



Translating Turmoil from Trauma in Atiq Rahimi's *Patience Stone*

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Abstract: *From 1978 through 1989, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan were embroiled in one of the world's bloodiest wars. Since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and fell into direct battle with the Afghani people and mujahedeen, this struggle has been ongoing (rebels). The Soviet invasion exacerbated the pre-existing political instability in Afghanistan, leading to complete chaos. There was still no resolution to the crisis when the Soviet Union withdrew, and mujahedeen factions began fighting among themselves. This dissertation uses the contemporary Afghan-French author Atiq Rahimi's Prix Goncourt-winning work *The Patience Stone* to investigate the trauma experienced by women during the aforementioned conflict (2008). The anonymous protagonist and the insane lady, who are both minor characters, are meant to represent the women of Afghanistan who were caught in the crossfire of war, domestic abuse, religion, and patriarchy, and to show how their suffering manifested itself in their actions. This study analyses the text through the lens of the theories of famous trauma critics such as Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001) and Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed Experiences*, 1996).*

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Some of history's deadliest and longest-lasting wars occurred in the 20th century. The Soviet-Afghan War, which lasted from 1978 to 1989, was one of the deadliest and had the longest-lasting effects. In the middle of a global power struggle, and at the height of Soviet influence, the Soviet Union overthrew the government of Afghanistan, which had previously been shaky. It led to chaos and complete anarchy, with Soviet officials and Afghan people and mujahedeen going into open confrontation with one another (rebels). The political and social climate of the nation was transformed to such an extent that intra-Mujahedeen violent fighting persisted long after the Soviets had left. Women are always the worst hit by war, and this battle was no exception. Afghan women have little to no influence over the social, economic, and political transformations taking place in their nation due to the country's volatile past and the lingering effects of a patriarchal culture. As a result, while males fought fratricidal conflicts to strengthen their ideas, women were left defenceless, helpless, and paradoxically emancipated. *The Patience Stone*, written by Atiq Rahimi, makes a sincere effort to portray the realities women confront against the background of mortar fire and gunfire. The emotional and mental breakdown of the book's nameless female characters is used to highlight the anguish and cruelty endured by women in conflict.

An unidentified lady serves as the protagonist, and she suffers at the hands of patriarchy, sexism, domestic abuse, and international conflict. Author Khaled Hosseini calls the book's unnamed protagonist a "conduit, a living vessel carrying the frustrations of millions of women like her" in the book's preface. She has no name since she is a generic Everywoman, a woman who may be replaced by any woman in her nation or anywhere else in the globe. The narrative is replete with examples of the abuse and sexism she suffers at the hands of her biological family and subsequently her husband. The book reaffirms this by detailing her youth, during which she is abused by her father, as well as her adult life, during which she is beaten by her husband and her in-laws, and her marriage at the age of seventeen to a photograph and a khanjar of her spouse. Even the local sanctimonious mullah is keeping an eye on her, waiting for his chance to take advantage of her. Yet the gunshot that knocks her husband unconscious is the final straw that breaks her resolute quiet. Her husband's unconsciousness flips her life upside down and forces her into a place of disorientation, fury, and revealing disclosures about her trauma. She has mixed emotions about her husband's current condition, ranging from profound resentment at the way he sacrificed her to the war to a sense of fresh release at finally being able to open her heart in front of him. Despite being married for eleven years, it is his quiet that allows her to finally express her mind. As if to indicate a power shift in her direction, she exclaims, "Your breath relies on the



disclosure of my secrets". "I don't have to worry about being cut off or getting the rap if I bring up a sensitive subject when we're talking."

As we get farther into the narrative, these declarations grow increasingly voluble and unrestrained. The nameless woman's internal conflict escalates into an eloquent riff that exposes gender inequality and the constraints of cultural norms that prevent genuine closeness. She tells her spouse everything, both the good and the bad, and scolds him for ignoring her. She gently caresses his beard, eyes, and lips with affection, taking advantage of her husband's slumber to search for bizarre forms of physical closeness. His lack of hostility melts her icy heart and makes her long for the romantic connection that has been sorely lacking in their marriage. As the days go by without his changing, she continues to beg him to come back to her, but her tone becomes increasingly harsh, domineering, and contemptuous. She blames him for her current state, saying, "And you, you know that you had a wife and two girls!" She hits herself twice in the stomach as if to dislodge the words she knows are there. She continues her outburst, asking, "Did you think about us for even a second, when you shouldered that fucking Kalashnikov?" What a jerk you are, you..." (14). The heroine, who remains nameless, is going through a constant emotional upheaval of hatred and dread, which serves to emphasise her trapped pain and helplessness. As Gary Elkins writes in his book *Handbook of Medical and Psychological Hypnosis: Founding, Application, and Professional Issues*, "it maybe be strange to think of any angry person as feeling helpless because any anger is often thought to reflect power," but in many cases, anger can be a sign that the person is trying to feel more powerful than they actually are. (467) Fear, anxiety, irrationality, bewilderment, wrath, and melancholy are all signs of trauma, as described by Mark Goulston in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for Dummies*. The protagonist's cyclical roller coaster of conflicting feelings—hatred, fear, rage, bewilderment, and helplessness—is a direct result of the trauma she endured.

In her book *Unclaimed Experiences*, Cathy Caruth describes trauma with a straightforward example: a train crash:

Sometimes people walk away from the scene of a horrific catastrophe, like a train wreck, seemingly unscathed. In the weeks that follow, however, he has a cascade of severe mental and physical symptoms that may be traced back to his own shock or whatever else transpired at the time of the accident. He's suffering from post-traumatic neurosis. This is an unexpected and puzzling finding. We talk about a "incubation period" when we talk about how long it took for symptoms to manifest after an injury. (17)

When the "accident" occurs, i.e., her husband is shot and falls into a coma, the unidentified lady with a history of trauma enters a realm of psychic incubation in which the world around her begins to lose meaning and sense. Her 'traumatic neurosis' causes her thought patterns to break down, leaving her stuck in endless cycles of rage, despair, and hopelessness.

The anonymous protagonist goes through a radical change in character as the novel proceeds. The more control she has over her own mind in spite of her husband's unconscious presence, the more she remembers earlier incidents of abuse and oppression in which he played a part as the oppressor. Forcing her to 'act out' by blaming her spouse for her problems, it reawakens suppressed feelings of hurt and fury in her. In his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra refers to this phenomenon as "transference." She recalls the day he got drunk and slept with her when she was asleep, then beat her for not warning him and making him "unclean" with her period blood. Finally, she expresses her defiance against her husband's oppression by smearing her vaginal blood in his beard with great glee. For her, this event initiates the traumatic "acting out" period. When addressing her husbands, she says, "Look! My blood is in there too... "What is so repulsive about this blood?" She gently touches his nose with her hand. These genes are in your veins! You couldn't even use your own blood since it's so pure! (31). She has insulted not just her husband's honour, but the entire hardline Islamist taxonomy, which considers menstrual blood filthy and bloodshed in combat pure and honourable. The protagonist has had a difficult upbringing, which sharpens her protest



when she tells her spouse everything that's been bothering her. She opens up and says, "it would be better if a stray bullet finished you out, once and for all." (36)

According to LaCapra, "acting out" is "the repetition compulsion-the desire to repeat something repeatedly." For example, those who have experienced trauma are an obvious example of this. They tend to dwell on the past, experience hauntings from it, or live in the present as though they were never separated from it. (142-43) The protagonist is "acting out" her suppressed anger via self-disclosure and risk-taking. Her husband's immobile form functions like a sponge, soaking up her poisonous emotions and thoughts. They made fun of her and she had no say in her own life for a very long time. But now that she is free to vent her emotions and frustrations in long, self-centered monologues, she is able to recall those memories with greater freedom than before. To paraphrase a Persian proverb, "he becomes her *sang-e sabur*," *the patience stone* to which "you confess everything in your heart, everything you don't dare tell anybody" (71). The magical artefact "hears, soaking up your words and your secrets until one day it erupts." And on that day, you finally let go of all your anguish and distress (71).

The novel reads more like a script than a work of fiction; rather than bogging the reader down with interminable language of moral theory, it allows the dramatics to play out the intricacy of war and human nature. In order to further emphasise how war and tight societal conventions left women vulnerable to trauma, the novel makes use of hallucinations and illusions that are symptomatic of the protagonist's acute PTSD. Although the unidentified woman represents strength for most of the novel, she eventually cracks under the pressure of the war and her own emotional struggle. She says a divine voice is leading her, and she can't handle the pressure. "The voice buried for thousands of years," she says, is her own (129). It calls attention to the persistent gender gaps that render women helpless and unchangeable. As the intense story builds to a climax, she begins to open up more and more, eventually revealing her most deadly secret in her heightened state of bliss. Her confession to her husband that he isn't the father of their kids comes as no surprise to him. She then proceeds to proclaim herself, in a metafictional sense, to be the messenger, the Prophet who is led by the voice of the holy God. That's why they're calling their experience a religion and treating their scars, aches, pains, and deepest, darkest secrets as sacred insights. Her spouse is brought back to life at the end of this spiral of revelations. In the last scene, after her husband has strangled her for utterly emasculating him, she plunges the *khanjar* into his heart, freeing herself from all affliction.

The nameless woman is the novel's protagonist, but an elderly woman is also used as a symbol of the continued strength of women in war zones. After seeing her husband and two boys brutally murdered, her mind slipped out of reality to help her deal with the grief she felt. Witnessing great bodily violation or exposure to severe violence and death typically amplifies the intensity of the trauma, generating recurrent fits of anxiety, helplessness, and panic, as Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (24). Another of her claims is that "traumatized persons often acts as though their nerve systems had divorced from the present" (25). The old woman in the narrative exhibits this pattern of behaviour, and her insanity serves as a qualifier for the pain she has endured. She describes events in her life with enigmatic expressions like "dance of the dead" and "oh King! Come back my King!" She tells her narrative without providing clear explanations or logical progressions. Her illogical account reflects how tragedy and grief have left their mark on her mind, leaving her with only fragmentary memories of past events and words. The resulting disconnection between her words and the world around her makes her sound as if she's speaking a foreign language. "Use ordinary phrases in customised and distinctive ways without trying to explain what they mean or even indicating that they are employing them in some particular or metaphorical meaning," Louis Sass writes of his observations of trauma patients in *Madness and Modernism* (177). *World of Hurt* by Kali Tal delves into this phenomena and how horrific events may alter one's interpretation of a given symbol. Words like blood, dread, anguish, and sanity, he says, "get new meaning within the context of trauma, and survivors emerge from the traumatic environment with a new set of meanings" (16). Similarly, the text's recurrent motifs, such as the old lady and the King, are not fully resolved, leaving open the possibility that the King represents either the protector or the destroyer. The old lady, no matter how little, reflects back the lost memories that show the nuance and breadth necessary to comprehend the anguish women experience throughout war.



The novel's nameless female protagonists, then, represent the beaten situation of many women who are doubly marginalised in patriarchal combat zones. The protagonist's complex range of feelings, her admissions, and her "madness of the old lady" are all manifestations of the trauma she has experienced. A projection of the physical and emotional damage that war may bring, the elderly lady becomes completely insane, while the anonymous woman utilises confession as an instrument for survival and through them, she acts out her buried sorrow.

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