



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

**THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE CONCEPT OF
EXILE AS REFLECTED IN *PLACES AND NAMES: ON WAR,
REVOLUTION, AND RETURNING, THE BEEKEEPER, AND
LOOK: POEMS***

Nisa SEVSAY

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude should be addressed to my advisor Assist. Prof. Merve Özman who never gave up her patience and support in this thesis. I am grateful to all my mentors over the years for their guidance. I wish to thank Assist. Prof. Özge Özbek Akıman for the road she showed me. Special thanks are given to Assoc. Prof. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş; thank you for being such an inspiration to me. I would like to pay my kindest regards to Assist. Prof. Ayça Germen for her invaluable contributions. I am also dearly grateful to Prof. Ufuk Özdağ for her wholehearted support. My thanks must also go to my family for all the sacrifices they made throughout this project. I owe a serious debt of gratitude to Elliot Ackerman and Dunya Mikhail for being with me along the way. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to George, Mohamed, Sayed, and Fairuz for their company. I am truly thankful to Leon for being a constant source of emotional support and encouragement. Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to the people whose stories made this thesis possible.

ÖZET

SEVSAY, Nisa. *Orta Doğu'daki Çatışma ve Sürgün Kavramının Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning, The Beekeeper ve Look: Poems Eserlerindeki Yansımaları*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Edebiyatta sürgün temasının milattan önceye kadar uzanan bir geçmişi vardır. Günümüzde küresel göç ve göçmen kavramları neredeyse hiç olmadığı kadar güncel ve önemlidir. 2021 yılının sonu itibarıyla, 80 milyondan fazla insan savaş, kıtlık, insan hakları ihlali gibi çeşitli siyasal, ekonomik ve sosyal sebeplerle ülkesini terk etmek zorunda kalmıştır. Sürgün deneyiminin en yoğun yaşandığı bölgelerin başında Orta Doğu gelmektedir. Sürgün deneyimi kuşkusuz pek çok sürgün için bireyi evsiz, kimsesiz ve yabancı kılan kaotik ve zorlu bir deneyim olmasının yanısıra, Edward Said'in öne sürdüğü gibi ona faydalar sağlayan bir deneyim de olabilir. Bu tez, Said'in sürgün yaklaşımından yola çıkarak, sürgün tecrübesinin faydalarını edebi eserlerine yansıtan Amerikalı Elliot Ackerman'ın *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), Iraklı Amerikalı Dünya Mikhail'in *The Beekeeper* (2018), ve İranlı Amerikalı Solmaz Sharif'in *Look: Poems* (2016) eserlerini inceler. Bu üç yazarın anayurdu farklı olsa da, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve sürgün tecrübesi onları bir araya getirir. Adı geçen eserlerin sırasıyla gazi kimliği, hafıza ve dil odaklı ele alınması sürgün kavramının çok yönlü olarak değerlendirilmesine olanak sağlamaktadır. Elliot Ackerman örneğinde sürgün, bir asker tarafından dost ve düşman kavramlarının hayati önem taşıdığı savaş esnasında deneyimlendiğinde, ona savaş sonrası hayatında farklı bakış açıları, yapıcı karşılaştırma becerisi ve görünüşte birbiriyle çelişen görüşler arasında ortak noktalar görebilme yetisi kazandırır. Dünya Mikhail örneğinde sürgün kavramı, hafıza odaklı incelendiğinde, bir yazarın fiziksel ve zamansal sınırları aşmasını sağlayan faydalı bir deneyim olarak karşımıza çıkar. Bu çalışmanın aynı kavramı dil odaklı incelediği Solmaz Sharif örneğinde ise sürgün, şaire günlük dili politik dil ile beraber ele alarak dilin politikacılar ve askeri kurumlar tarafından nasıl şiddete maruz bırakıldığını ve bunun dili kullanan ve bu dil tarafından tanımlanan bireyler üzerindeki etkilerini görme ve gösterme olanağı sunar.

Anahtar Sözcükler

sürgün, Orta Doğu, Elliot Ackerman, Dünya Mikhail, Solmaz Sharif, Edward Said.

ABSTRACT

SEVSAY, Nisa. *The Conflict in the Middle East and the Concept of Exile as Reflected in Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning, The Beekeeper, and Look: Poems*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2022.

The theme of exile has been present in literature from its very beginning. Today, the notions of global migration and refugees are more urgent and relevant than they have ever been. As of the end of 2021, more than 80 million people have been forced to leave their countries for various political, economic, and social reasons including war, famine, and human rights violations. The Middle East is one of the regions where a considerable number of people are forced to exile. Although exile is undoubtedly a chaotic and a challenging experience that renders individuals homeless, forlorn, and alien, from the point of view of Edward Said, it can also offer numerous benefits. This thesis, by making use of Said's approach to exile, examines exile as an enriching experience reflected in American Elliot Ackerman's *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), Iraqi American Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper* (2018), and Iranian American Solmaz Sharif's *Look: Poems* (2016). Although these authors have different homelands and backgrounds, their exile experiences in the United States bring them together. Scrutinizing these works by focusing respectively on veteran identity, memory, and language, the concept of exile can be analyzed through a multi-faceted approach. In the case of Ackerman, when experienced by a soldier during a war in which the concepts of friend and foe are vital, the exile experience provides the veteran with novel perspectives, offering the ability to compare constructively and see the shared points between seemingly conflicting notions. In Dunya Mikhail's work, the exile experience proves to be a beneficial experience that enables her to transcend both physical and temporal borders when analyzed through a memory-centred approach. Finally, an analysis of Solmaz Sharif's poetry with a focus on language presents how daily language is exposed to violence by US political and military institutions. Deconstructing the military language and US military policies has only been possible with her newly gained perspectives as a result of her exile experience.

Keywords

exile, Middle East, Elliot Ackerman, Dunya Mikhail, Solmaz Sharif, Edward Said.

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INTRODUCTION

Exile has been both a contemporary and a historical issue. Today, more than eighty million people are forcibly displaced, fleeing war and persecution with Syria having the largest refugee population, followed by Afghanistan, Venezuela, Sudan, and many others (“Refugee Statistics”). Exile, as much as it is defined as a humanitarian crisis today, is a state of being that is deeply connected with language, memory, and politics. In defining exile, there is a constant interplay between exile and nationalism. Nationalism stands for “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage” which “affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs” (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 176). By asserting a home, nationalism “fends off exile” and “fights to prevent its ravages” (176).

Although exile is often considered a dreadful experience, Edward Said questions this one-sided approach and asks: “If true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?” (*Reflections on Exile* 173). Exile is not a one-dimensional concept that always ends in a catastrophe by definition. On the contrary, it can pave the way for rewarding, beneficial outcomes. Wallace Stevens interprets exile as “a mind of winter,” a definition later expanded by Said as “a mind in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable” (Stevens 4; *Reflections on Exile* 186). For Said, the “distance from home—in all senses of that word—” can be “converted from a challenge or a risk, or even from an active impingement” on one’s selfhood into “a positive mission, whose success would be a cultural act of great importance” although the absence and unattainability of home render exile as an agonizing experience (“Secular Criticism” 7). By making use of the concept of exile as elaborated by Edward Said, this thesis will explore how the exile experience, which often implies living in a constant state of fear and destruction, can evolve into an enriching experience that provides one with multifarious benefits. It exposes how exile relates to identity, memory, and language; and brings to light the US foreign policy and military strategies in the context of conflicts in the Middle East by focusing on three

works written by American writers who have experienced exile: Elliot Ackerman's *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper* (2018), and Solmaz Sharif's *Look: Poems* (2016).

According to Said, although exile is “an *actual* condition,” it can also be “a *metaphorical* condition” which is derived from “the social and political history of dislocation and migration” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* 52). Exile can be metaphorical in the sense that it does not require one to physically leave his/her homeland behind. It is, in fact,

a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in. Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 63)

Always moving towards the margins and transgressing the borders of conventional thinking and living, exiles may turn the impermanence and uncertainty of always being on the move into an advantage. As Said quotes from Theodor Adorno, for the intellectual, it is a “part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (*Minima Moralia* 39). A writer in exile wanders not only across borders but also across languages, narratives, and perspectives. In his book *Extraterritorial*, American literary critic George Steiner claims that “those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism which has made so many homeless, which has torn up tongues and peoples by the root, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across languages” (11).

Literature provides the necessary ground for textualizing the exile experience. In his essay “Secular Criticism,” Edward Said confirms the connection between text and the “existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events” (5). He thinks that “the realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics” (5). He believes that an intellectual in exile “does not respond to the

logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 63-64). All three writers this study deals with—Los Angeles-born Elliot Ackerman, Iraqi-American Dunya Mikhail, and Iranian-American Solmaz Sharif—are exilic intellectuals fitting in the definition offered by Said.

The selection of works in this thesis centers on the conflicts in the Middle East, including the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the War in Afghanistan (2001-2021), the Iraq War (2003-2011), and the Syrian War (2011-Ongoing). For hundreds of years and still today, the people of the Middle East have been suffering from countless conflicts, both domestic and international, and thousands of people have had to leave their homeland. Exiles, as Said remarks, find themselves in “the perilous territory of not-belonging,” where “immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons” (*Reflections on Exile* 177). These works are examples of exile literature that crosses borders and wanders through the memories and origins of exiles. While some exilic writers choose to pass on their experiences through traditional, linear narratives, these books have neither linear structures nor fixed, pre-determined meanings. Instead, they offer new perspectives on how exilic intellectuals make sense of their lives. Taking exile as a potentially enriching experience for the intellectual, this thesis interprets these texts “not to give [them] a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning,” but to “appreciate what *plural* constitutes [them],” serving as what Roland Barthes calls a text (*S/Z* 5). It investigates the ways intellectuals in exile produce narratives with their fragmented identities and multiple languages and memories of their homeland.

CONFLICTS IN AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, IRAN, AND SYRIA

War has inspired many artistic traditions. Throughout history, war-poets and soldier-writers have made it possible for civilians to take a closer look at war. The effort to write about the experience of war is not only to memorialize it. As The Military Writers Guild puts it, it aims at informing civilians of what they are getting themselves into upon volunteering for seemingly inoffensive endeavors that might promote war in the

long term (“Why We Write About War”). The US involvement in the Middle East dates back to the late 18th century when the newly independent country joined Sweden in the war against the Barbary states—Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli. In the early 19th century, the Middle East region attracted American missionaries to spread Christianity and create educational institutions. At the start of World War I, which was introduced as “the war to end all wars,” the US was not interested in the resources of the Middle East. In 1916, the United Kingdom and France, two old colonial powers, negotiated the Sykes-Picot, a secret agreement that was a “fatuous arrangement judged from any and every point of view” (George 86). The agreement made it possible for the UK and France to carve up the remnants of the post-WWI Middle East and set up a new era for both the world and the Middle East region.

In the aftermath of World War I, Middle Eastern people did not consider the US as a colonial power. President Wilson, with his “Fourteen Points,” reinforced the idea that the US had no imperial designs in the Middle East. He stated that the US mission is to make the world “fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it [should] be made safe for every peace-loving nation” (“President Wilson’s War Aims Speech” 275). As Timothy O’Brien affirms, Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” were based on the concept of “self-determination,” an “integral component of Wilson’s vision of world peace” that “justified the emergence of ethnic and cultural groups and provided a method to establish for themselves their own nationalistic compositions” (54). However, it also aimed to “fulfill his dream of economic internationalism based on free trade” (Hoff 63). The US, with its liberal capitalist internationalism, protected its national economic interests and “began to practice independent internationalism as a way to foster its own world power primarily through economic means” (63). Thus, it served more the economic and political interests of the US as it grew to be “a powerful force on the world scene” (64).

Later, when an enormous oil field was discovered in Iraq on July 31, 1928, representatives from Royal Dutch/Shell, the Anglo-Persian Company, the Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP, later Total), and the Near East Development Corporation

signed the Red Line Agreement to negotiate the division of Middle Eastern oil between the Suez Canal and Iran (“The 1928 Red Line Agreement”). It would promote US expansion as the country “would gain entrée into Iraq under British protection” and acquire “added power to control production and prices” (Stivers 30-34). Therefore, the Red Line Agreement resulted in the creation of an oil monopoly spanning a vast Middle Eastern territory, making the US officially involved in the Middle East region.

In 1932, Iraq was granted independence by the United Kingdom. In 1940, however, the British government was convinced that the Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani was committed to the Axis cause, thus constituted “a potentially serious threat” to the security of the British in the region (Silverfarb 118). The British aimed at replacing him with a “more pro-British” leader (118). Since al-Gaylani’s government resulted from a military coup, Britain considered it illegal and refused to recognize it. Instead, the British tried to bring it down “by encouraging internal opposition” (Silverfarb 124). When they decided to send troops to Iraq in 1941, al-Gaylani ordered the occupying British forces to withdraw, which resulted in a series of events known as the Anglo-Iraqi War. The war resulted in the downfall of al-Gaylani’s government, and Britain re-occupied Iraq (Johnson 6). The same year, Syria was also invaded by Britain due to its strategically important position on the Eastern Mediterranean coast. Meanwhile, Iran was invaded by the British and the Soviet forces, who exiled Reza Shah and put his son Reza Pahlavi on the throne as he was friendlier to them and allowed their war supplies to go through Iran. These invasions embodied critical aspects that would play out in the region over the forthcoming decades, and proved the importance of the region for both Russia and the US, which would wage war against each other shortly after.

The ideological and political operations of Western powers during World War II “helped to shape radicalism in the region today” (Aboul-Enein 186). Iraq, Syria, and Iran would eventually propagate “narratives of conspiracy and distrust fueled in part by the actions by the Axis and Allies in World War II” (Aboul-Enein 190). By overthrowing governments in the Middle East in order to prevent them from siding with the Axis, the US, UK, and the Soviet Union repudiated democratic ideals with their strategic

decisions. This left “psychological scars on the region” as the Middle Eastern countries witnessed how democratic values were “being betrayed by the very Allied powers who claimed to be preserving democracy” (Aboul-Enein xiii). In 1941, Iraq was occupied by British forces “to prevent German intervention on the Iraqi side” together with “maintaining access to oil” (Johnson 7). The same year, Syria was attacked by the Allies who aimed to “[wrest] them from the control of pro-Germany’s Vichy France (Bou-Nacklie 512). Altogether, after World War II, the Middle East became the focal point of foreign governments who were “constrained in Europe and with a diminished role in the Far East” in order to “maintain their Great Power status” (Marsh 23).

Following World War II, the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the US began in 1947 and continued until 1991. According to Arne Westad, an expert on the Cold War era, the reason for the war was the transformation of the US and Russia into two “supercharged empires with a growing sense of international mission” and the intensifying ideological divide between capitalism and its antithesis communism (23). In 1954, US President Dwight Eisenhower coined the term “the falling domino principle” to describe the country’s international policy to prevent the spread of communism (Leeson and Dean 533). The dominoes he suggested were countries, and the doctrine they wanted to prevent was communism. According to Leeson and Dean, the “domino theory” was not only limited to the Cold War. Today, “a *democratic* domino idea has been used to justify American intervention in Iraq and the Middle East” (533). More than forty years later, the Cold War ended in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Soviet Union was officially dissolved on December 26, 1991.

The origins of the Middle East crisis as part of the Cold War date back to 1941 when British and Soviet troops occupied Iran in order to prevent the country from aligning with the Axis powers (De Vita 34). A close relationship between the US and Iran began on August 19, 1953, when the CIA played a key role in the Iranian coup d’état. In a CIA report titled “Campaign to Install Pro-Western Government in Iran,” Iranian Prime Minister Mosaddegh and his government were described as “target,” and its “objective” was the fall of Mosaddegh’s government in order to “replace it with a pro-Western

government under the Shah's leadership" through "legal or quasi-legal methods" ("Campaign to Install" 1). The coup was "the first peacetime use of covert action by the United States to overthrow a foreign government" (Gasiorowski 261). Although Mosaddegh was democratically elected, the US and British authorities imposed an embargo on Iran after Mosaddegh nationalized the Britain-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The 1953 coup brought a pro-Western monarchy led by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In 1954, under British and American pressure, the Shah signed the Consortium Agreement that gave American oil companies 60% ownership of the state-owned oil industry for the following twenty-five years ("Divvying Up the Loot"). Since Pahlavi was mostly unpopular among the Iranian population, he relied upon American support to stay in power until he was overthrown in 1979. Meanwhile, US President Nixon travelled to Iran with the aim of signing an agreement that would guarantee Iran's help in protecting US security interests in the region through opposing a Soviet-allied Iraq. For the Shah's part, he could purchase "any U.S. weapons system" he desired, a fact that constituted "the major component of a new U.S. Persian Gulf policy" (McGlinchey 841).

Nevertheless, the US strategy changed after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Although external forces play a central part in most revolutions, it was the internal forces of Iran this time that "pulled down the foundations of the old order" as the country was already struggling with socio-economic underdevelopment (Abrahamian 21). On January 16, 1979, after thirty-seven years on the throne, the Shah went into exile as anti-government protests intensified even though the US Defense Intelligence Agency anticipated that he was "expected to remain actively in power over the next ten years" (Kurzman 2). When the Shah left Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shiite Imam who objected to the Shah's westernization of Iran, returned. Khomeini had spent fourteen years in exile as he was not allowed to enter Iran during the reign of the Shah. When Khomeini seized power, he aimed at transforming Iran into a ferociously anti-West Islamic theocracy from a pro-Western monarchy ("444 Days"). The same year the Shah went to the US to receive cancer treatment, a group of several hundred revolutionary Iranian college students took

fifty-two Americans hostage for 444 days at the US embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979 and demanded the extradition of the Shah (“444 Days”). A day later, Khomeini approved the seizure of the embassy and condemned the US as the “Great Satan,” and since then, the US has treated Iran as “one of the most extreme, irrational, and dangerous governments in the world,” calling Iran “the permanent enemy of the United States” (Jordet 9). The Iran Hostage Crisis was finalized with the release of the hostages under the Algiers Accords, signed on January 19, 1981. Following the Hostage Crisis, the US severed relations with Iran and sanctioned Iranian oil imports.

During the hostage crisis, on September 22, 1980, the Iran-Iraq War began, which injured approximately one million people and killed 500,000 on both sides (Pollack 1). Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president, sent his army into Iran as he feared that “the advent of a revolutionary Shi’i Islamist order next door would affect Iraq’s internal situation,” given that Iraq had a Shi’i majority (Hiltermann 7). Despite Iraq’s use of chemical weapons in the war, the US backed Iraq with economic aid, military training, and technological devices. Meanwhile, an Iranian mine almost sank an American frigate in the Persian Gulf on April 14, 1988, as a result of which four US soldiers “were seriously burned” (“Operation Praying Mantis”). In response, the US Navy launched Operation Praying Mantis which was “the first, and so far only, time the U.S. Navy has exchanged surface-to-surface missile fire with an enemy” (“Operation Praying Mantis”). The US destroyed two Iranian oil fields, and sank a frigate. Two months later, the US Navy shot down an Iranian passenger jet when it mistook it for a fighter aircraft, and killed all 290 people aboard. On August 20, 1988, the Iran-Iraq war ended following the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, which was “determined to bring to an end all military actions between Iran and Iraq” (“The Situation Between Iran and Iraq” 6). Eventually, the US, instead of defeating the Islamic Republic of Iran, “reinvigorated” it by supporting Iraq (Hiltermann 14).

In 1992, under the George H.W. Bush presidency, the US intensified its sanctions against Iran with the Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act. The Act resisted the transportation of goods in order to prevent the two countries from obtaining biological,

nuclear, and chemical weapons. In 1995, the US expanded sanctions with an absolute oil and trade embargo. Three years later, at the UN General Assembly, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Iran's deputy foreign minister, which was "the highest level U.S.-Iranian diplomatic contact" since the Iranian Revolution (Laura Myers). Two years later, Albright confessed that the US "played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's Prime Minister, Mohammed Mosaddegh" in the 1953 coup (Albright). Although the US did not apologize for its part in the coup, it lifted several sanctions against Iran. On May 8, 2006, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent an eighteen-page letter to President Bush, seeking ways to ease nuclear tensions. Four months later, the US Congress approved the Iran Freedom and Support Act. It described Iran as a country which posed "the most critical security threat" to the US, and stated that Iran's agenda to develop weapons of mass destruction was "a special concern to the American people and should alarm the entire international community" ("Iran Freedom Support Act" 9). With this Act, the US attempted to "draw international attention to violations by the Government of Iran of human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press" (9).

However, the US was still skeptical about Iran's possible nuclear weapons. On November 24, 2013, President Barack Obama discussed Iran's nuclear program with the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani. Two months later, the UN Security Council and Iran signed the Interim Nuclear Deal which demanded Iran halt its nuclear operations in return for economic sanctions relief. On the one hand, Obama praised the deal as it "cut off Iran's most likely paths to a bomb" ("Statement By The President On First Step"); on the other, Rouhani cheered the deal as a "success" for Iran (Mostaghim and McDonnell). On July 14, 2015, Iran, the European Union, and the UN Security Council signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran Deal. While lifting some nuclear sanctions against Iran, it aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, increasing stability in the region, and improving America's global standing (Goldenberg et al. 5).

In 2018, under Trump's rule, the US withdrew from the Iran Deal which placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program. The US reimposed sanctions against Iran, and it signified the beginning of military escalation with Iran, a strategy which is known as the "maximum pressure" campaign ("Applying Pressure"). On April 9, 2019, the US named the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a branch of the Iranian army, a "foreign terrorist organization," which was "the first time the United States has designated an official military organization of a foreign state as an FTO" ("Iran's Revolutionary Guard" 1). On June 13, 2019, after Iran attacked two oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, President Trump called the country "a nation of terror" (Gambrell). In return, the US deployed one thousand additional forces to the Middle East. On December 31, 2019, enraged by deadly airstrikes, Iraqi Shiite protesters and Iran-backed militias broke into the US Embassy in Baghdad. Protesters chanted "death to America" and demanded US withdrawal from Iraq (Salim and Sly). President Trump accused Iran of orchestrating the attack, and tweeted that Iran "will pay a very big price" (Harding and Borger).

On 3 January 2020, only three days later, the Iranian major general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Qasem Soleimani was assassinated by an American air strike. Following Soleimani's assassination, Iran declared that it would "no longer abide by restrictions under the nuclear deal and President Trump has no long-term strategy to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," and attacked multiple US bases in Iraq ("Rep. Titus Statement"). A year later, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, revealed the regime's strategy "to avenge the attack and graded the severity of various consequences America might suffer for its 'arrogance' in the region," and announced that Iran's revenge would appear "at its own time and place . . . whenever the opportunity comes" (Nadimi). In August 2020, the Trump administration attempted to extend the UN embargo that restricted arms sales to and from Iran. However, the attempt failed at the UN Security Council. Apart from the US intervention, Iran also suffered from internal rifts like most other countries in the region. Iran has "dramatically increased the cost of peaceful dissent, sentencing dozens of human rights

defenders to decades-long prison sentences” (“World Report 2020”). Abused and tortured detainees were reported while repressive domestic security agencies suppressed activists. Today, the Iranian government is reported to oppress its Sunni Muslim, Arab, Azeri, and Kurdish minorities while authorities try to maintain “a tight grip over peaceful assembly, particularly labor-related protests” (“World Report 2020”).

Similar to Iran before the US intervention, Afghanistan was already “a land of seemingly unending turmoil and constant crisis” (Zain 79). The Afghan government was “under challenge from independent warlords, poppy producers, smugglers and the ousted Taliban guerrillas” while potential ethnic, sectarian, and tribal forces of disruption were “casting ominous shadows” that disintegrated the country (Zain 80). Before being invaded by the US, Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union during the Soviet–Afghan War which began on December 24, 1979 and lasted until 1989. As a result of the war, 1.8 million Afghan people were killed, 1.5 million were injured, more than 14,000 villages were destroyed, and there were approximately seven million refugees (Noorzoy). The first spark of the war came in April 1978 when Afghanistan’s communist party, led by Nur Muhammed Taraki, seized power in the Saur Coup and renamed the country as “Democratic Republic of Afghanistan” (Sidky 856). Soon, an Islamic insurgency began. The communist coup “set off a chain of events which resulted in a brutal campaign of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan” (Cynkin 269). After the rise of rebellion by anti-government groups, on December 5, 1978, the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty was signed in order “to strengthen in every way friendship and all-round cooperation between the two countries” (“Afghanistan-Union of Soviet Socialist” 1). It aimed at providing economic and military assistance to Afghanistan as the Soviets feared that rising tensions could make the new government switch sides to the US. The Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko declared that “under no circumstances may [the Soviets] lose Afghanistan” (“Meeting of the Politburo” 3). A year later, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Backed mainly by the US, the United Kingdom, and Iran, the Afghan insurgents were fighting against the Afghan government and the Soviet Army. Although

the United Nations called for Soviet withdrawal in 1982, the number of Soviet soldiers reached 108,800 by 1986 (Marshall 418).

Meanwhile, the CIA had “a significant role in inserting U.S. influence in Afghanistan by funding military operations designed to frustrate the Soviet invasion of that country” (Prados). Before the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the Al-Qaeda had already emerged in 1988 out of the coalition of various military organizations from different regions who believed that “the Afghan jihad was nearing its end” (Kamolnick 17). The organization aimed at establishing “a long-term organizational structure “to permanently institutionalize an elite army of Islamic fighters” (Kamolnick 17). Led by Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda carried out attacks in the Middle East and Europe in the upcoming decades. As it can be seen in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the foreign support of local separatism demonstrated “how easy it could be for outside powers to instrumentally support local ethnic and religious identities while pursuing their own geostrategic agendas” (De Vita 35).

Empowered by the American support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August, 1990, which signaled a new phase for the region and brought “a period of high tension” (Warbrick 483). In the mid-1980s before the war, Iraq was already struggling from internal challenges to Iraqi Ba’ath Party led by Saddam Hussein. One challenge was within his own family as Hussein executed his son-in-law for treason. Other challenges included the conflicts between Ba’athists who were loyal to Hussein and the tribes that revolved against Hussein after he allowed tribal militias to take up arms. Meanwhile, even Hussein’s half-brother warned him that “the Islamist groups the regime was supporting would eventually try to topple the Ba’ath” (Rayburn et al. 14). Hussein’s army invaded Kuwait in 1990, charging Kuwait with “direct aggression” and “oil theft” (Abidi 141). In response, the United Nations Security Council forced Iraq to withdraw by mid-January 1991, and thus the Persian Gulf War began on January 17, 1991. The war started with an extensive US-led air offensive against Iraq, known as Operation Desert Storm which became “the largest US air campaign since the conflict in Southeast Asia” (Collins). The

operation lasted forty-two days, and the US and forty other allied nations dropped more than 88,000 tons of bombs. While air attacks continued for six weeks, the ground campaign took only four days before Kuwait was liberated. About 697,000 US soldiers participated in the war, and 299 were killed (Collins). Eventually, by February 28, 1991, majority of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait had surrendered. President George H. W. Bush's address to the US Congress underscored the significance of the moment:

[T]he crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective — a new world order — can emerge: a new era — freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. (“Address Before a Joint Session”)

In the following years, the international sanctions that had been in place against Iraq for eight years profoundly affected the Iraqi nation, and resulted in unimproved infrastructure, a decline in the population's literacy rate, and brain drain (Rayburn et al. 18). Since the US still has three thousand troops in Iraq as of 2021, it is not safe to declare which side won the war. As Carl von Clausewitz argues in his 1832 classic *On War*, “even a victory in battle . . . which at first might seem highly advantageous to the side of the invading forces, might represent the culmination or turning point of the attack, and mark a decline in the attacker's forces and stamina, only to lead to his eventual defeat” (xxii). Today, thirty years after the Gulf War, the Middle East remains an exceptionally unstable region in the world. Since then, every American president has faced numerous complications regarding the Middle East, particularly following the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Until the attacks, radical Islamism was not considered “a high priority,” and President Bush's focus was more on domestic matters (Leffler 34). Reported to be orchestrated by al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden who waged war against the US and the West on the whole, the attacks were intent on serving the cause of the jihad, restoring Islam in Muslim nations by carrying out “a damaging strike against the United States in retaliation for its perceived aggression in the Islamic world” and opposing “the Zionist-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant coalition” (Blanchard). The 9/11 attacks killed 2,977 people while injuring

approximately 6,000 in the morning hours of September 11, 2001. 2,606 victims were in the World Trade Center and nearby areas, and the other 125 were at the Pentagon (Goldberg et al. 20). Four planes were involved in the attacks: the first hit the World Trade Center's North Tower; the second hit the North Tower; the third hit the Pentagon; the last one crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The loss of physical capital due to the attacks was 15 billion dollars (Klein 3). The economic impact of the attacks can reach up to 242 billion dollars ("17 Years Since the 9/11 Attacks"). In return, the US launched a "global war on terror," and Bush declared that "America was targeted for attack because [they are] the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining" ("Address to the Nation on the Terrorist"). The US would "take action to preclude not only imminent threats but also gathering ones," which ultimately led to war not only in Afghanistan but also in Iraq (Leffler 34).

The War in Afghanistan started on October 7, 2001 when the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom, which was later joined by other countries. In his address, Bush announced that the US would "starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place until there is no refuge or no rest" ("President Bush Addresses the Nation"). His key doctrine was based on "democratization" and "a democratic peace" (Leffler 35). However, the American nation was feeling fear, which inspired action in response, as did "a sense of U.S. power, a pride in national institutions and values, a feeling of responsibility for the safety of the public, and a sense of guilt over having allowed the country to be struck" (35). One month after the US and British forces began airstrikes on Taliban and al Qaeda, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that they increased the number of American troops based in Afghanistan, and was "confident the Afghanistan campaign would not take years as other U.S. officials have cautioned," although it has been more than twenty years today in 2021 ("Rumsfeld: More Troops"). According to Melvyn Leffler, instead of bringing freedom and democracy, the war on terror "coexisted with democratic backsliding globally," and more importantly, rather than "thwarting terrorism and radical Islamism,"

the US strategy eventually “encouraged” them as the number of terrorist attacks rose during the war on terror (39).

A year after the 9/11 attacks, the US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz declared that it was not “unreasonable to think that Iraq, properly managed . . . really could turn out to be, I hesitate to say it, the first Arab democracy” (qtd. in Allawi 77). On 18 March 2003, the House of Commons was requested to “recognise that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and long-range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council resolutions, posed a threat to international peace and security,” and that the US government should “support the use of all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction” (Chilcot 40). “Despite the failure to identify any evidence of WMD programmes during pre-conflict inspections,” the US remained convinced that “evidence would be found after the Iraqi regime had been removed” (Chilcot 77). On 19 March, 2003, Bush announced the beginning of the Iraq War:

[M]y fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger. On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war . . . The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. (“George W. Bush Operation Iraqi Freedom”)

In the light of this statement, the Iraq War began with Iraqi Freedom Operation on March 20, 2003 in order to “hunt for Saddam’s elusive weapons of mass destruction,” “none to be found,” and lasted until December 15, 2011 (Allawi 1). While the Iraq War cost the US \$2.2 trillion, around 1.2 million Iraqis were killed, and more than 70 percent of those were civilians (“Estimated Cost of Iraq War”). Two million Iraqis had to flee their country, and two other million became internally displaced (Bassil 29). Jihadist groups in Iraq proliferated after the invasion. Less than two months after the Iraq War began, on May 1, 2003, President Bush made his infamous “Mission Accomplished” speech which signaled the completion of the operation. He announced that “now [their] coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country,” and that they “fought

for the cause of liberty, and for the peace of the world” (“George W. Bush Announces End of Major Combat Operations in Iraq”).

Despite what Bush said, 97% of deaths on both sides occurred after Bush’s speech (Pike). “In just 20 days,” much like the War in Afghanistan, the Iraq War paved the way for perpetual chaos in the region (Rayburn et al. 81). Two months after the “Mission Accomplished” speech, as violence began to coalesce against the US occupation, Saddam Hussein’s sons, Uday and Qusay, were killed by US troops in Mosul on July 22, 2003. On December 14, 2003, US forces captured Saddam Hussein in an underground hideout in Tikrit, his hometown (“Capture of Saddam Hussein”). Afterwards, Bush declared that “In the history of Iraq, a dark and painful era is over. A hopeful day has arrived” (“Capture of Saddam Hussein”). A month later, the Bush administration admitted that the prewar arguments about Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction were mistaken. Thus, the claims that caused more than one million deaths turned out to be false.

Following, on March 31, 2004, four US contractors were burned and hung from a bridge in Fallujah by Iraqi insurgents. Four days later, the First Battle of Fallujah began. Although the First Battle of Fallujah killed 600 Iraqis, the number of civilians killed within that total is unclear. On April 28, 2004, CBS News aired photos that revealed the American soldiers’s abuse of Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. According to Taguba Report, written by Major General Antonio Taguba, “between October and December 2003, at the Abu Ghraib Confinement Facility (BCCF), numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on several detainees” such as “electric torture,” “placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee’s neck,” “using military working dogs to intimidate,” and “pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees” (“The Taguba Report”). Twenty-seven military officials were involved in the abuse, the US Department of Defense removed seventeen personnel from duty, and eleven soldiers were sentenced to prison (Bejesky 152). Later, the Bush Administration claimed that the media focus on “human rights abuses” was based on “political animus and misinformation” (Kreimer 1194).

As insurgent strength began to grow and the number of US casualties passed one thousand, on September 8, 2004, the US and Iraqi forces once again assaulted the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, killing thirty-eight US troops and six Iraqi soldiers. More than 30,000 Iraqi civilians lost their lives since the beginning of the war (“Iraq Index” 8). While the war was ongoing, Saddam Hussein was hanged to death on December 30, 2006 by the Iraqi High Tribunal for “the massacres committed by his regime,” upon which Bush stated that the US would “continue to support Iraq’s unity government as it works to bring peace to its great country” (“President’s Statement on the Saddam”). In the south of Iraq, Shiites began to celebrate while the Sunni militants in Northern Iraq demanded revenge. Ten days later, Bush announced a new Iraq strategy with a “new way forward,” declaring that he has “committed more than 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq” (“The New Way Forward”). On September 1, 2008, the US returned control of Anbar province, a place which was once heart of Iraq insurgency, to Iraqi authorities, and the move was seen as a first phase of US withdrawal (Lawson et al. 103). Two months later, with his vow to bring troops home, President Obama was elected the forty-fourth president of the US on November 4, 2008. Following the election, he signed the US–Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) which ordered all US forces to withdraw from Iraq by December 31, 2011 (*Status of Forces Agreement* 9). In his speech that came to be known as “Mission Accomplished II,” Obama announced his plan to remove troops from Iraq by August 2010 “as promised and on schedule,” while leaving a transitional force of 50,000 soldiers to train Iraqi for a year (Lee). As of June 30, 2009, US troops began to withdraw from Iraq, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki declared that it was “a great victory for Iraqis that [they] are taking the first step toward ending the foreign presence in Iraq” (“Iraq Declares Victory”).

On August 31, 2010, Obama addressed the nation on the “historic moment” and called the end of the mission in Iraq, after nearly 1.5 million Americans served and 4,400 US soldiers along with thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed (“Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation”). “In the end, only Iraqis can resolve their differences and

police their streets,” he declared. Although operations were officially over, around fifty thousand US troops stayed in the region to partner with Iraqi security forces. On October 21, 2011, the last US troops began to withdraw, and Obama affirmed that the Iraq War would end before 2012. He announced that “after a decade of war, the nation that we need to build—and the nation that we will build—is our own; an America that sees its economic strength restored just as we’ve restored our leadership around the globe” (“Remarks by the President on Ending”). Finally, on December 18, 2011, the last US soldiers left Iraq while the country was already struggling with safety problems and dogmatist, extremist separations.

Just as the US soldiers began to withdraw from Iraq, the Arab Spring began in 2010, which turned into a string of anti-government protests throughout the Middle East and continued until 2012. The Syrian Civil War, also called as “the new Arab Cold War,” was one of the indirect outcomes of the Arab Spring (Ryan 30). In 2011, a group of Syrians started protesting against President Assad’s rule, and it instantly rose to a large-scale war among the rebels, civilians, and the Syrian government. According to the United Nations, around more than 350,000 people died in the war (“Syria: 10 Years”). Almost thirteen million Syrians were displaced (Ferris and Kırışçı 1). When the war broke out, the Iraqi jihadists also took part in it. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the former leader of Al-Qaeda and the new leader of Daesh/ISIS, sent his jihadist groups into Syria to expand his organization. At the end of 2011, due to the departure of US forces from Iraq, the terrorist groups faced less pressure and expanded their territory (Byman and Williams). Raqqa, a large city in Syria, was captured by Daesh in January 2014 and changed into the capital of the caliphate (Ferris and Kırışçı 24). In May, 2014, Daesh was specified as a foreign terrorist organization by the US. A month later, Daesh announced itself “a Caliphate (Islamic state),” asserting that al-Baghdadi was the spiritual leader of Islam. They settled new territories in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria. As tensions escalated, on October 14, 2014, President Obama and the United States Combined Joint Task Force, together with an international coalition, launched “Operation Inherent Resolve” with numerous

airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq. The following month, the operation expanded and the US began striking targets also in Syria.

During the war, Daesh forces “swept across Iraq,” capturing major cities and strategic border checkpoints, important dams, and petroleum refineries (Byman and Williams). When Daesh seized control of Raqqa and carried a large number of terrorist attacks across Europe, coalition forces consisting of the US, the UK, and France expanded their already existing air campaign in Iraq to Syria. More than 1,200 people died in attacks organized by Daesh; around 3 million Syrians lost their jobs; 80% of Syrians lived in poverty; and over 50% of children could not attend school (Ferris and Kırıřçı 26). Meanwhile, the Syrian government was backed by Russia and Iran. For some critics, the Syrian War is a residue from the Cold War as Russia acts with its “innate desire to reconstruct Soviet influence” (Crosston 101). Daesh emerged out of the national unrest in Syria and Iraq to fill the power vacuum created by the US. Based on the view that the US support for corrupt dictators in the Middle East—such as the heads of Egypt and Saudi Arabia—is what allows these states “to withstand attempts by “the people” (namely, the jihadists) to overthrow them” (Byman and Williams). By pointing at the US, these militant groups aim at forcing “the United States to withdraw its support for these regimes and pull out of the region altogether” (Byman and Williams). In June 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council reached the conclusion that “Islamic State forces have committed genocide and other war crimes in a continuing effort to exterminate the Yazidi religious minority in Syria and Iraq” (*Casualties of War* 48). As of June 2017, the US has spent \$14.3 billion on Operation Inherent Resolve, the Coalition “has conducted 13,331 strikes in Iraq, and 11,235 strikes in Syria, for a total of 24,566 strikes (“Operation Inherent Resolve Cost Update”).

Meanwhile, as the US was planning to withdraw from Afghanistan, the NATO warned the US that “[t]he price for leaving too soon or in an uncoordinated way could be very high,” and that Afghanistan “risks becoming once again a platform for international terrorists to plan and organise attacks on our homelands” (“Stoltenberg Warns”).

Nevertheless, three months after being elected as the 46th US President in November 2020, Joe Biden made an announcement about bringing the war to an end:

[I] believed that our presence in Afghanistan should be focused on the reason we went in the first place: to ensure Afghanistan would not be used as a base from which to attack our homeland again. We did that. We accomplished that objective . . . We delivered justice to bin Laden a decade ago, and we've stayed in Afghanistan for a decade since. Since then, our reasons for remaining in Afghanistan are becoming increasingly unclear, even as the terrorist threat that we went to fight evolved . . . I'm now the fourth United States President to preside over American troop presence in Afghanistan: two Republicans, two Democrats. I will not pass this responsibility on to a fifth . . . I have concluded that it's time to end America's longest war. It's time for American troops to come home . . . War in Afghanistan was never meant to be a multi-generational undertaking. We were attacked. We went to war with clear goals. We achieved those objectives. Bin Laden is dead, and al Qaeda is degraded in Iraq — in Afghanistan. And it's time to end the forever war. (“Remarks by President Biden on the Way Forward”)

Biden's approach was very different from both Obama's and Trump's approaches to Afghanistan. After Osama bin Laden was killed by US forces in Pakistan in 2011, ten years after the war in Afghanistan started, President Obama announced his intention to pull out of Afghanistan with its 33,000 troops, and started holding peace talks with the Taliban. On December 2014, Obama declared that only 9,800 US troops would remain in Afghanistan, and that “the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion” now that “90 percent of [their] troops are home (“Statement by the President on the End”). However, when Donald Trump came into office in January 2017, although his “original instinct,” like Obama's, was to withdraw from Afghanistan, he outlined his new Afghanistan policy differently: “From now on, victory will have a clear definition—attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al-Qaida, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge” (Kerrigan 240-242). Following Trump's speech, the Taliban launched major attacks in Afghanistan, killing and injuring more than 10,000 civilians in 2018 alone (“World Report 2019: Afghanistan”).

Despite twenty years of US support since 2001, the Afghan security forces collapsed, and the US mission failed. A 2021 report by the Pentagon's special inspector general for Afghanistan Reconstruction, titled “What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty

Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction,” stated that the US government “continuously struggled to develop and implement a coherent strategy for what it hoped to achieve” (Sopko VIII). During the war, 2,448 American service members and 3,846 contractors were killed in Afghanistan, along with 66,000 Afghan military and police, more than 50,000 Taliban and other rebel fighters, and 47,245 Afghan civilians (Knickmeyer). A “Costs of War” project from Brown University shows that 176,000 people died as a direct outcome of the war in Afghanistan (“Human and Budgetary Costs to Date”). Of this, 2,455 were US service members, and 46,319 were civilians. As of August 2021, 20,722 US soldiers were wounded in action in Afghanistan (“Immediate Release”). According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 980,000 US Afghanistan war veterans (“Employment Situation”). The War in Afghanistan cost more than 2 trillion dollars (“Human and Budgetary Costs to Date”). On September 21, 2021, the US House of Representatives approved \$6.3 billion to help resettle Afghan refugees in the US as an emergency support.

Being “a conglomeration of ethnic groups loosely tied within state boundaries,” Afghanistan has never “witnessed an era where it could evolve consensus-based democracy and civil society” (Zain 80). The war shattered the social and political structure of Afghan nation (“Afghan Civilians”). The internal chaos paved the way for external chaos, forming a vicious cycle of violence that has not left Afghanistan for twenty years and counting. Some Afghans believe that after Americans leave, Afghan people might even “remember this period as a golden era for the freedom of speech and freedom of media” (Raghavan). Today, according to a Pew Research Center survey carried out in 2021, 54% of Americans think that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was right, while 42% think it was wrong (Green and Doherty). Sixty nine percent of the US public thinks the US mostly failed to achieve its goals in Afghanistan, while 26% think the US has done an excellent or good job. It is feared that the withdrawal from Afghanistan might “replicate the ‘end’ of the war in Iraq in 2011” (Kristian).

As of September 2021, while the US withdraws its troop presence in Afghanistan, a new geopolitical structure is evolving in the region. After local revolts, World War I and II, Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, Gulf War of 1990, Iraq War between 2003-2011, Syrian Civil War of 2011, the Iraqi insurgency that started in 2017, and recent Taliban victory in Afghanistan in 2021, the Middle East, a region that is considered the cradle of civilization, has been devastated by war. Today, the situation is as complex as it has ever been. All of the inherent problems that undermine progress are still present: sectarianism, corruption, terrorism, occupation, economic disparity, and unimaginable human suffering. These challenges are now being confronted by a more enthusiastic and ambitious population. The US seems to prioritize its economic interests in the region while ignoring the human cost.

The Operation Inherent Resolve is still ongoing as of 2021, and the US has recently deployed 2,000 troops to Iraq as part of the operation. The Syrian Civil war, with the US as a cause of it, has been the “most peculiar war,” due to the fact that the US has rarely “been killing so many while risking so few” (Thompson). Today, the operation still continues, and the coalition forces include the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Denmark, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. As of October, 2021, 106 US military personnel died, and 269 were wounded in action during the Syrian War (“Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Casualty”). The ongoing chaos has led to the destabilization of the region and migration of millions of people who responded to exile in various ways. While it is impossible for the majority of these people to return to their countries, exile has become a collective experience in the Middle East.

EXILE

Exile has been a recurring thread in the history of mankind. The Bible is a narrative of exodus with stories of exiles brought together. Adam and Eve were exiles. Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon of Akkad and the world’s first known poet, was forced into exile. The term “exile” often evokes negative sentiments. The exile may feel abandoned,

distant, uncertain, apathetic, vulnerable, painful, forlorn. It is juxtaposed against the notion of belonging; it is being in-between. At present, in a time of global migration and refugee challenge, the exile experience is becoming increasingly relevant. More and more people are being forced to leave their native lands and live the life of exile.

While the anti-refugee sentiment has been rising, the refugee crisis is growing. The number of camps and shelters for refugees and internally displaced people in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine has increased steadily. Greece is being investigated by the European Union for its pushbacks against refugees at both sea and land borders. Six million displaced Syrians seek refuge in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and some in Macedonia and Greece. Tens of thousands of Rohingya people who were forced to leave their homeland are once again under threat. The number of asylum-seekers who risk their lives to reach the UK increased in late 2020.

On September 27, 2020, a conflict erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh where people have been trying to escape from the war and leave their homes. In Yemen, after the Civil War that started in 2014, more than three million people have been forced to leave their homeland. Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants in Libya are trapped in harrowing situations with little to no hope of finding safety. After spending twenty years and \$2.313 trillion, the heavy fighting between the Taliban and Afghan government forces still continue (Crawford 3). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as of the end of 2021, more than eighty million people are forcibly displaced from their home countries (“Refugee Statistics”).

If exile is forced absence from one’s native land, then it is necessary to define the concept of “homeland” first. Home connotes almost the opposite of exile: a safe haven, a comfort zone, a place where one peacefully belongs. Most dictionaries define “homeland” as one’s country of birth although it is not simply a country or a piece of land. It is a place protected by borders surrounding people within the safety of a familiar territory, where one is supposed to feel at home. One’s country of birth can turn into a

source of great pride, a symbol of privilege that constitutes one's identity. However, the homeland and ideologies embraced or promoted at home may openly contradict with the previously given definitions of home. At times, the term homeland can indicate a place where one feels confined, detained, or alien. As Edward Said suggests, "borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prison, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity" (*Reflections on Exile* 185). It is not necessary for one to leave his/her homeland to feel in exile. It is "also possible to feel an exile in one's own country" (Brooke-Rose 20). However, as Edward Said claims, even though one is exiled, one's ties with his/her homeland are never severed. It is this tie that makes exile more challenging and complex:

[T]here is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that to be exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin. If only that surgically clean separation were possible, because then at least you could have the consolation of knowing that what you have left behind is, in a sense, unthinkable and completely irrecoverable. The fact is that for most exiles the difficulty consists not simply in being forced to live away from home, but rather, given today's world, in living with the many reminders that you are in exile, that your home is not in fact so far away, and that the normal traffic of everyday contemporary life keeps you in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place. The exile therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. Being skilled at survival becomes the main imperative, with the danger of becoming too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 48)

Although it would be a futile attempt to classify experiences of exile, there are three main forms: internal exile, external exile, and self-exile (Kéchichian 1). Internal exile is exile within the homeland; it is the condition of being estranged from one's homeland while still residing there. Forced by the Soviet Union between 1920 and 1950, the resettlement of populations to a designated area far from their place of birth can be considered an example of internal exile (Hasselberg 24). External exile indicates a forced separation from one's homeland. It is simple to exemplify external exile, since there are more than fourteen million external exiles today, wandering between places, histories, cultures and languages. In defining exile, physical spaces are crucial as they provide the socio-cultural domain along with the materiality of place. However, physical change of places is only one aspect of exile. An exiled Iraqi writer living in the

US might create a narrative that engages both with the experiences of growing up in Iraq and dwelling in the US later on. While rendering a sense of remoteness and homelessness, this narrative would be a by-product of ambivalence and hybridity as the writer may not be counted as either a “real” Iraqi or a “full” American as neither of these terms alone is adequate to truly define who s/he actually is. Taking the material reality of place as its stimulus, an exile’s intellectual expression is shaped by forces beyond his/her immediate environment, beyond the forces of power and politics.

Perhaps the most intriguing type of exile is self-exile in which one can be at “home,” yet still feel like an outsider. While there are definitions of self-exile with an emphasis on its voluntary nature, such definitions are open to dispute. Although an area of land with political borders might be a place where many feel “at home,” the same territory might be a place of “spatial and linguistic estrangement” for others (McClennen 58). It is exile in a subtle, spiritual essence as it stems from a removal that forces one to feel abandoned in one’s self-consciousness and perception. It leads to doubt and fragmentation of identity. Therefore, self-exile is an individual’s being outside the society and its ways of life. In fact, even intellectuals who can be defined as “lifelong members of a society” might be separated among themselves as “insiders” and “outsiders” (Rao 7). Said divides intellectuals into two groups: “those who belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent” and “can be called yea-sayers,” and those who can be called “the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 52). He describes the ways in which exile can be a significant experience for an intellectual’s life:

[T]he pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling out side the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives, so to speak, tending to avoid and even dislike the trappings of accommodation and national well-being. Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 53)

For Said, it is not only impossible to fully arrive or be at “home” in a foreign land, but it is also a dreadful experience, since “the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (*Reflections on Exile* 173). Although the crippling sorrow of estrangement is often permanent in exile, as Said confirms, exile can produce “rancor and regret” (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). More importantly, exile can bring along a set of conditions that provides “a sharpened vision” (xxxv). What exiles leave behind “may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses” (xxxv). Thus, exile is an encounter with an unfamiliar world that leads to a greater awareness of human experience. It is not a one-sided quicksand that swallows and destroys everything that gets in touch with it. Rather, it is an attitude toward life. It is a chance that can pave the way for new experiences in new geographies and territories of thought. It frees exilic intellectuals by allowing them to observe the world from a wider point of view, a crucial point elaborated by Said:

[B]ecause the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counter posed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 60)

Therefore, while exile might often be a diminishing experience, it can turn into an advantage that can provide skills at survival. Rather than feeling devastated, an exilic intellectual defies the artificial, pre-established definitions of identity and homeland. The exile experience allows him/her to take a step back and reconsider the world from newly gained extensive perspectives. The exilic intellectual “tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness,” so the dissatisfaction that is inherent in exile might become “not only a style of thought, but also a . . . mind flourishing, not to say benefiting, from such productive anguish” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 53). The harsh conditions that accompany an exilic intellectual can pave the way for the mind to flourish, which is the reason behind the vast canon of exile. Apart from a flourishing mind, there are many other “pleasures of exile” Said describes:

[T]he pleasures of exile, those different arrangements of living and eccentric angles of vision that it can sometimes afford, which enliven the intellectual's vocation, without perhaps alleviating every last anxiety or feeling of bitter solitude. So while it is true to say that exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness (so to speak), it is also very important to stress that that condition carries with it certain rewards and, yes, even privileges. So while you are neither winning prizes nor being welcomed into all those self-congratulating honor societies that routinely exclude embarrassing troublemakers who do not toe the party line, you are at the same time deriving some positive things from exile and marginality. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 59)

Exile brings manifold rewards to the intellectual. The bitter solitude favorably provides the exilic intellectual with the privilege of thinking in an unorthodox fashion, which turns out to be beneficial for the exilic intellectual in being accustomed to constant change and instability:

[O]ne of course is the pleasure of being surprised, of never taking anything for granted, of learning to make do in circumstances of shaky instability that would confound or terrify most people. An intellectual is fundamentally about knowledge and freedom. Yet these acquire meaning not as abstractions—as in the rather banal statement “You must get a good education so that you can enjoy a good life”—but as experiences actually lived through. An intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense *with* the land, not *on* it. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 59)

Exiles live “with” the land because they learn through experience that places, countries, nations, and names that are associated with them are only temporary. The feeling of belonging to a nation and the necessity of fitting in identities are embodiments of ideologies which have crucial roles in defining exile. To belong and to “be rooted” somewhere is “the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (Weil 40). The land where one might be rooted is inevitably connected with one's identity. A life of exile is a life full of engagement with foreign lands and “the other,” the unknown, who could well be considered an ally rather than an enemy. One can be exiled from his/her native land, only to be exiled again from his/her new asylum. In such cases, it becomes increasingly complex to identify the place where one belongs to and finds one's identity. Thus, exile is a knotted concept that can defy the centuries-old definition of borders, both physical and metaphorical. Exilic intellectuals almost never see the world from a fixed, single point of view. They have a tendency to compare everything

new with the memory of the old by comparing, contrasting, and weighing them against each other. This evaluation endows them with an extensive, encompassing perspective that defies limited, intolerant ways of thinking. The experience makes it possible for them to get rid of restrictive thinking. Another advantage is that exilic intellectuals “tend to see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 60-61). They “look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable,” and rather than considering them “as natural or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible,” they see them as the results “historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 60-61). Regardless of which period or region of history they are in at a certain time, they are able to see incidents within an inclusive, historical framework:

[A]s any real exile will confirm, once you leave your home, wherever you end up you cannot simply take up life and become just another citizen of the new place. Or if you do, there is a good deal of awkwardness involved in the effort, which scarcely seems worth it. You can spend a lot of time regretting what you lost, envying those around you who have always been at home, near their loved ones, living in the place where they were born and grew up without ever having to experience not only the loss of what was once theirs, but above all the torturing memory of a life to which they cannot return. On the other hand, as Rilke once said, you can become a beginner in your circumstances, and this allows you an unconventional style of life, and above all, a different, often very eccentric career. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 61-62)

A life of exile is a life of transience, which “moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home” (*Reflections on Exile* 186). It is a life “led outside habitual order;” it is “nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” (186). Exilic intellectuals are people who acquire the ability to simultaneously live in more than one place, in more than one identity. This ambivalence, although it often inflicts despair in exiles’ lives, can also play a useful role. Rather than being an irreversibly desperate experience, exile sets one free from the constraints of cultural, ideological, and national entanglements. Being always on the move and never belonging, “exiles look at non-exiles with resentment” since “they belong in their surroundings” while “an exile is always out of place” (*Reflections on Exile* 180). Like “a weapon to be used with stiffened will,” an exilic intellectual “jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong” (182).

Along with the chaotic nature of exile, exilic intellectuals face various political, literary, and psychological challenges which make them value unconstrained, unmediated, autonomous communication. Living in constant uncertainty, exilic intellectuals are compelled to create new ways to express themselves in order to reclaim their identity and selfhood. This inclination results from a wide range of difficulties they face during their exile. As a result, they break not only the borders of lands but also the barriers marked by tradition. The writers of exile are in search of a language that could enable them to locate themselves geographically and philosophically. Apart from being physically displaced, exiles are also displaced in terms of language. They break not only the borders of lands but also the barriers marked by language and culture. They are only left with themselves and a language that is never enough. That is why they are apt to think in unconventional, nontraditional ways, which, in fact, is a liberation according to Said:

[F]or the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from the usual career, in which "doing well" and following in time-honored footsteps are the main mile stones. Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. If you can experience that fate not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own pattern, as various interests seize your attention, and as the particular goal you set yourself dictates, that is a unique pleasure. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 62)

While most political authorities have the power to "speak for" others, any piece of exile literature should be considered an individual expression of someone who is immensely mired in his/her physical, social, linguistic environment. Said precisely traces the interdependence between the experience of exile and language of an individual work. As he suggests, it would be incomplete to analyze exile narratives without integrating the tangibility of exile into language. Literature becomes an output for the exilic intellectual to express the anguish that arises out of their exile. In fact, "if anything can ameliorate the loss of dignity in the insecure condition," it is "the creative work of writers and artists, who put the anguish into positive use" (Sazzad 18). By belonging to multiple sides that are not directly connected, exiles are able to see the commonalities between seemingly clashing points of view together with what is different. Exile brings

multiplicity of perspectives and a mind that is consistently challenging the given discourses, meanings, and definitions. Exilic perspective embodies the past and the future together, and exilic intellectuals bind them together through self-reflection. This plurality gives rise to an extensive consciousness for the exilic intellectuals, and endows them with what Said calls a “double perspective,” which allows them to view things with regard to what has been abandoned and what is in hand at present (*Representations of the Intellectual* 60).

By using Edward Said’s approach to exile, this thesis will focus on exile as an enriching experience in the works of Elliot Ackerman’s *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), Dunya Mikhail’s *The Beekeeper* (2018), and Solmaz Sharif’s *Look: Poems* (2016). With their widely different backgrounds and experiences, the selected writers reflect on exile in diverse ways. These exilic intellectuals observe not only their own exile but also the exile experience of others in order to make their voices heard. For this reason, all three writers recount multiple exile experiences. Their works are part of the exile literature that has been developed in the second decade of the 21st century in response to the cultural, political, and military domination of the Middle East by the US.

The first chapter will deal with Elliot Ackerman’s *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019). Born in 1980 in Los Angeles, Ackerman is a former US Marine with a degree in literature who served in the US Army between 2003-2011, including his five tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan (“In Their Own Words”). An analysis of his work provides this study with a different point of view that can be called reverse-exile, as he left his homeland and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He indirectly admits that the Middle East is where he feels “at home” despite the fact that it is not his home. His book consists of eighteen chapters. It presents not only a geographical but also a textual sense of exile through the misdirection and estrangement reflected on the pages as he tries to map himself in relation to the world around him. The relationship of the writer and the reader is formed around this perception of being lost, both geographically and textually. The reader has to keep going back and forth to fully

comprehend the narrative, context, and the setting in which the events take place. The title of the book, *Places and Names*, also points to the state of being lost. He describes the places where he fought as a soldier and the places he revisits years later as a veteran. This chapter will discuss how as a veteran, Ackerman not only gains a better understanding of himself by writing about his wars, but also reveals exile as an enriching experience providing the author and offering the reader a new perspective on war and soldiers on both sides of the conflicts.

The second chapter will focus on Dunya Mikhail's views on exile and poetry through her *The Beekeeper* (2018). Iraqi American poet and writer Dunya Mikhail was born in Baghdad in 1965. After graduating from the University of Baghdad with a BA in English Literature, Mikhail worked as a journalist and translator for *The Baghdad Observer*, the official English-language political daily newspaper that was published between 1967-2003 in Iraq (Robbins). After facing censorship and being included in Saddam Hussein's enemies list because of her poetry that deals with war, Mikhail had to leave Iraq in 1995, initially to Jordan, later to the United States, settling in Detroit. After receiving an MA in Near Eastern studies from Wayne State University, she has taught Arabic at Oakland University, Michigan (*Words Without Borders*). She has received numerous fellowships and the United Nations Human Rights Award for Freedom of Writing, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and the United States Artists Fellowship. Her first nonfiction novel *The Beekeeper*, which was longlisted for the National Book Award, offers a catastrophic account of the killings and kidnappings of the Yazidis, particularly women and girls, by Daesh in Iraq as they are forced to exile from their homeland, Iraq. In her work, Mikhail focuses on war, exile, and loss, while weaving her prose with poetry, photographs, and phone call records. Although Mikhail never returned to Iraq physically, she revisits her country "again and again in her poetry—line by line, stanza by stanza" (NPR). This chapter will discuss how Mikhail combines her personal recollections of her homeland with the tragic fate of the Yazidis, giving voice to a community which faced genocide in the twenty-first century.

The third chapter will look at Iranian American Solmaz Sharif's *Look: Poems* (2016) which was another finalist for the 2016 National Book Award. Born in 1986 in Turkey to Iranian parents who were on their way to the US, Sharif has been familiar with the exile experience from a very early moment. She uses poetry to draw attention not only to the inexcusable costs of war and the intolerable loss of human lives but also to the government's treacherous violation of daily language. Her exile experience provides her with a critical approach to language. She "interrogate[s] the violence that is happening as a result of war by using the very language of war" (Brooks). For Sharif, "any violence that is committed against human beings is premeditated in violence against language itself" (Brooks). Assembling fragmented experiences in the aftermath of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, she blends different narrative techniques in order to merge language with the violence of the US military. She deconstructs the definitions offered in the US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, rendering language as an effective tool to criticize the US military discourse. This chapter will reveal how Sharif uses language to criticize American military policy in her work by highlighting the link between ideology and everyday language, which is more visible to her as a result of her exile experience.

By analyzing exile in terms of veteran identity, memory, and language in these books, this thesis will present exile as a complex, dynamic, and introspective experience that may bring multiple benefits for the exilic intellectual. It will reveal that although exile has mostly been a chaotic experience throughout history and today, for the exilic intellectual, it can be transformed into an enriching experience that provides new perspectives and constructive responsibilities.

CHAPTER I

VETERAN IDENTITY AND EXILE IN ELLIOT ACKERMAN'S *PLACES AND NAMES: ON WAR, REVOLUTION, AND RETURNING* (2019)

Like any expat, I am defined by a place I might return to someday, the idea that somewhere on my life's horizon is a time when I'll again walk those streets knowing my war is finished.

Elliot Ackerman, *Places and Names*

As a former US Marine, a novelist, and journalist, Elliot Ackerman experienced exile first when his family moved to London when he was nine. His father was a businessman who later became the founding chair of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. His mother was a writer who worked as the international secretary for the writers' organization PEN (Blanding). Growing up in London, Ackerman felt luckier and freer than most of his non-white, working-class peers mainly because of the advantages that he had for being white and American. He was "face-to-face with the rigidity of the British class structure that denied his friends the opportunities he took for granted" (Blanding). The majority of his friends were "really smart guys," but they also had a "sense of fatalism," which often made them pursue relatively safe, familiar goals by following in the footsteps of their parents (Blanding). Ackerman was "the only one" among his friends who could "aspire to do whatever [he] wanted" (Blanding). As he spent most of his childhood with non-American friends, his self-perception of being "one lucky guy" only "deepened" when he moved back to the US. He finds a connection between the atmosphere in which he grew up and his decision to join the military: "You look at guys in the military, and these were the same guys I skateboarded with. Why shouldn't those guys who are running the greatest risk be led by the guy who has been given every opportunity life has to offer?" (Blanding). In this case, the rigidity

of the British class structure encouraged Ackerman “to lead” others. Thus, his decision to join the military stemmed from a “mix of confidence and humility” (Blanding).

Although Ackerman was accepted into the US Naval Academy upon his return, he chose to study literature first and enrolled at Tufts University. It was this choice that gave him “a broader view” and experiences he “would never have been exposed to” if he had joined the Naval Academy first (Blanding). In 2013, he graduated with the highest distinction, and received Phi Beta Kappa honors. Later, he earned a Master’s Degree in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Massachusetts. He wrote his thesis on the employment of indigenous troops by the British Empire, “a prophetic choice given the U.S. reliance on native troops in Iraq” (Blanding). Apart from writing novels, he covered the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as a journalist and still writes essays for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *TIME Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, and others.

Ackerman always knew he wanted to join the military, and always knew that he also wanted to write (Pezza). He decided to serve because he did not want to waste his early twenties “scouring spreadsheets at a bank or making photocopies at a law firm” (“Veteran and Novelist”). “For better or worse,” Ackerman pursued a job “with actual responsibility” in which his actions “really mattered,” and his actions mattered in the military “in terms of lives.” He also valued higher education, and “practically begged” the Marines at his command to pursue higher education once they completed their service (Ackerman, “A Few”). For Ackerman, if the basic premise of a university is to provide “a collection of voices educating each other, then one crucial voice seemed to be missing. The veteran.” They are the men and women, who have “borne the brunt of war, lost friends, spent long deployments away from loved ones, felt the interminable boredom of standing watch mix with the combustible terror and exhilaration inherent in his or her duties” (“A Few”). For Ackerman, just as the G.I. Bill presents every veteran with a chance to attend college, the universities should provide the military with more opportunities to pursue education. He believes military and education “feed each other,”

and their connection is “a tie that binds” since both the US military and academic institutions are “the cradles of [the US’] leadership” (“A Few”).

Right after finishing college in 2003, Ackerman joined the Marine Corps as an infantry officer, and was appointed as a platoon commander in 1st Battalion, 8th Marines. When he was deployed to Iraq in June, 2004, the situation was about to change drastically. A year after Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” speech, in March 2004, Iraqi insurgents killed four American contractors from the private military company “Blackwater,” and burned their bodies and hung two of them from a bridge in Fallujah, over the Euphrates (“Iraqi Reconstruction: Reliance”). He served five tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which he has been highly decorated. He received a Purple Heart in the Second Battle of Fallujah in 2004 for his wounds, and a Bronze Star for Valor for his role in leading a 700-man Afghan commando battalion in Afghanistan (Asoulin). A Second Lieutenant during Operation Iraqi Freedom II in 2004 in Fallujah, Ackerman was awarded the Silver Star, the nation’s third-highest military award for his “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving as Platoon Commander” (The Hall of Valor). After serving eight years in the US Marine Corps, Ackerman left the military in 2011. Yet, for Megan O’Grady, Ackerman had “never entirely left the front lines of conflict” (O’Grady). As he states, the American cause was not “central” to him; he did not join the Marines because he agreed with US policies but because he “wanted to serve” his country (Kuz). He served not because he believed that what his country did was the right thing to do, but because he felt that he belonged to his country. This chapter will discuss exile as an enriching experience in *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* by describing how Ackerman’s veteran identity and exilic intellectual standpoint have made possible a subversion of orthodox perceptions and an examination of his relationship with his so-called “enemies” in the countries he served.

At war, Ackerman felt an actual responsibility in which his actions mattered “in terms of lives,” a viewpoint that made him proud (“Veteran and Novelist”). After the war, however, it was “hard to figure out” a new purpose for him and many other veterans (Kuz). Before quitting the military, he first questioned his reason for joining it. His

“youthful desire to matter and make a difference had eroded,” and he asked “why did I keep deploying? Was I drawn back to war because I couldn’t find meaning outside it?” (“Veteran and Novelist”). Finding meaning in war equals finding meaninglessness outside it. Associating the places where one fights with the connection between places and belonging, it can be said that Ackerman feels more “at home” when he is at war. His new purpose turns out to be writing “to understand what [he] think[s]” (Kelly). In an interview, he reveals the necessity for a soldier to “repurpose” oneself once s/he returns from the war “in order to be happy” and to find “that same level of intensity” (Westenfeld). Just as an exilic intellectual’s life is a “life led outside habitual order” as Edward Said proposes (*Reflections on Exile* 186), Ackerman lived both an exile and a soldier’s life, which equally affected him in multiple positive aspects. As Said puts it, “no sooner does one get accustomed to [exile] than its unsettling force erupts anew” (186). Likewise, when Ackerman returns home, the discomfiting remembrance of the war he left behind becomes apparent, the war in which he “grew up” (*Places and Names* 77).

Upon his return, Ackerman found his next purpose in writing. He started writing his debut novel only nine months after he had left the military. His books deal with US foreign policy, conflict, and geopolitics. They often involve a journey shaped by loss and exile in relation to war, and run counter to the dominant portrayal of Middle Eastern people in the US media. What he does is to “parse someone’s motives” and “not conflate understanding with agreement” (Baird). He makes use of literature both as a way to offer often neglected perspectives and to transfigure the war experience into a tool for understanding the “other,” and binds his background in literature and history with his veteran identity, aiming at “emotional transference” between the reader and the characters in his book (Pezza). His first book, *Green on Blue: A Novel* (2015), is based on his experiences while he worked at the Shkin Firebase in Afghanistan as a combat advisor to an Afghan unit. In the war in Afghanistan, “green-on-blue” describes the attacks on NATO forces by Afghan forces during the war in Afghanistan. It is told through the eyes of Aziz, a young Afghan soldier, which makes criticisms at home target

him as he wrote from the Afghan perspective. He embarked upon a significant and risky task, trying to “provide a counternarrative” to the way Afghans are characterized by the American media (Baird). Moreover, he wanted the ordinary Western reader “to stand in Afghan shoes” (Pezza).

His second work, *Istanbul Letters* (2016), is a book of thirty-two pages that consists of letters and essays he wrote on various subjects including the US foreign policy, Syrian Civil War, and geopolitics. During another exile experience, this time in Istanbul, Turkey, he says: “These letters are from Istanbul, but I could’ve written them from anywhere because they trace the emotional contours of a certain time” (Preface).

His third book, *Dark at the Crossing* (2017), is a military fiction that revolves around Haris Abadi, an Arab-American ex-soldier who wants to cross the border into Syria to join fight with the Islamist insurgents against Bashar al-Assad’s dictatorial rule. It was both praised for its “boldness and empathy in trying to envision modern conflagrations from foreign vantage points” (Sacks); and criticized for being “written from the perspective of someone who is, superficially at least, not at all like [him]” (Baird). By creating Middle Eastern characters and telling “their” story instead of Western ones, Ackerman shows how his experience of war and exile brings him closer to the “other.” His decision, as one critic stated, is “motivated by empathy and a desire not to tell his story through characters thinking and speaking his own” (Osborne).

Ackerman’s third novel, *Waiting for Eden* (2018), is another military fiction which is told by an omniscient narrator who was previously killed by an improvised explosive device while deployed in Iraq and comes back to watch Eden, his fellow Marine. The “ghost” narrator waits for Eden to join him in the afterlife and Mary, Eden’s wife, stays with him at the hospital. Meanwhile, Eden is haunted by his memories of war. On reintegration into civilian life with a military identity, Ackerman reveals the following:

[It is] a process of redefinition. I think one of the things that's challenging is that the military so clearly gives you an identity. I mean, you put it on every day when you put your uniform on. Everyone knows who everybody else is and their jobs and all of that, and you leave that all behind and go into something where your

identity and who you are is far murkier. But trying to proactively think about and craft that identity for yourself and think about your purpose and where you're going to derive that purpose from. Because I think we derive our happiness from our sense of purpose in this world. And when someone is reintegrating or coming in, you're basically—you're repurposing yourself and trying to substitute the meaning maybe you got in the military with a new sense of meaning in your life. And proactively thinking about that, I think, can be very useful. (“Veterans in America”)

It is not an easy task since the soldiers have an “incredibly intense purpose” against which they start “measuring everything else” (Westenfeld). Yet, wars in Ackerman’s case turned out to be “so long that [the veterans] lack context for a life outside of them” (*Places and Names* 75). In an interview, he states that the idea that the war experience makes soldiers feel lost or “forever changed” is “disempowering” as it suggests that those who return from war become “unrecognizable” (O’Neill). If one cannot “go back” to being the person one was before, Ackerman says, it means one can “never really come home” (O’Neill). Thus, coming home is not about returning home in physical terms, but about being who one was before going into battle, which corresponds to the definition of self-exile. He explains how being a veteran is defined by two polarities in the US:

[E]ither they are heroes, supermen, you know, Navy Seals--list the movie--or they're these completely broken people who have come back racked with demon and guilt--demons and guilt . . . I would say the reality is probably somewhere in between. It's that muddy, nuanced middle that, at this moment, our culture doesn't seem to be doing a very good job grappling with, but that's not just for veterans. And we have to, I think, understand we're one community, but we also reflect the broader undercurrents of all of American society. And I would argue that right now none of American society is doing a very good job of sort of understanding and clearly articulating kind of the reality, which is that we all sort of exist in this gray middle. And the gray middle is really the truth and the truth of experience, whereas I think so much of our culture and our debate is defined by, “Nope, there's just two polarities. You have to pick.” (“Veterans in America”)

Such polarities in viewing veterans affect the way Ackerman has shaped his own life after deployment. Although society has preconceived notions about veterans, Ackerman reveals how it is more complicated. For him, a soldier does not necessarily need to carry that veteran identity for the rest of his/her life, and Ackerman himself is an example of this approach. He affirms that people have a propensity to look at his novels and assume that they are straightforwardly inspired by his experiences of war. However, he writes

that “much of it isn’t based on [his] wartime experiences” (“Veterans in America”). His memoir, as it is suggested above and will be mentioned later in the chapter, describes the veteran experience of feeling unable to find a purpose in life, the persistent avoidance, ongoing reconstituting presence, camaraderie, struggling against stereotypes, while exposing exile as an enriching experience for the exilic intellectual. As he affirms, his post-war perspective affects how he evaluates his overall war experience. Thus, it is necessary to unravel veteran identity at this point.

1.1. VETERAN IDENTITY AND EXILE

Being a veteran is interpreted in manifold ways. Ackerman defines it as a complex experience in which veterans are almost always falsely seen as “fundamentally broken, physically, emotionally and psychologically” (Ackerman, “My Veteran Problem”). However, Ackerman reveals that it is more complex than it is usually portrayed. His perspective shifts while transitioning from military to civilian life, during which he continuously questions his role in wars to the point where his pride turns into guilt. Today, when talking about veteran identity, much of the attention falls on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Historically, the term PTSD did not exist until 1980 when Vietnam veterans sought to medicalize war trauma, which was first diagnosed as “Post-Vietnam Syndrome Disorder” and later “Post-Combat Disorder” (R. T. Smith and Whooley 40). Before PTSD was diagnosed, during World War I, there was “shell shock,” a term that was used to describe “a variety of reactions to the First World War” (Loughran 104). The term was first used by psychologist Charles S. Myers in his 1915 paper “A Contribution to the Study of Shell Shock,” which he wrote after he examined his first cases of shell shock in 1914 by using World War I soldiers. All three soldiers of the study had shells that burst near them, hence the name “shell shock.” It was “a psychological disturbance caused by the experiences of war” (Loughran 107). It resulted in “loss of memory, vision, smell, and taste” (C. S. Myers 1). In World War I, the term was used to find out where a soldier must be sent along with the medical treatment he needed to receive, the same way PTSD functions today.

Today, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* specifies PTSD as a condition which occurs due to “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” in various ways, whose symptoms include “recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event,” accompanying “persistent negative emotional state” and “persistent avoidance” (271, 272). To reach a diagnosis of PTSD, the patient has to experience the following for at least one month: “re-experiencing symptom,” including “flashbacks,” “bad dreams,” and “frightening thoughts” (“PTSD Statistics 2021”). Secondly, there has to be avoidance symptoms, such as avoiding places, objects, events, thoughts, or feelings that could remind the traumatic event. The reactivity symptoms include feeling restless and angry. Finally, there are cognition and mood symptoms which include misremembering the event, having negative thoughts, and feeling guilty. Today, the prevalence of PTSD among veterans has been on the rise since 2000, peaking in 2011 and 2012 following the Iraq War, and the average PTSD prevalence in US personnel is around 10-20% today (“Post-Traumatic Stress”). As reported by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as of 2019, around 8 million people in the US have PTSD in a given year, and between 11-20% who served in US-led conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have PTSD (“How Common is PTSD in Veterans?”). However, Katherine N. Boone argued that PTSD emerged “as much from politics as from medicine” as a “disorder” (19). In her 1995 article, neuroscientist Nancy Andreasen claimed that it was “rare to find a psychiatric diagnosis that anyone [liked] to have, but PTSD [seemed] to be one of them” (Andreasen 964). According to her, a diagnosis of PTSD affirmed the patient’s “normality” rather than sickness, therefore it did not have to be treated. Decades later, similar ideas are still present today.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been “a structured normalization of struggles over the broken embodiments of combat soldiers and a naturalization of trauma,” a process in which state propaganda has been a prominent element (Moss and Prince 217). As an example, to lessen the stigma that persuade soldiers against seeking treatment, Peter Chiarelli, the operational commander of the American ground forces in

Iraq, founded the brain health research organization One Mind with the aim of redefining PTSD by dropping the word “disorder” as an alternative for “injury” (Jaffe). According to Chiarelli, “injury” suggests that one can heal with proper treatment; on the other hand, “disorder” suggests that something is “permanently wrong” (Jaffe). Similarly, Frank Ochberg, a professor of psychiatry, argued that PTSD is “more like a bullet wound or a broken leg than a typical mental disorder or disease,” because trauma, whether it is a shocking combat or a car crash, is “so overwhelming that it alters the physiology of the brain” and changes the way the victim’s memory works (Jaffe). In the same vein, former US presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama used the term “post-traumatic stress” without “disorder” (R. T. Smith and Whooley 39).

It is undeniable that “silence” and “shame” are still “perennial themes” in the modern age of combat (Moss and Prince 217). Upon return from service, a large number of veterans struggle to reconstruct their identity with recurring notions of “stigma” and “vulnerability” (Cheney et al. 5). As research revealed, stigmatizing terms such as “crazy,” “mental health patients,” and the military attitude which often pressures veterans to “suck it up,” enhance the feelings of “weakness” and “failure” (5). These long-established attitudes result in veterans’ distress, alcohol and drug use, and discourage them from seeking mental health treatment (5). The military ethos of “toughing it out” tied to masculinity still remains persistent in military today, and around 60% of veterans deny treatment, believing that seeking mental help might be discerned as a “weakness” (R. T. Smith and Whooley 41).

At this point, it is useful to consider Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation and hailing since the ideology the veterans internalize make them think that they should avoid looking weak at all costs. According to him, ideology represents “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” whether it is religious, ethical, or political ideology (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 163). It is almost impossible for individuals to exist outside ideology especially in the military. As Althusser explains, ideologies do not have “an ideal or spiritual” existence but a “material” one (*Lenin and Philosophy* 166). This material existence is embodied in

language as it is one of the spheres where ideologies can be laid bare. More importantly, ideologies have the “function of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (172). Individuals internalize ideologies to an extent that they constitute their “reality” which appears to be “true.” Two ideological state apparatuses—the military and government—expect soldiers to act in compliance with their patriotic expectations (Althusser, *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism* 120). Althusser defines this operation as “interpellation” or “hailing” (175). Following the 9/11 attacks, when President Bush declared that his message for people to fight against the enemy was “for everybody who wears the uniform,” he set an example of how rhetoric can be used as a tool to interpellate the members of the military (Ehrenberg et. al. 483). Failing to fit into the assumptions about being a “true” soldier after facing with the discrepancy between the expectations and reality, some soldiers undergo PTSD in a more severe way. Nevertheless, “a concern for “being seen as weak” is cited as the most prevalent barrier” to seeking treatment (Thomson 1).

PTSD has become almost central to US military ideology today. PTSD and war trauma have become “integral to operational goals of the military,” and with this integration, both terms have been “naturalized” to a point where they are perceived as “normal” or expected for veterans (Moss and Prince 217). Likewise, many veterans merge war trauma with their ideas of “what a soldier is or should be” (219). Both traumas and wounded bodies of veterans have become “the battleground on which the flows of psychiatric, military, pastoral, state, and familial power play out” (217). In this battleground, veterans’ identities and their “ongoing reconstituting presence” in war, recovery, homecoming, and everyday life are “at stake” (214). Even after homecoming, traumas and memories of war have a fundamental effect on veterans’ daily life and reconfiguration of their identity. According to social psychological theory, one’s “identity, self-definitions, and meanings” that are used for a specific social position—in this case, veteran identity—“fosters individual purpose in life” and “affects behavior in specific social situations” (Adams et al. 1). As a psychosocial factor, veteran identity can be utilized as a “protective factor for veteran well-being” (1). Research suggests that

veterans with a “more central” veteran identity are “less likely to suffer from physical and mental health problems compared to veterans with a less central veteran identity” (Adams et al. 3). However, there are many “adjusted” veterans who can “reenact their broken embodiments under specific (and sometimes imposed) circumstances” (Moss and Prince 226). Today, while the recent DSM-V defines PTSD as a disorder, the shifting definition of the condition “diluted its fit for soldiers” who try to give meaning to their experience and readjustment to civilian life (R. T. Smith and Whooley 42). Veterans display compound subjectivities not as “an indiscernible mess,” but as “strategic embodied formulations that can hold a shape” in their new identity as a veteran (Moss and Prince 225). Thus, veteran identity offers them an area where trauma and atrocities of war are “managed through cultural systems such as soldiering, camaraderie, fatherhood, and fraternity,” making it less stigmatizing in their view (225).

One of the most common treatments for PTSD is Written Exposure Therapy (WET), an exposure-based psychotherapy in which the patients write about their traumatic experience. This can be an example of “therapeutic intervention,” named “scriptotherapy,” which is “writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable” (S. Smith 22). Another treatment is Prolonged Exposure Therapy, founded on “emotional processing theory” according to which traumas are “not processed emotionally at the time of the event” (qtd. in Watkins et al. 3). What Ackerman does in his books is not much different than what these treatments achieve in principle. He reconnects with the places where he fought, both physically and emotionally, and turns to writing to make sense of his deployment, to “process” it emotionally at a later time. Research reveals that veterans’ reconstruction of their military encounters might be more crucial than their actual experiences. How and what veterans remember about their wartime service later on determines the meaning and importance of these experiences. Furthermore, memory is so crucial that it “may not be military experiences themselves that determine health and well-being as much as how veterans assess them” (Settersten et al. 21). Through literature or social spheres, the act of sharing war memories “may reinforce the

centrality of service in the identities and personal life stories of veterans,” either as marks of “pride” or “difficulty” (21). Research suggests that Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, a group of which Ackerman was part, used mental health services at higher rates than those deployed to other locations (Hoge et al. 1028). Although dreams “could surely be classified as PTSD,” for Ackerman, “the more insidious form of PTSD” is actually “the purposelessness associated with giving up the war” (*Places and Names* 76). Nevertheless, for him, the cure for his purposelessness lies in writing, which helps him to better understand and make sense of his deployment in the aftermath of his wars. Shortly after returning from Iraq, the Marine Corps had Ackerman complete a form to detect PTSD. He recounts: “It was a long list of symptoms. I ticked ‘No’ on every box” (Ackerman, “After Our”). In fact, the first months after his post-deployment were “a celebration.” That celebration was a way to take their lives “out of the darkness and hold them to the light.” Therefore, Ackerman’s perspective of war has evolved over time. Whilst he initially thought that his return from war was something to celebrate, he later realized that it was, in fact, an escape “out of the darkness,” from what he went through in war. Eventually, Ackerman’s post-war perspective becomes more constructive and positive as he reveals:

[T]he traumas that create post-traumatic stress also create conditions for post-traumatic growth — broadly defined as a “positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.” Although post-traumatic growth has long been a theme in religious and spiritual teachings, it is only in the past 25 years that mainstream psychology has acknowledged that those who survive trauma might benefit from a stronger personal makeup and greater capacities for compassion. (“After Our”)

Ackerman draws a parallel between being an exile and being an expatriate. While “exile” connotes banishment from one’s homeland, “expatriate” usually refers to those who do not live in their own country; therefore it lacks the political nuance. As he puts it, “the wars can make expatriates of us all—someone who is defined by one place but lives in another” (O’Neill). While living in the US as a veteran, Ackerman’s identity was partially shaped by his service in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to him, one is able to craft his/her identity regardless of the possible trauma s/he might have been exposed to. The places where he lived as a Marine are no less “home” than the US.

Even though the people he cared about most in the world lived in his homeland, his closest friends proved to be the people he was deployed with.

While crafting his identity, writing took on almost a therapeutic meaning for Ackerman as a way to make peace and declare the war over for himself even though it includes returning to those places and memories of his exile and war. He believes that being a veteran helped him in the sense that it made it easier for people to approach him because they “want to know those stories” (“Veterans in America”). He describes the motive behind writing *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* and his return to those places in these words:

[I]n my journalism (and in the book), I go back to some of the places where I fought. I’ve since been asked if that was cathartic, and the truth is: not really. Perhaps it would be cathartic if the wars weren’t still going on in those places – like how Vietnam vets return to a booming Ho Chi Minh City or World War II vets return to the beaches in France. But in places like Fallujah [in Iraq] or the Hindu Kush [mountain range in Afghanistan], the war is still going on, so returning feels more like the updating of an experience as opposed to the closure of an experience. And that gets to one of the things that’s been challenging in these “forever wars”: everyone who has returned [home] has ultimately had to make their own separate peace, declaring the war over for themselves even as it continues. (Kuz)

For him, going back to those places and writing about them have become a way of making his own separate peace. Yet, to understand what he thinks is not the only reason why he writes. As someone who grew up around books as a son of a novelist mother, the idea of writing “always felt natural” to him (“War Veteran”). This feeling is reminiscent of Adorno’s notion of writing as something that creates a “home” space as quoted by Said: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (qtd. in *Reflections on Exile* 568). Writing proves to be a place to live for Ackerman who writes to understand himself and his wars.

1.2. DEPICTION OF EXILE IN *PLACES AND NAMES: ON WAR, REVOLUTION, AND RETURNING*

Ackerman’s fifth book, *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), recounts his return to Syria and Iraq, covering the period between 2013 and 2016 when

he was retrospectively traveling in the Middle East. On the book's cover is a photograph taken by the French photographer Jérôme Sessini in Syria, Aleppo, on February 16, 2013, depicting Al-Amria front line. Ackerman's memoir mainly takes place in Syria, a strategic point where he psychologically "returns" to his memories in Afghanistan and Iraq, making the reader travel between the deep-seated, complex knots of a former Marine's mind. He did not know his work would become *Places and Names* until he came across a painting of Edmund Burke at the National Portrait Gallery in London (O'Neill). His girlfriend Lea Carpenter, also a novelist, compared Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* to what Ackerman was doing at that time. Burke "wrote about the French Revolution as a way to understand the failed British experience in the American colonies 10 years prior," and Ackerman was "writing about the Syrian civil war for the past 10 years as a way of reckoning with America's failed experience in Iraq and Afghanistan" (O'Neill). For her, "when you look at one experience and another experience looks back at you, that is a reflection" (O'Neill). In *Edward Said's Concept of Exile*, Rehnuma Sazzad—Research Associate at the Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies (CCLPS) at the University of London—also concludes that in exile, "self-reflection becomes the paradoxical benefit" (18). Ackerman explains his motive behind writing the book as follows:

[S]o if you look in this memoir, a lot of it is grappling with what these experiences mean. . . . If the experience is at the center of a circle, it's me trying to stand at every single point on the circumference of that circle to look at that experience from all angles—from the person I was when I was 24 to the person I became as a writer to meeting with the people I fought against . . . [to] the perspective of a Syrian activist in that country's revolution. So in many respects the journey of the book is sort of this circular journey around this circumference and then right at the middle of it are these combat experiences. (Kelly)

Places and names may change, but the present is always reminded of the past, and vice versa, offering a perspective that might otherwise be absent. In this memoir, as a veteran, Ackerman revisits the locations where he previously fought. No matter how far his "home" was, there was something in those foreign places that pulled him there. When he returned to those places as a journalist years later, the Syrian Civil War was

looking back at him, providing him with a standpoint that enabled him to reflect on his life, war, exile, and veteran identity.

In his memoir, Ackerman first visits Turkey, where he lived in the Turkish town of Gaziantep near the Syrian border with his friend Matt, an American who worked in Iraq and Afghanistan as a teacher. Unlike Ackerman, Matt did not fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, both have been “affected” by the war in “much the same way,” evidenced by the fact that they have “journeyed here, for a litany of reasons, but none greater than to take a look at another war” (*Places and Names* xvii) as veterans who can never really come home (O’Neill). Standing near the Iraq-Syria border, Matt and Ackerman reflect on Iraq and Afghanistan. They cross the border to witness “the end of a revolution, the beginning of a war,” where one’s exile ends and the other’s begins (*Places and Names* xix). What they see across the border is “familiar enough”; it is “an urban battle waged in this part of the world,” but they watch in a different context, as “this isn’t [their] war” (xvii). Ackerman observes a place where he has never been before. The looks he takes “seem to be looks back—as if, watching the fight ahead of [them],” he might understand the one behind him, “the violence” that he “witnessed in the last decade.” Ackerman and Matt talk about “Iraq and Afghanistan, swapping stories of places—towns, villages, other valleys of death—intoning the familiar names like spells” (9).

Looking at Fallujah, a city built on layers of destruction that came with war, Ackerman tries to “imagine” the place differently as if he could recreate the city in his mind, trying to relocate the hope and fate of the West to the East. Being capable of comparison is a fundamental “pleasure” of exile which makes Ackerman capable of perceiving both the US and Fallujah, the East and the West as a veteran who has experiences in both places. Another comparison between seemingly non-relevant places exists within memory, as it functions as a bridge between the past and the present. In 2014 in Istanbul, while walking with Vince, a former Marine who was now working as English teacher, Ackerman asks him the reason why he stays in Istanbul. Vince “talks a bit about his job, the parts of the city he likes, the parts of other cities he doesn’t like. But in the end he

decides on “[t]o be close to it” (*Places and Names* 75). That “it” turns out to be something significant and puzzling. For Ackerman, it is the same “it” many veterans need to be close to. It is not “a cause,” although it “can be,” and it is not “a particular war,” but it is “often that too” (75). He describes it as “an experience so large that you shrink to insignificance in its presence. And that’s how you get lost in it” (75). It is the same “it” that drives him to Istanbul, a place close and safe enough to keep an eye on what is going on in Syria, along with Iraq and Afghanistan where he previously fought. What pulls him to these places at the expense of being far from his homeland is his veteran identity along with the closest friends, fellow exiles he met on the way.

Despite being in exile, there is an emotional connection between Ackerman and these places because of his veteran experience. This experience repeatedly drives him to these places, for which there is “hardly language adequate” since they include “everything from the most collective of collective sentiments to the most private of private emotions” (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 177). Ackerman reflects on his present exile to better understand his past. Exile, for him, is quintessentially linked with loss. Whether Ackerman achieves to find what he is looking for or not, “the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (*Reflections on Exile* 173). He searches for the thing that has left its mark on him and pulls him back to this part of the world almost like a magnet, whether it is Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria. When asked about how often his war memories come back to him, he feels as if he is asked to “disintermediate” the “wartime” parts of him from the “peacetime,” “non-war” parts. It is challenging for him to do so, because the war in which he fought was “the defining event” of his life (Westenfeld). It is “tough” for him to describe how the war might have affected him, because, in fact, the war “made” him (Westenfeld). It is only fitting that Ackerman feels belonged to the places that were not his “home.” He was “compelled” to return to these places; he desired to “be present at events that felt like they were defining the time,” as it is “an experience that’s so large that you kind of lose yourself in it, and it’s bigger than you are” (Fazio). What pulls Ackerman there is his attachment to the warfront, which is his exile. Returning to the places where he fought

“offers no closure” (*Places and Names* 114). Furthermore, “it does not end an experience, but only adds to it. And if what [he is] doing is additive, then [his] war is not over” (114).

Ackerman acknowledges that he will “always” be living in a “strange” type of exile, in which he is defined by places where he “might return to someday” (*Places and Names* 55). Certain cities in the Middle East are the places that “have never been far” from his thoughts, as they are even more defining than the experiences he had in his homeland. Although he returns to these places in his memoir, as Said states, “no return to the past is without irony,” or “without a sense that a full return, or repatriation, is impossible” (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). Although veterans often feel the need to avoid places, thoughts, and feelings that might remind them of their war, Ackerman feels compelled to return to those places. The most important place he returns to is Fallujah, Iraq. Fallujah is a city where more than 300,000 people live, and it had been “a lingering threat ever since it was bypassed by U.S. troops in the initial run-up to Baghdad” (Blanding). When Ackerman tells Iraqis that he was in Fallujah in 2004, they want to know why he has chosen to come back. “To see what it was like now,” Ackerman replies (*Places and Names* 205). They look back at him, “perplexed,” only to say “it is just as you left it” (205). An Iraqi asks him what he is doing in Fallujah, whether he got “lost,” a question to which Ackerman does not reply, the same way he does not reveal the reason why he left the military (210). Although veterans oftentimes have a tendency to “suck it up” in order not to seem weak, Ackerman insists on facing things related to his war. He revisits both the places and the memories of war, which are always intertwined:

[M]y eyes cast out in specific directions, searching for hard-fought neighborhoods and alleyways, for unrepaired scars on the buildings. I am searching for the marks we left behind. I see them everywhere, commingled with the marks left by others. They have become the city, both battlefield and home. (*Places and Names* 199)

In the meantime, Ackerman forms close friendships with a number of people around the border. Yet, one of them stands out and becomes a major figure throughout the book: Abu Hassar, a former al-Qaeda fighter who does not speak English. Ackerman and Abu

Hassar meet through Abed, a young Damascene activist from the early days of the revolution and a poet who speaks English and acts as a translator between Ackerman and Abu Hassar. Abu Hassar is an important person in the narrative, through the depiction of whom Ackerman, as an exilic intellectual, displays what he has positively gained from his exile experience as a veteran. Abed comes up to Ackerman one day and says: “He [Abu Hassar] fought in Iraq for al-Qaeda . . . but I think you two would really get along” (*Places and Names* 13). In fact, they eventually get along unexpectedly well.

Accompanying to the estrangement of exile, Ackerman feels a constant fear of getting lost. At some point, Abu Hassar asks Ackerman a question that no one has ever asked him before: “When were you the most afraid in Iraq?” (28). “His question stops me,” recalls Ackerman. “Getting lost,” he replies. As an officer, Ackerman used to lead patrols, sometimes “in the middle of nowhere, just our column of Humvees and nothing but desert,” where it was easy to get lost. The shame of “[g]etting on the radio, telling everyone to stop and turn around because [he] was lost” was his “greatest fear” (29). Living with constant sense of lostness and disorientation in exile, Ackerman is “still afraid of getting lost,” and to this day, he has a large map software in his phone (29). During his years of service, he “never once got lost on patrol.” However, after having “thought about what Abu Hassar said, and coming home from the wars,” Ackerman has “learned there are other ways to get lost” (30). Although Ackerman returns home from the wars, he does not feel the safety and comfort of being “at home,” for he cannot be “at home” when he is far from the places where he fought, places which become more significant than his homeland to him. He eventually feels lost in his homeland rather than in the foreign countries where he fought. That fear of being lost brings him closer to the places and people which he would not normally consider as being familiar.

For Ackerman, the places where he fought and had inefaceable experiences are “intermarried” with his present life (Westenfeld). In exile, homeland is unattainable, and it wistfully stays as a memory. His ventures in a distant part of the world constitute an inseparable part of his life, a past which he keeps revisiting. The memories of places where he fought and those of his homeland flood back to Ackerman. He keeps revisiting

these foreign places, places of his war, only to realize that they are not foreign at all. While they were foreign at first, over time, anything outside of these places start to seem foreign. For Ackerman, the fact that so many of them “went to war in this part of the world, only to return, seems no surprise” (*Places and Names* 75). What makes these places so crucial is not their topography or location but their memories in mind; it is how they are remembered. One day, in Washington, D.C., Ackerman meets with Jack, one of his old friends who still served the US military. They talk about PTSD and whether they have it or not. Ackerman says he never sees dreams, but sometimes gets “very sad” (76). He still has flashbacks as part of his PTSD, when “an idea, a memory, will suddenly come to mind,” and he usually winds up crying. Later, he tells Jack that he “missed the war,” to which Jack nods and replies: “the melancholy of it all is that we grew up there” (77). The idea of growing up “there,” in Iraq and Afghanistan where he fought, evidences his persistent connection to these foreign places. Thus, exile becomes an inevitable part of himself, a state of being which is perfectly told by Mahmoud Darwish in his “Who Am I, Without Exile?”:

What will we do ... what
will we do without exile, and a long night
that stares at the water? (Al-Musawi 182)

While exile is a state of absolute loss with inherent misery, like Darwish, Ackerman feels lost in his home country. The warfront where he experiences exile as a Marine becomes the place he feels belonged if he ever can. Exile is “never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure” (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 186). While the places and memories of his war never abandon him, Ackerman feels neither fulfilled nor content when he returns to these places. When one experiences exile, security is lost forever.

1.3. EXILE AS AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE IN *PLACES AND NAMES: ON WAR, REVOLUTION, AND RETURNING*

Although Ackerman’s experience in exile as a Marine involves physical dangers, it also has positive consequences for him. In *Places and Names*, exile endows Ackerman with

a plurality of vision. This plurality enables him to be capable of comparison and see commonalities between seemingly distinct political stances, places, and people. Being able to look at a concept or an event from various angles makes him a more understanding, considerate individual. Through exile, Ackerman crosses physical, metaphorical, and linguistic borders. It allows him to defy the conventional beliefs around nations, identities, and ideologies as a veteran. This plurality of vision shifts between time and place, often through self-reflection. “The Revolution Is Over, or The Music Will Live Forever,” the first and only chapter in the book without a date reflects the multiple points of view he has gained. It begins in a town along the Syrian-Turkish border. “The revolution is over. The war can begin,” Ackerman begins (xiii). The revolution refers to the protests and civil uprising that started in Dara’a, Damascus and Aleppo, when “a feverish atmosphere of anticipation prevailed throughout Syria in early 2011 as people sensed that events in Tunisia and Egypt had changed political opportunity structures in their country as well” (Leenders and Heydemann 141). However, it is challenging to understand when exactly Ackerman verbalizes these reflections. Instead of merely stating the time, he presents certain references to the reader to find out “when” the events take place. While watching the smoke coming up from Azaz, a town in northwest Syria—a city he has not been to—Ackerman contemplates Steven Sotloff, an American journalist who was kidnapped in Aleppo on August 4, 2013 by Daesh and beheaded a year later.

As Ackerman looks back on his history from a border hamlet of Azaz where he did not fight, he remembers his wars. Despite the fact that he has never visited the town before, he does not feel stranger to it. As a veteran of other wars, he is “close to something familiar” (xiii). When he is “staring past the gates, past the concertina wire and then farther up the road,” what he sees is Syria; but “what doggedly looks back is the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan: a reflection” of his war and his exile (xviii). The view of Syria turns into a reminder of two different places and names: Iraq and Afghanistan. In a metaphorical sense, he simultaneously feels in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and feels both at present and also in the past, which is supposedly left behind. As Said

would say, “What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses” (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). In this case, instead of mourning for his past, Ackerman, as an exilic intellectual, is endowed with different points of view through which he makes meaning of the past. He sees both the past and the present as a cohesive whole which makes him feel safe as if he is at home. If he had not been a veteran who once fought near this place, being close to Syrian border and observing the war would have rendered him an uncomfortable outsider. When Daesh captures al-Anbar (Iraq) and ar-Raqqah (Syria) Provinces on the first days of the New Year, 2014, Ackerman looks back on his own advances in the same place ten years ago, but this time with fresh eyes and the different set of lenses Said writes about:

[T]hey lean on their horns, turning out the crowds—a parade renewed along the streets where I spent my early twenties fighting. In the years since, those streets have never been far from my thoughts. Like Abed and his uncle, I am, and forever will be, living in a strange type of exile, an expatriate of places like Fallujah, Hit, Haditha, and others that barely dot a map. Like any expat, I am defined by a place I might return to someday, the idea that somewhere on my life’s horizon is a time when I’ll again walk those streets knowing my war is finished. In reaction to the Islamic State’s gains across al-Anbar, a chorus of pundits wonders about the cost of America’s war in Iraq. Marines I fought alongside are quoted in newspapers across the country. They appear on television programs, their voices wrestling with a single question: Was it all a waste? I have a hard time pinning down my emotions about this. Instead a memory keeps looping in my mind, flickering like old archive footage. (*Places and Names* 55)

Ackerman will always live “in a strange type of exile,” yearning to go back to the places where he fought and through which he obtained his veteran identity. Fallujah, Hit, Haditha, are only some of the places that he is defined by as a veteran. He finds it difficult to answer whether it was all a waste or not, since the war and his veteran identity are results of the same experience. Perhaps he will never be able to answer this question, but his memories of exile will always loop in his mind, reminding his veteran identity and exile that always accompanies it.

“Back to the City” chapter dates back to Autumn 2016, a time when Ackerman has been “running from one ministry to another, making phone calls, emailing the US embassy, asking favors of friends, and then favors of friends of friends,” all because he wants to “be in Fallujah” (191). He wants to return there because his veteran identity is closely

tied to Fallujah. And the reason why he wants to compare Fallujah of the past and Fallujah of the present is that Fallujah is, in fact, not really “past” at all. The fact that he desires to go back reveals his “loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth” (*Reflections on Exile* 179). It is this solidity, the sense of belonging and familiarity of Fallujah that he longs to return:

[I]n Fallujah there is a doorway I want to stand in. Dan Malcom was shot and killed trying to cross its threshold as he stepped onto a rooftop twelve years ago. A sniper’s bullet found its mark beneath his arm, just under the ribs. In Fallujah there is a building I want to stand on top of. It was a candy store. The day after Dan was killed, my platoon fought a twelve-hour firefight from its rooftop. That was the worst day of the battle. That doorway in Fallujah, that rooftop—I remember exactly where they are. (191)

Anything Ackerman sees in Fallujah after twelve years is a reflection on his past. Both Both the old Fallujah of his memories and Fallujah of the present are “vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally” for him (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 186). This superimposition is the closest he could ever get to feel “satisfied, placid, or secure” (186). After twelve years, “everything is unchanged . . . A picket of minarets stab heavenward, their sides paneled with crumbling mosaics. Everything anyone has ever built in this city is pocked with bullet holes” (*Places and Names* 195). He feels partly responsible for the destruction of the city, hence visiting Fallujah as a veteran, “feels like walking through New Orleans if your name is Hurricane Katrina” (197). Even though he is able to compare Fallujah with its past through his exile, it is not the same Fallujah he left more than a decade ago:

I try to imagine this place differently, not as a battlefield but as a community of homes and businesses. Many of our most iconic cities—Rome, Istanbul, Athens—have a layered architectural aesthetic, each population having built on what its predecessors created. Fallujah is different. It is defined not by creation but rather by destruction. (199)

Ackerman had “never seen the candy store from the outside in daylight,” one of the places in Fallujah where he had one of the most distressing moments of his life, a moment in which he was face to face with death (198). “A rusted mesh fence, padlocked shut, encircles the building.” He climbs up the side, and by the time he is on the rooftop, he is “covered in familiar dust,” so familiar, so inherent in his veteran identity that it is

still with him after twelve years: “[I] guess I would equate visiting the candy store again as akin to bumping into a lover from your past, one who broke your heart but for whom you can’t help but feel some affection” (“Re: A Question, An Entreaty.”). Although he is heartbroken, he still carries certain feelings which are so significant that they grow into an affection. He equates seeing the candy store after all those years with “seeing that person’s face across a room, a blend of heartache and exhilaration” (“Re: A Question, An Entreaty.”). Ackerman, contrary to what is expected from a veteran, has a fondness for these places. Despite of all the risks and distress he faced there during the war, he still feels exhilarated whenever he gets close to them. It is owing to his exilic perspectives that he is able to question the wars and his role in them, which probably is the source of his heartbreak.

The “Fourth War” chapter takes place in 2013 in a refugee camp in Akçakale, a border-town in southern Turkey, where Ackerman, Abed, and Abu Hassar sit together at a café. It shows how three veterans from three opposing sides of a war are able to find a “unifying thread” between them (*Places and Names* 22). Ackerman reveals the unanticipated similarities they share despite their differences. He writes that “even in the abstract, I feel a connection to [Abu Hassar], but the hope that he’ll feel the same toward me could prove to be naive, even a bit delusional” (14).

When they first meet, there is both a political and a linguistic barrier between them as they solely rely on Abed to translate their exchanges. Abed has a “perfect British accent,” owing to the time he spent in London and a position he formerly held in the British Consulate’s cultural division (14). Along the way, the car “becomes quiet, the silence awkward” (17). Trying to make a small talk, Ackerman asks Abu Hassar if his whole family is in the camp, and Abed translates their conversation. Abu Hassar answers yes and returns the question to Ackerman. “Yes,” Ackerman says, and instantly feels the need to correct himself: “I mean, they’re back home.” They constantly switch languages, while depending on their experiences to connect them. The three exiles cross the language border. Once inside the café, they “awkwardly” take their seats, “not sure who should go where” (18). Ackerman sits next to Abu Hassar “on the same bench.”

Symbolically, this is where they get the closest: from two opposing sides of the war to the same bench.

At first, Ackerman introduces himself as a journalist who worked in Iraq to avoid tension. Until he confesses the truth of his being a former Marine, “three veterans from three different sides of a war that has no end in sight” are sitting together (22). It is “not the Syrian Civil War, or the Iraq War, but a larger regional conflict. Amidst all of this, Abu Hassar has hit on a unifying thread between [them]: friendships born out of conflict, the strongest we’ve ever known” (22). In fact, this thread is their veteran identity, which unites them despite having directly fought on opposing sides. This thread is the reason why Ackerman “sought out Abu Hassar: to see if that thread binds two people who’ve fought against each other.” He wonders why Abu Hassar met with him. Maybe he, just as Ackerman, “has become tired of learning the ways we are different,” and “wishes to learn some of the ways [they] are the same” (22).

This is another point which shows that Ackerman, as an exilic intellectual, brushes aside orthodox judgment and conventional perspectives. Although Said thinks that exiles are “eccentrics” who sense their differences no matter how well they may endure, Ackerman prefers to focus on their similarities rather than differences, which Abu Hassar also encourages him to. (*Reflections on Exile* 182). After he reveals that he was a Marine who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, Abu Hassar picks up the water that has been on the table, pours a full glass in front of him, and hands it to Ackerman. “A captain,” Abu Hassar says, “So we were both like the handle of the spear” (23). Ackerman nods and drinks the last of Abu Hassar’s water. The fact that the first thing Abu Hassar does after learning that Ackerman was once his “enemy” is sharing his water with him proves their shared position as veterans. Although exiled from two distant lands, both feel close enough to share their last sip of water, the source of life. If “to be rooted” is “the most important and least recognized need of the human soul,” here, at this table, to share and to be understood are also added to the list of needs of the human soul (Weil 40).

Although Abu Hassar and Ackerman do not speak one another's languages, they manage to connect with each other owing to their veteran identities. They try to communicate about their wars, from their personal perspectives. For Abu Hassar, as someone who fought in Iraq for al-Qaeda, war has a very different meaning than it has for Ackerman. For him, it means jihad, and fighting for it was his "true happiness" (21). Abu Hassar sees war as his "duty" and he "thirsted for paradise," and believed that "in God's eyes the straightest road there was jihad" (23). At one point, he states that jihadists are "as keen for death as Americans are for life" (24). Unlike Abu Hassar, Ackerman sees war as a "bad idea," and although he does not regret his choice, he regrets "being asked to choose" (23). In an interview with Baird, Ackerman explains the reasoning behind presenting Abu Hassar's perspective in his book:

[W]hy is his perspective not legitimate? Of course it's legitimate. And if you were going to try to draw that character, why would you want to do it in an overly simplistic way? When I'm writing a character—even a character who is despicable—I think the onus is on me to write that character as though they were making their case in front of God. To give them all the urgency they can possibly have, to give them all the credibility they can possibly have, so that they can make their case. . . There's a case there. (Baird)

The reader who watches the news at home as an outsider would not think of an al-Qaeda militant the way Ackerman depicts him. It is owing to Ackerman's and Abu Hassar's veteran experiences that Ackerman is able to see how they mirror each other rather than how they differ. For "normal" residents, the "precarious sense of expression" comes "easy and natural," while it requires an "almost excessive deliberation, effort, expenditure of intellectual energy at restoration, reiteration, and affirmation" for exiles (*Reflections on Exile* xxxiii). This requirement makes exile valuable, as it leads to a constructive outcome with an expanded intellect and understanding. For Said, this effort and deliberation furnish exilic intellectuals with "insights not ordinarily available to others" fitting to the insight and perspectives Ackerman has acquired thanks to his exile (Sardar and Yassin-Kassab 258). Ackerman considers Abu Hassar's exile to be a significant experience since it represents the "other's" perspective and provides him with a new viewpoint. Although Abu Hassar and Ackerman come from very different backgrounds, the dialogues with Abu Hassar help Ackerman make sense of his own

exile experience. While war brings them together, both are in a place where they did not fight before. If veteran identity is considered as a common denominator of their exile, it is possible to draw historical parallels between them. As Said argues, in previous ages, exiles,

. . . had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks,” but there is a difference between earlier and present day exile, which is their “scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration. (*Reflections on Exile* 174)

Ackerman and Abu Hassar are exiles of our age. Still, Abu Hassar seems to enjoy the Christmas story Ackerman tells him, a story from World War I about how the German and British soldiers played soccer known as the Christmas Truce. “What did they do the next day?” Abu Hassar asks Ackerman (20). He replies: “[They] went back in their trenches and killed each other for another four years” (20). Abu Hassar laughs after hearing the story. A Christmas story might seem bizarre to tell a former jihadist, yet, Ackerman thinks this story may help achieve a partial common ground where their differences and former antagonism lose their importance as they begin to view each other as veterans in exile, leading Ackerman to depict Abu Hassar as a friend of his in the book. The connection achieved between Ackerman and Abu Hassar defy borders of ideologies, memory, and nations. Sitting together at the small table, the two veterans with different standpoints, spell out their motives, pride, and sorrow, even though it was possible for them to kill each other during war. In exile, ideologies and politics may lose their dividing force, only to unearth the deep-rooted impulses to show what it means to be an enemy, and an ally. In Ackerman’s case, exile is transformed into a “potent,” “enriching” device which helps him see things through the other’s point of view as an exilic intellectual (*Reflections on Exile* 173). The way Ackerman reflects on his friendship with Abu Hassar in an interview reveals this:

[W]hat I recognized in my relationship with Abu Hassar . . . was that those conflicts . . . were all interrelated, were the defining events of our twenties and thirties . . . and in that way, we were similar. As we grew older and recognized the significance of those events with the perspective of time, we began to want to understand those events from every vantage point possible, which included the

vantage points of the people who had been our antagonists. We could see that there were many ways we had been similarly defined. Someone like Abu Hassar, who fought in Iraq at the same time as I did, in the same places that I did—I feel that I have more in common with Abu Hassar than many of the people I grew up with who didn't go to the wars. (Westenfeld)

Ackerman not only empathizes with Abu Hassar, but also acknowledges that he is someone with whom he shares a common ground. This experience is most visible when Abed, who has been translating Ackerman and Abu Hassar's dialogues, excuses himself to go to the washroom, leaving them next to each other on the same side of the table. Ackerman describes the situation as follows:

[W]ithout our interpreter the space between us becomes awkward. I open my notebook to a clean page. I begin to draw. First, I sketch out a long, oscillating ribbon running from the top left to the bottom right of the page: the Euphrates. Abu Hassar quickly recognizes this. He takes the pencil from my hand and draws the straight borderline between Iraq and Syria, one that cuts through a tabletop of hardpan desert. Along the border he's made, I write a single name: al-Qaim. Next to that name, Abu Hassar writes 06.2005. I nod back and write, 09.2004. I travel farther down the Euphrates and write another name and another date. Our hands now chase each other's around the map, mimicking the way we'd once chased each other around this country. Haditha: 07.2004 / 02.2005. Hit: 10.2004 / 11.2006. On it goes. (*Places and Names* 27)

In that moment, all juxtaposition and antagonism that might have been expected between former enemies dissolve and leave their place for understanding and sympathy. As Said asserts, there is “a unique pleasure . . . if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy” (*Reflections on Exile* 186). Not only the map, but also the way they create it, handing the pencil to each other to connect their past and veteran experiences, demonstrates how borders, lands, and enemies are always provisional to the exile:

[O]nly the dates and place names matter. These are a common language to us, one not even Abed can translate. Had I understood Arabic or had Abu Hassar understood English, I don't think we would've spoken. The small log we make on these two notebook pages contains the truth of our experience. Soon we've filled most of the map. Between us one thing is missing: we have many places that overlap, nearly all of them, but we don't have a single date that does. Abu Hassar looks at me for a moment. I think he's noticed this too. Neither of us says, or tries to say, anything about it. But I think we are both grateful, or at least I am. Abed comes back from the restroom. I turn my notebook to a clean page. (27)

For both of them, it is an exceptional experience that no language can recreate. It defies not only the linguistic barriers but also the supposed border between friend and foe. In fact, “this language of places and names and the dates was a language that [Ackerman and Abu Hassar] shared” (Kelly). He turns his notebook to a “clean” page, as if hiding something confidential between the two, something they share and perhaps Abed cannot understand since he did not fight a war but only took part in a civil war as a protestor; and thus is not allowed to see. Not only the places and names on the map but also their history overlaps in that instant. It is an experience that defies definition and description. It is beyond words and wars, overruling the political discourses and polarizing rhetoric that have been governing the scene for two decades. Despite this, Ackerman conduces to a shared experience between two former “enemies,” who are brought closer in a place where neither belongs. The bond and closeness between them are only made possible by their exile and Ackerman’s veteran identity which brings him back to these places. According to Patrick Bishop, this bond becomes intricate once Ackerman and Abu Hassar inquire their motives behind their wars (“The Vietnam War”).

Just as the shared experiences between Ackerman and Abu Hassar are revealed in the book, there are mutualities between the experiences of Ackerman and Abed too. Ackerman and Abed would “stay up late on the veranda,” smoking cigarettes, contemplating Ackerman’s “failed wars” and Abed’s “failed revolution” (xviii). A former Marine and a former activist, they are “veterans of the same conflict, one in which democratic and high-minded ideals have bogged down in the quagmire of Islamist dogma and sectarian bloodshed” (xviii). Years ago, Ackerman fought on the American side while Abed was fighting on the Syrian side. However, their realities are connected. Ackerman realizes that both of them “reckon with the destruction;” their causes left in their wake; they seek for ways “to move on from the wreckage of [their] experience” (xviii). For him, their past and failures link them together although both are away from their home countries, Abed being closer to his. Although war brings them together in a foreign land, their exiles result from different vantage points. While the driving force behind Abu Hassar’s exile is his identification both as an Arab and a

Muslim, Abed's exile begins as a consequence of his rebellion with the dream of living in a free country. Despite sharing a homeland, Abu Hassar and Abed were on the opposite sides of the revolution. Although Ackerman, Abed, and Abu Hassar are supposed to feel estrangement and distance, understanding and a tendency to find a common ground are visible in their dialogue which Ackerman highlights. As Said puts it, although there is a "sense of dissonance engendered by estrangement, distance, dispersion, years of lostness and disorientation" in exile, it can also be a source of cultivation for the exilic intellectual (*Reflections on Exile* xxxiii).

In "Expatriates" chapter, Abed's history offers Ackerman a different point of view on exile. The chapter takes place in three different places: Gaziantep, Turkey; Damascus, Syria; and Fallujah, Iraq. Although the timestamp of the chapter points to Winter 2014, the reader moves back and forth between places and time, even back to 2004. Years ago, when Abed was called into the army to fight the rebels, he left Syria for Lebanon to cross the border—a decision that would result in his ongoing, perhaps lifelong exile. On his way to the border, Abed was carrying a memory stick and a notebook in his bag, which contained the records of his activities in the revolution. Just as he saw the border agent, he decided to destroy all of his writings:

[T]here was no time left. Abed made a choice. He ripped the pages from his journal, flushing them down the toilet. In these pages, he had written drafts of the slogans he and the other protestors shouted in the streets: "One, one, one, the Syrian people are one!" And he had written what it felt like to shout those slogans at the police, at the soldiers, at the paramilitaries; to shout in the face of a regime that had muzzled him for his entire life. He flushed the memories away, erasing the descriptions written in his hand. The toilet basins didn't fill quickly enough. He ran between the stalls, flushing all the toilets at once while he ripped the pages. He could hear the noise of those protests swirling in his ears, and now, at this dark crossing, in the quiet, the toilets were too loud. Habitual fear toyed with him. *They will burst in on you, Abed. "What is all this flushing?" they'll say. But I once rushed the barricades at the al-Rifai mosque. I once shouted with my whole voice. But that was then, Abed; now the flushing is too loud.* (52)

Abed's uneasiness about annihilating all the reminders of the revolution is of great significance. He has a strong attachment to his cause, the revolution, and his homeland. These memories are more than mere remnants of past as they are inextricably linked with his identity. For Abed, his home and language become "nature," a place where

everything is as it should be. The streets of Syria where he protested, the language in which he wrote his poems, all cross the borders of thought and experience. In the end, Abed is left with “just the flimsy wire of the notebook’s spine, which he tossed outside into the dust” (53). That is when he starts considering “betrayal” to his homeland, which is “the same as a suicide, for what he had just done felt like a bit of both” (53). Minutes later, Abed crosses not only the Lebanese border, but also the borders of his memory, his past, and the revolution, only to wind up in exile. He flushes “the words” of his fellow protesters away, the words that could only be truly felt by the Syrians with whom he shared his cause. Although Abed’s cause was different than Ackerman’s, Ackerman is able to empathize with Abed, a skill he has further developed as an exilic intellectual.

The Assad regime and Daesh are common adversaries for the three exiles. When Ackerman asks Abed if he thinks there is “some young member of the Islamic State marching to Baghdad now, glamorizing his appointment with history,” Abed replies: “[s]adly,” it is “something we all have in common,” which conveys one of the myriad commonalities two opposing sides have (69). With regards to truth, Said considers it “only situational and political,” and “opens up the discipline of history to subaltern writing and intervention” (Walia 18). The idea that truth is provisory empowers the oppressed intellectual or the subaltern to speak for him/herself. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines “subaltern” in an interview with Leon de Kock:

[E]verybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie . . . everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference . . . if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern’s sphere. . . To do *a thing*, to work for the subaltern, means to bring it into speech . . . the worst, that is, you don’t give the subaltern voice. (46)

Through Abed and Abu Hassar, Ackerman gives the subaltern voice, for which he has at times been criticized. Nevertheless, although Abed, Abu Hassar, and Ackerman are on three different sides of the same war and their truths are only situational and political, they are able to find a common ground. According to Ackerman, there was a lot of pride in what Abed and Abu Hassar did for their country, but the result was “the complete

destruction of their country” (Baird). Their pride turned into guilt. The aftermath of their revolution “completely cleft their heart and there’s incredible internal conflict with them,” as they kept asking themselves: “*Am I proud of this? Am I not proud of this? Should we have done it? Should we have not done it?*” (Baird). These are questions that Ackerman also asks himself: “When I think about my wars, and what happened, I do sometimes ask myself if it was worth it” (*Places and Names* 66). However, Ackerman does not think about politics, politicians, or wars, instead, he is “thinking about Pratt and Ames,” and “other friends like him” (66). He “wonder[s] what [they would] say,” and “hope[s] they [would] think what [they] did for each other was worth it” (*Places and Names* 66).

Fluctuating between places, “The Triumph of Death” chapter materializes in seemingly disparate places: Ghouta, Madrid, and Washington, D.C. In the Syrian Revolution’s second year, in May 2013, Republican Senator John McCain met Major General Salim Idris. He who was the former Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army, which was also “the first recognized military opposition group to President Assad” (Sary). In this part of the world where contentious borders and their altered nature intensify the existing internal conflicts, it is arduous to draw a line where a revolution ends, where a war begins, and where and for whom help is needed. If Palestine was the “touchstone case for human rights” in 2000 in Said’s words, today, it has become Syria (*Reflections on Exile* 435). General Idris asks for American help to save his homeland from its very own president, Bashar al-Assad, who attacked his own people perceived as exiles in their homeland. One of these attacks against human rights came in August, 2013, in Ghouta, southwestern Syria, which Ackerman puts into words in an objective and unvarnished manner:

[A]t 2:00 a.m. on August 21, 2013, the weather at Damascus International Airport is clear, 23°C, with 69% humidity. A breeze blows at 11.1 kilometers per hour (6.9 mph) from the west-southwest. By 5:00 a.m., seven rockets, each containing two liters of sarin nerve agent, land in Ghouta, a rebel-held suburb of Damascus, and the temperature drops to 21°C. Then humidity increases to 83%, and the wind increases to a moderate breeze of 22.2 kilometers per hour (13.8 mph) from the southwest. The conditions are ideal: the sarin spreads. There is a full moon, which sets twelve minutes after the sun rises at exactly 6:00 a.m., when the light becomes adequate for hundreds of bodies to be videoed in the streets. (2)

In this section of the memoir, Ackerman chronicles the Ghouta chemical attack, which killed hundreds of civilians including children and animals (“Attacks on Ghouta”). However, the language he uses is far from being sentimental and decorated. Immediately after describing Ghouta, Ackerman writes about Madrid, where he first saw *The Triumph of Death*, a painting by the sixteenth-century Dutch Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The painting represents Death as it leads its armies to destroy the Earth, world of the living. What enables this immediate transition from Ghouta to his memory of seeing *The Triumph of Death* as a child is a confusion, a confusion shared by exiles. As a child, he “could not comprehend Bruegel’s vision” (3). Now, looking at Ghouta and reflecting on his past, he is able to recognize “the same incomprehension expressed on the dead faces of the children in Ghouta” (3). His incomprehension reflects that despite hundreds of years and thousands of miles between *The Triumph of Death* and Ghouta chemical attack, he ties them together in the same cause since they both signify a similar sense of catastrophe and puzzlement.

While exile may be a traumatic event for many people, it partly serves as an enriching experience for Ackerman. He uses writing to make sense of his exile, since it allows him to better understand himself and his experiences. As an exilic intellectual reconnecting with his past, he sees his exile as a valuable experience that has earned him perspectives he would not have acquired if he had not been a veteran. For him, war can “become a device to engage with a larger subject, the one that engages all great art—our shared humanity” (Ackerman, “My Veteran Problem”). For him, exile becomes a device to engage with a larger world, to get closer to our shared humanity in which former “enemies” may find commonalities in their experiences and empathize with one another.

CHAPTER II

MEMORY AND EXILE IN DUNYA MIKHAIL'S *THE BEEKEEPER* (2018)

My heart beat loudly as I looked at its spots, both dark and light. I was worried to be so far from the sphere that was my home — not a specific home, since I've moved from place to place and can't tell which one to call home and which one to call exile. In fact, I don't really care. The spider makes a home outside of itself — it doesn't know the difference between home and exile.

Dunya Mikhail, *The Beekeeper*

Dunya Mikhail was forced to leave her homeland after being placed on the government watchlist in 1995, following the Gulf War. Mikhail was questioned by Saddam Hussein's government and labeled "subversive" due to the content of her writing and poetry (NPR). Speaking and writing in Arabic, Assyrian, and English, Mikhail identified herself as a poet from a young age:

[D]uring my teenage years in Baghdad, I wrote poems as gifts for my friends' birthdays. They called me "the poet." At home, my mother used to mention to our guests that I was busy writing "feelings" as an excuse for me being in my room and not with them. She called the poems "feelings" because in Arabic the two words are close; we call poetry "shi'r" and feeling "shi'ur" and she made her own plural of both words. But my identity as a writer can be traced to a particular time: September 1980. That month, the Iraq-Iran War was announced. All men who could bear arms were called to the battlefield (jabha). "Are they taking women too?" I asked. No, I learned. The reason I asked with concern was that I really wanted to continue my poetry discoveries and be left alone with my writing and not be taken away. (Jarrar)

Her intimacy with poetry would later merge with her intimacy with her homeland. Mikhail published books in Arabic before moving to the United States, where her "consistent anti-war stance" would peak in the "hypnotic clarities of her poems written in exile" (Lieberman). The United States first came into Mikhail's life when she graduated from secondary school. Her father wanted to send her to the US to study,

believing that she could improve her math skills there most advantageously. Mikhail was “so excited,” not about math, but about going to America and “being independent” (Library of Congress). However, as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) had started at that time, Mikhail was not permitted to leave Iraq for the US, which left her disappointed. Believing that the war would not last “forever,” Mikhail decided to study English in the meantime as a preparation for the life that was awaiting her in the US. Back then, she had no idea that she would be forced to flee her homeland because of the censorship she faced after the publication of her third poetry book. While her poetry resulted in exile, her exile inspired her poetry in a rewarding, complementary way in return. This chapter will discuss exile as an enriching experience in *The Beekeeper* by first outlining Mikhail’s exile, followed by examining the way she combines her memories of her homeland with memories of the Yazidis, and it will conclude that although exile was the most critical event in Mikhail’s life, it brought certain “pleasure” that she could not obtain otherwise. Mikhail explains the importance of poetry in her life in these words:

[O]n personal level, poetry saved my life, not in the metaphorical way, it really did. It is written in my Iraqi passport that my profession is “poet.” That helped me leave my country when time was critical and paper work complicated. I would need a leave of absence from my work and that would require then huge paper work and prolonged time while every minute then mattered. As a “poet”, you don’t need a “leave of absence” from anywhere! It was for the sake of freedom of writing that I left, but poetry, in return, gave me the freedom to leave and to live. (“The Trace of Poetry”)

As an exilic intellectual according to the definition of Edward Said, Mikhail’s exile intensifies her bond with her homeland. Exile is “predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one’s native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss” (*Culture and Imperialism* 715). In an interview, Mikhail describes the connection between her exile and poetry. In Iraq, censorship was her “annoying reader hidden behind the true good readers” (Vanasco). As a writer, she confronted a significant challenge “to be understood by the true readers and not by the censors.” She found the solution in adding “more layers of meanings to cover the core meaning, making a sort

of onion-poem” (Vanasco). Although those layers were “good for [her] poetry,” her poetry was still “subversive.” Eventually, “poetry was worth it for someone like [her] to leave the country (Vanasco).

Even if exile is often considered to be a condition of loss, estrangement, uncertainty, and sorrowfulness, it has transformed into a powerful, rewarding state of being for Mikhail. She embodies Said’s perception that exile can be transformed into an enriching motif. She explains how poetry was the greatest strength to transfigure and give meaning to her exile:

[B]ecause of poetry, I never felt in exile. Poetry has been always my country, and when I read other poets I feel that I know them as if they were my neighbors. The first emotional connection I was able to make in my new place (America) was the moment I went back to writing. That very moment you make semantic and semiotic sense of the world and thus you are accompanied by others (the loved and the loving others), not only poets, but everybody. (“The Trace of Poetry”)

For Mikhail, poetry compensates for the feeling of loss that is inherent exile. In poetry, she finds a familiar place which becomes “home.” It is only because poetry provides Mikhail with a space where she is able to understand herself as well as the others. Despite the physical distance between her homeland and her new country, Mikhail reconnects with her home by her poetry. She states: “I felt I was as an exilic writer even when I was in Iraq, but living here in America, I feel that Iraq is far away, Iraq is in exile” (Khan 12). She feels more “belonged” to the place where she is exiled. Linking exile with memory and literature, Mikhail emphasizes how language offers an opportunity for an exile to reconnect with one’s memories of “home,” and thereby serves as the basis of an advantageous duality:

[A] word can occupy only one space in a language. The same way, a human being cannot occupy two spaces at the same time. But, just as the word has more than one connotation, a human being in the exile carries two existences, for the exile becomes a body that bears, in addition to its own meaning, a meaning of another place (strictly the homeland). In another word, the exile, as a term, becomes, for the exiled person, a word with two codes. The second code is usually added by the exile’s memory of his original place. It becomes dual: First, its real substance as a “space,” and second, its “connotation” to the other “place.” Thus, the “here” becomes an occasion to think of “there.” This here/there duality in exile is similar to the structure/function in language. (“Re: Master’s Thesis.”)

This duality of “here” and “there” enables Mikhail to perceive the world from multiple perspectives simultaneously, both in her everyday life and her literary works. Even censorship that was the root cause of her exile becomes a vantage point from which she compares and contrasts Iraq and the US:

[C]ensorship was the main reason I left my country. We had an actual building called The Department of Censorship. The job duties of the employees included looking out for what was “acceptable” or “unacceptable” for people to write and to read. Some of my writing was found “subversive” and “unacceptable.” The Minister of Information and Culture called us once to a meeting with him. I was one of 12 young poets waiting to see what he had called us to meet for. After offering us tea, the minister said, “This modern poetry you are writing does not serve our national interests,” and “Why do you write about the turtle when you mean the war?” We were all silent and listening . . . When I came to America, I found that censorship had no home on the ground, but it was somehow in the air, implicit. Speech here is usually restricted to what is “acceptable.” In other words, censorship precedes speech here in America, as opposed to in Iraq, where censorship follows speech. You wonder when censorship is acceptable, yet censorship wonders when speech is acceptable. (Jarrar)

Comparing two dissimilar places in different parts of the world, Mikhail is able to evaluate not only censorship but also other concepts such as exile, homeland, belonging, and identity from multiple perspectives through her writing. Instead of creating confusion and disorder, her manifold outlooks on existence and life in a broader sense proves to be an enriching experience that renders her more empathetic to others. In Iraq, censorship compelled her to create more layers to hide the core meaning, through the use of metaphors as “shields” (Library of Congress). After moving to the US, Mikhail has not felt the need to use metaphors to hide the meanings to avoid censorship. Instead, she translates her own poetry from Arabic to English, giving her works more than one life as she puts in these words: “My poetry has two lives, like any exile” (Khan 11). For Mikhail, to write a poem in two languages¹ is to “always hold a mirror to the first text while the mirror behaves as if that text is actually her mirror” (7). This double poetry reflects exile “with all of its chances and risks,” Mikhail states (Saeed). One starts to perceive home from a different perspective once in exile. In the same manner, a poem takes on a different meaning once it is written in another language. “Just as home is

¹ The relation between language and exile will be further analyzed in Chapter III by showing how Sharif utilizes language to critique American military strategy through her literary style which makes use of military terminology, punctuation marks, and line breaks that represent the violence perpetrated on language by the US government and military.

flashed through exile,” she says, a poem is sometimes “born in the tip of another tongue” (Vanasco).

Mikhail’s books deal with war, exile, and loss. Her first poetry collection *Psalms of Absence* (1993) voices her reflections on the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) with metaphors and journalistic facts; hence the title includes “absence” as it laments the lives lost in war. Her extensive use of metaphors about war was almost necessary to avoid censorship by the Iraq, government. Her second book, *Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea* (1995), was originally published in Arabic as a poetic memoir of her life growing up during the first war in Baghdad. It was translated into English in 2009 and won the Arab American Book Award. The translation has two parts; the first part covers 1995, one year before she was forced to flee her country; the second part covers the period between 1995 and 2007, later added by Mikhail in exile. Mikhail’s exile began with the publication of *Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea*, after which she was interrogated and had to flee from her homeland to the US.

Her third book, *Almost Music* (1997), is another poetry collection in Arabic that addresses her experiences during the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War of 1991, and the US sanctions against Iraq at the time. *War Works Hard*, her fourth book in Arabic and first book translated into English in 2005, is another poetry collection in which she reflects on the second Gulf War and the oppressive regime in Iraq. The translation includes poems from her previous books, which also deal with the Gulf War of 1991. It “catches the reader on the wrong foot” and “casually tells the horrible truth in just a few words” (Nijland). It established Mikhail as the first Iraqi women poet who published a book in the US, and the book was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize (Vanasco). In 2013, Mikhail edited a pamphlet of twentieth-century Iraqi poetry: *15 Iraqi Poets*. Her *The Iraqi Nights* (2013) revolves around *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern tales written during the Islamic Golden Age. It is a gesture that could be found in her many other works. She draws on ancient myths such as Ishtar, the ancient Mesopotamian goddess of war, justice, fertility; Enheduanna, the earliest known poet, a woman who lived in ancient Mesopotamia in the 23rd century BCE, around 1,500 years

before Homer; and Nisaba, the Sumerian goddess of writing. Thus, Mikhail not only crosses borders of places and languages as an exilic intellectual, but also connects the past and the present by building a bridge across distant historical periods.

In Her Feminine Sign (2019), another poetry collection of hers, was chosen one of the ten best poetry books of 2019 by The New York Public Library. In this collection, she fluctuates between her homeland, her childhood in Baghdad, and her exile in Detroit. It is the first book she has written in both Arabic and English. However, she does not consider it a translation as she allowed herself “to be free in the ‘rewriting’ of the poem as if trying to give it two lives that relate to each other but are not exactly a copy of each other” (Saeed).

Having written in English has made it possible for Mikhail to look at the places she feels she belongs to from two different windows. For Mikhail, language is intertwined with identity and home, like a symbol that stands for where one belongs. As she puts it, the poet is “at home in both texts,” yet she “remains a stranger” (7). For her, “poetry is not medicine—it’s an X-ray. It helps you see the wound and understand it” (NPR). In fact, it goes beyond understanding the wound, and provides the reader with new ways of thinking about it. As an exilic intellectual, Mikhail acquires new perspectives through comparison, which is possible through reviving her memories from the past. As Eva Hoffman writes in her article “The New Nomads,” we, as human beings, “could hardly acquire a human identity” outside of culture, the same way we “could hardly think or perceive outside language. In a way, we are nothing more—or less—than an encoded memory of our heritage” (Hoffman 50). Mikhail perceives almost all of her surroundings in relation to what she remembers from her past. Much of her poetry is shaped around her memories. In her “Tablet” poem series, which are short poems resembling the Iraqi Haikus that imitate the ancient Sumerian tablets, she ties together the sense of crossing borders, leaving one’s country behind, and the memories one carries within oneself:

We cross borders lightly
like clouds.

Nothing carries us,
 but as we move on
 we carry rain,
 and an accent,
 and a memory
 of another place. (*Iraqi Nights* 60)

In another poem, she points out that memory is almost an intrinsic human need:

Back when there was no language
 they walked until sunset
 carrying red leaves
 like words to remember. (*In Her Feminine Sign* 57)

The same way Hoffman argues that we could hardly think outside language, with her poetry, Mikhail claims that memory is what we could carry even when we did not have language. It is an indispensable part of being human. Mikhail's lines indicate to the way human beings feel the need to hold on to things that would remind them of their past, their heritage. At this point, it would be useful to focus on the link between memory and exile.

2.1. MEMORY AND EXILE

Memory works in a way that makes it easier to comprehend the conditions under which exile is experienced. Everything is understood relatively in exile. How one perceives the present moment depends on how one remembers the past. As Hana Píchová argues in *The Art of Memory in Exile*, it is "precisely memory," which is "a possession that was carried off to and shaped by exile, that allows for an unexpectedly unique voice to emerge" (110). This voice is unique as it does not contemplate the past and the future only in themselves or in comparison to one another, but both are felt at the same time in it. It is "a voice that explores and expands the possibilities" (110). A writer in exile discovers new connections that s/he has not seen before by exploring his/her memory. The writer creates a kind of intellectual nest by combining the past and the present with here and there. Outside of this nest, the exilic intellectual learns to live by bearing in mind many factors at the same time. Being "uniquely positioned" and faced with two audiences, which are "the fellow exiles and the readers of the newly adopted country,"

the exilic writer needs to “fashion a voice that would lure both” (Píchová 112). In order to shape that voice, the exilic writer has to consider widely differing criteria while both living and writing. Observing and contemplating many different approaches and concepts at the same time, the exilic writer cultivates a mind that is multifaceted and unconventional.

In her “Memory in Exile,” Marcia Schuback and Cecilia Schuback argue that “exile is not only existence after a cut and separation but it is an existing afterness, in a ‘present tension’ of being with the without and without a with” (175). Therefore, an exile might take refuge in the realm of memories since they often function as a bridge between their past and present reality. As it is suggested by Schuback, “what is specific in the experience of exile and exilic memory is how the experience of afterness reveals, like photographic negatives, the present as a movement in itself, as a meanwhile, a movement marked by a repetition that can be compared to the echo and lingering of several lingering delays” (Schuback 178). This delay can be compared to the “echoes” of memory when one remembers the past. Such an echo is visible in Mikhail’s poem “Baghdad in Detroit:” “On the Fourth of July / here in Detroit / I hear the echo of Baghdad explosions / They say it is the sound of fireworks” (*In Her Feminine Sign* 15). Mikhail’s present in Detroit is only understood through her memories of Baghdad. As Yanick Lahens suggests, “To be exiled is to be from here and from elsewhere, to be at the same time inside and outside, settled in the insecurity of a painful and uneasy situation” (736). The interconnection is not only between the past and the present but also between the home country and the foreign land. Similarly, in his *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*, André Aciman describes how his present reality is only recognized by his memories of the places of his past:

[I] come to Straus Park to remember Alexandria, albeit an unreal Alexandria, an Alexandria that does not exist, that I’ve invented, or learned to cultivate in Rome as in Paris, so that in the end the Paris and the Rome I retrieve here are really the shadow of the shadow of Alexandria, versions of Alexandria, the remanence of Alexandria. (31)

As the quotation reveals, memory is an inseparable part of exile that functions as a repository to connect “here” and “there.” Moreover, exile has also been considered a “great source of creativity and liberty” although it is “commonly perceived as the presence of a broken past presence” (Schuback 179). That creativity is often rooted in the past and enriched by memories. In exile, “all that is before and after becomes constantly present as a task to be re-interpreted; and indeed, not one after the other but simultaneously” (179). Fittingly, Mikhail’s book keeps switching in time and space, not only in her mind but also in her narrative structure—or the lack of it. The way she writes in *The Beekeeper* echoes Said’s stance on exile according to which the past shapes one’s perception of the present and the future. Instead of acting as a “passive storage,” memory plays a crucial part in giving meaning to the present as an “active becoming-presence” (Schuback 181). By using her memories, Mikhail reconstructs her present. Through writing, Mikhail aims for what Yanick Lahens calls “the idea of constituting a memory, and of forming a deeper rootedness” (736). Even though memories and rootedness might “clash with the impossibility of the here and now,” and the memory of the homeland might be “blurred,” exile is still “nourished by the dream of the homelands” (Lahens 736). Rather than posing a problem, that blurriness is transformed into an all-encompassing, overarching perspective that embodies both past and present, both here and there in *The Beekeeper*.

In an interview, Mikhail describes how her past is an inextricable part of her present: “I left with this condition, like Orpheus, to not look back, because I didn’t want to lose my Eurydice. But we can’t not look back” (Ahmed). By integrating her past into her “present,” Mikhail elevates the exile experience into another dimension, a higher position that is beyond all time periods. “The here,” as she puts it, is “an occasion that reminds us of there” (Khan 11). In her poem “Song from Another Time,” Mikhail writes how her past ceaselessly accompanies her:

A song from another time
 survived with me.
 It follows me wherever I go.
 It rushes after me.
 I crumple it up,

a small piece of paper,
and throw it away.
But I peel the paper open
and smooth it out
whenever I remember
one of my dead friends. (*The Iraqi Nights* 85)

Since the past lives with her in the present moment, even an effort to remember “another time” is non-essential for her. Although she tries to ignore some of her memories at times by crumpling them up, it gives her peace to go back and remember them in due course. She voices a similar impression about the inevitability of memory in “Footprints on the Moon:” “my mind empty of everyday concerns, / the lack of memories of any kind, / the earth off in another place, / and these footprints... / All of this points to you” (*The Iraqi Nights* 77). A mind that lacks memories of any kind is only possible outside of this world. This relationship between the dualities of time and place in exile can be so complex that it can only manifest itself in writing, which provides an outlet for the memory due to its potential to reflect and make meaning out of one’s present. From within the instability and fragmented temporality, writing establishes “a bridge between the mental imaginary and the living reality, between memory and history” (Mir 331). Even creating a mental image is grounded on memory. “The streets crawl, intersecting in the veins of my hand,” writes Mikhail, “How can I arrange these things / in my memory?” (*Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea* 7). Ultimately, she is capable of arranging things in a non-linear, fragmented way. When asked about the relationship between memory and writing, Mikhail answers the following:

[T]he Bible starts with “in the beginning was the word”, and the Quran starts with the word “Read...” But not only prophets know the power of words. Terrorists know it as well. Ironically, Daesh fighters get high by chanting certain words that raise their adrenaline level to the point where they forget everything but what those words call them to do including praying and raping. The survivors [of terror], on the other hand, are silent. They survived alone and they cannot forget what happened to them and to their loved ones. Giving voice to their silent and painful memory is difficult but extremely important. Bringing their personal memory to the public rather than ignoring it honors their need to bear witness. To speak about the unspeakable is part of our responsibility as writers. (Robbins)

Through writing, Mikhail reflects her personal memories as well as the Yazidis’ tragedy, highlighting the vast range of viewpoints that exile experience may offer to an exilic

intellectual. Thus, exile gives Mikhail a new literary obligation. In her *Exile: Between Writing and Place*, Yanick Lahens voices the following on how the writer's exile can be read in a literary work:

[T]he writer's exile is often perceived as a simple departure from his native country. Therefore the critic is always tempted to measure the degree of acculturation in the work produced by the writer in the host country, whether to analyze the sterilizing or on the contrary stimulating effects of exile on literary creation. Thus all reflection on the relationship which exists between exile and literary creation leads to more profound questioning. (735)

For this reason, the extensive way Mikhail makes use of memory in her writing reflects the embracing perspective of the exilic intellectual. Edward Said made use of this human agency "to write his life and identity into existence," and through his autobiography *Out of Place*, for example, one can understand that Said "is coming to know himself for the first time" through writing his autobiography (Abraham 144). Similarly, through *The Beekeeper*, Mikhail scrutinizes her past in order to have a deeper understanding of her exile. In order for exile to be scrutinized, "the past must be articulated or represented in creative form to become memory" (Mir 327). Although it is almost impossible to remember a memory in its entirety, this challenge can be turned into a benefit too. The "fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable" (Huysen 3). However, "rather than lamenting or ignoring it," this split should be viewed as "a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity" (Huysen 3). Instead of translating her poetry from Arabic to English, Mikhail writes in both languages in her later works, demonstrating the artistic creativity of that challenge. She believes that it "mirrors" her as a writer and as an exile (Brown). This encompassing movement between two languages can be described by Sashar Zarif's definition of "moving memory," which is a "remembering [that] is amended by time, place, and a variety of other influences and variables" (Zarif 127). Mikhail remembers not only in English but also in Arabic. The same way as exile, memory has no borders. Mikhail affirms that "everything is dual," and as long as she has her "memory," she has "another life" (Brown). In an interview, she speaks about the importance of writing memories:

[W]hen ideology controls the writing of the history of society, the realities that do not serve the idea of the authoritarian group will be marginalised and even falsified, and the most dangerous thing that can happen to the society is for that group to pass its one singular idea on generations, and the latter adopts that one story as the truth, especially since the characters or witnesses who represent the other side of the story, die after the passage of time, and their collective memory disappears with them, and here comes the importance of literature in shedding light on those marginalised lives and transferring their memory from the past to the future. (Ezzat)

Mikhail, by transferring her memories to the future, not only becomes the voice of marginalized minorities who do not have a voice, but also rebuilds her own homeland through her memory. Her elegiac, impassioned poetry reflects the “touch of solitude and spirituality” that is inherent in exile (*Reflections on Exile* 181). Since an exilic intellectual’s life is occupied with “compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule” in Said’s view, Mikhail creates a new world to compensate for her loss through memory. As she herself states, exile provides layers to both everyday life and writing, enabling her to make sense of the world through multiple, enriched perspectives:

[I] would say that writing makes me feel at home no matter where I am, even if I am in an airplane over cities that I know or don’t know. It’s the moment I make sense of the world and I am accompanied by others, not only people I know but also strangers. What excites me the most is how my writing (especially poetry) opens a space of discovery for me and then it expands into the meanings added by the active readings of others, like immigration. The readers immigrate to our poetry or art and then, gradually, they associate it with some semantic experience, a familiar or unfamiliar one. Only in writing I become the native who welcomes others as others had welcomed me. Another aspect is that using a second language (English in this case) made me more sensitive and thoughtful about my first language (Arabic). And just as home is flashed through exile, a poem sometimes is born in the tip of another tongue. (“Re: Master’s Thesis.”)

Writing becomes a place to live for Mikhail. Welcoming others in her writing as if she aims at compensating for the lack of it in her exile experience, she makes use of her exile both for her artistic creativity as an exilic intellectual and benefits from her knowledge of two languages in a way that represents exile. Therefore, *The Beekeeper* exemplifies how literature and memory may compensate for the loss of a “home” in exile for the exilic intellectual.

2.2. DEPICTION OF EXILE IN *THE BEEKEEPER*

Mikhail's first nonfiction, *The Beekeeper*, was published in English in 2018 after it was published in Arabic a year before. She ponders on her exile experience in relation to the tragedy the Yazidis face. She illustrates both the inclusivity of memory and the advantages of exile by blending her personal recollections with the harrowing experiences of the Yazidis who lived in the Sinjar Mountains in northwest Iraq before they were enslaved by Daesh. It was a catastrophe that was defined as a genocide by the United Nations. Mikhail believes that the catastrophe Yazidi people went through is something that has "never happened in history," and as an artist, she responds to this through writing *The Beekeeper* (Ahmed). She does not only give voice to the Yazidis, to "the other," but also goes against the male-dominated war literature. Although the Iraqi war literature is "dominated by male writers concerned with men's heroism at the battle front and boundless patriotism," and male authors "rarely depict Iraqi women's experiences of war beyond the battle grounds," Mikhail's work provides an alternative to the mainstream male perception by embodying a female lens to show war and its brutality (Al-Athari). *The Beekeeper* is a non-linear narrative, enriched by Mikhail's poetry and photojournalism. The lack of chronology reflects her physical and mental journeys in time and space. The time and setting of the memoir shifts between the US and Iraq, from Detroit to Baghdad, shifting between her memories, her past, and present. The temporality of homes, places, and experiences is represented by this lack of chronology. It is one of the "very few texts—especially nonfiction—written by [an Iraqi writer] [that] have reached mainstream American readers" (Martin). *The Beekeeper* was long-listed for the National Book Award, and became a finalist for the PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award. Although she tells the survival of the Yazidis who experienced exile in their own homeland when Daesh attacked their region, Mikhail hesitates to call their "survival" a final statement, just as "home" is not a final statement in exile, because what has survived is not only themselves but also their memories, everything they have witnessed. *The Beekeeper* begins with "A Simple Word of Thanks," in which Mikhail pays homage to "those victims who were killed but didn't

die, who came back to tell us their stories” (Preface). The book has fourteen chapters, the first one being the shortest and the last one being the longest. All chapters include photographs except for two of them.

The central setting to the book, Sinjar is home for a diverse range of ethnic and religious groups, such as the Yazidis, Sunni and Shia Arabs, Christians, Kurds, and Turkmen. However, the Yazidis are not considered as “People of the Book” and are often mistakenly defined as “devil-worshippers” despite being one of the world’s oldest religious groups (Cetorelli and Ashraph 7). The book circles around the perilous road that led to the exile of the Yazidis and their rescue with the help of Abdullah Shrem, the beekeeper, who used to tend beehives and selling honey between Iraq and Syria before he created a network to rescue the Yazidis after Daesh invaded the region. Different from her previous books which are made up of the translation of her earlier poetry, *The Beekeeper* reflects Mikhail’s memories in the context of traumatic stories of the Yazidis although she is “at pains to show her faithfulness to the spoken word” (Arifa Akbar). In the book, exile resides not only in different locations but also in different languages, which is only understood with the help of Abdullah.

Since the scholarly study of Yazidism did not begin until 1850, their definite history is still not clear (Reshid). Historically, it is believed that the Yazidis originate from a “geocultural” region called Kurdistan “in which the Kurds have historically formed a prominent majority population and Kurdish culture, language, and national identity historically have been based” (Maisel 105). The modern use of the term points “to parts of Eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and northern Syria” (Maisel 105). It is also a part of the area considered the cradle of civilizations. Many believe that before accepting Islam, the people in the region believed in Zoroastrianism, “the reigning religion” that influenced their beliefs for hundreds of years (Reshid). Today, the Yazidis live mainly in Iraq, Turkey and Iran, while a minority is present in Armenia (Yazidi Cultural Heritage).

Since the 13th century, the Yazidi community has been subjected to numerous massacres, initiated by Mongol chiefs, Kurdish tribal leaders, Ottomans, and Muslims. Recently, with the invasion of the Sinjar area by Daesh, around 50,000 Yazidis are forced to flee their homes and held captive in Syria and Iraq where they were faced with “almost unimaginable horrors” (United Nations 1). They were forced to abandon their religion and convert to Islam, which caused the exile and killings of thousands of Yazidis. Historically, it was not a first. After the Ottomans changed their tax regulation in 1885, they forced the Yazidis to pay the same taxes as the Muslims. When they refused to do so, they were forced to convert to Islam, and the Sinjar area was invaded, with its inhabitants massacred (Yazidi Cultural Heritage). More than a hundred years later, history repeated itself. The fact that Yazidis were exiled from their homeland by Daesh fits into Said’s description of being “exiled by exiles.” The Muslim neighbors of Yazidis feel the same way: “You were here in these houses before us. It’s not right to do this to you” (*The Beekeeper* 192). In his *Reflections on Exile*, Said describes this state of being “exiled by exiles” in the case of Palestinians. They know that their “sense of national identity has been nourished in the exile milieu” in which anyone who is not related by blood is an “enemy” (178). For Said, it is “the most extraordinary of exile’s fates: to have been exiled by exiles—to relive the actual process of up-rooting at the hands of exiles” (178).

Living a similar fate to that of Palestinians, Yazidis and the crime Daesh committed against them, which was called the Sinjar massacre, was examined by the UN. They reached the conclusion that Daesh committed “almost unimaginable atrocities against the Yazidi community” (United Nations 3). The report includes instances “of men being killed or forced to convert; of women and girls, some as young as nine, sold at market and held in sexual slavery by ISIS fighters; and of boys ripped from their families and forced into ISIS training camps” (United Nations 3). August 4, 2014 was the day the Yazidis’ exile began, which, according to the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, is when “the 21st century’s clearest case of genocide so far” began (“Iraq/

Yazidi”). In *The Beekeeper*, Abdullah describes the day it began and the onset of their exile, to an unknown future:

[A]t three in the morning on August 3, 2014, we heard the booming sound of artillery. We had never heard such blasts, even in times of war. Twenty-eight of us gathered together . . . all of us hesitant to flee. It isn’t so easy for a person to give up their home. After four hours of waiting, we set off in a convoy. There were hundreds of us, including Muslims who’d lived in the same region alongside us for hundreds of years. It was like Judgment Day, people walking to God knows where, some of them barefoot, clutching their children or carrying elderly people on their backs . . . [A] lot of people died on the journey. (*The Beekeeper* 23)

When Daesh raided the region in 2014, they wrote letters on the doors of Yazidis to force them to leave: “N for the Christians, and Y for the Yazidis. S for the Sunnis, and Sh for the Shi’ites,” Abdullah describes (Arifa Akbar). As Mikhail had to leave her homeland because of governmental pressure, Abdullah had to leave his home and quit beekeeping in order to create a network of rescuers, including cigarette smugglers in the region. Complying with Said’s view that exile’s “loss and sadness should be acknowledged and registered,” Mikhail, as an exilic intellectual, relates to Abdullah’s sorrow which he shares with her (*Culture and Imperialism* 678). When asked about whether he considers to return to his home in Sinjar, Abdullah replies: “Nobody from Sinjar has gone home” because of Daesh (*The Beekeeper* 170). Going home is not a possibility anymore. Said defines that impossibility as “pathos of exile,” which “is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth” in which “homecoming is out of the question” because it is often impossible (*Reflections on Exile* 179). Consisting of people who aim at returning the kidnapped Yazidis to their families, Abdullah’s network was “modeled on the female-led fortress of the beehive” (Arifa Akbar). He recognizes the significance of women both in his new rescue mission and in his previous job as a beekeeper. He also perceives the mistreatment of women through an exploration of the organization in the beehive to discover,

[t]he secrets of the bees, their meticulous organization, their harmony with nature. The movements of the queen bee up above, her superior flying abilities compared to the males amazed me, made me profoundly appreciate all the women in my life—especially the queen mother—because her loss would completely disorient the colony . . . In our society women work and sacrifice for others without getting what they deserve, without enjoying the same privileges as men. Women are oppressed even outside the world of Daesh. (*The Beekeeper* 17)

Fifty-six members of Abdullah's family, including his brother and sister, had been kidnapped (Evans). Together with his aides, he worked almost as an "organized intelligence agency" (Evans). He also recruited a widowed woman who played a crucial role in saving numerous Yazidis, by visiting houses in the disguise of a children's clothes seller or a bean vendor. Abdullah says that although most people believe "only men can do this job," the disguised woman had the "most important role" as she could easily go into houses (Evans). She was later caught and executed by Daesh.

Mikhail had a personal reason to treat this topic in *The Beekeeper*, as her niece was also kidnapped in Baghdad and has not been found yet (Vanasco). According to Hassou Hormi, the president of the International Yazidi Foundation Against Genocide, after the occupation of Sinjar by Daesh, around seven thousand Yazidis were captured, many of whom were sold into sexual slavery, trained as fighters, or given to Daesh militants as sexual rewards. As of 2021, three thousand children are still missing (El-Amin et al.).

The book reveals Mikhail's condition of being twice removed by language. First, it is because she cannot communicate with the Yazidis herself as she does not speak Kurdish. Secondly, she also has to translate what Abdullah translates to her in Arabic to English. Said explains this state of being twice removed in his autobiography *Out of Place: A Memoir*:

[M]ore interesting for me as author was the sense I had of trying always to translate experiences that I had not only in a remote environment but also in a different language. Everyone lives life in a given language; everyone's experiences therefore are had, absorbed, and recalled in that language. The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher, and so trying to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other—to say nothing of the numerous ways in which the languages were mixed up for me and crossed over from one realm to the other—has been a complicated task. (16)

While Mikhail calls *The Beekeeper* nonfiction, the content of the book mostly resembles fiction due to its distressing subject matter. Said thinks that this resemblance stems from the "unnatural" and "unreal" new world of the exile (*Reflections on Exile* 181). With her book, Mikhail calls for creativity, recognition, awareness, sympathy, and hope. As Said

quotes from Theodor Adorno, “for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (qtd. in *Reflections on Exile* 568). On that account, the textual space created in *The Beekeeper* through Mikhail’s memories acts as a “home” not only for Mikhail as a writer in exile but also for the Yazidis whose stories have been told. The book begins with Mikhail’s description of how she teaches Arabic to her American students and continues with the translation of her phone calls and interviews she made for a year with the Yazidis who were rescued with the help of Abdullah.

Similar to the relationship between Ackerman and Abu Hassar, Mikhail’s relationship with the Yazidis is made possible by Abdullah who functioned as a translator. At first, as a poet, Mikhail wanted to write a long poem about the catastrophe that was taking place in her homeland. However, when she met Abdullah and began to hear the stories of the Yazidis, she wanted to prevent these memories, “that sense of reality,” the sense of “bearing witness” from being lost forever (Namou). This is thanks to her exile experience which has endowed her with an intellectual responsibility to give voice to the Yazidis. In the middle of the book, Mikhail writes about her exile, homeland, and her family. By weaving together her memories of Baghdad and the harrowing stories of Yazidi women and children, she brings to light a battle, a catastrophe that is often overlooked as part of her cause as an exilic intellectual. She draws on her skills as a journalist while bearing witness, and stays behind the scenes of her story. She thought that the book would not be complete unless she met the Yazidis in person. Therefore, the book ends with her visit to Iraq, her homeland, after leaving it with a one-way ticket twenty years ago. Although Mikhail was mostly based in the US while writing the book, there is almost no mention of her immediate context in *The Beekeeper*. Instead, she brings together pieces that are far away and foreign with the goal of understanding and giving voice to them. Hence, the book also aims at understanding “the other” while also giving hope “in the middle of darkness,” in Mikhail’s own words (Namou). Compared to her other books, *The Beekeeper* stands out as being more politically determined as she explains in an interview:

[U]sually, I don't seek anything beyond the creativity, [the desire] to create something that is art [. . .] but now I just can't believe that . . . nothing [is being done for these women]. I feel that we need to shake this world. I don't mean to shake the world with this book, but I feel the need, although not necessarily with this book. This time, though, I do I feel I need to do something beyond [an exercise in] creativity . . . This time it's a mixture of poems and reportage. It's nonfiction. It's reality, but it just has some poems in between or some poetic lines. Sometimes I felt that the characters were not able to express enough, so I put in some poetical lines to give them, more on their behalf to express something. I don't know what genre this is. (Ahmed)

Mikhail aims at “translating” experiences which occurred in far away places in different languages. *The Beekeeper* exemplifies how, on a similar note to “home” in exile, memory can also take on a new meaning depending on the environment. As Said puts it, exiles are aware of the fact that in a “contingent world, homes are always provisional” (*Reflections on Exile* 185). Likewise, meaning is tentative as certain words and even certain letters may take on new meanings throughout time. Throughout *The Beekeeper*, Mikhail fluctuates between her new country and her memories of her homeland. It is for this reason that she is criticized for being “clunky,” “contrived,” and “dissonant” when she “throws in” her poetry and the dreams she saw about her family’s exile from Baghdad in 1991 (Arifa Akbar). It is certain that she digresses from the point when she suddenly begins to narrate her own family’s exile and her dreams for twenty-four pages. However, as Said argues, “exile and memory go together,” which accounts for Mikhail’s impulse to return to her seemingly divergent memories (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). Since “what” and “how” a person remembers the past defines how s/he sees the present and future, Mikhail’s present is determined by both her past in her homeland and her exile in the US. Recalling her own exile, Mikhail sees unfamiliar places in her dreams. Despite the fact that more than half of the immigrants are from Iraq in her new home in Michigan (Barrett and Levin), nothing is sure, and everything seems temporary to her. Indeed, everything is so uncertain and unfamiliar that just like Ackerman, Mikhail is still afraid of getting lost even in her dreams:

[I] don't know the name of the planet I visited, but I kept looking back at Earth because I didn't want to get lost. My heart beat loudly as I looked at its spots, both dark and light. I was worried to be so far from the sphere that was my home—not a specific home, since I've moved from place to place and can't tell which one to call home and which one to call exile. In fact, I don't really care. The spider makes a

home outside of itself—it doesn't know the difference between home and exile . . .
I'm afraid of getting too lost. (114)

Since Mikhail cannot tell which place to call home and which place to call exile, much like a spider, she makes a “home” outside of herself, creating a present moment from her memories. In his dreams, Abdullah is also haunted by memories of his brother who has not returned yet:

[M]y brother would come striding out of our childhood, I'd see him once again in our garden with our two trees, one beside the other. We used to sit side by side in the shade of the two trees . . . I'm afraid to go back there one day and see all of those memories. In the old days the people in my village used to plant olive trees despite the fact that olive trees take a long time to bear fruit, sometimes even longer than the life span of the planter . . . Actually I no longer see the point in growing anything, even if it only takes a couple of days, because I can't be sure what's going to happen tomorrow. And I don't like growing a tree that I'll only have to leave behind. (80)

Marred by their shared experience of exile, both Mikhail and Abdullah keep revisiting memories from their past and their traumas in their dreams, often unwillingly. In the same vein, Abdullah is afraid of going back and facing with his memories, for which he cannot be blamed, as they indicate “loss” for him; something that has been left behind, whether it is his family or homeland. While Mikhail is able to benefit from her exile as an exilic intellectual, Abdullah suffers from it. After Abdullah's reflection, Mikhail asks a question to him: “Abdullah, you left behind your house, your garden, and all of your belongings in Sinjar. If you could be back at your house for one hour, what would you take with you from there?” to which he replies “I wouldn't take anything, I'd just want to water the plants” (80). Perhaps Abdullah would not take anything because he knows that he would eventually have to leave it behind, or because he already has all the things related to his homeland in memory. He knows that life would never be safe for him again. After this confrontation, there is a moment of silence between Mikhail and Abdullah, “one of those punctuating moments for which we stand and dedicate to mourning some kind of loss,” whether it is “the loss of a person or a homeland or a meaning” (80). Exile leaves its mark on Mikhail: “My hand on the map / as if on an old scar” (*The Beekeeper* 109).

Another exile experience depicted in the book is of Nadia. She is a 28-year-old Yazidi woman whom Mikhail met through a Yazidi journalist friend. Through the narration of her story, Mikhail highlights the suffering of the Yazidis, which, as an exilic intellectual, she aims to make heard. When Mikhail writes her memories about how she taught the letter N in Arabic to her American students, she realizes that it is a letter that is “no longer neutral like all the others, nor is its story like any other” (*The Beekeeper* 1). It has a story that leaves Mikhail “spending more time with N than with any other letter in [her] entire life” (*The Beekeeper* 6). What makes the letter N significant is the fact that in 2014, it was being “written in red on doors, notifying residents that they must leave their homes or else face death” (1). This red “N” on doors stands for “Nasara” in Arabic, meaning “Christians.” In the summer of 2014, the Yazidis were given twenty-four hours by Daesh to leave the city and their possessions behind, otherwise the “sword would be the only option” (Hanish 8). If they were still there the next day, their Muslim neighbors would threaten them with death, as they believed they had the “right” to take their home (Kingery 34). The Yazidis, “with the stroke of a red marker across their doors,” had to “abandon the houses they’d lived in for over 1,500 years” (*The Beekeeper* 1). The letter N stands out in one of the words Mikhail writes on board for her students. “N” means “wattan,” which translates into “homeland.” Yet, more importantly, “N” stands for Nadia. Nadia was kidnapped by Daesh, and was worth 100,000 dinars—eighty-five American dollars—when she was put up for auction. Although Mikhail does not speak Kurdish, she understands Nadia’s pain “fluently” (2). They are only able to communicate with the help of Abdullah, through whom she meets Nadia.

Nadia and her family fled their home in Sinjar to head into the mountains without any water or food, together with two hundred people (3). About two weeks later, they were captured and transferred to Raqqa, Syria by Daesh. There, Nadia and her children were forced to read the Quran although they did not know how to read Arabic. The men around her spoke amongst themselves in languages she could not understand. This failure of communication corresponds to Said’s concept of “Conradian exile,” inspired by Joseph Conrad’s short story “Amy Foster” which reveals the story of an emigrant

who dies of a heart failure since he keeps asking for “water,” for help in his native language but not understood. “Each Conradian exile fears,” according to Said, and “is condemned endlessly to imagine, the spectacle of a solitary death illuminated, so to speak, by unresponsive, uncommunicating eyes,” the same way Nadia is condemned to, albeit by Daesh in a very different context (*Reflections on Exile* 180). Almost as a way to pay homage to Nadia and other stolen Yazidis, Mikhail writes a poem for the letter N:

*The N on the doors,
the exodus
from houses:
no keys,
no compass,
no words. (8)*

Their exile that starts with the exodus lacks a compass and words, the same way they lack a route, a clear path to follow. They did not have the words to understand and to be understood. While Ackerman and Abu Hassar set an example of friendship despite not sharing a language and being “enemies” of the same war in *Places and Names*, the antithetical case is present in *The Beekeeper*. On August 3, 2014, when Daesh came to a Yazidi family’s home, the family’s “first shock” was to see that the people whom they knew now was a part of Daesh (62). In fact, they even considered them “friends” who suddenly behaved as if they were enemies (62). The scene reminds one of Mikhail’s memories of the large house of Nadia’s family which was always filled with guests who came over for their parties, to eat and drink with them: “They were the same people who killed us and captured our women later . . . The person who shot me used to be my neighbor” (174). As Said describes in his *Culture and Imperialism*, Mikhail discovers that seemingly opposite sides such as “enemy” and “friend” can coexist by means of an exilic perspective in which everything is “counter,” or “strange” (709). Such a discovery would help her interpret her own experiences and understand exile experience from manifold perspectives as an exilic intellectual. Although Nadia does not have the circumstances that can make it possible for her to benefit from exile, Mikhail gives Nadia and many other Yazidis like her a voice by sharing their experiences and demonstrating a sense of responsibility that she has gained through her own exile.

2.3. EXILE AS AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE IN *THE BEEKEEPER*

In *The Beekeeper*, by making connections between her memories of Iraq and the Yazidi memories passed on with the help of Abdullah, Mikhail scrutinizes the experience of exile. As an exilic intellectual, Mikhail is aware of multiple settings and ways of living rather than being aware of a singular homeland or a singular culture. She is able to “diminish orthodox judgment” and “elevate appreciative sympathy” (*Reflections on Exile* 186). Mikhail’s broadened perspective earned through her exile experience supports Said’s view that exile can provide “cross-cultural and transnational visions” (*Reflections on Exile* 174). It also supports Said’s idea that most exiled poets and writers “lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people” (*Reflections on Exile* 175). Mikhail, in the same vein, lends the dignity Yazidis were denied and makes their stories heard. Said also sets forth that exilic intellectuals experience “an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives,” (*Reflections on Exile* 177) and Mikhail chooses to reconstitute her life through writing. For Said, exile serves “better than staying behind or not getting out,” which is also true for Mikhail since she continually received threats while she was in her homeland (178). Exile enhances her outlook on both life and writing. Claudio Guillén describes two different types of exile according to the way exile is treated by writers:

[A] certain kind of writer speaks of exile, while another learns from it. In the first case, which is common in poetry and often assumes elegiac modes, exile becomes its own subject matter. In the second, which may lead to narratives and essays, exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterized by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism. Writings of the former sort can be rightly regarded as examples of the literature of exile. Instances of the latter compose what I shall call the literature of counter-exile, that is to say, of those responses which incorporate the separation from place, class, language or native community, insofar as they triumph over the separation and thus can offer wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin. (272)

Mikhail fits into the second description of exiled writer as she triumphs over separation and enriches her perspective. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said describes what exile means to him: “[w]hen I say ‘exile’ I do not mean something sad or deprived. On the contrary, belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide enables you to

understand them more easily” (45). Belonging to both sides which are usually contradictory enriches an exile’s life by enabling him/her to understand the conflicts, discrepancies, and distant things better. To understand exile as belonging to both sides of a divide—of “here” and “there,” of “now” and “then”—is beautifully expressed in Mikhail’s poem which opens “The Exodus” chapter:

*Like the turtle,
I walk everywhere
with my home on my back. (The Beekeeper 93)*

Mikhail carries her home on her back everywhere she goes, and makes use of the load of her memory to compensate for the loss of her homeland. It is a metaphor which evidences the fact that homes are always provisional. Leaving her homeland for exile has enabled Mikhail to broaden her perspective about the meaning of “home,” which has now come to mean “everywhere,” instead of being only Iraq.

Another way exile enriches an intellectual’s life is that it endows it with newly gained perspectives that go against the conventional ways of thinking. Mikhail’s close friend named Amani could be considered an “enemy” because “during the Iraq–Iran War, the Iranians were forced to leave Iraq as they were considered as ‘enemies’” (*The Beekeeper* 101). Mikhail remembers how she and Amani were marching together in a student demonstration, where “deep down inside” Mikhail felt as if she were marching to protest Amani’s banishment from Iraq, and calls her: “Amani, my enemy friend” (102). Mikhail’s attitude toward Amani embodies what Said calls “a unique pleasure” of exile, especially since Mikhail, as an exilic intellectual, is aware of juxtapositions that go beyond conventional judgment and provide appreciative sympathy. While the orthodox judgment considers Amani as a mere “enemy,” Mikhail’s newly gained exilic perspective challenges orthodox perceptions and allows her to regard Amani as a friend when she remembers a scene from her past.

“The Exodus” chapter stands out as being divergent from the other chapters since Mikhail focuses on her personal and familial exile in it. She writes about her trip from Detroit to Pittsburgh for a poetry reading and a photo exhibition on war and asylum, *She*

Who Tells a Story. While contemplating the photographs at the exhibition, she pauses in front of one picture: *Aerial I* by Jananne Al-Ani. It is an aerial view that reminds her of the 1991 Gulf War when the satellites took photographs of them from the sky in which they appeared “merely as dots moving in various directions—you couldn’t see the fear that was the cause of our random movement” (94). For her, feelings were invisible in the images:

[T]he satellite images depicted us as rows of ants leaving their hills, leaving behind everything they had worked at for their entire lives. Every passage was an exodus for them. Our houses looked like dark holes, sometimes lit by the explosion. My home was in that little spot right there. Can you see it? . . . From above, the burnt fields and bewildered animals look more like an abstraction. From above, there are no souls, only bodies, but they are seen as hollow forms, moving the way atoms do in the universe—unseen . . . To see those intersecting dots and lines is to find myself back in Baghdad. (96)

The discrepancy between how the Iraqi people look in the image and how they actually are is not visible to those who do not have the possibility to stand back and revisit their homeland. It is through “those intersecting dots and lines” that she reconnects with her homeland. By belonging to multiple sides that are not directly connected, exile enriches Mikhail’s life by enabling her to see beyond what is visible at first glance. It is because of her exile that she sees the contrast between images and reality from memory, and in this way it can be said that exile takes her one step closer to reality. Although the image depicts her people as rows of ants leaving their home behind, what Mikhail does with her book is almost the opposite as she tries to give voice and bring these people to life through their memories embodied in photographs, interviews, and testimonies, together with their fear and hope. This points out to another pleasure of exile, which Said calls having a “double perspective.” Such a perspective enables exilic intellectuals to observe things both with regard to what has been left behind and what is here and now. The fragments of Mikhail’s memory “interact like fish swimming without running into one another” (*The Beekeeper* 97). They do not “proceed according to logical or chronological order,” and rather “displaced as if they are clips spliced together from unrelated films” (97) Although her memories are displaced just as herself, she counts on them. She not only reconnects with her past, but also connects the stories of the Yazidis

with the world. She compares her memories with those of the exiles of the present-day: “These days, people are leaving the homeland without suitcases. I was lucky because I left with one” (101). It is through her own memories that Mikhail is able to understand them truly. In that regard, memory enables Mikhail to connect her past with the current situation of the Yazidis who fled for their lives. If Mikhail had not had any experience of war and exile which typically cause “rancor and regret,” she would not have been able to reflect on the immediate present of the Yazidis in an all-encompassing, “sharpened vision” as Said suggests (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). If “what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it” affect the way an exile sees the future (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv), by making use of her memory, Mikhail’s own exile experience helps her better comprehend the Yazidi situation.

Another way exile could be an enriching experience for the exilic intellectual is that, having experienced it, the distance from home can evolve “into a positive mission, whose success would be a cultural act of great importance” (Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 7). Exile can develop into a cultivating experience. When Mikhail’s friends learn that she has come back home, they hurry to organize a poetry reading. Poetry is not on Mikhail’s mind, until her friends demand that she not leave the country without reading some of her poems. The people “clung onto” Mikhail’s words, “as if they were actually going to save them” (*The Beekeeper* 186). Once again, through exile, poetry becomes a tie that connects Mikhail to her homeland.

In her poetry collection *In Her Feminine Sign*, a tie between the two countries is visible Mikhail makes a comparison between Iraq and her new home:

The map of Iraq looks like a mitten
and so does the map of Michigan—
a match I made by chance. (46)

This comparison enables her to see the details that can bring her closer to her hometown, however far she may be. The match might have been made by chance, yet the likeness of these two distant places and its expression through language are only made possible by Mikhail’s reflection. Her reflection almost mirrors her wish to revisit

Iraq through her poetry. In Said's term, this reflection is "an enactment of a homecoming expressed through defiance and loss" (*Reflections on Exile* 175). She might be yearning for a homecoming, but this yearning is compensated by her memory. Rather than "mourning" for "what has been left behind," Mikhail makes use of her past (*Reflections on Exile* xxxv). She uses her memory to recount both her own exile and that of the Yazidis to call attention to their suffering. She gains a sharpened vision which endows her with a responsibility and allows her to "do something beyond [an exercise in] creativity" as an exilic intellectual (Ahmed).

While in Iraq, Mikhail meets a man, Emad Noury, who is an actor. Emad invites her to visit him at Amal Camp. The camp is not like Qadia Camp where Mikhail visited before, but it is a five-story building where Emad lives with his wife and children. When Daesh arrived in the region, they only took their photo albums and wedding tapes while leaving home, because there was "nothing else of any value except for the house itself" (189). The only valuable thing was the record of their memories, which they could not leave behind the same way they leave their "home." However, after they build a new "home" in Amal Camp, Emad starts teaching the children and founds a theater group in the camp where they meet on the fifth floor for their artistic activities. They even have homework, "despite everything" in these "extraordinary times" (190). Emad, together with his students and theater classes, provides an example of what Said attributes to the exile experience: it can be transformed so easily into a rewarding incident. Although Emad and his family had to leave their home behind and leave a life in exile, they manage to make use of their exile in a creative way. Leaving everything except for their photographs as they embody their memories, they create a new world out of memories on their own, similar to the way a spider makes its web outside of itself. Theatre becomes a new home for Emad and his family, contributing also to the lives of others. They reconstitute their broken lives not only for themselves but also for the Yazidi children.

One example of how the exile experience can turn into a positive mission is *The Beekeeper* itself. Not only the benefits that have been explained so far, but also the book

itself is an outcome of the exile experience since Mikhail could not have written this book in her homeland because of the censorship she faced there. “Is there anything we can do to help? I feel horrible not doing anything,” Mikhail asks Abdullah, to which he answers: “The best thing you can do is write about our suffering,” which Mikhail accomplishes with her book (*The Beekeeper* 15). She wonders whether the publication of *The Beekeeper* would cause any harm to Abdullah or anyone mentioned in the book. “No,” he replies, after which Mikhail relates “Scheherazade saved her life with the tales she told. You, on the contrary, may be putting your own life at risk because of these tales” (203). Both Mikhail and Abdullah might have put their lives at risk with the writing of *The Beekeeper*, yet it has proved at least two conclusions. Firstly, the book gives voice to those who suffered from a genocide in the twenty-first century and whose stories would not be heard otherwise. Secondly, it reveals the ways in which exile, far from being “spiritually orphaned” and “alienated” in this “age of anxiety and estrangement,” in fact, pave the way for the exile to turn into an enriching motif (*Reflections on Exile* 173):

[O]f course we want the region to be fully liberated so that we can return to our past lives. But, in fact, something inside us has changed forever. Some people will never return. On the other hand, this disaster has opened our eyes to some beautiful stances and wonderful people. (*The Beekeeper* 204)

By writing how she discovered new standpoints and came across brave people, Mikhail commits herself to a meaningful cause. In an interview, she states that Enheduanna, “the first known poet in history,” “had a title, and that was ‘the flame keeper’” (Jarrar). For Mikhail, the responsibility for any writer is to keep the flame “aesthetic and moral.” It is clear that she keeps the flame burning through her words, poetry, and *The Beekeeper*. Although Mikhail “never physically returned to Iraq,” it is her homeland where she returns and revisits, not in flesh, but through the virtue of her poetry, “line by line” (NPR). In Dunya Mikhail’s *The Beekeeper*, exile is depicted as a constructive experience. This chapter points to the idea that while homes are always provisional, exile can compensate for the loss in numerous ways. In the final analysis, despite the fact that Mikhail was forced to live in exile, writing becomes a safe haven for her, a place where she can observe life from multiple perspectives gained through her

memories of the past. Exile becomes a place where she can defy orthodox judgment, enrich appreciative sympathy and give voice to the “other” with the goal of having recourse to her memory and restoring hope in exile.

CHAPTER III

LANGUAGE AND EXILE IN SOLMAZ SHARIF'S

LOOK: POEMS (2016)

Let it matter what we call a thing.

Solmaz Sharif, *Look: Poems*

Being forced to leave her homeland even before she was born, Sharif experienced exile at an early age. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, her parents were already studying in the United States. After the Islamic revolution, they returned to Iran and left again in 1986 for the US. Sharif was born “en route out of the country” (Clemmons). After she was born, they moved to Texas for her father’s studies, then to Birmingham, Alabama, this time for her mother’s studies. When she was in middle school, they moved to Los Angeles, the first place they lived which had a considerable Iranian population. However, she felt “immediately ostracized” and “dominated by upper-class, well-to-do Iranians who were more into assimilation” than her (Clemmons). Sharif received her MFA degree in Creative Writing from New York University, and her BA in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, where she studied and was part of June Jordan’s Poetry for the People, an arts and activism program founded by June Jordan in 1991 at UC Berkeley. She is the former managing director of the Asian American Writers’ Workshop. She also worked as a lecturer in Creative Writing at Stanford University, and as an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Arizona State University. Her poetry has appeared in various magazines including *the Paris Review*, *the New York Times*, *Harper’s*, *New Republic*, *Poetry*, *Granta*, *The Kenyon Review*. She won the 2011 “Discovery” Poetry Prize by *Boston Review*. She received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2013 for her poetry. In 2014, she won the Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers’ Award, and the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Two years later, she received

Lannan Literary Fellowship for Poetry in 2016, and the Holmes National Poetry Prize from Princeton University in 2017. *Look: Poems*, her first book, became a 2016 finalist for the National Book Award and the 2017 PEN Open Book Award. It won the 2017 American Book Award and the 2017 Pen Center Literary Award in Poetry. *Look* was one of *The New York Times* Book Review's 100 Notable Books of 2016, and was on several other lists which announced it as one of the best books of the year. She has a forthcoming second book entitled *Customs: Poems* that will be published in March 2022. In *Customs*, Sharif contemplates "what it means to exist in the nowhere of the arrivals terminal, a continual series of checkpoints, officers, searches, and questionings that become a relentless experience of America" (Graywolf Press, *Customs*). She traces "a pointed indoctrination to the customs of the nation-state and the English language," parallel to what she does in *Look*. This chapter will discuss exile as an enriching experience in *Look* by presenting Sharif's reflections on her own exile, followed by her stance on language and US politics to conclude that although exile affected Sharif negatively to a certain extent, it proved to be a rewarding experience.

When Sharif was born, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was ongoing. Despite the fact it was taking place far away from where she physically was, the image of war and her exile made her contemplate images that reflect both an Iranian and American perspective from afar. Although she settled in the US, a sense of coherence and unity with her new environment was still unobtainable. Although Iranians have a considerable presence in the US, Sharif suggests that there is a lot of anti-Black, anti-Arab, anti-Indian, and anti-Pakistani racism among the Iranian-American community. Her experience has been "one of obvious allyship between these communities" (Clemmons). She acknowledges a "rift" between first and second generations as the latter has realized that "assimilation is not just a matter of your accent or class or education," instead, "there is an 'in' that [one] will never be in because of who [one] is" (Clemmons). When she was sixteen, she experienced almost an epiphany at an Iranian feminist conference where Angela Davis, an American activist and author, was the key speaker. Davis referred to the audience as "women of color," which left some of the women "squirring

in their seats” (Clemmons). Yet, after hearing the term for the first time, Sharif thought “that’s it,” because the term “exactly” referred to what she had been trying to name; she thought it fittingly described her community. Although that statement “did not make too many people happy at the time,” it comforted Sharif by enabling her to define her community as “women of color,” which stands for the reluctance of younger generation to assimilate. Sharif expresses her unbelonging to the identities preconditioned for her; questions them both as a woman and an exilic intellectual; and stands outside the narrow definitions imposed by the idea of assimilation. As she explains, her perception of exile is reminiscent of Edward Said’s definition of it:

[N]o matter where I went, I was outside of whatever community I found myself in, so that even when I arrived in a place where there was a lot of “me,” I was totally outside again. That probably influenced my artistic impulse—to go back to the exilic intellectual—to stand outside of and look into, and constantly question and interrogate the collectives that exist. It’s easy for me because I’ve never felt a part of any of them in a real way. (Clemmons)

Seeing herself as an exilic intellectual, Sharif transforms her exile, in-betweenness and exclusion—not only by Americans but also by her fellow Iranians—into an advantage. Her stance on both politics and poetry is shaped by her exile experience, which she describes with reference to Said:

[It is] exciting for me to think of poets that are allowing their politics to also be shaped by these aesthetic considerations, and wondering when the poetic will lead you to the kind of political surprise that a dogmatic approach wouldn’t allow. These are the artists that live on the fringes of what is aesthetically and politically accepted. When I say “living on the fringes,” I’m thinking of Edward Said’s idea of the “exilic” intellectual pursuit. It’s this artistic presence continually outside, questioning and speaking back to whatever supposed “here” or “we” or “now” we’ve created. The word *fringe* is belittling in a way I don’t intend—I mean a nomadic presence, or a mind that is consistently on the run, and preventing these political moments from calcifying. (Clemmons)

Living on the fringes as part of a nonconformist, nomadic presence, Sharif reflects on her exile in her poem “The End of Exile:”

As the dead, so I come
to the city I am of.
Am without.

To watch play out around me

as theater —

audience as the dead are audience
to the life that is not mine.
Is as not
as never.

Turning down Shiraz's streets
it turns out to be such

a faraway thing.

A without which
I have learned to be. (Sharif, *Poetry Foundation*)

As the poem reveals, she belongs neither to the US nor Shiraz, Iran. She can only watch “play out around” her, being only able to observe what is going on in both places, unable to participate in any of them. Her exile is defined not only by her country but also by her not belonging to the intellectual communities. There is a “vein of self-affirmation that runs through that generation of radical poets,” and it is where she feels “split off” (Clemmons). While most radical poets feel as if they need to “define and affirm a collective identity that is otherwise despised,” she does not belong to any, and does not find it necessary (Clemmons).

She quotes Dunya Mikhail to explain the logic behind her poetry: compensating for her unbelonging as she thinks poetry is “diagnostic,” rather than “curative” (Clemmons). What Mikhail accomplishes through memory, Sharif accomplishes through language. Sharif's *Look* also offers a lens into war through a female standpoint. She is interested in how women are “described by media, or by state-sponsored language, in warfare,” and “how that representation is used to justify state-sponsored violence” (Clemmons). Women are often brought into descriptions of war, to “justify the rescue of a nation,” or to “justify its decimation by showing its entire people as despicable or threatening,” where war happens only “to men on the front lines during wartime.” Sharif thinks that “the boundaries of warfare” are historically “divided along gendered lines,” and those lines are what she aims to challenge. As a woman, Sharif feels that she is constantly under attack, and this feeling is true for many other women. She wants her poetry to “show that every time you're washing the dishes, every shower, every grocery trip—

that's all informed by this violence, whether we're seeing it or not." She also points out to the similarity between America's attitude towards war and women:

[W]hen you're told that you're overreacting, that what you think is going on isn't actually happening—this is how the U.S. largely deals with warfare. They say, The war is no longer happening on this block, what are you talking about? That's something natural to my experience as a woman, and something that seems necessary to expose over and over again. I want to talk about how far-reaching these effects are and how intimate these effects are and how there's no part of our bodies or desires that are not somehow informed or violated by these atrocities. This is a conversation that began with my own gender. (Clemmons)

The same way the American government considers the anti-war sentiment as an unpatriotic overreaction, men often manipulate women by making them doubt their sense of reality, only for the reality of what they think to be true in the end. Her experience is also reminiscent of Mikhail as she finds herself "caught in self-censorship all the time," which is "a legacy of centuries of monarchy, state-sponsored surveillance, notions of propriety wrapped up in necropolitics" (Badra). As her parents "challenged this with their lives," they also raised her knowing what she says "might cost [her] life, might cost a friend's life, but [she has] to say it anyway" (Badra).

Sharif feels constantly oppressed by the patriarchal system and censorship, which, ironically, encourages her to speak up. She feels the urge to expose the violence, wars, and struggles of the exile regardless of their physical proximity, since they are able to affect us in an intimate way. She defies censorship by pointing out the ways in which the daily language we use is violated by war and politics. She not only brings together autobiographical details in the context of war, but also examines language in the light of current politics through her exilic perspective. She believes that "all action is political"; and that "poetry is an action," which makes it political (Clemmons). Her "lyric self" is her "political weapon," and she names it "the most potent force" she has as "interacting politically on the page" (Kaveh Akbar). By rewriting the US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (DoD), which, for her, is a symbol of "violence against language itself" (Badra), she wants to "reveal the truth beneath the terms," and asks the reader to question the language that is forced on them daily (Clemmons). She is "irked by the attempt to fix language" as it is alive and constantly in

flux,” which justifies her job as a poet, in keeping language “alive as much as possible” (Tuffaha). For Sharif, language can reflect the violence that is committed against itself and against the people who use it, often without being aware.

Her first and only poetry collection as of 2021, published by Graywolf Press in 2016, *Look* “asks us to see the ongoing costs of war as the unbearable losses of human lives and also the insidious abuses against our everyday speech” (Graywolf Press, *Look*). She explains why she wrote *Look* in these words:

[I] wrote *Look* for the dead. For the displaced. For myself and my own outrage and perceived powerlessness. For history, believing that somewhere in our literary record, this outrage, this grief, this Mustapha Mohammad Khalaf, 15 months old must be registered, that the history of the “Wars on Terror” should not be left to the generals and the embedded journalists. For the readings I attended and left complaining that no one was writing about the wars. For those who said the art would suffer, who said political poetry was easy, didactic, and should remember its place. For Baghdad, Basra, Mazar-e Sharif, Jenin, Deir Yassin, Abadan, Baltimore, Fruitvale. For those whose bodies lie in the streets while uniforms chatter and chew their gum, those whose corpses some can walk around. For the despised everywhere. For the poets—Jordan, Darwish, Rich, Césaire, Rukeyser, Oppen, Williams, Whitman, and on and on—who spoke to me. For myself seen hardly worthy of address, who spoke wrong, to say I see you. Of course, for you. For the wonder with which I find myself alive at all. (American Booksellers Association)

By drawing attention to language and its violation by politics, emptying out the given, fixed definitions, and contextualizing the DoD Dictionary in actual lives of the people who experience war firsthand as the victims of it, Sharif criticizes US politics. She has been capable of enriching her worldview as a result of her exile experience, which include acquiring a multiplicity of perspectives, an inclination to resist fixations, and a tendency to focus on what is shared rather than what is different between seemingly contradictory sides. She explains how she set out for *Look* in these words:

[I] first came across the dictionary in 2006. I was collaborating with a visual artist friend of mine named Samira Yamin whose work deals with war photojournalism, and she was doing these prints that she wanted me to caption. So she would take a war photograph, turn it into a litho, and then she wanted me to throw like a military euphemism underneath it; and I ran out of them off the top of my head, and I Googled military language to see what would happen and I saw there was a whole public document, actually, devoted to creating this language and for a long time I sat with it thinking like, “What’s the one poem I will write with this?” And then I realized it’s not one poem, it’s a book. But I thought the book was going to be a kind of very direct rewriting of the dictionary, almost like a devil’s dictionary of sorts. (“A Conversation”)

The book has three sections titled “I,” “II,” “III,” and ends with a coda. Throughout *Look*, Sharif rewrites the DoD Dictionary in each poem by integrating military terms into her lines and daily experiences, including her encounters with Americans who ostracize her, the memories of her uncle whom she never met, and her family. Her exilic perspective makes the rewriting of the dictionary possible, and in order to analyze her work, an evaluation of the relationship between language and exile is necessary.

3.1. LANGUAGE AND EXILE

Literature is a form of expression operated by language, and politics play a crucial role in shaping our language. As Norman Fairclough argues in his *Critical Discourse Analysis*, ideology exists at the moment when a text is produced or interpreted. Not only content, but also “formal features of texts at various levels may be ideologically invested” (74). A text always carries an ideological stamp in its form and content since it is the product of socio-historical forces that form the basis of our thinking and consciousness. As Theodor Adorno puts it, “since the immediate consciousness of human beings is a socially necessary illusion, it is in great measure *ideology*” (*Lectures on Negative Dialectics* 176). Ideologies present the predominant tendencies as “the beliefs of society as a whole,” therefore, they prevent individuals “from seeing how society actually functions” (Hamadi 155). By creating a false consciousness and blurring the reality, ideologies may draw a curtain on the way we perceive the world. They operate not only in the political sphere but also in the literary. When it comes to constructing an ideology, rhetoric is the most common tool used by those in power. Since exile is inevitably a political struggle as much as a physical one, writers of exile revolve around both the physical and metaphorical borders of politics. Nevertheless, when a writer textualizes the exile experience, it would be a mistake to regard it as mere propaganda as it is an artistic, intellectual work of art that is not confined to the politics of a specific time and place.

According to Louis Althusser, the fact that writers might incorporate certain ideologies in their narrative does not necessarily mean that literature is a merely ideological propaganda. By its very nature, literature cannot solve political problems and it is not aimed at doing so. What literature and art do is to “make us see” and “make us feel.” Literature alludes to ideology, but it “detaches itself as art” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 222). An exilic text can go beyond physical realities and transcend the narrow, limited perspectives, the same way exiles surpass bordered territories through their movement. Fairclough outlines the relation between text and ideology:

[I]deologies reside in texts. While it is true that the forms and content of texts do bear the imprint of ideological processes and structures, it is not possible to “read off” ideologies from texts. This is because meaning are produced through interpretations of texts and texts are open to diverse interpretations, and because ideological processes appertain to discourses as whole social events—they are processes between people—not to the texts which are produced, distributed and interpreted as moments of such events. (71)

Locating ideology in literature is not an objective process. The way a narrative is interpreted changes over time depending on the dominant critical theories. During the early twentieth century, Anglo-American criticism prioritized formalist approaches that pushed the reader toward the form of writing while detaching the reader from the lived experience, socio-political power relationships, and the context that provide historical critique to literary work. It reduced the literary work to the materiality of the text only, and thereby cut it off from its historicity. Edward Said’s approach toward exile, however, predicated on the objective that all writers are witnesses to the dominant perceptions and lingual discourses of their time, and it scrutinizes the issues of power, politics, and ideology in the context of exile. Writers transform the facets of their social milieu into facets of language in manifold ways. Examining the exile experience and its manifestation in literature is one way to inspect the connection between language and politics, both of which are fundamental to the exile experience. Language is an amalgam of immediate experiences and politics, and thus textualizing the reality of exile through language is complex. Literature is not conceptual, but it is a by-product of socio-cultural reality whose orbit has the individual firmly in its grip, shaping the way

one thinks, speaks, and acts. The way an exile textualizes the exile experience cannot be detached from the reality in which it takes place.

As Roland Barthes argues in *Elements of Semiology*, language is a “social institution and a system of values” (14). It is filled with ideological formations, and has a social part that the individual cannot build or modify. Language “is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate” (14). The way we use language to express ourselves might not always bear a close relationship to our underlying intent, feeling, or perception, as an individual speech cannot be free from shared convention. Language inevitably exists together with ideology to provoke certain sensualities. This sensuality can be used as a means to “manufacture consent,” a concept introduced by Walter Lippmann, meaning “the process by which public opinions arise” (176). The way governments manufacture consent is “certainly no less intricate than it has appeared in these pages,” and the “opportunities for manipulation open to anyone who understands the process are plain enough” (176). Along with media, propaganda, and discourse, language paves the way for society’s actions, which directly or indirectly pave the way for wars, and thereby exile.

Not only the exiles’ opinions but also the way they form their thinking around language evokes certain ideological implications. Exilic intellectuals do not need to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in their texts. Indeed, since exile springs from not belonging, contradiction and conflict are the bases of its literature. These contradictions might resonate differently depending on the subjectivity of the reader. In Barthesian terms, any meaning that is assigned to the text by the reader requires knowledge of its social and historical context, and it might transcend any intentional meaning as he assumes that meaning “necessarily involves an ideological coercion of the reader or viewer” (Silverman 30). Just as the literary work is shaped by the mindset of its writer, readers and writers of exile inevitably shape the narrative according to the ideologies they are inclined to. Words, expressions, denotations, and all other elements of language carry different meanings depending on the positions held by those who use them. Therefore, how we interpret language eventually depends on our standpoint. In his book

Language, Semantics, and Ideology, French linguist Michel Pêcheux explains this condition by focusing on the language and experience of people from different professions:

[A] French soldier does not retreat signifies in fact “if you are a true French soldier, which is what you are, you cannot/must not retreat.” Through “habit” and “usage,” therefore, it is ideology that designates both what is and what ought to be, sometimes with linguistically marked “deviations” between observation and norm which operate as a device for the “taking up of slack.” It is ideology that supplies the evidentness with which “everyone knows” what a soldier is, or a worker, a boss, a factory, a strike, etc., the evidentness that makes a word or an utterance “mean what it says” and thereby masks in the “transparency of language” what I shall call the material character of the meaning of words and utterances. (110)

The “material character of meaning” which is “masked by its transparent evidentness for the subject, lies in its constitutive dependence on” what he calls “the complex whole of the ideological formations” (Pêcheux 111). In this light, when an exile writes about the generative pain of exile, the meanings of words and expressions do not exist in themselves independent from the ideological formations around them. A text does not have a fixed meaning on its own, instead, readers interpret ideologies presented by language through their own perspectives. The socio-historical context, ideology, and discourse “in which words, expressions and propositions are produced or reproduced” are of vital importance as their meaning can significantly change. Therefore, ideology and discourse exist together to shape language, and thus the literary work, a point which Mikhail Bakhtin puts forward in his “Discourse in the Novel.” He states that “discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object” (292). If we were to “detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life” (292). Discourse can also be embodied in the language used in a text. In exile literature, the feeling of separation, uncertainty, and loneliness that accompany exile are textualized through different techniques. Just as exiles feel fragmented as they keep going back and forth between places, their texts can also be fragmented in structure.

Literature is an expression that enables the reader to see, feel, and perceive what is written on the pages of a book. It allows the reader to gain an awareness of the ideology on which the narrative is based. A literary work might expose predominant ideologies of the society it deals with. Exilic intellectuals know that writing allows them to reintegrate themselves into narratives that endorse their selfhood they have supposedly “lost” as a consequence of exile. Language enables them to develop renewed identities with their new perspectives, have a fresh start in an uncertain world where they can act as agents in control of their actions and future. By uncovering the actuality of their exile experience in an intangible way through writing, exilic intellectuals can free themselves from the entanglement of nationalities and fixed political stances. Writing about their traumatic experience provides them not only with the agency to speak for themselves but also with self-discovery as a tool to reconfigure their fragmented self-hoods. They read their lives as stories of self-replacement:

[D]riven to exile or self-exile, shaken by momentous events, they feel compelled to reassess themselves, performing it through narratives that, while foregrounding primarily cognitive processes, bear evidence to the unequivocal dimensions of the ethical involved in self-knowledge. Forced to re-place themselves and to replace their selves, it is not surprising that their stories are ultimately narratives of self reparation, although in two different senses: reparation as restoration and renewal of the self (Blanco White and Goytisolo), and reparation of the self as compensation for a loss. (Loureiro 181)

Exilic intellectuals are perpetually compelled to re-evaluate themselves, together with the world around them and that of their memories of home. Solmaz Sharif, through a rewriting of the DoD Dictionary, reconsiders the truth behind language in the context of war and exile.

3.2. DEPICTION OF EXILE AND LANGUAGE IN *LOOK: POEMS*

Sharif reveals her interest in “interrogating the language of power,” through a “single,” “subjective” self that is “constantly doubling” and “tripling” meaning, time, self, and location (“A Conversation”). This kind of space where she can “double” herself through “pressurized language” can only be found in poetry, which is why Sharif has turned to it (“A Conversation”). When Sharif first started writing *Look*, she was “taking military

language and keeping it defined within a war context,” using it to describe the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran: the “lands and peoples” that Americans understand “only through warfare” (“A Conversation”). While her original intention was to “undermine the language of the military,” she realized that she kept “reenacting it by trying to reveal the truth of it,” an approach which contradicts the notion of border-crossing in exile since it keeps war in places that are understood only in the context of warfare. She fights the notion of “there” and “that,” the distance between one’s faraway homeland and where one is exiled, and she sets out to “complicate and blur that line as much as possible,” similar to the way exiles cross borders (“A Conversation”). Thus, she seeks a way to “force” this border-crossing through language. She wrote *Look* to show that the US commits violence not only against Middle Eastern people, Guantánamo detainees, or civilians, but also against language itself. Sharif believes that the republic is “built on a destruction of language,” which is “a kind of obliteration of language that will enable and excuse violence against bodies” (Nazaryan). As a poet, Sharif aims at being “a bane to the republic.” For her, there are definitions and places offered “willfully” through the “oppressor’s language” in our daily lives, and her mission is to “interrogate and agitate” that as much as she can (Kaveh Akbar). Poetry offers a space for her to interrogate the politics, military, their effect on language, and also to examine its implications, not through a formal, military context but through a subjective, personal lens of day-to-day existence. In an interview, she explains why language and lexicography have always been a problem for her:

[T]he fixing of language, its standardization, the decisions behind how words are to be used and aren’t, often by committee, is a doomed and often imperial enterprise. Language is, sure, a shared medium, so we must have some idea of how we are each using it, some sort of agreement, I guess. But dictionaries are doomed. Any number of obscure military manuals, any state-sponsored language can and should have lyrical pressure applied to it, but it made most sense to use their very own dictionary. (Badra)

Just as exiles stand against the fixation of home, Sharif stands against the fixation of language. As a political poet, she applies “lyrical pressure” to the US military language. For her, the “job” of a poet is to “make alive in the reader the rendered experience, which may or may not awaken possibilities of political action” (Badra). She does not

openly call for action in her poetry. She sees herself as an “agitator” rather than a “legislator” (Badra). She resists the so-called objective, factual military terminology of the US government and defines her objective as exposing the intimate connection between language and politics which goes unnoticed in the context of everyday life, and as making that connection “as intimate as possible” (Tuffaha). In *Look*, she quotes from numerous sources such as journalists, military radio recordings, human-rights reports, and WikiLeaks’ Guantánamo files. She challenges the meanings attributed to the military terminology employed in them by incorporating the terms in a daily context and reorganizes them with her unique writing technique.

The intimate connection is also enriched by her writing style. She uses colons, capital letters, small caps, italics, bold, and untraditional indentation. She writes the DoD terms mostly in small caps, integrates them into her lines, and offers alternative definitions for them, using the multiplicity of perspectives she has gained through exile. She explains the motive behind her style in an interview:

[I] realized they were small caps and they would be more markers that are, one, disrupting the narratives that are happening within this nation, revealing the violence that’s just shimmering underneath everything that we do in this nation. And that also fizzled out because that just became a series of ironic poems basically using small caps and then I realized I needed to include some kind of personal narrative in there using these small caps as well so that I hit all these—a kind of range of tonal realities that I was after. (“A Conversation”)

Her style of writing short but unbroken verses that are lined in a row, lines that are separated by semicolons, and narratives that are abruptly cut symbolize the violence committed against language in the US. By writing her personal narratives in small caps and the military terms in capital letters, Sharif brings them together and breaks down the barrier between the personal and the political. She voices her surprise to find out that writing requires “callousness” as well as empathy, and she continues: “Maybe this is the nature of the material I immerse myself in—mostly testimony of warfare and imprisonment. Maybe this is the nature of the craft—that putting language, putting music first requires a kind of violence” (Kenyon Review). For her, language is a tool to defy borders and build bridges, although it requires a textual type of violence. In *Look*,

using the DoD Dictionary to interweave her exile with her criticism of the US politics was useful for her, although political works were often overlooked and disparaged.

Weaving military language with poetry, she tries to find the shapes that will “interrupt” her speech and “prevent” her from saying what she needs to say—the shapes that will “exist only in infinitives” so there would be no subject. She also tries to find ways in which she cannot “quite get to the thing” using repetition (Tuffaha). It embodies the fixed, rigid relation between politics and language. She challenges the blind, fixated, limiting, emptied out, prejudiced, assuming meanings by redefining them; therefore, she uses the DoD Dictionary to point its atrocity back at itself. Her “intention as a person is to end US imperialism, at home and abroad” (Badra), which shows her inclination to challenge the authoritatively given status quo.

The opening poem of the book, which is also titled “Look,” challenges the status quo by directly addressing to an implied reader who supposedly belongs to a group that has a prejudice against exiles in one’s own country. Having read the poem, readers face the responsibility to question themselves about their standpoint in regard to discrimination against exiles or minorities. Sharif intertwines six different voices in the poem besides the speaker: a lover, a xenophobic American man who converses with the speaker outside the 2004 Republican National Convention, two US Air Force jet pilots, a federal judge sentencing one of the speaker’s acquaintances, an 18-year-old US Army Staff Sergeant, and the Bible to inspect the ways in which language diminishes a person’s existence and denies one the right to claim his/her own identity.

A lover calls the speaker “exquisite,” which makes her realize that words are important, that “it matters what [we] call a thing,” drawing attention to language (*Look* 11). The fighter pilots discuss whether their target was “a child” or “a dog,” which would have made no difference as both are of nearly equal importance to them. The federal judge itches to “make sure [he] [pronounces] the defendant’s name correctly,” another point showing the significance of words and language. An American man tells the speaker that she “should be disappeared” solely because of her family name as it reveals her un-

Americanness, and it is “exactly” what he means. Rather than seeing the speaker in her entirety without prejudice, his biased viewpoint reduces her to a word, because of which she should “disappear:”

Whereas *You mean I should be disappeared because of my family name?* and he answered *Yes. That’s exactly what I mean*, adding that his wife helped draft the PATRIOT Act; (*Look 12*)

Said, like Sharif, also talks about the “often startling similarity of namelessness and rejection” (*Reflections on Exile xxxiv*), which are introduced in the poem as synonymous together with “disappearance” according to the dominant language (*Look 12*). The speaker is asked to be “nameless,” “rejected,” and “disappeared.” In this respect, Sharif is an example of what Spivak calls “tokenization” which stands for being hailed into a certain subject position by others (167). According to Spivak, individuals “must resist subject positions offered to [them] as tokens, by the other side” (167). In the poem, Sharif is offered a subject position by the American man who perceives her as a token assuming that he is in a superior position because of his nationality. Similar to Sharif, Said “always felt the rift” between Western and non-Western peoples, mostly because the former are in a position of authority having the conversation usually in “their” language (*Out of Place 212*). If Sharif takes the given language for granted, she would not have a language through which she could express herself and make meaning out of. By definition, as an exilic intellectual, Sharif is in “a condition of marginality” (*Representations of the Intellectual 63*). In this condition, names, surnames, and language as a whole, can be used as an excuse to further exclude exiles by denying them the right to claim their identities. All of these acts of naming prove that the language we use takes shape in a way that is sensitized to politics and depends on one’s standpoint. While pronouncing one’s name correctly is of particular importance at one point, one can also be asked to “disappear” solely because of a family name. A name signifies not only a word, a specific language, but also one’s roots and homeland, a place where the speaker should return and “disappear.”

Sharif contemplates her exile in “Stateless Person,” a poem that was first published online with the title “Exile Elegy” in 2015. In the poem, the speaker recalls the memory of how she and her family were not notified of a relative’s death as a result of being in exile: “calling us / months later / because we were / exiles, were vagabonds, fugitives” (*Look* 43). Exiles live in far away places “where the dead can not reach” (43). Whether it is good news or the news of one’s death, it “will not reach us here” (44). As an exile, the speaker sorely claims: “I can’t hear that music here” (45). “Here” might stand for the US, where Sharif resides now. In that case, Sharif cannot “hear the music” in the US, which might reflect her inability to fully adapt to the country, a “music” that she could perhaps hear if she were in her homeland. Similarly, for Said, exile refers to “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home,” where one cannot hear the news or the happenings that take place in one’s homeland (*Reflections on Exile* 173). The “essential sadness” and “loss” of leaving one’s homeland behind forever woefully manifests itself, both in exile experience and in Sharif’s poetry (173). Sharif reflects on her exile and not-belonging also in her “Deception Story:”

DISTANCE

is a funny drug and used to make me a DISTRESSED PERSON,
 one who cried in bedrooms and airports. Once I bawled so hard
 at the border, even the man with the stamps and holster said *Don’t cry*.
 You’ll be home soon. (*Look* 21)

While the DoD Dictionary defines “distressed person” as “an individual who requires search and rescue assistance to remove he or she from life-threatening or isolating circumstances in a permissive environment” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 146), Sharif personalizes it by recounting how she cried in bedrooms and airports. She “bawls” to reach her home, like most exiles. Said’s ideas that “the pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth,” and “homecoming is out of the question,” are the reason behind the speaker’s intense emotions in this poem (*Reflections on Exile* 179). For Sharif, in-betweenness is permanent while belonging is unimaginable. This in-betweenness is also detailed by Said, who affirms that the exilic intellectual “exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor

fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 49). The exilic intellectual feels “nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another,” similar to the way the speaker feels in Sharif’s poem (49). In this median state, Sharif asks herself: “Am I grateful to be here? Someone eventually asks / If I love this country,” “Somehow I can’t say yes” (*Look* 36). She explains in an interview how that line came into being after an exchange she had with an American:

[H]e was getting a pedicure across from me and asked where I was from, of course. “I’m from Westwood.” And he said, “No, the other from.” Eventually he gets to the answer he’s after: Iran. He said, “Oh, aren’t you grateful to be in this country where you can paint your toenails?” And I was like, “No, I’m not. Do you have any idea what exile means? Do you have any idea what displacement actually does to a person’s soul? And then to be in the country, the nation that caused it? And to have to show gratitude? It’s humiliating. It’s degrading. (Kaveh Akbar)

Sharif can never fully arrive or be at home in the US. She is not grateful for the facilities and benefits she has in this new country, nor does she have to. She feels damaged, emotionally and mentally, which is also visible in her writing style. Her family would not have left their homeland if the US had not caused it through its wars in the region, and it is for this reason that Sharif does not show gratitude. As someone who was born and raised in exile after constantly being excluded and humiliated as the “other.” She is often forced to “disappear” or to be silenced by non-exiles:

I feel like I must muzzle myself,
I told my psychiatrist.
“So you feel dangerous?” she said.
Yes.
“So you feel like a threat?”
Yes.
Why was I so surprised to hear it? (*Look* 36-37)

The urge to “muzzle” herself as if she is a threat that needs to be silenced reveals how she internalized the oppression she faced in the US, her new homeland in which she is the “other.” The troubling necessity to silence oneself mentioned in the poem which reminds one of the “agitated, largely hidden” earlier life of Said and his urge to “break through an imposed and enforced silence” (*Out of Place* 415). Said thinks it is the lack of an “acceptable narrative to rely on” or a “sustained permission to narrate” that makes

one feel “crowded out and silenced” (*Culture and Imperialism* 693). Still, Sharif speaks up instead of “muzzling” herself, while also giving voice to other exiles who are deliberately excluded in their new environment.

Later, Sharif lines up military terms from the dictionary and offers subjective definitions for them, as if she is trying to make up for the governments’ silence on violence. In one page, she writes “BATTLEFIELD ILLUMINATION” in small caps on the left of the page, and without any punctuation, she writes “on fire / a body running” right next to it, leaving most of the page empty (*Look* 15). She continues with other terms, such as “CONTAMINATED REMAINS,” “DAMAGE AREA,” “DEAD SPACE,” and “DESTRUCTION RADIUS” (18). “Damage area” for example, is defined by the DoD as “the plan area around a minesweeper inside which a mine explosion is likely to interrupt operations” (*DoD Dictionary* 1994, 103). However, by applying “lyrical pressure” to the term, Sharif expands it as being a thing that “does not include night sweats / or retching at the smell of barbeque” (*Look* 18). With this personal touch, Sharif draws attention to the unshown realities of war, in a second language, which she gained through her exile experience. Similarly, “destruction radius” means “the maximum distance from an exploding charge of stated size and type at which a mine will be destroyed by sympathetic detonation . . . with a stated probability of destruction” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 138). For Sharif, it is “limited to blast site / and not the brother abroad / who answers his phone / then falls against the counter / or punches a cabinet door” and thus it excludes the actuality of it in everyday life (*Look* 18). By putting the term in an everyday context, Sharif displays the unseen, often unexposed face of war through language. She delves into the disengagement between language and politics by quoting from Muriel Rukeyser, an American poet whose *The Book of the Dead* Sharif counts as her biggest influence. The second part of the book begins with a quote by Rukeyser: “During the war, we felt the silence in the policy of the governments of English-speaking countries. That policy was to win the war first, and work out the meanings afterward. The result was, of course, that the meanings were lost” (14).

After the meanings of war were lost, Sharif makes sense of her personal war in “Safe House.” She incorporates twenty-seven military terms that begin with the letter S, written in small caps at the beginning of each stanza. Instead of giving the official definitions, Sharif puts her childhood memories intertwined with the military connotations. The speaker and her family “have to use a SCALE each morning,” worried that they “take up too much space” (*Look* 19). Her father, whom she describes with his moustache and profile, kept their house “SECURE,” and he is not afraid of “SEDITION,” which means “willfully advocating or teaching the duty or necessity of overthrowing the US government or any political subdivision by force or violence” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 421). Her father has given her “SHIELDING” and “SHELTER” (*Look* 20).

In “Personal Effects,” an erasure poem and a long elegy she wrote for her uncle named Amoo, who died in Iran-Iraq War, she attempts to translate the letters her uncle wrote “from the frontlines of the Iran-Iraq War shortly before he was killed” in her broken Farsi (“The Near Transitive”). The poem became “the last major piece the book needed,” in Sharif’s words (Clemmons). Her “inability to translate” represented her “inability to speak to him physically,” and she thought that inability “should remain” in the poem (“The Near”). For Sharif, a “fraught space” exists between herself and her uncle (“The Near”). Moreover, that space also exists between the translator and the reader, and between her exile in America and her homeland Iran, where and “for” which her uncle was killed. She is only able to translate a number of words, revealing that the distance between Sharif and Amoo is not only physical but also a linguistic one. This poem is Sharif’s attempt to meet him through language and imagination. Rather than describing him with his personal details and character, Sharif introduces his picture album and letters that “survived from the frontline,” and her depiction of that picture covers the first six pages of the poem (“A Conversation”). She begins by defining the album as a “STOP-LOSS,” which stands for the “presidential authority . . . to suspend laws relating to promotion, retirement, or separation of any member of the Armed Forces determined essential to the national security of the United States” (*DoD*

Dictionary 2010, 446). It is a “STOP-LOSS” because as a martyr, there is no chance for him to be promoted anymore, and he could not “retire” the way a soldier would ideally do. Besides, his death could be seen as a “separation,” and Sharif, with her poem written for him, suspends his death, and brings him to life via poetry.

Sharif defines her uncle’s photographs in a metaphorical way, as objects that refute his separation both from Iran’s army and from life since they are the real-life evidences of his existence. However, while he “flips through” the album denying his separation, Sharif suddenly inserts a formal statement which once revealed the news of his death: “A young soldier (pictured above) the son of an imam, brother to six, is among the latest casualties in the military campaign of Susangerd” (*Look* 63-64). While the reader is given a description of his looks, Sharif does not include the picture. It remains “absent,” corresponding to the “loss” that is often tied to exile. Reflecting on the process of writing the poem, Sharif tells that she had “the luxury of accumulating and adding all the languages and materials essential to the sociohistorical narrative that subsumed [her] uncle” for “seven undisturbed months in a mostly-shut-down town at the end of the world” (Kenyon Review).

3.3. EXILE AS AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE IN *LOOK: POEMS*

Sharif has experienced much of what Said calls “the pleasures of exile” from a very early age (*Representations of the Intellectual* 59). She speaks about how she carries both Iranian and American sentiments as parts of her identity, and how her exile gives rise to her poetry and a cultivation of an imagined place to live in the absence of home:

[M]y own experience as an Iranian born in Turkey beneath the long shadow of the Iran-Iraq War has always been an impetus behind this project. As an Iranian abroad, this experience was quintessentially American—the warfare was happening over there. Less American, perhaps, was being from the there. Regardless, the being from an elsewhere forced me to cultivate an image, as many have, of the home they left. An imagined place. (Kenyon Review)

Although exile distorts her sense of belonging, making her neither Iranian nor American, her exile forced her to cultivate an image of a home, an imagined place

where she would feel at home through writing. Thus, in *Look*, Sharif weaves the sentiments that accompany her exile, both the pleasant and bitter ones, with the language of the US government. She gains an inquisitive, questioning perspective which becomes a “pleasure” of exile. This perspective helps her redefine the terms that are interwoven with our lives. Exile endows her with a constant inclination to keep away from fixed meanings attributed to them, and it enriches her artistic impulse which allows her to reach the masses. She fits very well into Said’s description of an exilic intellectual, as a poet who is “a part of a more general condition affecting the displaced national community” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 50). While exile might be seen as a source of “volatility and instability” for most, Sharif uses her exile as a source that provides acculturation and adjustment, after being familiar with that “shaky instability” of exile since she was born.

The first and the most prominent “pleasure” of exile for Sharif is the multiplicity of perspectives it brings. According to her, exile is “a mind that is consistently on the run” (Clemmons). Constantly moving, exile endows one with a myriad of standpoints which are described by Said in these words:

[B]ecause the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counter posed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 60)

Sharif observes her surroundings from exilic perspectives that enable her to exist outside of predetermined ways of seeing life. In her “Reaching Guantánamo,” Sharif demonstrates the multiple perspectives exile could provide. It is an array of seven erasure poems which serve as imaginary letters written to Salim Ahmed Hamdan from his wife. Hamdan is a Yemeni who used to work as Osama bin Laden’s driver. He was “the first Guantanamo detainee to go to trial before the military commissions” and be held as a detainee at Guantanamo Bay between 2002-2008 (Human Rights Watch). While she makes use of official government documents and fills in the blanks between

definitions throughout *Look*; in “Reaching Guantánamo,” Sharif makes use of a fictional text and creates blank spaces through erasure. The reason behind “erasing” something imaginary is to equate the presence of language with its absence. Sharif defines erasure as “what a state does” through the often “late” and “censored” letters the Guantanamo detainees receive (“The Near Transitive”). By wiping out words, she exposes how language operates in an urgent, vital way to communicate—a fact that often goes unnoticed:

Dear Salim,
 Love, are you well? Do they you?
 I worry so much. Lately, my hair , even
 my skin . The doctors tell me it’s
 I believe them. It shouldn’t
 . Please don’t worry.
 in the yard, and moths
 have gotten to your mother’s
 , remember?
 I have enclosed some —made this (*Look* 53)

The poem proves how erasure can be equally revealing since it attracts one’s attention to what might be hidden beneath the surface. Erasing words is also reminiscent of one’s loss and separation from one’s homeland and the way exiles and refugees are often silenced, being denied the right to speak for themselves in places and languages that are foreign to them. Sharif believes such erasure “may well be the closest poetry in English has gotten to role of the state” (“The Near Transitive”). Therefore, “Reaching Guantánamo” reveals how erasing a section from a text is as important as filling in its blanks as both techniques point at the effectiveness of language:

Dear Salim,
 The neighbors got an apology
 and a few thousand dollars.
 They calculate based on
 and
 and age. The worth of a , of a human (58)

There is a vast possibility for the reader to fill in the blank spaces reflecting the manifold ways of thinking. It is important to note that Sharif does not write a complete letter first and cross it out later. Instead, she views the reader as a co-writer, capable of filling in the blanks in the poem. She does not try to “replicate” the violence that has

been committed by the US military. What she tries to do is “to grieve” it and “to exist alongside the reader in that absence,” in that “not knowing” (Tuffaha). By opening up a space where numerous standpoints can intersect, Sharif resists seeing things from a defined, static vantage point.

In “Break-Up,” Sharif describes this multiplicity by portraying it as voices that are divided into multiple fragments. First, she gives the first definition of the term “break-up” according to the DoD Dictionary, which stands for “the separation of one solid return into a number of individual returns which correspond to the various objects or structure groupings,” and it is “contingent upon a number of factors” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 60). She personalizes the term by inserting her memories between her lines:

[I like to think years apart, in the]
distance between objects contingent on a number of factors
[before the moment I first saw you, (*Look* 30)

Later on, the speaker describes how s/he fell in love with someone at lunch, “when the coffee kicked in” and when he “cut carrots into coins” for their salad while the speaker “worshipped” him from the sofa (32). They “walked into Masjid-e Imam and looked / up into its mosaic domes” which resemble “a series of tonal impressions” (32). The speaker and his/her companion sent their voice up into its mosaic domes “to hear it return,” to hear it “lose its identity” (32). The way an imaged item loses its identity is not different from the way exiles lose their identity and become nameless, “random” impressions. This contrapuntal vision the voices represent in the poem are one of the “pleasures” of exile. It is visible when the speaker, together with someone, walks into a mosque and sends her voice up into its domes, only to hear the voice clap echoing:

we walked into Masjid-e Imam
and sent our voices up into its mosaic domes
and heard them clap back to us in seven
divine echoes, that our voices became
a PERMANENT ECHO, that we called
our names up into a dome to hear]
the separation of one solid return
[as our names returned, names
not even a blip on their]
radar (*Look* 30)

The “permanent” echo of the voices is defined by DoD as “any dense and fixed radar return caused by reflection of energy from the earth’s surface” (*DoD Dictionary* 1994, 287). The return is caused by their resistance, while their voices are “not even a blip on their radar” indicating that they are nameless and non-existent in the perspectives of non-exiles. Later, she gives the second definition of “break-up” according to the dictionary: “In imagery interpretation, the result of magnification or enlargement which causes the imaged item to lose its identity and the resultant presentation to become a random series of tonal impressions. Also called **split-up**” (*Look* 31, emphasis in original). Sharif divides the definition into fragments and fills in the blanks with her personal reflections. In contrast to the objectivity of the dictionary, Sharif tends to define these terms within the framework of personal, idiosyncratic details, connecting the personal with the political. One solid return of their names separates into multiple returns, resembling the multiple view points one gains through the exile experience.

“Ground Visibility” is another poem where a thing is viewed by a multiplicity of perspectives. The poem describes a prison, named as “History’s Dumping Ground” where peepholes are “burnt through the metal doors of their solitary cells” (*Look* 34). The holes are “just large enough . . . for one eye then the other / to regard the hallway / to regard the cell and inmate” (35). These are peepholes “without a lens / so when the GUARD comes to inspect me, / I inspect him.” The peepholes represent a shared point of seeing the world between two opposing sides. They are gateways to reciprocation, to counteraction between seemingly divergent sides—a guard and an inmate, an exile and a non-exile. When the guard comes to inspect the speaker, he is inspected in return. Thus, when exiles are undervalued and rejected by non-exiles, it actually provides them with a chance to “stand outside” and “look into” the existing political conjuncture, in Sharif’s words, to “constantly question” the situation from various angles (Clemmons). Sharif keeps shifting between multiple points of view in “Drone,” which was titled after the military term “drone:”

[T]he term “drone” appeared in the 2007 version, but no longer appears in the 2015 version. It is likely “drone” was removed from the dictionary since understanding of the term has fully entered English vernacular; in other words, the military

definition is no longer a *supplement* to the English language, but the English language itself. (*Look* 102)

Each stanza begins with a colon, pointing to the consecutive, uninterrupted arrangement of multiple voices. It opens with a first person speaker, whose cousins' computers are being watched by the FBI and whose father "was reading the Koran when they shot him" (*Look* 98). The speaker's job is to "dig graves into the soccer field" (98). Suddenly, there is a shift in perspective into two soldiers who took part in the Haditha massacre on November 19, 2005 when American soldiers "evidently massacred" twenty-four Iraqi civilians in Haditha, Iraq, after a company member was killed by a roadside bomb (Engelhardt 2). The speaker depicts the event from the American soldiers' point of view: "I took no more than two steps into a room before firing / in Haditha we cleared homes Fallujah-style," the speaker voices (98). Later, the perspective shifts again, and the reader is faced with atrocities of war. There is "blood splattered up the walls to the ceiling" in the depictions of a fifteen months old victim, Mustapha Mohammad Khalaf, who is portrayed as "an unknown martyr" (99). Suddenly, an American interrupts the conversation in the poem to tell the speaker "*you don't have to do anything you don't want to do*," a sentence which the speaker uses as a response when the FBI knocks on her door (99). However, once again, the speaker shifts to the first person speaker whose blood "moved through borders according to grazing and season" two generations ago, "the displaced whatnots," "then a lifeline of planes" (100). Overall, just as the reader is assured that the poem is told by a certain speaker, the perspective shifts, a fact what contributes to the impermanence and temporality of exile.

Another "pleasure" of exile is that it resists fixation: fixation of places, fixation of time, fixation of meanings. "Drone" offers a multiplicity of perspectives and resists the fixation of meaning and narrative point of views. The poem embodies the "exilic energy" that is never "being satisfied, placid, or secure" (*Reflections on Exile* 186). Exile is "nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew" (186). Said describes this resistance as follows:

[I]t is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange. From this perspective also, one can see “the complete consort dancing together” contrapuntally. (*Culture and Imperialism* 812)

This exilic energy paves the way for the complete consort dancing together. Similarly, in “Deception Story,” exile satisfies Sharif with its “violent currents:”

My life in the
American Dream is a DOWNGRADE,
a mere DRAFT
of home. Correction: it satisfies as DRAG.
It is, snarling, what I carve of it alone. (*Look* 22)

“Downgrade” means “to determine that classified information requires, in the interests of national security, a lower degree of protection against unauthorized disclosure than currently provided, coupled with a changing of the classification designation to reflect such a lower degree” (*DoD Dictionary* 1994, 122). For Sharif, her life is only a draft of home which supposedly requires a lower degree of protection. This perspective demonstrates how downgraded and undervalued exiles feel in relation to life, which is always connected to their home, an insignificant, mere draft. At the same time, it is a “drag,” which stands for the “force of aerodynamic resistance caused by the violent currents behind the shock front” (*DoD Dictionary* 1994, 122). Her exile is a downgraded version of home, a mere “draft,” yet it still satisfies her as “drag,” offering a form of “resistance.” Exiles face the “violent currents” of xenophobia, but their resistance is empowering, to the extent that it is “snarling,” as she hopes to build a homeland:

Stepped out to ASSESS this AREA
OF INFLUENCE, to admire together the ARCHITECTURE,
share a DESIRED
APPRECIATION of our
HOME
LAND that (fingers crossed!) we will build together... (*Look* 24)

The speaker evaluates the “area of influence” which stands for “a geographical area wherein a commander is directly capable of influencing operations” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 34). There is the hope of sharing a “desired appreciation” of one’s home, defined as “adversary personal conclusions, official estimates, or assumptions, valid or invalid, that result in adversary behaviors and official actions harmful to friendly interests and objectives” (*DoD Dictionary* 1994, 31). Thus, sharing a “desired appreciation” is considered to be harmful, which suggests that even the hope of having a homeland is perceived as a threat, something that is “adversary.” According to Said, arriving one’s homeland only stays as a “desire,” an unrealistic hope for the exile since it signifies a fixation.

Another enriching aspect of exile is that it enables one to see what is shared between seemingly irrelevant concepts. Sharif makes a connection between her everyday life and war when she writes: “I smell my fingers and I am smelling his” meaning her uncle Amoo’s fingers (*Look* 62). Later, she sat down “rolling little ears of pasta off my thumb like helmets” (68). Although there are both physical and emotional distance between Sharif’s present life and her uncle’s experience in war, she brings the two together. Moreover, she swiftly moves between two different meanings of the verb “move.” Portraying her uncle, she writes that “He was, we hope, moved. / Moved, but we will have to guess by what” (78). Then she presents a list of the possible things that might have moved him: “shampoo in her wet hair,” “salty and fried breads,” “the chase scene in *Bullitt*” (78). Suddenly, she changes the meaning of “move” and begins to use it in its other meaning: “He was moved like that / across a minefield— / moved by a hand we cannot see, // a hand that is all our hands combined” (78). A considerable portion of the poem might be considered as “departures” between places, time, and meanings which are the product of what Said calls “a decentered consciousness,” “a plurality of terrains” and “multiple experiences” (*Reflections on Exile* 214). This perspective supports the physical, intellectual, and lexicographical border-crossing that is central to the exile experience and manifest throughout *Look*.

Just as Sharif draws parallels between past and present, definitions and real meanings, she also refuses to establish certain connections between things, when she criticizes the government's attempt to reduce her uncle to a box, dehumanizing him and diminishing the line between his life and the forces that caused his death:

They are building a museum for the martyrs.
 Some metal shelf
 a white archival box
 with his PERSONAL EFFECTS.
 I am attempting my own
 myth-making
 He didn't want to have anything
 to do with it. (70)

“Personal effects” is defined as “all privately owned moveable, personal property of an individual” (*DoD Dictionary* 2010, 358). Sharif counteracts the language of the US government by her “own myth-making,” her own language. Language can be considered a myth as it does not always reflect reality as it is. Just as the US government reduced her uncle to a box—almost like a myth as if he had not existed—Sharif makes another myth by writing on the subject. “Daily I sit / with the language / they've made // of our language,” she writes, using the same language to reflect its atrociousness (*Look* 71). The military language can diminish a human being to an extent where one could fit into a box with one's “personal effects.” She aims at showing this violence by integrating these terms into daily, intimate contexts. She connects the violence that caused her uncle's death to the violence of the US government:

to NEUTRALIZE
 the CAPABILITY of LOW DOLLAR VALUE ITEMS
 like you.

You are what is referred to as
 a “CASUALTY.” Unclear whether
 from a CATALYTIC or FRONTAL ATTACK, unclear

the final time you were addressed

thou, beloved. It was for us a
 CATASTROPHIC EVENT.

Just, DESTROYED.

DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION. (71)

Just as her uncle is a mere “casualty,” his father who would sob upon receiving the news of his son’s death is a mere “PERSON ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE EFFECTS,” a person “authorized by law to receive the personal effects of a deceased military member” (*Look* 86; *DoD Dictionary* 2005, 408). It is a definition that dehumanizes millions of people, especially the relatives of soldiers who were killed in wars. The lexicon of war dehumanizes and underestimates lives so much that they become trivial and not tragic. The human value is only restored by means of poetry in this intimate case. By lining up the terms consecutively, Sharif reveals the vicious rift between them and their real-life connotations from a personal standpoint. She says she “needed” the poem to be about her uncle and the Iran-Iraq War, but she did not want it to remain “just about him or about that war.” In fact, she wanted to “blur the borders between himself and all the dead that were thawed, and between that war and all the wars” that have happened (“A Conversation”). As an exilic intellectual, Sharif once again crosses the so-called borders of experiences, wars, time, and places. She embodies the “overlap” between “state-sponsored violence” and “state-sponsored language.”

Sharif defies the permanence of meanings attributed to language. She expresses how her entire existence is at odds with fixed definitions: “According to most / definitions, I have never / been at war. / According to mine, / most of my life / spent there” (73). She shows how the meaning of a term, a place, or a thing might change depending on where one stands. She holds that her life was spent at war, not in the same way the government or dictionaries define it, but in a way that feels real for her. She has not fought in trenches, yet she is close enough to claim that “I burn my finger on the broiler and smell trenches” (*Look* 89). However, a “friend” or a “daughter of a Vietnam vet” would object to it. She has heard so many questions such as “How can she write that? She doesn’t know” (89) that even Sharif herself questions whether she can know: “I wasn’t there / so I can’t know, can I?” (*Look* 73-75). It is problematic to assume that one should not have the right to speak about something s/he has not experienced. Sharif defies that notion as she even writes about her uncle, whom she could not have met if it were not for language. Thus, drawing attention to the link between past and present, here and

there, Sharif reveals language as a tool to unite things that seem disconnected and far apart. Although the American government is committing violence against language as part of its discourse of war, Sharif, with her unique style, brings this unnoticed truth into light. For her, it is exile that equips her with a perspective which helps to recognize the connection between things visible to every eye:

[C]onnections should be drawn between these systems of power regardless, whether it's happening in the U.S. or it's happening in Iran. So when I see Roosevelt thanking mothers for sacrificing their sons and their nylons, I can't help but think of the mothers in Iran who sacrificed their sons and were celebrated by national leaders. To be the mother of a martyr, or to be the mother of a fallen soldier—you know, it's funny, you just change the term and it has a different charge to it in English—is a respected position. (Kaveh Akbar)

Although there is no direct connection between Roosevelt and the mothers in Iran, Sharif ties them together since they exemplify a system of power. That system of power changes when it is translated into a different language. The mothers in Iran call their sons martyrs whilst the American mothers call them fallen soldiers. By connecting these two seemingly disparate mothers and their words, Sharif binds together an emotion, encompassing them rather than setting them apart, which is explained as a “pleasure” by Said:

[Y]ou tend to see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way. Look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible. (*Representations of the Intellectual* 61)

Going back in time, looking at history as an outcome of a whole range of historical choices, and bringing dissimilar people and events together is what Sharif does. Overall, with her reflective, intimate approach that blends the political with personal, Sharif has been able to turn the exile experience into a rewarding experience. She draws attention to our daily lives that are under attack by politics and war by making use of the enriching, potent perspectives she has gained through exile. She uses the terminology that is specific to US military operations, redefines them to make them heard. She aims specifically at the American ears as if “forcing” them to listen, since they are usually unaware of it and often think themselves “outside of this violence” (Kaveh Akbar). By

placing the military terminology in the lives and language of Americans, who see themselves “somehow free from war,” Sharif aspires to “infiltrate” and “disrupt” Americans’ narratives, and delivers her “defense,” “outrage,” and “grief” (Kaveh Akbar). For this reason, instead of being an uneasy experience that stays private only for Sharif, exile empowers her to criticize the language and the whole military institution of the United States.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of World War II, the Middle East has almost never been a stable region. Throughout history, foreign interventions have paved the way for further conflict. As of 2021, over eighty million people are forced to leave behind their homes in order to flee from war, violence, or persecution, which has made exile a collective experience in the Middle East. Today, the fact that there are extraordinarily strict border rules between countries and that most Western nations close their doors on refugees make the exile experience more relevant and urgent than ever. A humanitarian crisis at present, the experience of exile is examined in detail by Edward Said. For Said, exile is a state of ultimate loss. It is “like death but without death’s ultimate mercy” (*Reflections on Exile* 174). Exile is nomadic, eccentric, and unfamiliar. It is the perpetual split between an individual and his/her homeland which can never be reconciled. It is a state of yearning to rebuild an identity out of discontinuity and estrangement. Exile necessitates an unusual amount of intellectual energy devoted to restoration, reiteration, and confirmation for exiles. The biggest challenge in exile is the urge to counter-convert, the need to discover a new system or a new place to replace the one that has been lost; to conceive one’s life in terms of remedies and a new, more comprehensive vision that abolishes ambiguity and conflict.

Although it is true that exile deprives the intellectual of the comforts of “being-at-homeness,” it is equally important to underscore that exile also brings certain benefits. In fact, “exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out” (*Reflections on Exile* 178). The exilic intellectual benefits from the foreignness because it allows him/her to think in an unconventional way, which gives “pleasure” to the intellectual by making him/her accustomed to continuous change and instability. Through writing, the exilic intellectual can provide dignity to people who are denied dignity. A new territory’s traditions and ways of living are inextricably linked to memories of homeland. For this reason, both the new and old territories are dynamic and real, and they coexist. Self-reflection becomes another “pleasure” for the exilic intellectual,

making one able to evaluate their past actions and question them. This could also be turned into a great catalyst for cultural, artistic, and socio-political creativity. Another way exile enriches the lives of exilic intellectuals is that, owing to this experience, they learn how to adapt to instability that would generally terrify most people and never to take anything for granted (*Representations of the Intellectual* 62). They do not follow a predetermined route, both in their personal life and in their writings. When an exile is aware of contrasts that subvert conventional ways of thinking, this perception offers a distinct pleasure. There is a sense of accomplishment for the exilic intellectual in feeling as if s/he is at home, no matter where s/he actually is. Today, in a time of global refugee crisis, exilic intellectuals urge us to grasp the fate of exile, which is what Elliot Ackerman, Dunya Mikhail, and Solmaz Sharif do through their writing.

An examination of Ackerman's work with a focus on the connection between his veteran identity and exile reveals his unique experience which might be defined as reverse-exile. Despite the fact that neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is his homeland, it is his exile and veteran identity which make him feel "at home" in distant places. In his *Places and Names: On War, Revolution, and Returning* (2019), Ackerman's post-war perspective shapes what he makes of his wars as an exilic intellectual. It reveals the benefits his veteran perspective provided him while shifting from military to civilian life. Most veterans have difficulty reconstructing their identity after returning from war. They have persistent, intrusive recollections of the traumas of war, the same way exiles remember their homeland. Constantly avoiding the memories of the war and having flashbacks are very common occurrences among veterans. Similarly, exiles often avoid thinking about their homeland because they remember it with grief. Veterans are haunted by their sense of "home" in war where they are exiled, yet when they return home, they discover that their perspectives of "home" have shifted. Although the warfront is a location where they are constantly faced with death, the places where they fight might end up being more familiar than "home." Ackerman cannot resist the urge to return to those places where he fought in exile in order to feel "at home."

As a veteran, Ackerman travels to Syria and Iraq during the Syrian Civil War. Despite the fact that he did not fight in Syria, he feels compelled to go there as he wants to be close to combat which reminds him of his previous wars. By observing the battle in front of him, he tries to comprehend his own wars in places where he “grew up,” and he is drawn to (*Places and Names* 77). Despite the fact that many veterans feel compelled to avoid places, ideas, or experiences that remind them of their trauma, Ackerman is perpetually attracted to them. Acknowledging that he will always be in a strange form of exile, he goes in search of a home which he finds in places where he fought. For Ackerman, returning to those places years later is not surprising, as he reveals that “the melancholy of it all is that [he] grew up there” (*Places and Names* 77). In exile, Ackerman begins to question his involvement in wars to the point that heroic pride might turn into guilt. Befitting the description of exilic intellectual proposed by Said, Ackerman is endowed with a multiplicity of perspectives owing to his exile. Because of this manifoldness, he is able to identify the similarities across seemingly disparate individuals, political stances, and places. This multiplicity of perception enables him to freely move across time and places through self-reflection. Through these movements, he is able to defy linguistic and ideological barriers to a point where he is able to empathize with his supposed adversary Abu Hassar. Being aware of “other contrapuntal juxtapositions” through his relation with his adversaries is one of the pleasures of exile (*Reflections on Exile* 186).

He perceives the past and present as one seamless unity that responds to one another and helps him feel at ease. This sense of amity provides him with novel and inclusive perspectives that he might not have acquired without exile. Being close to the Syrian border and watching the conflict would have made him an uneasy stranger if he had not been a veteran who fought near this zone. Ideologies and politics lose their separating power in exile, a fact which renders exile as an experience that gives rise to “appreciative sympathy” (*Reflections on Exile* 186). A shared veteran identity allows him to empathize with presumed “enemy.” Despite the fact that he is expected to feel antagonistic, estranged, and distant, the connection propels a cultivation of

understanding and they discover a common ground between their lives. Although soldiers might internalize marginalizing views during their service, Ackerman finds himself at odds with those views when he becomes a veteran, the same way he is at odds with the US and feels at home in exile. This allows the conclusion that Ackerman yearns to go to the places where he fought instead of his homeland, because his most significant and meaningful experiences have taken place in exile.

The same way veteran identity shapes how one makes use of exile, a reworking of memories operates in a manner that makes it easier to grasp the circumstances of exile. In her first nonfiction, *The Beekeeper* (2018), to be exiled means to be from both here and there, to be within and without at the same time. It is being stuck between past and present in the instability of an unsettling condition. Everything that has happened and is happening now becomes a perpetual endeavor to be reconsidered not separately, but all at once. She recalls her own exile experience in relation to the Yazidis' tragic stories. Through these stories, Mikhail is able to realize and appreciate the "pleasures" exile brought to her. She illustrates the inclusivity of memory and perspectives she gained through her exile experience by blending her personal recollections with the catastrophic experiences of the Yazidis. By connecting the past and the present, "here" and "there," Mikhail unravels the integrative, inclusive points of view that she gains through her exile experience. Through an analysis of *The Beekeeper* in regard to memory and exile, it becomes evident that memory can compensate for the loss of a "home" for the exilic intellectual by becoming a source of cultivation.

Memories make it possible for an exilic intellectual to develop an unusually distinctive voice. This voice is distinctive in the sense that it does not consider the past and future just in terms of themselves or pertaining to one another but instead both are perceived concurrently. Memory, thus, acts as a repository that discovers new horizons. By exploring memory, Mikhail encounters novel connections that she has not discovered previously. By integrating the past and present along with here and there, she forms what can be called a metaphorical home, an intellectual nest. As an exilic intellectual, she learns to exist outside of this nest by combining different multiplicities at once. She

cultivates an unfettered, multidimensional, and unorthodox mind by simultaneously observing and meditating on various notions and standpoints. Seeking sanctuary in the sphere of memories enables an exile to establish a link between their past and present realities.

Although her memories are as displaced as her, she holds onto them anytime she encounters something that reminds her of her homeland. These memories bind her to her homeland, regardless of how far she is from it. When she sees strange places in her dreams, it reminds her of her own exile in the US where nothing is certain and everything appears to be transitory. Just as a spider which “makes a home outside of itself” yet “doesn’t know the difference between home and exile,” Mikhail weaves a “home” out of herself and her memories, unable to decide where to call home and where to call exile (*The Beekeeper* 114). Mikhail’s experience of exile has allowed her to broaden her understanding of “home,” which now may refer to a variety of places or nowhere at all, rather than meaning only Iraq. Through *The Beekeeper*, Mikhail aspires to save these memories from being lost forever. She alternates between time and place, both in her thinking and writing.

Her memory entails a new literary responsibility for her which is to recount the sufferings of the Yazidis along with her personal recollections. In Mikhail’s experience, what is unique about exile and exilic memory is this responsibility she feels as an exilic intellectual. Owing to the perspectives she has gained through her exile, Mikhail is able to bring herself closer to feel “at home” through her memories and poetry while giving voice to the silence of the Yazidis. She is able to locate a bit of herself and her birthplace in the stories of Yazidis. Writing her exile into actuality, she unearths the unknown ties between their lives. As an exilic intellectual, she looks back on her memories and those of the Yazidis Abdullah informed her about in a creative way to make the voice of the Yazidis be heard. When she looks at her homeland from a distance, she is able to see things she would not have been able to realize if she had stayed there. She believes that an exile “carries two existences,” similar to the way memory operates in regard to both the past and the present (“Re: Master’s Thesis”). Serving to build links with the present,

Mikhail's memory becomes an active force rather than a passive reservoir. Exile allows her to make sense of her surroundings from a variety of viewpoints. Not only the benefits stated so far but also *The Beekeeper* itself is a product of her exile, since she would not have been able to write this book in her homeland due to censorship. As long as Mikhail preserves her memories, she has a home in exile.

Similar to memory, language has a significant effect on how exilic intellectuals make sense of their exile experience. Language is both a social institution and a value system full of ideological configurations that are difficult for individuals to challenge. Ideologies are active in the literary world as much as in politics, since literature is a form of expression governed by language. Politics has a significant impact on how language is shaped. The most prevalent weapon employed by politicians to establish an ideology is the use of rhetoric. The way exilic intellectuals use language to express themselves can reveal the effects of politics on language. Since exile is often a political struggle as well as a physical one, exilic intellectuals may recognize when language is manipulated to serve political ideology. Words and their implications have varying meanings depending on who uses them in what context.

As an exilic intellectual, Sharif is often compelled to "disappear" or be silenced by non-exiles, being considered as the "other." Her desire to "muzzle" herself as if she were a menace who had to be silent illustrates how she internalized the discrimination she experienced in the US (*Look* 36). Not feeling at home or at ease in the US, Sharif is critical of the country since her family would not have fled their hometown if the US had not caused it via the conflicts it inflicted in the region. Examining how exile manifests itself in Sharif's *Look* is one approach to study the link between language and politics, both of which are central to the exile experience. *Look* is broken in structure, the same way exiles feel fragmented while switching back and forth between places. Sharif makes use of writing in order to recreate herself in a narrative that reaffirms her selfhood, despite the widespread belief that exiles lose their sense of selfhood as a result of their inability to belong. However, for Sharif, language allows her to create a fresh selfhood based on her new viewpoints, allowing her to make a fresh start in an uncertain

place where she can act as an agent in charge of her own life. Through *Look*, Sharif liberates herself from the entanglement of nations and rigid political ideologies by revealing the realities of her exile in an intangible way, merging the US military rhetoric, and deconstructing the definitions presented in the US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (DoD) by putting them into daily context.

She attempts to discover the forms that will interrupt her and keep her from saying what she has to say by weaving military terminology with poetry in a personal, daily context. She uses repetition in her poetry, making it unable to reach easy conclusions, the same way exiles cannot reach home. She is interested in probing the language of power by a subjective self that continuously pushes the boundaries of the meanings of words, the same way exiles go beyond the limits of time and places. Redefining the DoD by integrating them into her lines, Sharif makes use of the multiplicity of perspectives she has gained through exile. Her exile gives rise to the growth of an imagined place to dwell in the absence of home. Belonging neither to Iran nor the US, she perceives her environment via exilic lenses which allow her to exist outside of conventional ways of thinking. She sees this as an opportunity to critically examine both sides. The act of erasing words in her poetry evokes exiles' separation from their homeland and the way they are silenced in foreign lands and languages. By setting up a space in her poetry to which numerous meanings can be attributed, Sharif opposes the fixation of language, the same way exiles resist fixation of home. She expresses herself by refusing to fit into the identities that have been pre-determined for minorities and by refusing to conform to the restrictive definitions dictated by assimilation. She is able to question such identities and classifications owing to her outsider experience as an exilic intellectual.

A study of the works of these three exilic intellectuals is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Their experiences in the Middle East and the US connect them. As Ackerman serves his country as a Marine and lives in exile in Mikhail's homeland, Mikhail flees her homeland and is exiled in the US due to war. Sharif's life begins even before she sees her homeland. Although exile has an equally fundamental place for each of them, they approach exile from different perspectives. Ackerman makes meaning of his exile

through his veteran identity; Mikhail brings herself closer to her homeland by means of a refunctioning of her memories; Sharif creates a unique voice for herself by reflecting on her exile through language. Although these three authors have different backgrounds and different concerns, the root cause of their exile is the same: the US and its wars abroad. Whilst these authors have their roots in different lands, they are all eventually brought together in the same land. Despite the fact that they encounter different hardships in exile, the way exile serves them is similar.

All three authors are afraid of being lost, and they cultivate homes for themselves in territories far from their homelands. Their defiance of borders and urge to find a common ground between discrepancies tie them together. They perceive the world around them from exilic perspectives which allow them to think beyond predefined notions. This diversity of standpoints allows them to look at the world from multiple perspectives at the same time, making them more empathetic and understanding individuals. The distance from home provide these exilic intellectuals with different constructive missions in a wider sense. As a veteran, Ackerman not only understands his own identity better by writing about his wars, but he also provides the reader with a reevaluation of war and the warriors from different sides of the conflict. Mikhail, by weaving her own memories with the tragic fate of the Yazidis, gives voice to a community that suffered a genocide in the 21st century. Sharif critiques American policies by problematizing the language employed by the US military to demonstrate the relationship between political ideologies and daily language. By examining exile in terms of veteran identity, memory, and language in these three works, this thesis concludes that the three books offer various viewpoints on exile as a complex, dynamic, and introspective experience which proves to be an enriching experience for the writers as exilic intellectuals.

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