



# مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط

مجلة علمية مُحَكَّمة  
(مُعتمدة) شهرياً

العدد التاسع والثمانون  
(يوليو 2023)

السنة التاسعة والأربعون  
تأسست عام 1974

الترقيم الدولي: (2536-9504)  
الترقيم على الإنترنت: (2735-5233)



يصدرها  
مركز بحوث  
الشرق الأوسط



الآراء الواردة داخل المجلة تعبر عن وجهة نظر أصحابها وليست مسئولية مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط والدراسات المستقبلية

رقم الإيداع بدار الكتب والوثائق القومية : ٢٤٣٣٠ / ٢٠١٦

الترقيم الدولي: (Issn :2536 - 9504)

الترقيم على الإنترنت: (Online Issn :2735 - 5233)

## شروط النشر بالمجلة

- تُعنى المجلة بنشر البحوث المهمة بمجالات العلوم الإنسانية والأدبية ؛
- يعتمد النشر على رأي اثنين من المحكمين المتخصصين ويتم التحكيم إلكترونياً ؛
- تقبل البحوث باللغة العربية أو بإحدى اللغات الأجنبية، وترسل إلى موقع المجلة على بنك المعرفة المصري ويرفق مع البحث ملف بيانات الباحث يحتوي على عنوان البحث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية واسم الباحث والتايتل والانتماء المؤسسي باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، ورقم واتساب، وإيميل الباحث الذي تم التسجيل به على موقع المجلة ؛
- يشار إلى أن الهوامش والمراجع في نهاية البحث وليست أسفل الصفحة ؛
- يكتب الباحث ملخص باللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية للبحث صفحة واحدة فقط لكل ملخص ؛
- بالنسبة للبحث باللغة العربية يكتب على برنامج "word" ونمط الخط باللغة العربية "Simplified Arabic" وحجم الخط 14 ولا يزيد عدد الأسطر في الصفحة الواحدة عن 25 سطر والهوامش والمراجع خط Simplified Arabic حجم الخط 12 ؛
- بالنسبة للبحث باللغة الإنجليزية يكتب على برنامج word ونمط الخط Times New Roman وحجم الخط 13 ولا يزيد عدد الأسطر عن 25 سطر في الصفحة الواحدة والهوامش والمراجع خط Times New Roman حجم الخط 11 ؛
- (Paper) مقاس الورق (B5) 17.6 × 25 سم، (Margins) الهوامش 2.3 سم يمينًا ويسارًا، 2 سم أعلى وأسفل الصفحة، ليصبح مقاس البحث فعلي (الكلام) 21×13 سم. (Layout) والنسق: (Header) الرأس 1.25 سم، (Footer) تذييل 2.5 سم ؛
- مواصفات الفقرة للبحث : بداية الفقرة First Line = 1.27 سم، قبل النص = 0.00، بعد النص = 0.00، تباعد قبل الفقرة = 6pt (تباعد بعد الفقرة = 0pt)، تباعد الفقرات (مفرد single) ؛
- مواصفات الفقرة للهوامش والمراجع : يوضع الرقم بين قوسين هلاقي مثل : (1)، بداية الفقرة Hanging = 0.6 سم، قبل النص = 0.00، بعد النص = 0.00، تباعد قبل الفقرة = 0.00 تباعد بعد الفقرة = 0.00، تباعد الفقرات (مفرد single) ؛
- الجداول والأشكال: يتم وضع الجداول والأشكال إما في صفحات منفصلة أو وسط النص وفقًا لرؤية الباحث، على أن يكون عرض الجدول أو الشكل لا يزيد عن 13.5 سم بأي حال من الأحوال ؛
- يتم التحقق من صحة الإملاء على مسئولية الباحث لتفادي الأخطاء في المصطلحات الفنية ؛
- مدة التحكيم 15 يوم على الأكثر، مدة تعديل البحث بعد التحكيم 15 يوم على الأكثر ؛
- يخضع تسلسل نشر البحوث في أعداد المجلة حسب ما تراه هيئة التحرير من ضرورات علمية وفنية ؛
- المجلة غير ملزمة بإعادة البحوث إلى أصحابها سواء نشرت أم لم تنشر ؛
- تعتبر البحوث عن آراء أصحابها وليس عن رأي رئيس التحرير وهيئة التحرير ؛
- رسوم التحكيم للمصريين 650 جنيه، ولغير المصريين 155 دولار ؛
- رسوم النشر للصفحة الواحدة للمصريين 25 جنيه، وغير المصريين 12 دولار ؛
- الباحث المصري يسدد الرسوم بالجنيه المصري (بالفيزا) بمقر المركز (المقيم بالقاهرة)، أو على حساب حكومي رقم : (9/450/80772/8) بنك مصر (المقيم خارج القاهرة) ؛
- الباحث غير المصري يسدد الرسوم بالدولار على حساب حكومي رقم : (EG71000100010000004082175917) (البنك العربي الأفريقي) ؛
- استلام إفادة قبول نشر البحث في خلال 15 يوم من تاريخ سداد رسوم النشر مع ضرورة رفع إيصالات السداد على موقع المجلة ؛
- تحصيل قيمة العدد من الباحث (نقدًا)، ويستلم الباحث عدد 6 مستلآت من بحثه 5 منها (مجانًا) و (15) جنيه للمستلة السادسة الإضافية ؛

• المراسلات : توجه المراسلات الخاصة بالمجلة إلى: merc.director@asu.edu.eg

السيد الدكتور/ مدير مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط والدراسات المستقبلية، ورئيس تحرير المجلة  
جامعة عين شمس - العباسية - القاهرة - ج.م.ع (ص.ب 11566)

للتواصل والاستفسار عن كل ما يخص الموقع : محمول / واتساب: 01555343797 (+2)  
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مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط

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مجلة مُعْتَمَدَة من بنك المعرفة المصري



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- تنشر الأعداد تبعاً على موقع دار المنظومة.



العدد التاسع والثمانون - يوليو ٢٠٢٣

تصدر شهرياً

السنة التاسعة والأربعون - تأسست عام 1974





**مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط**  
**(مجلة معتمدة) دورية علمية محكمة**  
**(اثنا عشر عددًا سنويًا)**  
**يصدرها مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط**  
**والدراسات المستقبلية - جامعة عين شمس**

رئيس مجلس الإدارة

**أ.د. غادة فاروق**

نائب رئيس الجامعة لشؤون خدمة المجتمع وتنمية البيئة

ورئيس مجلس إدارة المركز

**رئيس التحرير د. حاتم العبد**

مدير مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط والدراسات المستقبلية

**هيئة التحرير**

أ.د. السيد عبد الخالق، وزير التعليم العالي الأسبق، مصر

أ.د. أحمد بهاء الدين خيرى، نائب وزير التعليم العالي الأسبق، مصر ؛

أ.د. محمد حسام لطفي، جامعة بني سويف، مصر ؛

أ.د. سعيد المصري، جامعة القاهرة، مصر ؛

أ.د. سوزان القليني، جامعة عين شمس، مصر ؛

أ.د. ماهر جميل أبوخوات، عميد كلية الحقوق، جامعة كفر الشيخ، مصر ؛

أ.د. أشرف مؤنس، جامعة عين شمس، مصر ؛

أ.د. حسام طنطاوي، عميد كلية الآثار، جامعة عين شمس، مصر ؛

أ.د. محمد إبراهيم الشافعي، وكيل كلية الحقوق، جامعة عين شمس، مصر ؛

أ.د. تامر عبد المنعم راضي، جامعة عين شمس، مصر ؛

أ.د. هاجر قلديش، جامعة قرطاج، تونس ؛

Prof. Petr MUZNY، جامعة جنيف، سويسرا ؛

Prof. Gabrielle KAUFMANN-KOHLER، جامعة جنيف، سويسرا ؛

Prof. Farah SAFI، جامعة كليرون أوفيرني، فرنسا ؛

إشراف إداري

أ/ سونيا عبد الحكيم

أمين المركز

**سكرتارية التحرير**

أ/ ناهد مبارز رئيس وحدة النشر

أ/ راندانوار وحدة النشر

أ/ زينب أحمد وحدة النشر

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المحرر الفني

أ/ رشا عاطف وحدة الدعم الفني

تنفيذ الغلاف والتجهيز والإخراج الفني للمجلة

وحدة الدعم الفني

تدقيق ومراجعة لغوية

د. هند رافت عبد الفتاح

تصميم الغلاف أ/ أحمد محسن - مطبعة الجامعة

ترجمة المراسلات الخاصة بالمجلة إلى: د. حاتم العبد، رئيس التحرير merc.director@asu.edu.eg

• وسائل التواصل: البريد الإلكتروني للمجلة: technical.support.mercj2022@gmail.com

البريد الإلكتروني لوحدة النشر: merc.pub@asu.edu.eg

جامعة عين شمس - شارع الخليفة المأمون - العباسية - القاهرة، جمهورية مصر العربية، ص.ب: 11566

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## الرؤية

السعي لتحقيق الريادة في النشر العلمي المتميز في المحتوى والمضمون والتأثير والمرجعية في مجالات منطقة الشرق الأوسط وأقطاره .

## الرسالة

نشر البحوث العلمية الأصيلة والرصينة والمبتكرة في مجالات الشرق الأوسط وأقطاره في مجالات اختصاص المجلة وفق المعايير والقواعد المهنية العالمية المعمول بها في المجالات المُحكَّمة دوليًا.

## الأهداف

- نشر البحوث العلمية الأصيلة والرصينة والمبتكرة .
- إتاحة المجال أمام العلماء والباحثين في مجالات اختصاص المجلة في التاريخ والجغرافيا والسياسة والاقتصاد والاجتماع والقانون وعلم النفس واللغة العربية وآدابها واللغة الانجليزية وآدابها ، على المستوى المحلى والإقليمي والعالمي لنشر بحوثهم وإنتاجهم العلمي .
- نشر أبحاث كبار الأساتذة وأبحاث الترقية للسادة الأساتذة المساعدين والسادة المدرسين بمختلف الجامعات المصرية والعربية والأجنبية .
- تشجيع ونشر مختلف البحوث المتعلقة بالدراسات المستقبلية والشرق الأوسط وأقطاره .
- الإسهام في تنمية مجتمع المعرفة في مجالات اختصاص المجلة من خلال نشر البحوث العلمية الرصينة والمتميزة .



## مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط

- رئيس التحرير د. حاتم العبد

- الهيئة الاستشارية المصرية وفقاً للترتيب الهجائي:

- أ.د. إبراهيم عبد المنعم سلامة أبو العلا
- أ.د. أحمد الشربيني
- أ.د. أحمد رجب محمد علي رزق
- أ.د. السيد فليفل
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- أ.د. حمدي عبد الرحمن
- أ.د. حنان كامل متولي
- أ.د. صالح حسن السلوت
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- أ.د. محمد مؤنس عوض
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- (قائم بعمل) عميد كلية الآداب - جامعة عين شمس - مصر
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- ومقرر لجنة الترقيات بالمجلس الأعلى للجامعات - مصر
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- كلية السياحة والفنادق - جامعة مدينة السادات - مصر

- الهيئة الاستشارية العربية والدولية وفقاً للترتيب الهجائي:

- أ.د. إبراهيم خليل العلاف جامعة الموصل - العراق
- أ.د. إبراهيم محمد بن حمد المزيتي كلية العلوم الاجتماعية - جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية - السعودية
- أ.د. أحمد الحسو جامعة مؤتة - الأردن
- أ.د. أحمد عمر الزيلعي مركز الحسو للدراسات الكمية والتراثية - إنجلترا
- أ.د. عبد الله حميد العتابي جامعة الملك سعود - السعودية
- أ.د. عبد الله سعيد الغامدي الأمين العام لجمعية التاريخ والأثار التاريخية
- أ.د. فيصل عبد الله الكندري كلية التربية للبنات - جامعة بغداد - العراق
- أ.د. مجدي فارح جامعة أم القرى - السعودية
- أ.د. محمد بهجت قببسي عضو مجلس كلية التاريخ، ومركز تحقيق التراث بمعهد المخطوطات
- أ.د. محمود صالح الكروي جامعة الكويت - الكويت
- أ.د. محمد بهجت قببسي رئيس قسم الماجستير والدراسات العليا - جامعة تونس ١ - تونس
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- أ.د. محمود صالح الكروي كلية العلوم السياسية - جامعة بغداد - العراق

- *Prof. Dr. Albrecht Fuess* Center for near and Middle Eastem Studies, University of Marburg, Germany
- *Prof. Dr. Andrew J. Smyth* Southern Connecticut State University, USA
- *Prof. Dr. Graham Loud* University Of Leeds, UK
- *Prof. Dr. Jeanne Dubino* Appalachian State University, North Carolina, USA
- *Prof. Dr. Thomas Asbridge* Queen Mary University of London, UK
- *Prof. Ulrike Freitag* Institute of Islamic Studies, Belil Frie University, Germany

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# الدراسات اللغوية

**Linguistic studies**





**Storytelling**

**in selected Women's Memoirs**

**of Conflict**

**رواية القصص في مذكرات صراع مختارة  
للنساء**

**Nayerah Saad**

**Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University.**

**الباحثة/ نيرة سعد أبو الرضا محمد**

**قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها**

**كلية الآداب جامعة عين شمس**

**nayerah.saad@gmail.com**



**www.mercj.journals.ekb.eg**





## Abstract in English:

Storytelling is an integral element in relating experiences that people go through, helping them to make sense of the world and the self through imposing a narrative order on chaotic and/or traumatic experiences such as those lived in war/conflict zones. Additionally, it becomes a lifeline for women involved in conflict zones. This paper seeks to examine the notion of storytelling in selected life writing texts by women in conflict zones, namely: *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya* (2000) by the French journalist and writer Anne Nivat, *Baghdad Burning* (2005) by the Iraqi Riverbend, and *The Crossing* (2015) by the Syrian journalist and writer Samar Yazbek. The focus is on exploring the notion of the coxer, whether an individual or a situation, and storytelling as significant elements in women's memoirs of conflict that form a frame narrative for the stories of the women writers and people involved with them.

## Key words:

Life writing – Storytelling – Anne Nivat – Riverbend Samar Yazbek — Coxer – War Memoir – Frame narrative



## Abstract in Arabic:

يمثل الحكي عنصراً أساسياً فيما يرويهِ الأشخاص عن التجارب التي يخوضونها، كما يساعد في فهم تلك التجارب وإضفاء نسق سردي لها مما يساعد في فهم الذات والعالم، ويصبح الحكي طوق نجاة للنساء لسرد تجاربهن في مناطق الصراع من خلال نصوص كتابة الحياة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تناول مفهومي الحكي والدافع له من خلال النصوص المختارة التي تمثل ثلاث نماذج مختلفة من الصراع في الشيشان والعراق وسوريا. يجب الإشارة إلى أن مفهوم الدافع للكتابة يأخذ أشكالاً مختلفة في نطاق الكتابة الذاتية سواء كان موقفاً أو شخصاً، وأحياناً تأخذ الكاتبات ذلك الدور لحث الآخرين على الحديث لهن. تمثل هذه النصوص سردية إيطارية لتجربة كل من الكاتبات الثلاثة: (آن نيفات وريفرند وسمر يزيك) وما تسردنه من تجارب الآخرين الذين يشاركون تجربة العيش في هذه الصراعات والرغبة في حكي وتوثيق تلك التجارب في محاولة لإستيعابها وتعريف الآخرين بها. تلجأ كل من الكاتبات الثلاثة إلى عدد من الأساليب تقدم من خلالها حكاية معاشتها الشخصية لمنطقة الصراع كما تضمن كل منهن تجارب الآخرين سواء كانت شهادات أو حوارات مع مختلف الأفراد مما يعطي شمولية ومصادقية لنصوصهن.

## Key words:

الحكى - السير الذاتية في مناطق الصراع - سمر يزيك - آن نيفات - ريفرند - السرد



Telling stories is one of the most basic human interactions. While it might be dismissed as fictional or minor, which is not the case; the stories that people tell about their life experiences are quite illuminating especially when they gain circulation either through publishing or the social media platforms that play a significant role in shaping the world today. Stories help know oneself, establish identity and make sense of the world, as Paul Ricoeur notes. Narration and life writing help one make sense of their world as Baldwin notes in his explanation of Paul Ricoeur's view that "we form our identities through ... the process of bringing causal continuity to temporal sequencing or, in lay terms, imposing a narrative order on apparently chaotic experience" (Baldwin 2). Similarly, Smith and Watson explain the strong links between experience, storytelling and identity, arguing that "we retrospectively make experience and convey a sense of it to others through storytelling; and as we tell our stories, discursive patterns both guide and compel us to tell stories about ourselves in particular ways" (Smith and Watson 32). Hence, there has been a growing interest in the stories that people tell as cultural products that help examine socio-political circumstances as well as issues of positionality and relationality of the authors. This interest foregrounds that "life narratives are always symbolic interactions in the world" (Smith and Watson 63).

A note is due about the selected texts as representative of women's life writing especially in war/conflict contexts. Estelle Jelinek highlights that "the idea that oneself, one's feelings ... were properly and innately worth writing about was essentially a female idea" (Jelinek 28). Similarly, Brodzki and Schenck stress the specificity of female/women life narratives and the importance of examining these narratives without falling into essentialism or being captivated by extreme textuality that "consigns woman ...to an unrecoverable absence" (Brodzki and Schenck 14). Miriam Cooke shares a similar point of view highlighting that, Arab women narratives of war challenge the stereotypical roles assigned to women,



as they have lived war as survivors rather than mere victims, playing “all the other roles that a war culture prescribes” (Cooke 5 *War Story*). Women’s life narratives had and do have a substantial presence that paved the way for its status and developments. Their narrative fulfills a dual function as both lived and told which relates to Paul Ricoeur’s view that argues that “Narratives are both lived and told. Narrative configurations mediate between the world of action and the world of the reader” (qtd. in Laitinen 1). Through their writing, these women used the narrative order not only to organize the chaotic war/conflict experience but also as a call for recognition which in itself is a call for action mediating the world written and the world lived.

This paper seeks to examine the notion of storytelling in selected life writing texts by women in conflict zones, namely: *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya* (2000) by the French journalist and writer Anne Nivat about her experience of the war in Chechnya from 1999 to 2000; *Baghdad Burning* (2005) by the Iraqi Riverbend covering her experience of the American occupation of Iraq in 2003 as an Iraqi woman; and *The Crossing* (2015) by the Syrian journalist and writer Samar Yazbek narrating her experience of the War in Syria during the years 2012 and 2013. The paper focuses on exploring the notion of the coxer in life writing and storytelling. Moreover, it also briefly touches upon the memoir of conflict as a frame narrative for the stories of the people involved with the writers.

### Coaxers:

In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson quote Ken Plummer who designates three contributors to the action of a story: “the producer or the teller”, “the coxer, the person or persons, or the institution, that elicits the story from the speaker” and “the consumers, readers or audience who interpret the story” (Smith and Watson 64). While people may be faced with numerous situations that instigate them to “tell/write” their story for numerous reasons, living



in conflict zones and the daily encounter with death and destruction, loss and uncertainty accentuate the need to tell that story. The individual reasons and the sense of duty to communicate the suffering to a wide audience in hopes of voicing the experience becomes a common ground. Thus, it could be argued that the conflict zone and experience of living these events become the initial coxer in case of the narratives under study. The notion of the coxer is one of the main elements in autobiographical storytelling and is important to make better sense of the experience. Smith and Watson use the term as one of the central elements in the examination of autobiographical acts. They quote Ken Plummer's definition of the coxer as "any person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicit or provoke people to tell their stories" (Smith and Watson 64). The writers of the text under study highlight why they choose to write and stress their positions from their experiences in several instances throughout the narratives, confirming that they have witnessed what they are narrating firsthand, emphasizing their position from the conflicts and their surrounding community. They, furthermore, highlight that as writers and individuals sharing this experience with others, they felt a duty to tell the story of these conflicts and the people who lived through them to the world. On the other hand, it could be argued that within their texts, the women narrators themselves take up the role of the coxer at times, as they ask the people that they interview or record their experiences/testimonies to tell their stories, clarifying the centrality of coaxing in the life writing process. This in turn proves how "Global culture multiplies the possibilities for both coaxing and coercing life stories" (Smith and Watson 66).

Examining the coxers in the texts under study elaborates how there are multiple coxers, be it the experience itself of living in the conflict zone, the individuals that the writers meet, or the writers themselves at times as they prompt others to speak to them for recording their experience. In *Chinne de Guere*, Nivat clarifies that her covering the conflict, although a choice, was living through hell



and that she is relating what she has seen and lived as she says, “I can only sketch [the Russian-Chechen conflict] contours and paint to the best of my abilities a faithful picture of what I *saw and experienced on the spot* [emphasis added]” (Nivat vii). She later describes her strategy in talking to whoever was willing to talk to her as investigating, explaining that watching, listening, and documenting are her main purpose. She highlights that her motivation is an urge to do her job and never stop writing, to tell the story of the war and to show the suffering of the Chechen men and women. She states, “It was my sense of myself as a journalist that allowed me to survive Chechnya” (Nivat ix). She could have considered her journalistic articles enough for covering the conflict, but she wanted a more involved and comprehensive engagement than the articles represented. She sums up her coxer stating, “I have written this book to tell the pitiful and pointless story of war, and to show the plight of a proud people, these Chechen men and women, with whom I bore the unbearable” (Nivat x). One example in which Nivat becomes the coxer is when she takes the chance of meeting two soldiers and invites them to lunch, and at the end of the meeting she clearly states, “But may I ask you some questions before I leave?” (Nivat 35). Nivat explains that at times she had to curb her urge to cut a speaker so that he would not stop talking, she states in one situation, “Although I would like to interrupt him, I listen without saying a word. To get these... to talk – these young men who are suspicious of me but curious at the same time – I have to assume a humble demeanor and ask only naïve questions” (Nivat 128). In another example, she comments on her interview with Shamil Bassayev, a Chechen commander, that she could not get him to speak about a topic she asks about, which shows that coaxing sometimes does not achieve its goal within the narrative. However, this brings to mind Smith and Watson argument that coaxing can become coercive as in situations of collaborative life writing or the censorship exercised by editors. Therefore, it should be noted that despite the positive effects of coaxing, “the role of a coxer in assembling a life narrative can be more coercive than collaborative” (Smith and Watson





68). Thus, it is important to identify that nature of the coaxing, keeping in mind the effects it has on the narrative produced. At another situation, Nivat states, “My attempts to persuade him to talk about his relations with other figures of the Chechen independence movement fails miserably” (42). Moreover, the speaker (the storyteller perhaps) may insist on elaborating on a certain part even against the direction of the coxer. “There’s no way to interrupt him on this subject” (43) Nivat highlights that as Bassayev talks about the unity of the Chechen against the Russians. These incidents highlight that the notion of the coxer in life writing and storytelling, is not simply a straightforward process. It is true that it achieves its goal of urging the subject to speak/tell their story, yet at the same time, in most cases the speaking subject keeps some degree of agency and authority of selection and direction of the narrative discourses that this coaxing produces.

Riverbend on the other hand, initially wanted to vent her anger and frustration at the occupation of Iraq and the devastation that took her life and country. Moreover, because of the different medium for rendering her narrative (originally a blog before being published into a book), she had to respond to people (mainly Americans as she states) who accused her of lying either in the details she relates about the Iraq War or her identity as an Iraqi. She clarifies that she is an Iraqi born in Iraq to Iraqi parents and her command of the language is because she spent some years abroad as a child before returning to Iraq as a teenager where she continued her education in English. Keeping her anonymity, Riverbed clearly states that she does not feel safe otherwise which is indicative of the position of women in conflict zones, for male bloggers have the freedom of disclosing their identity, but women were and (are for most part) neither welcomed nor allowed to speak freely. She explains, “You know me as Riverbend, you share a very small part of my daily reality – I hope that will suffice” (Riverbend 21). In her response to these accusations, the coxer shifts between the conflict itself, and the people who undermine her



authority over her story. Smith and Watson explain that in life writing, writers/autobiographers are occupied with asserting their authority of the experience, implicitly and explicitly. In Riverbend's case, this authority over the narrative and the right to narrate "is hard-won [as she is] in a constant engagement with readers posited as skeptical, unbelieving, resistant, and even hostile" (Smith and Watson 34).

It is noteworthy that Riverbend's blog later turned into a published memoir started as a venting/ranting space and became a record of the Iraq War from a female civilian perspective. When she began writing, Riverbend thought that she was talking to herself as a survival mechanism thinking that no one would be interested in reading her "ranting" which turned out not to be the case. Thus, writing the narrative and sharing it with the world becomes a means of survival. In this sense, writing and storytelling offer a way of letting the Iraqi story known which provides opportunities for resilience in this traumatic context. Hence, her narrative serves as both a documentation for the Iraq War from a civilian perspective and a tool of survival and resilience. Riverbend initial trigger/coaxer to write is personal. She writes:

#### The Beginning...

So this is the beginning for me, I guess. I never thought I'd start my own **weblog**... All I could think, every time I wanted to start one was "but who will read it?" I guess I've got nothing to lose... but I'm warning you- expect a lot of complaining and ranting. I looked for a 'rantlog' but this is the best Google came up with.

Given the blog medium, where Riverbed's narrative was first published, it allowed for an evident and immediate form of coaxing at times, for Riverbend would choose to respond to readers who comment or send her emails, or responding to blog post by other bloggers on her own blog. Moreover, the 'ongoings' of the war provided frequent coaxers to the entries she decides to narrate which is reflected in the titles as in "Demonstration in Baghdad", "Madrid



Conference” (Riverbend 113), “Iraqi Governing Council” (135) and “Splitting Iraq” (182) to name a few.

Moving to *The Crossing*, as a writer, Yazbek explains that before her first trip to Syria she was planning to start a novel, but her “First Crossing” changed her plans altogether. She states that her trigger for writing was “a minor incident [that] set me on a different course and compelled me to compose *this testimony* [emphasis added] in the book you are reading now” (Yazbek 38). Yazbek’s awareness of the position of recipients and participants from the narrative is evident. The initial coaxing incident occurs when a young militant who was condemning Assad and his group apologises to Yazbek upon knowing that she is an Alawite. Yazbek responds to him in a way that goes beyond the sectarian differences clarifying that at this point they are all just Syrians. As a result of this encounter, she decides to undertake two parallel projects: one is writing the testimony of what is happening in Syria, and the other is supporting Syrian women with projects that give them financial means to help with their dire economic situation. She states at the beginning, “At the time I didn’t even know if I would ever manage to write about it later somehow I just assumed I would die like so many others.” (Yazbek 3-4) and “Everything I recount in the following narrative is real.” (Yazbek 5) stressing the creditably and authority over the story. During Yazbek’s third crossing a similar incident took place, a young man from a group of fighters she was meeting said to her, “But tell the world, ma’am that we’re dying alone and that the Alawites killed us, and that the day will come when they’ll be killed” (Yazbek 215). These words were a coxer for Yazbek to disclose her identity as she casually mentions that her family are Alawites as she was leaving the fighters place and getting into the car. Even though it might have meant killing her on the spot, perhaps Yazbek announced that because she was faced with the wholesale sectarian hatred that was fuelled in the Syrian society. She felt that sectarian conflict has ripped the Syrian society beyond what she could bury within herself. Those fighters felt guilty and



apologised to her profusely. After that, Abu Waheed, her accompanying male, reproaches her, “I won’t ever take you back to a place like that. What I did was risky, though it was good for you to see how these guys think. But you need to understand that other people might have reacted differently. And you could have been killed.” (Yazbek 216). The shift of her position from a person entrusted with the story of the struggle of the Syrian fighters, being coaxed to communicate it, and a coaxer, to someone from the other sect who might be killed simply for her identity is quite telling of the intricacies of the situation in Syria and the conflict zones in general. The examples of the coaxing in each of the three narratives elaborate its role in the memoirs and the varieties it involves.



## Storytelling

Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of memoirs and life writing generally, and one that directly relates to the idea of coaxing, as the eventual outcome of coaxing is narration and storytelling that takes the written form in a following stage. Moreover, the writing of the story of the conflict and the involved sharing of others' stories make storytelling a tool of resilience in dealing with the trauma of living in the conflict zone. Roger Luckhurst argues that "resilience remains just another kind of post-traumatic reaction" (Luckhurst 211). It does not replace or undermine other traumatic reactions, he guards. The conflict zones memoirs under study could be described as 'serious storytelling' as differentiated from entertaining storytelling. 'Serious storytelling' means "Storytelling outside the context of entertainment, where the narration progresses as a sequence of patterns impressive in quality, relates to a serious context, and is a matter of thoughtful process" (Lugmyar et al 15709). Hence, storytelling in the three texts under study is serious because of their war contexts, the three writers' motivations for writing, the process of telling that aims to make sense of such contexts and to provide instances of resilience and survival. The way the narrators get to hear the testimonies of the people that they interview qualifies as instances of storytelling. Moreover, in the conflict zones, storytelling becomes a way that "binds a group of disparate individuals together" (Smith and Watson 70). It is noteworthy that the memoir narrative as a whole could be seen as an example of storytelling containing other stories that are all bound by the context of the War. Thus, the story of the female writer becomes a frame narrative into which the stories of others in the conflict zone are embedded. Smith and Watson emphasise that "The stuff of autobiographical storytelling... is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting these experiences" (Smith and Watson 40)

Through her interaction with the Chechen people, Nivat hears numerous stories about the war conflict and its consequences on the



life of individuals, she narrates images of suffering and destruction because of the war, orienting her readers on parts of the background of these scenes in addition to describing events that she herself lived during her coverage of the war. She includes political interviews, based on set questions and answers, with leaders, along with civilians. She shares the stories of people of different cities and backgrounds, males, and females. On a bus to Nazran, Nivat describes the people and their desire to share their experience, “Everyone on the bus seems worried about the situation. They’re eager to talk” (Nivat 16). Nivat structures her memoir based on telling her own story of moving through Chechnya to report the unspoken side of the war from the Chechen perspective, and in the process incorporates others, mentioning the names and details of those who agree to talk in the course of their stories and/or interviews as she writes them. It is noteworthy that while some people would “confide” to her (Nivat 106, 139), some either refused or were reluctant to share their stories or help Nivat with her endeavour. She writes of a Russian officer, “Like most military men, Sergei has no great love for journalists, especially those who don’t offer to pay for information” (Nivat 32) and about Lida the woman who tells Nivat about the destruction of the market by Russian soldiers who “tells the story reluctantly” (Nivat 102). Nivat’s style is remarkable for its professionalism and journalistic line that focuses on observation and commentary along with the narrative line.

Moreover, Nivat adds her comments on some of the stories that she shares while highlighting the need of others to tell their stories. Speaking about one of two mothers of young boys who were in a hospital, she writes, “One of the mothers, Leyla Magomadov, rises suddenly and begins, in short phrases interrupted by sobs, to tell her story” (Nivat 56). When Nivat interviews Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen president selected by the people but rejected by Moscow, she alternates the storytelling between reporting his words, direct quotes at times, and also giving descriptions and her own comments at others. At the end of her interview with him, she asks him what progress he



had made in the country and comments that “his answer is surprisingly honest” (79). The same narrative technique is used by her when she narrates the story of Larissa, a young girl who was shot to death by a Russian soldier in front of her sister and father for no reason other than that the drunken soldier shot her for being ethnically different. When Nivat went to visit the family, talk to them and observe the ways of giving condolences, she records her observations not only about the parents of the killed girl but also about the community that is coming to share the grief that has a political and national dimension. She comments about the girl’s parents, “Lyubov, Larissa’s mother,...manages to hide her sorrow. But if her husband seems determined not to speak ill of the Russians, she is also more spontaneous and also more critical...All around me the eyes of the onlookers are red and swollen, but no one is crying. That’s not allowed especially in the presence of a stranger” (Nivat 91). The Larissa incident sheds light on several aspects of the conflict and functioning of the Ingush society, its relation to Russia and the way the inhabitants relate to Nivat, the foreign reporter especially from a gender perspective. This highlights how the narration and storytelling involve a significant aspect of cultural orientation of the reader which could be traced in each of the texts under study. Another example of Nivat’s interfering voice is when she signals her interview of a man describing him and how he tells his story in the following manner, “Adam Atsupov, a deputy from the district of Grozny...This mustachioed former engineer-economist ... chimes in with his own story” (Nivat 142, 143).

In *Baghdad Burning*, Riverbend incorporates storytelling in a centralized manner through her home and familial or communal connections. Her storytelling is satirical, perceptive, and revealing of how a normal individual, a female, lived day to day under the war and occupation. Miriam Cooke stresses that Riverbend’s “messages are carefully crafted with a keen sense of satire” (Cooke 24 “Baghdad”). Riverbend tells her readers stories of her own family daily life in Iraq.



The struggles of her relatives or their acquaintances are included which gives a wider image of life at that time and place highlighting the relational aspect that is characteristic of autobiographical storytelling. It is noteworthy that though Baghdad is the central stage of Riverbend's narrative about the war and the occupation, she stresses that the situation is similar in other Iraqi cities. She was not moving around as either Nivat or later Yazbek but she had the means to relate stories of diverse individuals. Two of the major examples of storytelling in Riverbend's narrative are the episodes of her trying to go to her workplace again, and the one explaining the story of a young girl who was detained along with her mother and three brothers in Abu Gharib. When Riverbend tries to get back to her work a couple of months after the initial occupation of Baghdad, she narrates the shock of the change that took her company and colleagues, "He looked at me for a moment without really seeing me...He congratulated me on being alive, asked about my family and told me he wasn't coming back after today. Things had change. I should go home and stay safe. He was quitting" (Riverbend 24). The other incident of the young girl who got detained with all her family based on a false accusation from an angry neighbour was entitled by Riverbend "Tales from Abu Ghraib" (Riverbend 231). Umm Hassen, the friend of Riverbend's mother narrates the first part of the girl's sad story then the girl herself, whom Riverbend gives the name "M." continues it finishing by saying, "It's okay—really—I'm one of the lucky ones...all they did was beat me" (Riverbend 235).

Riverbend incorporates stories and anecdotes to clarify the situation in Iraq to her readers. In one incident she says "Almost every single sheikh had his own woeful story to tell. They were angry and annoyed." (89). In narrating the farce of the rebuilding of Iraq, she refers to one example about the rebuilding a Diyala Bridge. She signals the topic stating, "Listen to this little anecdote" (Riverbend 34), she then goes on to tell of how a prominent engineering company in Iraq, where her cousin is an engineer, estimated the cost to be





\$300,000. A week later, an American company took the project with an estimated cost \$50,000,000. Riverbend's narration and commentary produce a narrative that combines revealing stories with sharp and realistic political criticism. Moreover, she uses the title of each of her entries to lead her readers in whether the title is political or general relating to her life or the inside of Iraq. The political titles could be seen in ones like "Al Chalabi ...No strings attached" (Riverbend 12), "Chaos" (37) and "Palms and Punishment" (Riverbend 103). The general entries include titles as "Setting the Record Straight" (13) where she explains her stance from Americans as a nationality versus the American administration and "Riots, Star Gazing and Cricket Choirs" (241). She sums up the Iraqi situation at one point, "The problems feel endless and everyone has their own story to tell... Every story begins with a deep \*sigh\* and ends with an "Allah kareem"" (Riverbend 131).

Storytelling has a significant place in Yazbek's narrative not only in the structure of her text, through the stories and the testimonies she includes, but also in her numerous direct references to stories, storytelling and to the process of narration highlighting its importance in conveying the truth of the War in Syria. She comments on her narrative, comparing the lived reality, to the possibilities and choices if it were a fictional text or if she herself were a fictional character. This hypothesis that Yazbek offers, juxtaposes the notions of fact and fiction in a way that emphasises the dire reality of the situation on the ground in Syria and engages the reader. In doing so, Yazbek achieves several purposes. Yazbek's narrative demonstrates her artistic background as a professional writer which is evident in the literary style of the Arabic text. At the beginning of her stay at Abu Ibrahim's family, she mentions that she told the women about her earlier life as she wanted to "inspire trust" (Yazbek 7) and this sharing combines storytelling and female bonding.

Yazbek begins the series of storytelling by sharing her story with her hosts. People are enthusiastic to share their stories with



Yazbek for they understand that through her, the world would know about them and their “stories of Syria”. She mentions on one occasion, “One day I was getting ready to visit some widows and female relatives of martyred fighters... when I found myself surrounded by a gathering of beautiful female neighbours all intent on recounting their stories about Saraqeb” (11). This incident begins the line of shared stories that Yazbek becomes a participant in, along with the young daughters of her host family Aala, whom Yazbek calls “my Scheherazade” (26) and Ruha. Yazbek’s use of the term “Scheherazade” brings to the fore all the implications that the name of the ultimate female storyteller in the Arab civilization invites. Yazbek clarifies that she herself alternates between being Scheherazade and Shahryar. Towards the end of the narrative, she would comment that she assigns the voice of Scheherazade to Raed, the revolutionary leader and two emirs who tell her about the events. She writes,

And so now is the turn of the emirs...to adopt the voice of Scheherazade... and I would be Shahryar the one who...consumed her tales. But I would be a dual-gendered Shahryar, with a dual role: I would listen then go back and assume the identity of Scheherazade as I passed on the narrative in turn...If it hadn’t been for this process – of relaying these stories – I would have stopped returning to Syria and remained cocooned in my exile. (Yazbek 248)

Yazbek alternates her storytelling between reporting what people said, her exchanges in interviews and the direct narration that involved dialogue exchanges. It is noteworthy that in her text, and as a sign of hospitality of the Syrian culture, these stories were almost always shared over some meal or after it even in poor and lacking places. Through stressing this detail among others, Yazbek clarified some of the traits of the Syrian culture and people. Going into the shelters during the shelling invites storytelling in an attempt to overcome fear and panic, “the shelter had reverberated with stories”(Yazbek 28). Yazbek relates how Aala would narrate to her “in intricate detail, the deaths of various neighbours and stories of young



people who had disappeared from the town one after the another” (26). The participation in the process of storytelling across the different age groups and generations highlight its importance to the speakers and its role.

One of the very indicative incidents of storytelling occurs in the second crossing of Yazbek into Syria. A displaced family was being sheltered in the basement refuge by Ayouche, the sister of Abu Ibrahim, Yazbek's host. At the coaxing of Yazbek by asking how they were forced to leave their home, the daughter of the family engages in a very illuminating exchange with Yazbek as she entrusts her with telling the world the story of her Syrian village, Amenas and she reads Yazbek her diary entries:

‘Will you write down everything I tell you?’ she asked

‘Yes,’ I promised. ‘I will’

‘Do you swear by God that you’ll tell the world what I have to say?’ she asked

‘I swear’

‘Swear by the thing you hold most dearly deep in your heart.’

I swore quietly, and as her palm came down on my head it felt like a rock might have shattered from the force.

‘Write about the village of Amenas... the place where I was born.’

...

Then she started to read out her diary, and I began to make notes... She paused. ‘Shall I carry on?’ she asked me eagerly but shyly. ‘Yes...Please.’ I replied... She didn’t stop talking, ignoring the noise of the shelling, and I didn’t stop writing.

The previous quotation is worth quoting at length as it highlights a number of significant aspects of both the notion of



storytelling and the memoir of conflict/war. The topic of the daughter of the displaced family is the story of her own living of the Syrian War, and it relates to the notion of “the wounded city” (Smith and Watson 44) and the relation of people to place, which is one of the important aspects in memoirs and life writing. Significantly, the daughter takes on the second part of the narration of the family’s story to Yazbek (and other women in the shelter who were listening attentively) after the matriarch of the family starts it. This sharing in the narrative and circulating it is important for both the coaxer and the person speaking. Before entrusting Yazbek with her story, the girl wanted to make sure that her telling would be communicated to others, and though her situation might not improve soon, the knowledge that her suffering and story, and potentially life would not go unnoticed is another coaxer for the girl herself to narrate. This in turn relates to the idea of sharing the trauma and resilience. Yazbek becomes the witness as well as the recipient of this storytelling process and mentioning the girl’s diary highlights the interest in proving the credibility of the storytelling and by extension the whole of Yazbek’s narrative. Moreover, in the previous extract Yazbek is both an “eyewitness” to the Syrian war generally and “secondhand witness” (Smith and Watson 285). Smith and Watson agree with Kelly Oliver view that “the two senses of witnessing are inevitably in a tension that...may be productive for getting beyond the reputation of trauma to a more humane, ethically informed future” (Smith and Watson 286). Perhaps it could be argued that this explains the eagerness of the girl to make sure that her story would be told to the world and Yazbek’s insistence on stressing that she wrote her whole story. Thus the coaxer and the storyteller both become elements in voicing the trauma of living in the conflict/ war zone. It is rightfully argued that “Bearing witness publicly thus involves several acts: coming to voice, claiming social space, and insisting on the authority of one’s previously unacknowledged experiential history” (Smith and Watson 85). This view agrees with Ricoeur’s notion of making sense of the world through narration.



Yazbek refers also to her own narrative and her story through the three crossings. When she arrives at Antakya airport at the beginning of her third crossing and she finds Maysara “the rebel fighter, and his girls Aala and Ruha” (115), she comments about her story and the position of this family in her narrative saying, “They’d become a part of my story – not the kind of story with jinns and sprites, but the kind of tale you would imagine existing as a place of refuge inside an enchanted crystal ball” (Yazbek 114). This extract highlights the significance of the story as both a shelter and a way around the weight of the experience of living the conflict along with others who become part of a collectively. This also relates to importance and the therapeutic effect of storytelling that is emphasised in the examination of trauma and healing. Smith and Watson emphasize, “Narrators suffering from traumatic or obsessional memory may see the act of telling as therapeutic in resolving troubled memories, acknowledging how the process of writing has changed the narrator and the life story itself” (Smith and Watson 28). Another illuminating point in relation to storytelling is the idea of remembering, and memory. The link that Yazbek draws between remembering, forgetting and communicating stories is quite significant. “You must forget the faces of the victims so that you can write about them later, so you can tell their stories and narrate to the outside world how their eyes shine as they watch the sky that showers us with barrel bombs” (Yazbek 143).

The narrative style that each of the writers uses to render her memoir is noteworthy. While the nature of the experience that each of the writers relates in her memoir is similar, and they share the humane interests, the narrative style and the language of each is different and remarkable for standing out. Each chooses a chronological and at times episodic timeline for her narrative covering a different time durations, which is one of the defining characteristics of memoirs as a genre. Nivat’s narrative style is episodic covering her experience, observations, and interviews of the period she spent in the Chechen



lands during the war. Nivat's style reflects her journalistic background in clarity, short sentences and covering the story that engages the reader. The engagement of the reader is a significant element in each text. Riverbend narrative style, on the other hand, could be argued to be representative of the style of the blog medium, with its sharpness, immediacy and sarcasm which was not as clear in the other two texts. While Yazbek's narrative style does not use a lot of sarcasm, the eloquence of her language benefited her text and allowed the reader a rhetorical enjoyment despite the painful experience that it being communicated. Each of the three texts employs a variety of techniques that allows each narrative to have its unique stance that connects it to the other women's memoirs of conflict while keeping its character.

Storytelling is a pivotal element in life and how people relate to the world around them. Hence, it plays a significant role in life narratives either through the story of the narrator or the others that are involved in the life narratives directly with their stories/testimonies or through relationality. Thus, life writing or the memoir, in case of the texts under study, becomes a frame narrative encompassing the story of the writer which in turn includes the stories of diverse others. Women in conflict/war zones find in memoir writing a space to narrate their experience and those of others, voicing a less known perspective. The conflict becomes the initial coxer to tell the story. The narrators also take on the role of the coxer to encourage others to speak to them for the purpose of documenting these stories which includes numerous references to cultural practices. The process fulfils the ethical and humane responsibility of communicating the suffering of the self and the others which is pivotal in dealing with trauma and highlights the significance of relationality and storytelling in making sense of the world especially in chaotic experiences as those lived in wars and conflict zones where storytelling becomes a lifeline.



*Forty – ninth year - Vol. 89 July 2023*



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# Middle East Research Journal

**Refereed Scientific Journal  
(Accredited) Monthly**



**Issued by  
Middle East  
Research Center**

**Vol. 89  
July 2023**

**Forty-ninth Year  
Founded in 1974**



**Issn: 2536 - 9504  
Online Issn: 2735 - 5233**