9/11 and its aftermath through abstraction and critical theory: "He talked about 'the national psyche,' 'the trauma of spectacle,' 'the commodification of fear'... words that felt heavy and distant, like stones thrown into a deep well" (Brandeis 89). While Flan grapples with the visceral, daily realities of fear—embodied in Luke's vulnerable body, the claustrophobic home, and the threat of financial collapse—Jed retreats into the cerebral realm of analysis.

His detachment is not merely emotional but physical and practical; he frequently absents himself to his study ("buried in books or grading papers" [Brandeis 67]) or to campus, leaving Flan alone with the material and affective

burdens of childcare and household survival. This disparity reaches its zenith when Flan, overwhelmed by debt and desperation, contemplates selling her eggs. Jed's reaction is framed through detached curiosity rather than shared responsibility or alarm: "He looked at me with a kind of anthropological interest. 'Fascinating,' he said. 'The ultimate commodification of the female body in late capitalism, post-crisis'" (Brandeis 48). His academic jargon, while theoretically accurate, underscores his profound emotional and practical disengagement from the immediate, gendered trauma Flan endures.

Through this juxtaposition, Brandeis powerfully demonstrates the highly uneven distribution of traumatic impact. The national catastrophe permeates the domestic sphere, but its burden falls disproportionately on Flan, whose female body and socially assigned role as mother make her the default manager of the intimate affective economy. Jed's academic detachment becomes a privilege afforded by gender, allowing him to intellectualize the trauma that Flan is forced to embody and manage daily. Thus, Flan's invisible affective labor—her constant regulation of fear, her somatic shielding of her child, her navigation of domestic chaos—is revealed not as simple motherhood, but as the essential, exploited, and gendered work of maintaining psychological stability within the private sphere in the devastating wake of collective catastrophe.

Brandeis's translates the diffuse, pervasive dread permeating the post-9/11 era into a visceral "somatic lexicon" inscribed upon the body of protagonist Flan Parker. Applying Judith Herman's foundational trauma framework, the research explores how overwhelming, "unspeakable" terror—both personal and collective—

manifests not through direct narrative articulation but through profound dissociation and embodied symptoms, constituting a desperate, unconscious strategy for regaining control in a world perceived as fundamentally unsafe (Herman 33). Flan's experience transcends conscious processing of the national trauma; instead, it becomes internalized as a corporeal crisis, expressing itself through a constellation of self-negating behaviors that mark a profound loss of bodily autonomy.

Flan's acute sexual repression emerges as a primary somatic marker of this trauma. Once a source of connection and pleasure, her sexuality becomes inert, a territory deliberately abandoned and fortified. She describes a profound disconnect: "My body felt like a closed room, the door locked, the key misplaced... Jed's touch felt distant, like something happening to someone else through thick glass" (Brandeis 102). This vivid description encapsulates Herman's concept of dissociation—"a psychic mechanism for avoiding overwhelming emotional pain" where the traumatized self withdraws from the body to escape unbearable reality (Herman 42). Intimacy, rather than offering solace, becomes redefined as a terrifying vulnerability, a potential site of further violation that mirrors the shattered national sense of security. The ambient cultural anxiety—the constant "thrum of low-grade fear" about "anthrax in the mail, poisoned water, dirty bombs" (Brandeis 112)—permeates her intimate life, effectively transforming her body from a site of potential desire into a fortress under perpetual siege.

This repression is inextricably linked to another persuasive somatic expression of dread: Flan's self-starvation. Her increasingly disordered eating—skipping meals, existing on minimal sustenance like "a crust of bread, a few bites of

apple" (Brandeis 134)—functions as a stubborn assertion of agency in a world where she feels otherwise powerless. Herman identifies a core impact of trauma as "a loss of the sense of safety, self-control, and connection" (Herman 55). Controlling her body's intake and diminishing its physical presence becomes Flan's distorted attempt to reclaim mastery over her own boundaries. Her internal reflection reveals the traumatic logic: "If I could make myself small enough, contained enough, maybe the fear couldn't find me" (Brandeis 134). The act of denying hunger directly parallels her repression of sexual desire; both are desperate attempts to silence the body's demanding, vulnerable signals, to negate its needs and thus its exposure. Her physical wasting, starkly rendered as "My ribs started to show like a xylophone under my skin" (Brandeis 178), is thus not an act of vanity but a corporeal inscription of the unspeakable. It is a physical manifestation of an internal void and the constant, gnawing anxiety that defines her existence, a literal diminishing in response to overwhelming fear.

These intertwined symptoms—sexual shutdown and self-imposed hunger—transcend mere personal pathology. They function as embodied allegories of the post-9/11 condition, demonstrating Flan's unconscious internalization of the era's pervasive, invisible threats and her somatic adaptation to navigate them. As Herman argues, trauma disrupts the "ordinary systems of care that protect people from... helplessness and despair," forcing adaptation through often self-destructive bodily states (Herman 34). Brandeis thus positions Flan's body itself as the primary, silent archive of cultural trauma. It is upon her flesh that the "unspeakable" dread finds its most potent expression, articulated through a harrowing language of repression,

diminishment, and dissociation. Her corporeal existence becomes the text where the profound cost of living perpetually in the shadow of catastrophe is relentlessly inscribed, a testament to the erosion of bodily autonomy under the weight of unresolved terror.

A significant dimension of Flan's traumatic experience is profoundly shaped by her socio-economic privilege as a white, suburban, middle-class woman. Unlike trauma rooted in direct material harm or state-sanctioned violence, her distress emerges from the destabilization of affective security and the coherence of identity that her privileged position within the neoliberal order ostensibly guarantees. This context informs the particular forms of her "resistance" and coping strategies. Brandeis critically examines the gendered burdens of post-9/11 recovery through Flan's simultaneous roles as mother and compulsive storage bidder. Flan characterizes herself as "a container for [her children's] terror, a hollowed-out thing, stuffed with their nightmares and my own" (Brandeis 65), exemplifying Nancy Fraser's notion of a "crisis of care" under neoliberalism (Fraser 102). At the same time, her obsession with storage units—"Each box held a life that had outgrown itself" (Brandeis 92)—recasts acts of consumption as a form of mourning, resisting what Lauren Berlant identifies as "cruel optimism" (Berlant 1). Her confession, "I kept buying storage auctions, thinking the next one would fix me" (Brandeis 118), exposes the illusory promise of commodity-based catharsis, a luxury contingent on disposable income. Thus, Flan's strategies of resistance are intricately inflected by her privilege; they operate within the parameters of the consumerist system rather than constituting a radical challenge to it.

In the aftermath of 9/11, consumerism was rhetorically reframed as a civic and patriotic obligation, amplifying societal expectations for individuals—particularly women—to demonstrate emotional resilience through acts of purchasing, beautifying, and organizing. The protagonist's preoccupation with storage units exemplifies this dynamic, functioning as a symbolic manifestation of the broader logic of consumption. Her desire to engage with the contents of others' possessions gestures toward a more profound search for emotional coherence and stability. Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" provides a compelling lens for interpreting Flan's attachments: she clings to the promise of domestic fulfillment and social success even as the very pursuit of these ideals constrains her capacity to thrive. As Berlant observes, cruel optimism denotes a condition in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 1). Within this framework, Flan's pursuit of the so-called "good life"—expressed through conventional motherhood, suburban aesthetics, and meticulous emotional management—emerges as a source of silent despair, transforming her social and economic privilege into a form of psychological confinement.

Consumerism functions as a central affective framework in Flan's experiences within the novel. Her preoccupation with the storage units extends beyond voyeuristic curiosity, serving instead as an attempt to interpret what has been emotionally repressed or socially marginalized. She interprets these objects as repositories of unarticulated histories—remnants of thwarted ambitions, postponed desires, and unresolved grief. In this context, Brandeis interrogates the neoliberal injunction that individuals must negotiate collective anxiety through acts of personal

consumption and self-discipline. The post-9/11 cultural discourse reinforces private modes of coping, particularly for women, who are positioned as responsible for restoring affective equilibrium within the domestic sphere, rather than addressing the broader structural conditions underpinning grief and social instability. Flan's engagement with the storage units exemplifies this individualized burden, a capacity facilitated by her socio-economic privilege.

Within the novel, the storage facility emerges as a potent symbol within the affective economy of Flan's experience. It operates as a liminal site where detritus, memory, and emotion are deposited, concealed, and, at times, rendered forgotten. For the protagonist, the facility functions as a psychic mirror—compartmentalized, disorderly, and yet infused with an aspiration for clarity. It serves as a metaphor for the broader cultural tendency to outsource trauma, simultaneously relocating the emotional burden of national catastrophe into private and largely invisible spheres. The carefully maintained façade of suburban life, with its attendant rituals and performative appearances, masks the gradual unravelling of emotional and psychological stability beneath. Through Flan's acts of intrusion and observation, Brandeis illuminates the affective disorder that persists just below the surface of a sanitized domesticity, revealing the tension between personal privilege and the hidden labor of emotional management.

Flan's understated forms of resistance—her partial refusal to fully embody the ideals of selfless motherhood or the serene conventions of suburban life—emerge through subtle affective disruptions. Her emotional detachment within marital intimacy, her transgressive engagement with strangers' belongings, and her

evolving self-perception collectively constitute a nuanced constellation of refusals. These seemingly minor instances of affective divergence gradually unsettle the normative frameworks that surround her. As Ahmed observes, “to affect and to be affected” denotes an openness to the world, one that is profoundly shaped by the impressions, moods, and circulating atmospheres within it (Ahmed, Cultural Politics 6). Flan’s responsiveness to the emotional residues of others operates as a vehicle for introspection and personal transformation. Yet, this form of resistance remains largely internal and psychological—a latitude enabled by her relative security—and stands in stark contrast to the more exigent modes of survival and defiance necessitated by structurally marginalized positions.

Victor Turner’s concept of the “liminal” provides a useful framework for understanding the storage units as transformative and ambiguous spaces in which conventional roles and identities are temporarily suspended. These spaces function analogously to the unconscious: simultaneously structured and opaque, regulated yet inherently chaotic. As Flan navigates these interiors, she engages in a form of emotional archaeology, wherein the objects she encounters act as catalysts for introspection. Through this process, she confronts the fragmentation of her own identity, her perceived shortcomings as a mother and partner, and her unarticulated desire for clarity. In this way, the storage units operate as surrogate affective objects, both provoking her personal instability and offering a critique of the cultural conditions that engender such instability.

The novel foregrounds the intricate relationship between affective disorder and consumer capitalism. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, national discourse

emphasized resilience through consumption, framing acts of shopping as both patriotic duty and a mechanism of emotional recuperation. Brandeis interrogates this neoliberal logic, demonstrating that accumulation does not constitute a remedy for trauma but rather signifies its persistence. In this context, the storage units materialize the emotional detritus of a culture characterized by excess, fragmentation, and unresolved affect. They serve as reflections of a society that seeks to categorize grief and fear while simultaneously failing to engage with their structural origins. Flan's repeated examination of these units underscores the impossibility of attaining closure; the anticipated resolution gives way instead to a recognition of affective overflow and persistent incoherence.

Lauren Berlant's concept of "slow death" offers a valuable framework for understanding the subtle forms of destruction encoded within these spaces. Berlant defines slow death as the "physical wearing out of a population" under structural and affective pressures that impede the capacity to flourish (Berlant 95). Viewed through this lens, the storage unit functions as a potent metaphor for gradual decay, embodying the sedimentation of loss, fear, and deferred aspects of identity. Flan's recognition that these locked containers reflect her own interior landscape emphasizes a central argument of the novel: trauma is not always manifest in rupture or spectacle. Rather, it often persists quietly, residually, and invisibly within the rhythms of domestic and everyday life, mediated by the contours of specific social positions.

Flan's formative identity is deeply enmeshed in the imperatives of suburban consumerism, with her existence oriented around the pursuit of aesthetic refinement,

effective parenting, homeownership, and the maintenance of a socially sanctioned self-image. This individual striving, however, reflects a broader national discourse in which economic activity is positioned as a marker of patriotic resilience. As Judith Butler observes in Precarious Life, the post-9/11 American ethos valorized militarized fortitude while promoting privatized mourning, effectively marginalizing grief in favor of stoic conformity (Butler 29). Within this ideological framework, women's emotional labor—particularly that performed by mothers—is commodified to uphold both domestic stability and the collective national psyche. Brandeis critically illuminates this dynamic, demonstrating how Flan's engagement with consumer culture simultaneously conceals and perpetuates unacknowledged trauma, a complicity made possible by her privileged socio-economic position.

Flan's acts of resistance manifest through both silence—"Sometimes the loudest thing I could do was say nothing" (Brandeis 154)—and the deliberate embrace of vulnerability: "Being fragile didn't make me useless; it made me part of everything else that could break" (Brandeis 203). This articulation resonates with Judith Butler's framework of precarity, in which "vulnerability is the condition of being undone by another" (Butler 20). The storage units, functioning as liminal spaces, reflect her fragmented subjectivity—"I stacked my grief in Unit B-12, my fear in C-7" (Brandeis 181)—and exemplify what Anne Whitehead characterizes as "trauma's material afterlife" (Whitehead 89). Through this interplay of vulnerability and refusal of performative resilience, Flan enacts a subtle yet potent form of resistance. However, the capacity to express such fragility is conditioned by the

relative security conferred by her socio-economic privilege, highlighting how the risks and meanings of vulnerability are unevenly distributed across social positions.

In the novel, silence emerges as a deliberate and active affective strategy, providing a space in which unspeakable grief, latent desires, and complex forms of belonging can gradually surface. Brandeis challenges the cultural imperative for constant emotional exhibition, particularly the gendered expectation that women maintain a cheerful and nurturing demeanor. Instead, she valorizes a slower, more opaque temporal rhythm of feeling, privileging interiority over performative clarity. This attentiveness to inwardness interrogates dominant narratives that prioritize productivity, visibility, and the legibility of affect. Flan's engagement with silence and introspection operates as a nuanced response to trauma: by attuning to her own affective states and to the residual memories embedded in others' possessions, she enacts a quiet mode of care that is frequently elided or obstructed within consumerist frameworks.

Judith Butler's theory of precarity illuminates the ethical stakes embedded within the novel. As Butler contends, recognizing our shared vulnerability is not an admission of weakness but a politically generative act capable of reshaping notions of community and social obligation (Butler 20). Flan's emotional disintegration and her eventual turn toward inward honesty exemplify a confrontation with this very precarity. Her process of learning to live underscores the limitations of commodified security, embracing instead the fragile and incalculable dimensions of human experience. Through this lens, *Self Storage* reconceptualizes trauma not as a discrete, remediable event mediated through therapeutic consumption, but as a

sustained affective condition that demands new modalities of inhabiting time, space, and emotion. Flan's gestures of silence, withdrawal, and refusal do not signify resignation; rather, they enact a subtle resistance to cultural imperatives that valorise rapid recovery, performative healing, and the maintenance of a polished exterior. In this manner, Brandeis advances a distinctly feminist intervention into post-9/11 literature, one that resists reductive binaries—resilience versus collapse, mourning versus distraction—and instead foregrounds the entangled, ongoing interplay of political and personal affect, while simultaneously acknowledging how socio-economic privilege shapes the forms and possibilities of such resistance.

By foregrounding the ways in which capitalism co-opts emotional labor and traditional gender roles in the aftermath of crisis, Brandeis illuminates the mechanisms through which neoliberal cultures exercise affective governance. Flan's preoccupation with storage units—repositories of abandoned objects, deferred emotions, and latent identities—operates as a powerful metaphor for the psychic storage of grief and precarity. These spaces mirror her own internal compartmentalization, reflecting a broader cultural imperative to suppress vulnerability under the guise of functionality and resilience. Brandeis highlights the subtle, embodied gestures through which Flan resists normative expectations: her silences, hesitations, and quiet refusals to perform idealized femininity function as affective counter-narratives that subvert dominant scripts of maternal self-sacrifice and emotional transparency. These acts of introspection and withdrawal should not be read as passivity; rather, they constitute forms of critical resistance—what Sara Ahmed describes as affective disorientation, which generates openings for

alternative modes of inhabiting emotion, time, and relationality (Ahmed, Cultural Politics 10). Yet, the scope and visibility of this resistance are both enabled and circumscribed by her positionality within intersecting systems of socio-economic privilege.

The novel's affective framework deliberately resists narrative closure. Rather than portraying trauma as resolvable through catharsis or redemption, Brandeis emphasizes the enduring presence of ambivalence, fatigue, and unfulfilled longing—affective states that necessitate a reconsideration of what it means to inhabit life in the aftermath of loss. In Self Storage, silence functions not as absence but as a strategic mode of survival, particularly for women navigating the dual imperatives of postfeminist performance and neoliberal productivity. Through this lens, Brandeis enacts a feminist intervention within post-9/11 literature, asserting that trauma should not be conceived merely as a discrete rupture requiring repair, but as a persistent condition that reshapes domestic practices, emotional expression, and the very contours of subjectivity.

Flan's relentless economic struggles form a constant, suffocating counterpoint to the ambient national fear, grounding the novel's trauma in the visceral reality of bills, debt, and the threat of homelessness. Her financial desperation is palpable: "The numbers in the checkbook bled red. Rent, utilities, diapers, formula—each demand felt like a physical blow" (Brandeis 31). This material instability forces her into ethically fraught choices, contemplating the sale of her eggs ("'Five thousand dollars,' the brochure promised. Five thousand dollars

was rent, was groceries, was breathing room" [Brandeis 48]) and later subjecting her body to the humiliating appraisal of a cash contest.

Her labour managing the self-storage facility is poorly compensated, trapping her in an economy of others' discarded lives while her own domestic space collapses under hoarded objects symbolizing both psychological chaos and a desperate, misguided hedge against scarcity ("What if I need this broken lamp? This chipped plate?" [Brandeis 23]). This working-class grief—the constant anxiety over basic survival—is inextricably intertwined with the national trauma, amplifying its impact and limiting her capacity for emotional processing.

Brandeis constructs a stark contrast with her husband Jed's position of relative security and academic abstraction. As a tenure-track professor, Jed possesses a stability Flan lacks; his salary, though seemingly insufficient for their needs, provides a structural safety net she cannot access. More significantly, his engagement with the crisis remains cerebral and detached. He analyzes "the semiotics of terror alerts" or "the geopolitics of oil" (Brandeis 89), intellectualizing the catastrophe from a position of institutional security. His theoretical pronouncements on "late capitalism" or "the commodification of fear" (Brandeis 48), while potentially insightful, ring hollow against the backdrop of Flan's daily scramble to afford diapers. His detachment is not merely intellectual but practical; he remains largely oblivious to, or deliberately avoids, the grinding material pressures Flan shoulders, framing her potential egg sale as a fascinating sociological phenomenon rather than a desperate act of survival.

This juxtaposition underscores Sara Ahmed's argument that affects circulate and adhere differently depending on one's position within social and economic structures (45-46). For Jed, fear can be an object of study; for Flan, it is an embodied reality intertwined with the terror of economic collapse. The storage unit auctions serve as the novel's most potent theater of class-based loss, laying bare the brutal consequences of financial precarity exacerbated by crisis. These auctions are spectacles where private grief becomes public commodity: "It was like watching lives unravel... A whole history laid bare for strangers to paw through and bid on" (Brandeis 132).

Flan, positioned as the reluctant facilitator of these dramas, witnesses the residue of economic ruin—units abandoned due to job loss, medical debt, or simply the crushing weight of existence in an insecure economy. Items like "a box of baby clothes," "a wedding album splayed open on a dusty chair," or "tools that smelled of sweat and honest work" (Brandeis 132, 158) are not just objects; they are tangible fragments of working-class lives shattered by circumstances often beyond individual control. The auction of Nadine's unit, containing the freezer of abandoned breast milk—her own attempt at navigating economic need through commodification—becomes a particularly tragic emblem of this intersectional precarity. The bidders, often dealers seeking profit, engage in a "giddy, grim dance" over these remnants, highlighting the callousness of a system that turns personal catastrophe into commercial opportunity (Brandeis 158).

Flan's proximity to this theater—her job requires her to enable it—forces a constant confrontation with the fragility of her own class position, intensifying her

sense of vulnerability and demonstrating how the national trauma of 9/11 did not create but intensified pre-existing economic fault lines. Her whiteness may shield her from certain forms of racialized violence or profiling depicted in works like Waldman's The Submission, but it offers no protection against the corrosive anxiety of economic freefall. Thus, Brandeis reveals Flan's trauma as profoundly intersectional: her gendered burden of affective labor is compounded by her class precarity, rendering her suffering both intense and, like the contents of the auctioned units, largely invisible to those occupying positions of greater economic and academic privilege like Jed. The storage facility, therefore, is not just a metaphor for repressed trauma, but a literal archive of class-based catastrophe in post-9/11 America.

Gayle Brandeis critically interrogates the blinding nature of Flan's whiteness, exposing how this unmarked privilege obscures the pervasive reality of systemic, racialized trauma operating alongside her own struggles, particularly embodied by her Afghan American neighbor, Sodaba. While Flan grapples with the diffuse dread of the post-9/11 era and her class precarity, her racial position insulates her from the specific, targeted state violence and profiling inflicted upon Muslim communities. This limitation manifests as a profound failure of recognition.

Flan observes Sodaba's adoption of the hijab—a decision made explicitly in response to escalating anti-Muslim sentiment ("After the towers fell... people looked at us like we were poison. The scarf felt like armor," Sodaba confides [Brandeis 92])—yet Flan primarily interprets it through a lens of personal aesthetics or cultural identity, unable or unwilling to fully grasp it as a necessary strategy for navigating a

hostile landscape of racialized fear. Her internal reflection, "It was just a choice, like choosing a sweater" (Brandeis 92), underscores her privileged perception of safety and belonging, a perception fundamentally unavailable to Sodaba.

This blindness extends to Sodaba's husband, Javad, who becomes a target of state surveillance and harassment ("men in suits came asking questions... took his computer," Sodaba whispers, her voice tight with a fear Flan cannot comprehend [Brandeis 168]). Flan registers Sodaba's anxiety but frames it as individual misfortune or paranoia, failing to connect it to the systemic pattern of state-sanctioned oppression targeting brown bodies in the name of "security." Her whiteness allows her the luxury of seeing her own ambient fear as the dominant trauma narrative, rendering Sodaba's specific, racialized suffering largely invisible or illegible within Flan's affective world.

Flan's whiteness operates as such a protective surface; the negative affects of suspicion, state violence, and overt discrimination do not "stick" to her body with the same adhesive force as they do to Sodaba's. Consequently, Flan remains relatively "unaffected" by the specific mechanisms of racial terror, allowing her to misinterpret Sodaba's embodied strategies of survival (the hijab as "armor," Javad's forced silence) as personal choices rather than coerced responses within an affective economy saturated with Islamophobia.

Furthermore, Flan's own affective labor—her management of household fear and maternal anxiety—exists within a sphere largely shielded from the external surveillance and threat Sodaba faces daily. While Flan worries about abstract terror alerts, Sodaba navigates the concrete terror of being profiled, harassed, or having her

family torn apart. The affective economy demands vastly different forms of labor: Flan manages internalized dread; Sodaba performs the exhausting, constant labor of affective self-regulation for safety—modulating her appearance, speech, and visibility to avoid provoking white fear and state retribution. This labor, as Ahmed suggests, is required to navigate a world where her body is already "read" as threatening (75-76).

Flan's privilege enables her to remain oblivious to this specific, racialized affective burden Sodaba carries. Thus, Brandeis utilizes Sodaba's presence not merely as contrast but as a crucial critique of the limitations inherent in Flan's white-centric trauma narrative. The novel reveals that while Flan suffers intensely from intersecting gendered and class-based precarity, her whiteness fundamentally shapes and restricts her understanding of the post-9/11 landscape, blinding her to the pervasive, systemic trauma inflicted upon those marked as racial "others." This blindness demonstrates how affective economies, far from being neutral, reinforce existing power structures: Flan's privilege masks the full scope of her security, while simultaneously amplifying the invisible, exhausting affective labor required of Sodaba to simply exist within the same national space marked by catastrophe.

Gayle Brandeis's *Self Storage* fundamentally reorients the narrative of post-9/11 trauma, shifting the focus from Amy Waldman's incisive dissection of public memorial conflicts and contested national identity in The Submission to the cluttered, intimate spaces where the catastrophe's pervasive dread seeped into the fabric of daily life, becoming domestic, embodied, and feminized. Through protagonist Flan's unraveling existence, Brandeis meticulously constructs an

argument that the true, enduring "afterlife" of trauma resides not solely in grand political battles or symbolic architecture, but within the affective economies of the private sphere, where women's bodies and labor bear its hidden, exploitative weight.

The novel's central metaphor—the self-storage unit—serves as the literal and figurative archive of this unprocessed grief, a space where Flan curates "wedding dresses, baby clothes, stacks of National Geographic, taxidermied animals, boxes labeled 'Xmas,' 'Memories,' 'Dad'" (Brandeis 56), mirroring the cultural impulse to compartmentalize overwhelming loss. Flan's own hoarded home, a suffocating "landscape of unread magazines, unsorted laundry, unwashed dishes, unpaid bills" (Brandeis 23), becomes the primary site where trauma is somatically inscribed, manifesting as dissociation, sexual repression, and self-starvation—symptoms Judith Herman identifies as markers of the unspeakable embedded in daily life (33).

Brandeis crucially exposes how this embodied trauma operates within gendered intimate economies, as defined by Sara Ahmed. Flan's management of the storage facility positions her within an economy of deferred emotion, while her motherhood demands the invisible labor of constant "affective management," absorbing ambient fear for her child ("the television flickered with images of anthrax scares... Luke suckled, oblivious, but my own body tightened" [Brandeis 112]). This burden culminates in the explicit commodification of the female body, starkly illustrated by the abandoned freezer of breast milk—"little ghosts... each one held a moment of her life, her body, her love, frozen and left behind" (Brandeis 195)—a symbol of maternal "purity" marketed amidst national contamination anxiety, and Flan's own desperate contemplation of selling her eggs.

Thus, *Self Storage* powerfully argues that 9/11's trauma permeated the domestic, exploiting pre-existing gendered and class vulnerabilities (evident in Flan's economic precarity versus Jed's academic detachment), transforming women's affective and physical labor into commodities within the very spaces presumed to offer refuge. Flan's ultimate reclamation of voice through her "ragged, real" poetry (Brandeis 224) offers a counter-narrative, yet the novel's enduring power lies in its unflinching portrayal of trauma's feminized, corporeal legacy within the intimate shadows of American life, a stark counterpoint to Waldman's examination of its public spectacle.

Gayle Brandeis's *Self Storage* significantly advances theoretical understandings of trauma by illuminating the invisible labor of affective management as a critical form of trauma work, while simultaneously reconceptualizing the female body as a living archive of national catastrophe. Through Flan's relentless, gendered burden of emotional regulation—shielding her infant from ambient dread ("my own body tightened with each grim report" while Luke suckled obliviously [Brandeis 112]) and maintaining domestic equilibrium amidst chaos—the novel substantiates Sara Ahmed's assertion that emotions create "surfaces and boundaries" through the "very 'work' of inhabiting or dwelling in the world" (12).

Flan's existence demonstrates how this affective labour, essential for psychic and familial survival in the wake of collective trauma, operates as unrecognized, exploitative trauma work, demanding constant somatic and emotional resources without compensation or societal acknowledgment. This labor renders women the unseen shock absorbers of national crises, their efforts circulating within intimate economies that extract value while obscuring the cost.

Furthermore, Brandeis compels Trauma Studies to confront the corporeal inscription of historical trauma on the specifically female form. Flan's body is not merely a site of individual suffering; it becomes a palimpsest upon which the anxieties of the era are viscerally etched. Her hoarding manifests as a somatic metaphor for cultural repression; her disordered eating and sexual dissociation embody Herman's concept of trauma disrupting "ordinary systems of care" and fragmenting the self (34); the commodification of her reproductive potential ("How much for the potential inside me?" [Brandeis 221]) and the spectral presence of Nadine's abandoned breast milk—"like little ghosts... each one held a moment of her life, her body, her love" (Brandeis 195)—literally archive the exploitation of female biology under crisis capitalism.

Thus, *Self Storage* argues that the female body, in its vulnerabilities and its exploited capacities (reproductive, affective, somatic), functions as the primary, living repository for the unspeakable burdens of national trauma, demanding that theories of collective catastrophe look beyond the public sphere and the monument to recognize the intimate, feminized body as the enduring, contested archive of history's violence. Brandeis forces a reckoning: the management of affect and the material reality of the female form are not secondary to trauma but central to its pervasive, enduring operation within the domestic shadows.

Gayle Brandeis's *Self Storage* makes a pivotal contribution to post-9/11 literary studies by compellingly demonstrating how ostensibly "private" gendered spaces—the home, the maternal body, the psyche—function as primary absorbers and archives of cultural trauma, shifting critical focus away from an exclusive emphasis on the public sphere. While novels like Amy Waldman's *The Submission*

powerfully dissect the political conflicts surrounding national memory and identity in the wake of catastrophe, Brandeis reveals the profound, often hidden, domestication of trauma.

Through Flan's lived reality—her cluttered home embodying repressed chaos ("a landscape of unread magazines, unsorted laundry, unwashed dishes, unpaid bills" [Brandeis 23]), her body commodified as a site of reproductive potential ("'I could sell my eggs,' I whispered" [Brandeis 48]), and her psyche burdened with the invisible labor of affective management ("my own body tightened with each grim report" while nursing [Brandeis 112])—the novel argues that the pervasive dread and societal fractures unleashed by 9/11 seeped relentlessly into the intimate, exploiting pre-existing gendered and class vulnerabilities.

This focus on the domestic absorption of trauma necessitates a fundamental methodological shift. *Self Storage* implicitly and powerfully argues for the adoption of embodied, intersectional methodologies in analysing 9/11 fiction and its aftermath. Flan's trauma cannot be understood solely through the lens of national event; it demands an analysis attuned to the somatic inscriptions of dissociation and repression (Herman), the gendered circulation of affect (Ahmed) within intimate economies, and the intersecting pressures of class precarity and racialized privilege (as seen in her economic desperation versus Jed's detachment, and her blindness to Sodaba's oppression).

By foregrounding the female body as a "living archive" and exposing the affective labor performed within the domestic sphere as unrecognized trauma work, Brandeis compels scholars to move beyond narratives of public spectacle and

political contestation. Her work insists that a full understanding of cultural trauma requires examining how it is materially embodied, unequally distributed along lines of gender, class, and race, and managed within the everyday spaces presumed to be separate from the geopolitical. *Self Storage* thus serves as a crucial corrective lens, advancing the field by demanding methodologies that prioritize the corporeal, the intimate, and the intersectional to fully grasp the enduring, feminized legacy of catastrophe within the fabric of ordinary American life.

Self Storage reconceptualises post-9/11 trauma fiction by foregrounding the "unseen labour" (Brandeis 65) of those positioned at the margins of crisis. Through Flan's psychological fragmentation, the spatial metaphor of storage units as repositories of unclaimed experiences and social relations (Massey; Soja), and incisive critiques of gendered care alongside the structuring effects of privilege, Brandeis exposes trauma's "diffuse, embodied afterlife" under neoliberal conditions (Balaev 15). The novel's concluding image—Flan "holding a single, chipped teacup" retrieved from a storage unit (Brandeis 225)—encapsulates its central argument: that recovery is less about erasure than about "holding space for the broken things" (Brandeis 225). This understated form of resistance, shaped but not entirely determined by Flan's suburban privilege, contests dominant trauma narratives, offering a spatially attuned and intersectionally informed feminist revision of post-9/11 affective landscapes. Ultimately, Brandeis presents trauma not as a discrete event located at Ground Zero, but as an enduring, circulating affective condition, mediated by gender and class, and persisting within the ostensibly secure interiors of quotidian American life.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The study which travels through intersectional understandings of cultural trauma to probe the erasure of Muslim women in American historiography, adds a decolonial methodology to literary scholarship, problematises post-9/11 fiction written by Muslim-American and diasporic women writers, subverts hegemonic national narratives and theorises a feminist trauma aesthetics based on diasporic subjectivities by reconstructing gendered trauma as an embodied, intersectional experience through formal innovation and affective narration.

Engaging a qualitative, interpretive research methodology this research has focussed on connecting Ahmedian affect theory and feminist trauma studies through an integrated analysis of six post-9/11 novels written by Muslim women (published between 2003 and 2012), to problematise the nuances of trauma effect on gendered diasporic representation.. Its main contribution is this new theoretical synthesis, which makes three important and connected contributions to scholarship. Initially, it creates a distinct trauma-affect synthesis that demonstrates how the gendered bodies in these stories navigate Ahmed's idea of "sticky" emotions—strong emotional states such as fear and shame that cling to people in hostile, Islamophobic environments—as an essential component of lived trauma. Second, the study illustrates through targeted literary formal analysis how certain aesthetic techniques—in particular, fragmented narration and visceral sensory language—serve as textual mechanisms that materially enact and embody forms of resistance and resilience rather than just

serving as representations of suffering. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the project is a substantive decolonial intervention as it actively challenges the Eurocentric and male-dominated frameworks that have historically defined the post-9/11 literary canon by highlighting the perspectives and formal innovations of Muslim women writers. This broadens our understanding of trauma, affect, and resistance in contemporary fiction. When taken as a whole, these developments redefine critical interaction with this important corpus.

The thesis fundamentally reconceptualizes post-9/11 trauma by centering Muslim-American and diasporic women's fiction as a generative counter-archive—one that dismantle Eurocentric universalism not merely through thematic contestation but through counter-innovative strategies. Where canonical trauma theory, epitomized by Cathy Caruth's influential formulation of trauma as an "unclaimed experience" existing beyond linguistic representation (4), privileges psychological rupture and unspeakability, the novels analyzed here radically reframe trauma as an embodied affective reality. These texts demonstrate how trauma is felt sensorially, inscribed corporeally, and articulated communally through culturally specific narrative practices. By synthesizing Sara Ahmed's theory of "affective economies"—which traces how emotions circulate and adhere to racialized, gendered bodies within social hierarchies (Cultural Politics 45)—with feminist critiques of Cartesian mind-body dualism in trauma studies, this project exposes the limitations of disembodied theoretical models.

The authors under study employ literary forms to render trauma embodied on gendered bodies, converting abstract experiences of suffering into concrete, tangible

testimonies. In Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, henna artistry transcends decorative ritual to become epidermal historiography: the protagonist's skin emerges as a "palimpsest of communal memory" (73), where intricate patterns encode generational grief and resilience. This corporeal archive literalizes Ahmed's assertion that emotions "accumulate in the thickness of flesh" (Promise 39), rendering trauma visible and legible. Similarly, Gayle Brandeis's *Self Storage* reconceptualizes domestic space through the metaphor of the storage unit. The protagonist's curation of mundane objects—discarded photographs, childhood toys—becomes an act of "intimate historiography," where material artifacts preserve traumatic personal and collective histories that official narratives erase. These formal strategies collectively constitute what might be termed a feminist trauma aesthetic: one that rejects Caruth's paradigm of ineffability by grounding trauma in the visceral textures of lived experience. Through this reorientation, the thesis reveals how marginalized women reclaim agency over their traumatic inheritance. Where Eurocentric models universalize trauma as pathological silence, these counter-archives affirm that pain is structured in the telling—circulated through daily acts of care, labour, and cultural hybridity, and articulated through bodies that bear witness against erasure.

By positing Sara Ahmed's affective economies, the study proposes counter-theoretical intervention, thereby achieving affective materiality as the core of three distinct domains of study. These are hybrid location, affective domain and anti-canon theorisation. Ahmed's theoretical framework, specifically her concepts of "affective economies" and "stickiness," provides the primary lens through which the

fictional traumatic experiences in the select novels are understood. Ahmed's theories enter these narratives by revealing trauma not as a private, intrapsychic rupture (contra Caruth), but as a social phenomenon that circulates and adheres disproportionately to specific bodies within power structures. The novels materialise these concepts: trauma and its associated emotions (fear, pain, shame) are shown to "stick" to the gendered and racialised bodies of Muslim women characters, becoming inscribed upon them – evident in Abdullah's use of henna art transforming skin into a "palimpsest of communal memory" (73), or the involuntary trembling of Halaby's character at checkpoints (*The Promised Land* 133). Furthermore, Ahmed's "affective economies" explain how these emotions circulate within public and private spheres. Waldman's *The Submission*, for instance, demonstrates how public grief becomes commodified within an affective economy that systematically excludes and marginalizes the mourning of racialised women (118). Thus, Ahmed's theories illuminate how trauma, within these fictions, is an embodied and socially circulated affective reality, deeply embedded in the characters' lived experiences of gender, race, and Islamophobia.

Hybridity enacts itself within the selected narratives primarily as a mode of resistance against monolithic nationalist and Islamophobic discourses. As analysed in Chapter 3, focusing on Halaby and Kahf, hybridity manifests through the complex, overlapping identities navigated by characters. This involves linguistic blending, religious syncretism, and the refusal to assimilate into singular, allegorical representations of nation or ethnicity. Characters exist within Bhabha's conceptualized "third space" (55), a liminal position that actively fractures attempts

to impose homogeneous cultural or religious identities. This enactment of hybridity counters dominant narratives seeking to erase the legitimacy and complexity of Muslim identities within diasporic and multicultural contexts (Mishra 37). Crucially, this hybrid existence is not merely a state of being but an active practice of resistance, challenging the very frameworks that seek to categorize and contain their identities according to reductive binaries.

The affective domain, as theorised by Ahmed and applied to the novels, fundamentally challenges previous Eurocentric concepts of trauma, particularly Caruth's influential model centered on "unspeakability" and individual psychological rupture. The affective perspective demonstrates that trauma is not inherently ineffable or confined to a pathological silence. Instead, the analysis reveals how trauma is actively felt, embodied, and articulated through culturally specific affective practices and narrative forms. By focusing on how trauma circulates socially within "affective economies" and adheres ("sticks") to bodies marked by race and gender (Ahmed, Cultural Politics 45, 91), the study moves beyond the intrapsychic model. It shows trauma materializing on the body (e.g., henna, scars, trembling) and being expressed through daily acts of care, labor, cultural hybridity, and communal ritual. This transforms trauma from an abstract, universalized psychological state into a tangible "somatic testimony," directly countering Caruth's emphasis on the unclaimed and unspeakable nature of traumatic experience (4). The affective domain thus redefines trauma as an embodied, social, and articulable reality grounded in lived experience and power dynamics.

The study argues that analysing trauma through the lens of affective materiality effectively dismantles the notion of trauma as a "stipulated or closed framework" (like the universalizing, unspeakable model). Affective materiality provides the means for trauma to "free itself" from these confines by grounding its expression and understanding in the concrete, lived, and often mundane realities of the body and daily practice. This analysis focuses on embodied inscription, material practices as counter-historiography and disrupting passivity

Trauma escapes abstraction by being materially stored and signaled on the body itself – through culturally significant practices like Abdullah's henna ("palimpsest of communal memory" [73]), physical markers like scars, or involuntary physiological responses like Halaby's trembling checkpoint scene (133). This corporeal presence acts as undeniable somatic testimony.

Affective materiality manifests in daily acts that transform the domestic and private sphere into sites of resistance and historical reclamation. Gayle Brandeis's depiction of domestic labor, caregiving, and specifically the act of storage, is analyzed as "intimate historiography" (*Self Storage*). These mundane, material practices actively preserve and manage personal/familial histories intertwined with trauma, repurposing domestic space and labour.

These embodied and material expressions align with Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" figure (*Promise* 67). Characters actively engage with their traumatic inheritance through these tangible acts (henna, storage, navigating hybridity), disrupting narratives of passive suffering and transforming the trauma framework from one of closed pathology to one of generative counter-history and agency.

Therefore, analysing trauma through its affective materiality – its manifestation on the skin, in domestic objects, through bodily reactions, and in the labor of daily life – provides the concrete evidence and narrative strategies that liberate its representation from the constraints of disembodied, universalizing, and unspeakable models, asserting instead its situated, communal, and articulable nature.

Through somatic testimony, this study challenges Caruth's paradigm, demonstrating that pain is not silent or pathological, but rather actively circulated and articulated through daily acts of care, labour, and cultural hybridity. The selected narratives collectively establish a feminist trauma aesthetic. This theoretical framework bridges the scholarship between affect studies and literary trauma. As such, the study recentres marginalised women as agents who reclaim historical violence through embodied narrations.

This study engages Sara Ahmed's affect theory—with particular emphasis on her notions of stickiness and affective economies—while integrating perspectives from feminist literary theory. Ahmed argues that trauma and its associated emotions (fear, pain, shame) are not confined to individuals but circulate socially, adhering disproportionately to gendered and racialized bodies (45, 91). Feminist literary methods trace this movement through narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism, revealing how trauma embeds itself in and transfers between subjects. Crucially, the novels studied depict resistance to these imposed affective flows. Such resistance emerges through both discursive and material practices—for example, the archival preservation in Brandeis's work or the ritual use of henna in

Abdullah's fiction, which intervene in traumatic economies to reclaim bodily agency (*Cultural Politics* 45, 91)

Chapter 1 traces the historical evolution of trauma aesthetics within the analysed texts. It identifies a significant shift from Cathy Caruth's influential concept of trauma as inherently "unspeakable" towards Sara Ahmed's framework of embodied affect. This progression decenters Eurocentric models of trauma that often universalize experience. Instead, the texts foreground feminist and diasporic perspectives, reclaiming the representation of trauma by emphasizing situated, communal, and culturally specific expressions of suffering and resilience (Craps 48; Rothberg 11).

Chapter II demonstrates how trauma and memory are materially stored on the body itself, with a focus on the writings of Kamila Shamsie and Shaila Abdullah. Important locations for recording individual and collective history include physical indicators like scars or culturally significant customs like applying henna. Trauma is transformed from an abstract psychological state into a type of somatic testimony by this embodied inscription. It offers a concrete counterpoint to Caruth's focus on the ineffable nature of trauma (Ahmed 91). It illustrates Ahmed's idea of "sticky" affect, in which trauma sticks to and flows through the gendered body.

Chapter 3 analyses Laila Halaby's and Mohja Kahf's writing highlights how linguistic and religious hybridity actively fractures monolithic nationalist narratives. Characters steer complex, overlapping identities that resist assimilation into singular allegorical representations of nation or ethnicity. This existence within a "third space," as theorized by Homi Bhabha, functions as a potent mode of resistance. It

specifically counters Islamophobic discourses that seek to erase the complexity and legitimacy of Muslim identities within diasporic and multicultural contexts (Bhabha 55; Mishra 37).

The chapter 4 examines Amy Waldman's exploration of public grief and memorialization, particularly in the aftermath of collective trauma. It argues that grief becomes commodified within public discourse, often manifesting in contests over the meaning and ownership of memorials. Applying Ahmed's concept of "affective economies," the chapter demonstrates how these economies of feeling systematically exclude racialized women. Their grief is marginalized or instrumentalized, denying them full participation in the communal processes of mourning and remembrance (Ahmed 45; Puar 78).

The final chapter analyses Brandeis's work, positioning domestic labour—specifically acts of caregiving and the mundane practice of storage—as a form of intimate historiography. Through these daily, material practices, particularly by women, personal and familial histories intertwined with trauma are actively preserved and managed. This repurposing of domestic space and labour aligns with Ahmed's figure of the "feminist killjoy." These characters disrupt expected narratives of passive suffering by actively engaging with their traumatic inheritance, transforming the domestic sphere into a site of quiet, resilient counter-history (*Promise* 67).

The conceptual strains of affective economies run through the non-established structures of traumatic experiences in the fictional narratives. These overlap within the algorithm of interconnected sensibility within plural locations of

histories and cultural semantics. Consequently, the singular theoretical models of trauma and reception become thin layers of larger questions of identities and lived forms of experiences. These emerge as exercises of cultural as well as subjective ensembles that shape the material origins of global constructions of trauma as a metaphor.

Trauma is not a figure of speech that can be substituted, extended, or enlightened through associations or literary enunciations. The analysis identifies traumatic experiences as a totality of a specific set of myriad assemblages of affective sensibility in action. The momentum of such actions can be seen in fictional articulations in varied structures and forms in select narratives. However, these narratives might share subjective elements of pain, alienation and rage in cultural locations. However, when trauma is historicised within the fictional narratives, a mediating plane of thematic procedure is required.This mediating process springs from Sara Ahmed's affective economy.

The conclusion leads to a radical assertion of trauma as a regional and political concept in the specificity of global identities. Gendered scapes of traumatic experiences infiltrate and shape questions, thereby influencing agency and execution within their diverse social structures. These are achieved through a rigorous affective close reading in the select post-9/11narratives.

A subtle nuance of affective materiality works in these varied fictional representations with specific modes of gender, class and ethnicity procedures. The emergence of such affective materiality discredits the preconceived, subjective nomenclature of universal experiences of trauma as a political existence. The study

opens these subtle existences and other musings through various levels of fictional analysis, though it has got analytical challenges; it reimagines close reading for new points of origin. Thus, gendered imaginations usurp the cultural and political locations with affective materiality that are still present in our daily existence.

This research primarily challenges Eurocentric models of trauma that universalize psychological experience, demonstrating instead how marginalized women reclaim narrative agency through culturally specific forms. By centering texts that articulate trauma through diasporic, religious, and feminist frameworks, the analysis reveals how authors like Mohja Kahf deploy culturally embedded practices as acts of counter-testimony. For instance, Kahf's nuanced depiction of hijab debates in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (214) transcends simplistic Western narratives of oppression. These scenes reframe the hijab not as a symbol of passivity, but as a site of complex negotiation, personal faith, and communal identity – actively contesting monolithic, often Islamophobic, interpretations of trauma and resistance imposed from outside the community. This foregrounding of culturally specific expression dismantles Universalist assumptions and asserts the authority of lived experience in defining trauma and its articulation.

This research bridges Ahmed's theories of embodied affect with established frameworks in literary trauma studies. While traditional trauma theory often emphasizes individual psychological rupture (as seen in foundational work by Caruth), this study demonstrates how Ahmed's concepts—particularly the "circulation" of emotions within "affective economies"—provide a crucial lens for analysing trauma's social dimensions within literature. For example, the analysis of

Amy Waldman's *The Submission* reveals how the grief of a racialised widow is not merely a private experience but becomes enmeshed in a public "affective economy." Her mourning circulates within contested public discourse, shaped and ultimately constrained by racialised perceptions that dictate whose grief is deemed legitimate and worthy of public recognition (118). This synthesis significantly expands trauma studies by foregrounding how affect adheres to and moves between bodies within power-laden social fields, moving beyond purely intrapsychic models to expose the collective, often exclusionary, dynamics of traumatic experience.

A core methodological contribution of this project is its decolonial approach, which actively centers texts produced by minoritised writers not merely as objects of analysis but as vital sources of theoretical insight. By prioritizing narratives emerging from diasporic, Muslim, feminist, and other marginalized perspectives, the study contests the canonical exclusions that have historically privileged Eurocentric frameworks within both trauma studies and literary theory. Authors like Kahf, Abdullah, Halaby, and Brandeis generate unique conceptualizations of trauma, memory, resistance, and belonging through their literary practices. Positioning these texts as theory-generating challenges the assumption that theoretical authority resides solely within established Western academic discourse. Instead, it validates the epistemic power located within communities often relegated to the margins, demonstrating how their artistic expressions actively reshape critical understanding and contest the colonial legacies embedded within academic knowledge production itself (Gray 15; Morey 62).

A significant limitation of this study is its primary focus on U.S.-based narratives, which inevitably overlooks crucial transnational dimensions present within the works of authors like Kamila Shamsie. Her exploration of interconnected traumas spanning locations such as Pakistan and Japan (Burnt Shadows) offers fertile ground for comparative analysis that remained largely untapped here. This U.S.-centric lens potentially restricts a fuller understanding of how trauma circulates, adheres, and is resisted across distinct but linked geopolitical contexts shaped by imperialism and globalization. To address this gap productively, a convincing future research trajectory involves examining representations of trauma in women's climate fiction originating from the Global South. Analyzing these narratives could powerfully extend Sara Ahmed's concept of "atmospheric walls"—the ways affect structures space and belonging—to investigate how the embodied, gendered, and racialized experiences of ecological crisis and displacement are portrayed. Such research would not only broaden the geographic scope but also deepen our understanding of how affective economies operate in the context of planetary-scale environmental trauma, centering the perspectives of those most acutely impacted.

The limitation of this study is its focus on the novel form, which excluded the rich potential of other genres like poetry and memoir. This restriction necessarily limited the investigation into the full formal range employed by Muslim women writers to articulate trauma and resistance. The distinct aesthetic strategies, fragmented narratives, and intimate first-person perspectives common in poetry (e.g., Warsan Shire) and memoir offer unique modes for representing embodied

affect and fragmented memory that novels alone cannot fully capture. To address this gap, a significant future research direction involves a multigeneric analysis of contemporary Muslim women's life writing. Examining novels, poetry, memoirs, and autofiction together would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse literary strategies used to navigate trauma, memory, and identity formation across different textual forms, revealing how genre itself functions as a tool for reclaiming narrative agency.

Although this study foregrounds gender, race, and religion, a more thorough examination of the intersections of class, sexuality, and disability within the represented affective economies remains necessary. The analysis could be productively extended to explore how socioeconomic status and sexual identity further modulate the circulation and "stickiness" of trauma for the characters and communities represented, particularly within contexts shaped by global capitalism and nationalist discourses. Future research should explicitly integrate these intersectional axes, drawing on frameworks like Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism." Analysing how narratives engage with or challenge homonationalist logics—where certain LGBTQ+ identities are co-opted to justify Islamophobia and nationalism—would reveal the complex ways class privilege and sexual normativity intersect with racialization and religious identity in shaping experiences of trauma, belonging, and resistance within Muslim women's texts.

A significant contribution of this research lies in its articulation of a restorative epistemology, positioning contemporary novels by Muslim women as

vital counter-archives that challenge and supplement dominant state historiography. Where official narratives often obscure, sanitize, or deliberately erase the lived experiences of marginalized communities—particularly under regimes of surveillance, war, or occupation—these literary texts function as repositories of embodied knowledge and affective truth. For instance, Laila Halaby's depiction of Jassim's involuntary "trembling" at military checkpoints in The Promised Land (133) materializes the otherwise abstract violence of border regimes. This visceral, bodily inscription transforms a fleeting physiological response into a powerful testament to the pervasive, dehumanizing impact of state power on the racialized subject. By centering such intimate, sensorially rich moments of lived experience, these novels generate an alternative historical record, restoring epistemic agency to communities whose traumas are systematically excluded from official archives. This framework demonstrates literature's unique capacity to document the affective and corporeal realities of structural violence, offering scholars a crucial methodology for accessing histories written on and through the body itself.

This research offers a transformative pedagogical model for teaching post-9/11 literature, moving decisively beyond reductive allegorical readings that often flatten Muslim experiences. By foregrounding Sara Ahmed's affect theory and feminist literary analysis, it provides educators with concrete strategies to center the embodied and affective dimensions of trauma, memory, and resistance within these narratives. Instead of treating texts primarily as political commentary or cultural explainers, this approach encourages students to analyze how emotions "stick" to racialized bodies, how trauma circulates within intimate and public spaces, and how

material practices (like Abdullah's henna or Halaby's trembling) constitute forms of agency. This shift cultivates critical engagement with the visceral, lived realities depicted, fostering deeper empathy and a more nuanced understanding of gendered Islamophobia and diasporic subjectivity that challenges monolithic interpretations.

The analysis demonstrates a significant political resonance by revealing how the literary strategies and themes within these texts prefigure and intellectually ground contemporary modes of resistance against gendered Islamophobia. The novels' focus on reclaiming bodily autonomy, archiving marginalized histories, and challenging affective exclusions directly anticipates and informs real-world movements. For instance, the communal assertion of identity and visibility central to initiatives like "MuslimWomens Day" mirrors the counter-archival and counter-testimonial functions analysed in the texts (e.g., Kahf's hijab debates, Brandeis's domestic historiography). By documenting the systemic operation of Islamophobic affect and the diverse strategies employed to resist it, this research provides a critical theoretical framework for understanding and supporting ongoing struggles for justice, validating the power of cultural production as a vital site of political contestation (Sayyid 76).

This thesis culminates in the assertion that trauma, as represented in contemporary Muslim women's fiction, transcends conventional framings as pathology or rupture. Instead, it emerges as a profoundly generative site for historical reclamation. Within these narratives, the gendered and racialised body—marked by both literal and figurative wounds—becomes a living archive, actively

preserving and transmitting counter-histories suppressed by dominant power structures. Characters traverse and reclaim their traumatic inheritance not through passive suffering, but through transformative practices that convert silence into powerful acts of testimony. As Kamila Shamsie's work vividly illustrates, these acts forge potent "weapons of memory," enabling resistance against erasure and the reconstruction of fragmented pasts (203). Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates that fiction functions as a vital epistemological tool: it rewrites history not from grand, impersonal vantage points, but from the intimate outward, centering embodied experience and affective truth to challenge official narratives and imagine restorative futures rooted in the resilience inscribed on and through the body itself.

Extending the analysis of emotional and imaginative frameworks in *Once in a Promised Land* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, future research could extend these insights into other affectively charged domains that shape contemporary experiences of Muslim women and broader diasporic communities. The nuanced portrayals of hybrid identity, trauma, and agency found in the works of Halaby and Kahf offer a solid foundation for exploring new intersections between affect, memory, and identity. Future studies could examine the following areas to further develop and deepen our understanding of the role of emotion and imagination in marginalized communities:

Future research may delve into how diasporic memory is constructed and transmitted through affective narratives, particularly in the context of Muslim diasporas in Western countries. Scholars could examine how feelings of

displacement, nostalgia, and belonging are navigated by second-generation immigrants or those who experience the complexities of transnational identity. Similar to how Salwa and Khadra grapple with trauma and hybrid identity, future studies could explore the affective dimensions of memory and belonging within other diasporic communities. Memory work in literature could reveal how past traumas (e.g., experiences of migration, war, or colonialism) continue to affect emotional lives across generations, shaping both individual and collective subjectivities. Researchers could explore how these affective narratives negotiate the tension between home and exile, exploring how memory is not just a passive recollection but a living emotional force that continues to shape the present.

An additional critical avenue for future research concerns environmental trauma and its affective ramifications for communities. As climate change accelerates and ecological degradation intensifies, the emotional and psychological consequences of environmental crises demand urgent scholarly attention. Building upon the affective and trauma frameworks employed in Halaby's and Kahf's works, researchers might examine how environmental trauma—manifested through natural disasters, loss of land, or climate-induced displacement—reshapes cultural identity and social belonging. Questions arise regarding how marginalized groups, including Muslim women, articulate their emotional responses to environmental devastation, and how such experiences influence their capacities for agency and resilience. This line of inquiry could productively intersect with ecofeminist and environmental justice perspectives, emphasizing how women, particularly within the Global South

or diasporic communities, navigate ecological precarity and engage in practices of affective resistance to envision more sustainable futures.

Finally, the role of digital representation and the affective politics of online identity provide another rich domain for future study. As digital platforms increasingly serve as spaces for self-expression, activism, and community-building, Muslim women, along with other marginalized groups, engage with these technologies in ways that both reflect and challenge dominant narratives about their identities. Research could explore how Muslim women use social media, blogs, digital art, and other forms of digital expression to articulate their emotions, assert agency, and resist the stereotypes imposed upon them by mainstream society. This line of inquiry could examine the affective charge of online interactions—such as cyberbullying, digital activism, or per formative identity—and how they shape both individual experiences and collective movements. The digital realm offers new possibilities for narrative reconstruction, enabling marginalized voices to assert their own stories and challenge reductive portrayals. Researchers could explore how digital spaces offer Muslim women opportunities for emotional expression, imaginative reconstruction, and resistance.

By expanding on the emotional and imaginative frameworks of trauma and agency explored in Halaby and Kahf's works, future research can investigate how affect functions in other charged domains such as diasporic memory, environmental trauma, and digital representation. These areas provide fertile ground for understanding how emotional experiences shape identity formation, political

resistance, and cultural belonging across different contexts. Extending these insights into new affective realms will deepen our understanding of how marginalized communities—especially Muslim women—continue to negotiate their place in a world marked by both global trauma and the desire for self-determination.

Chapter 7

Recommendations: Toward an Intersectional Praxis of Affective Justice

This chapter expands on the study's critical framework, which analyses affective justice in contemporary literature through three key lenses: Edward Said's contrapuntal critique, Judith Butler's ethics of precarity and grievability, and Sara Ahmed's affective economies. It then proposes actionable strategies for scholars, teachers, and cultural workers, showing how literary analysis can inform real-world efforts to challenge structural violence and advance intersectional healing. By bridging theory and practice, these recommendations aim to transform literary insights into tools for ethical, justice-oriented engagement.

First and foremost, intersectional approaches that specifically highlight the intertwined dynamics of race, gender, coloniality, and class in trauma narratives must be given top priority in literary scholarship. Trauma appears through overlapping systems of power, as evidenced by the shift from corporeal (Abdullah/Shamsie) to hybrid (Halaby/Kahf) and intersectional (Waldman/Brandeis) frameworks. Therefore, in order to examine how texts encode hierarchies of suffering, future research should use Butler's differential grievability and Ahmed's lens of "sticky" affective histories. In order to prevent scholarship from reproducing the epistemic erasures it criticizes, Said's contrapuntal method should be operationalized to recover silenced narratives within canonical and diasporic archives.

Second, in order to position literature as a place of ethical engagement rather than passive consumption, pedagogical practices need to be rethought. Teachers ought to create curricula that approach works such as Flan's storage unit or Khan's garden as blueprints for critical consciousness rather than as static artifacts. This entails supporting student-led analyses of the circulation of affective economies in literary works (Ahmed), promoting contemplation on the lives that are made grievable (Butler), and mapping geopolitical entanglements (Said) within narratives. Creative assignments that enable students to enact intersectional remembrance and imagine reparative futures, like collaborative counter-archives or digital storytelling projects, should be incorporated into trauma or postcolonial literature courses.

Third, cultural organizations (such as museums, publishers, and festivals) need to examine how they contribute to or counteract affective injustice. Among the suggestions are: commissioning public projects that materially embody contrapuntal memory (Said), such as community-curated exhibits that juxtapose imperial and subaltern testimonies; diversifying acquisitions and programming beyond tokenistic inclusion to foreground works that structurally reframe grievability (Butler); and implementing editorial policies that reject trauma commodification by emphasizing narratives that prioritize agency and collective care over sensationalized suffering.

Lastly, in order to decenter Western theoretical hegemony, future trauma studies scholarship should broaden its geographic and linguistic scope. The integrated framework of this thesis should be applied to texts that deal with Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, or non-Anglophone experiences in order to conduct comparative analyses of affective justice paradigms across Global South literatures.

Such research would shed more light on the colonial logics that underlie popular trauma theories and shed light on different resilience epistemologies. Funding organizations ought to give special attention to cooperative, international initiatives that exemplify Said's contrapuntal philosophy and promote discussions between academics from historically hostile areas.

Together, these suggestions support a transformative praxis that makes use of literature's special ability to serve as an example of intersectional affective justice. Academics, educators, and institutions can help free cultural memory from the oppressive legacies of the canon by viewing narratives as blueprints—as dynamic spaces where trauma is remembered relationally and futures are seeded through ethical imagination. The ultimate goal is emancipatory rather than merely analytical: to create what Butler might refer to as "liveable worlds," where grievability is universally accepted and Ahmed's circulating affects become forces of solidarity rather than exclusion.

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