# From Vivid to Darker 'Shades of the War' – Sumis Sukkar's Fictionalization of Syrian Trauma

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**Abstract:** This article is devoted to Sumia Sukkar, a young British author, whose debut novel *The Boy from Aleppo Who Painted the War* seems an important voice in debates on the repercussions of the Syrian conflict. The novelist's decision, due to her national descent (she is of Syrian origin), to create a fictional narrative, which serves more as a moral intervention in matters of public concern, derives from Sukkar's personal conviction that one cannot hold aloof from the carnage going on in Syria. Although written in 2013, the book, with its emphasis on the unending war 'games' and unrelenting violence in the Middle East, turns out to be even more valid today than before. With this voice of moderation, Western readers have been given yet another chance to delve into the nature of the Syrian conflict, presented from the position of a devout Muslim believer as well as a person of ethical integrity. Hers is the narrative in which changing colors symbolically reflect a slow deterioration of individual mindsets. In this sense, Sukkar's novel seems more like an important attempt to 'find an adequate objective correlative' that in a comprehensive way enables one to gain insight into traumas of the local conflict/war.

**Keywords:** the Syrian war, trauma, political and moral intervention, colors and symbolism, 'personal testimony'

Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean novelist, speaking of the Latin American literary field, notes how often 'local narratives' have underscored the interdependence of such 'distant' domains as politics and fiction. In his opinion, political agendas are compelled to encroach on the area of the imaginary to illuminate the predicaments of a given community, a religious/ethnic group or society. This conclusion pertains especially to regional writings of South America as marked by some expectations of the public that concern not only cultural

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eloquence but also discernible socio-political referentiality of literary productions. Imposed on various authors, they are to prompt adequate reactions whenever a serious 'crisis' begins to transform the social fabric of a specific national framework (Dorfman 2007, 88). The question, of course, is how one construes the very term 'crisis'. If contextualized by references to political changeovers in South American countries, its designation boils down to turbulent revolutionary processes, which usually sell promises to challenge, rather than maintain, the status quo of internal relations. Regarding the objective of this article, the idea of 'crisis' – if formulated accordingly – falls short of moral profoundness, and thus needs to be completed by depicting any societal conundrums in terms of humanitarian dimension as well as by ethical reflection.

Such a perspective that acknowledges the role of literature as a potential tool for personal and moral intervention in matters of public concern is not discretionary but mandatory, unless one tends to hold aloof from the carnage in Syria that has left its imprint on the local population and far beyond. Apparently, Sumia Sukkar, a young British novelist, was of the same mind while writing her debut novel *The Boy from Aleppo Who Painted the War*. Though written in 2013, a few years later, the book, with its emphasis on the unending war 'games' and unrelenting aggression in the Middle East, appears to be even more valid today than before. But Sukkar's narrative is also worth considering for other reasons. Firstly, with this voice of moderation, Western readers have been given a good chance to delve deeper into the nature of the Syrian conflict. Elaborated on from the position of a devout Muslim believer and a person of moral integrity,[14] Sukkar's story undoubtedly examines the dimensionality of Syrian torments. As she declared in an interview conducted by Jack Little (2013), it is her religious and moral identification that shall prefix the tag of a British and secular writer. In this regard, any attempt to associate her with a manipulative religious/political zealot would be an unforgivable mistake. Secondly, some of Sukkar's relatives happen to live in Damascus, so an inspiration for writing the novel came from 'stories she had heard from family

[14] To outline Sukkar's general approach to her own 'ethical' writing, I propose considering Brigit Naumann's reflection on 'the process of […] value-making', observable in referential literature. As she claims, an ethical stance in literary works is not so much tantamount to 'teaching any particular lessons'. Rather, what comes to the fore is '[…] the ability to question established notions of value and initiating processes of change' (Naumann 2008b: 135). Sukkar, in this sense, appears both as a witness and an informer trying to trigger serious reactions on the part of the public.

members still stuck in Syria' (Wilson, 2014). Hence, drawn upon the actual experiences of Syrian civilians, the author's version of the conflict's ramifications passes the criterion of a close-to-authentic expression of different shades of cumulative traumas as inflicted by the bloodshed.

As Sukkar asserted, in writing the novel, she attempted first and foremost at 'speaking her mind' and 'raising awareness' by thematizing 'the pain and suffering' (Little, 2013). For these reasons, the format of her narrative avoids any unnecessary textual complexities to accentuate some uneasy (mis)fortunes of a single Syrian family. From the very outset, a strong light is thrown on their ordinary life in Aleppo, which is about to change dramatically along with the outbreak of spontaneous protests against Bashar al-Assad's regime. The main narrator – Adam, a fourteen-year-old boy suffering from Asperger's syndrome, is informed by his sister Yasmine that life as he knew it has come to an end: 'Adam Habibi, you're old enough to understand this is the beginning of a war' (*BA*, 1).[15] Unlike all the other members of this family, who do not intend to hide themselves behind the veil of ignorance, Adam – with a distorted perception of reality, even though witnessing firsthand some of the atrocities, remains incapable of developing a greater sense of awareness: 'I wonder what is going on. (…) It can't really be a war. No one is dressed in army clothes. On the screen, there are huge groups of people on the streets protesting with banners but I can't read them from here' (*BA*, 8). Regardless of the narrator's inherent 'innocence', the reader – perusing the text with one's wisdom of hindsight – gains an early insight into changing shapes and colors of the human catastrophe as evolving in Syria.

Although Sukkar, having in mind the weight of this subject-matter and her objective to make 'literature a potent source of change' (Little, 2013), expresses little interest in rewriting literary tropes. Her referential narrative is not entirely lacking in borrowings from other canonical works of fiction. One of such intertexts leads us to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Be it slightly over-excessive, Sukkar's digression is only seemingly based on a false analogy. In order to grasp its essence, let us consider the protagonist's reasons for redirecting his (and our) thought to the European masterpiece: 'The day is going by slowly. (…) I walk into my room and think about what book to read today. I have just borrowed *Death in Venice* (…) from the library. (…) The main

[15] Henceforth, for any references to Sukkar's novel the 'BA' initials are to be used.

character's name looks ***grey*** (…). Gustav Aschenbach is a very ***dark*** name (…). I don't want to finish the book in case it upsets me' (*BA*, 11) (emphasis mine – R. B.). Only by confronting Adam's 'ignorance' with some critical readings of Mann's story will it become evident that such a juxtaposition is far from being unintentional. André Brink, speaking of its content, indicated – inter alia – that one of the key aspects of the novella relates to the dualism of the character's name. 'Aschenbach', as underlined by Brink, is a composite of two separate terms, namely 'death and life'. Mann's protagonist, on his journey to Venice, begins a travel/journey '(…) away from the familiar environment and the strictly ordered existence (…) to a wilderness'. In a nutshell, this decision to leave behind the familiar is simultaneously a decision to 'turn towards death' (Brink 1998, 174). Whether with full awareness or without, Adam (from Sukkar's novel) shall eventually have to embrace (like Mann's protagonist) a turn towards darkness and recognize the devastating impact of the Syrian conflict upon the life of his own family.

Another reason for acknowledging the validity of Sukkar's textual references to Mann's fiction is related to potential limitations a context-specific language imposes both upon its user and addressee. Driven by intense emotions of psychological or aesthetic nature, Aschenbach finds dressing any of the overwhelming aesthetic experiences in adequate words impossible.[16] Although Sukkar's novel concerns no dispute over 'words' that would fully encapsulate *the ungraspable beauty* (Mann's theme), it provides an intriguing narrative about a young mind with a limited scope of perception, whose language should, by definition, impede the reader's in-depth picturing of the humanitarian crisis in the beleaguered city of Aleppo. Contrary to what might be expected, Adam's limitations, his specific non-analytical perception/depiction of the Syrian tragedy, as marked by unengaged neutrality and honesty, bring an adverse effect. The pictures of violence, resounding with ghastly horror, rush through some textual cracks simply and directly into the reader's consciousness, yet without any intervention of politicized commentaries. It is so since the unrelenting pressure of the conflict does not allow Adam to stay immune to an ongoing radicalization of the outside world. Therefore,

[16] Analyzing Gustav Aschenbach, Brink (1998, 178) points at the character's difficulty in overcoming 'the limits of language' on finding in the real world an object of irresistible beauty which has to be verbally 'reproduced'.

what comes to the fore is just a visual picturing of life in Aleppo that no longer can be re-projected in vivid colors:

> All I can see from here is a group of people with banners marching on, and an ambulance in the far distance. (…) My fingers start to tremble and twitch. I back way from the door and sit in the corner of the corridor towards the wall. I grind my teeth trying to ignore the ***dark*** thoughts that start clouding my mind. I can't see the wall in front of me any more; I can only see ***grey*** triangles covering my vision (*BA*, 16; emphasis mine – R. B.).

With hindsight, it is rather undeniable that the magnitude of the Syrian catastrophe has been assessed many a time by various media covers or through journalistic accounts. Yet the fundamental question is whether what has been conveyed meets the needs of writing on Syrian devastations? Provided that the war is still brewing, it seems like a rhetorical question. Most apparently, the (reading) public shows no signs of stopping short of stories shedding light on the local drama. And even though a comprehensive (media-like) evaluation of the local humanitarian disaster must be aimed at, central to having noteworthy examinations of the war activities are – to use Karl Schlögel's terminology – individualized (also in fictionalized formats) 'mental maps'. Regardless of their individual character, which often results in 'radical subjectivization of one's imaginings' of the brutalization of personal and collective spaces (2009, 242) (translation mine – R. B.), they might turn out to be an enormous asset to the public/to the outside world. This conclusion fits in Sukkar's fictional thematization of Adam's internalization and further (re)presentation of most obscure and nasty shapes of the escalating Syrian violence.

To identify the abnormal, the protagonist is first exposed to disruptions of the habitual. In order to achieve such an effect, the novelist sets the main character, as indicated before, across the backdrop of darkening and fading colors. Initial stages of the transition, from the order into disarray of the surrounding reality, are painted in ***burgundy***. This is the moment when Adam's thoughts begin to grow shadowy as the familiar undergoes a slow process of deconstruction, yet the truth remains dormant: '(…) going to school disturbs my dark thoughts and I notice many banners on the ground ripped up with red paint on them. The streets still haven't been cleaned. There is usually

somebody who cleans the streets every morning. Nothing is normal today' (*BA*, 28). Does the Asperger's syndrome explain the character's ambiguous shifting of perspective? Yes and no. Sukkar's construction of this character alludes to more general patterns of disavowal, when individual mindsets attempt to keep ramifications of armed conflicts at bay. As Elleke Boehmer claims (2012, 36), whenever a gross crisis is at issue, different 'narratives reveal (its) pervasive spirit'. This in turn leads to a presentation of characters as trying to remain mentally aloof from traumatic experiences. In part, that is the way Sukkar portrayed the protagonist of her novel. Trying to separate himself from the outside world, Adam asserts the following: 'If I do not think about it, I can erase the memory and it will be like there was just a light earthquake. I have always wished a board and rubber would appear in our minds when we close our eyes so we could rewrite our memories' (*BA*, 57). The above conclusion demarcates a specific abruptness within the protagonist's life-storytelling. According to Boehmer, whenever 'an inability to name or confront the latent problem' appears, one observes within a given narrative 'suspended action', which can be regarded as an 'indication of systemic disorder' (2012, 35). Here, it is the Syrian conflict which persistently intrudes into the order of a 'normal' life, disorienting and making the individual relapse to denial. In the case of Sukkar's protagonist, it relates to a constant struggle between intrusive manifestations of the cruelties of war and Adam's (dis)advantage of unawareness. Yet, detached from the real, even Adam eventually cannot avoid responding to what is happing beyond his personal safety zone: 'Our lives had a perfect routine that I was so comfortable living in, and now (…) [t]he war holds so much uncertainty above my head like a ***grey*** cloud waiting to pour and thunder down' (*BA*, 57).

All of the above might add up to an impression that a depiction of war traumas, when observed through a distorted lens of a fourteen-year-old boy, must be rather flawed. Therefore, the author proposes an alternative (yet complementary) insight into the actual pain and suffering inflicted by anonymous perpetrators upon innocent victims. This time it is Adam's sister, who, opposed to circumventing honest descriptions, relates in 'her own chapter' (the only one where the leading voice has been given to an adult) the disturbing experiences of a tortured mind. Yasmine's account turns into ***dark indigo*** to imply a gloomier and ultra-intense rendition of local brutality. As a potential political enemy, she has been abducted by 'soldiers' of the regime and subjected to 'coordinated destruction'. This term, used after Charles Tilly, denotes

actions undertaken by people most often representing an ideological or political organization whose sole objective, 'by deployment of coercive means', is to do 'damage to persons' or to 'annihilate' anyone who falls into the category of a political *other* (2003, 14). Fully conscious and equipped with adequate words, Yasmine bombards us with drastic descriptions of agony. With her uncensored language, one learns about the ugliest side/dramatic colors of the Syrian war:

> He comes closer and licks my belly button. I am on display. I start to repeat my prayers in my mind hoping I won't feel any pain. Only I do. I have never screamed this loud. I have never even thought my voice box could reach this high. He hooks the fish hook into my belly button and I look down to a river of blood pouring down to my knees. I scream and shout for the help of God with all my strength (*BA*, 100).

Unfortunately, the imprints of war, as always, are indelible and start resounding in *everyone's mindset*. One way or another, participating (involuntarily) in the atrocities, Syrians are doomed to befoul themselves with irresistible hatred. Yasmine is no exception. Even though her blasphemous thoughts are understandable, given what has been done to her, we see her becoming another cog in the machine of war: 'Curse you people (…) you ruined our lives (…) CURSE YOU! I have a war going on in my mind, feelings of fear, hatred and sorrow thrown into conflict with one another' (*BA*, 96). After Yasmine's testimony, the remainder of the book comes to the '(ab)normal', once again narrated by Adam. What has not changed, however, concerns the equally ominous colors by means of which Yasmine's brother continues to 'paint' other – devoid of any consolation – stories/pictures/drawings of contemporary Syria.

With the continuous gradation of tone, ***brown*** becomes another color to suggest an overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation of the life in Aleppo. Wolfgang Hallet, discussing the necessity of literary discourse to touch upon ethical issues, points out that characters happen to be designed in a way as to 'offer the reader insights into psychological (states of mind)', which in turn allows one to see the full dimensionality of given 'socio-political spaces' (2008, 195). What is then Adam's mental framework? The longer he is exposed to the ashes of what used to be the city of vivid colors, the more

perplexed and despondent he becomes. With Yasmine and his brother Isa, both missing; with Khalid, Adam's brother, mutilated; with his mother, dead; and his father, on the verge of insanity, the young boy's disorientation makes him retreat to the claustrophobic room of childish, yet forgone innocence: 'I go to my room (…) I have a pile of drawings on my desk but I have no space to hang them on the wall. The top one is of Isa smiling (…). I try to speak to him but he isn't answering me. (…) Do you know where Yasmine is? (…) Come help me Isa. Come back Isa' (*BA*, 117). But seeking asylum by the young Syrian is to no avail. Given Hallet's view on a potential correlation between the characters' psychological profiles and the public realm they represent, Aleppo – its every nook and cranny – has changed into an entrapment, a maze of endless suffering, a place in which the dawn of each day brings another confirmation of the utter human despair.

In a description of Wilson's interview with Sukkar, one reads that her novel '(…) pulls no punches in its depiction of the reality of war in Syria' (Willson 2014). As indicated before, in order to enhance the impact of this narrative, the author gives voice to a politically unengaged and 'inoperative' minor who, due to his intellectual disabilities, is incapable of grading the scale or defining the actual nature of the Syrian cataclysm. Hence, a critical evaluation of the provided imagery seems to have been ceded to the text's recipients. To quote Hallet, ethical responses to a given story derive from two interrelated elements. Firstly, it becomes evident that some questions of moral gravity are inscribed into the very plot and its leading characters; secondly, 'the reader's own social space and life' enables him/her to read a given narrative's ethical significance (Hallet 2008, 197), which most apparently shall go far beyond a mere recognition of the text's 'literariness'. Thus, the latter part of Sukkar's book, more intensely than before, is imbued with some drastic scenes like the one below, which – as one may presume – leave no one (especially 'decent' individuals) indifferent:

> I push my head up to see better and the seven men that had their eyes covered and were leaning with their mouths open on the pavement now have blood all over them and broken faces. There is one man left and the soldier steps on his head and in my mind I can see the way his mouth cracks open in slow motion. Blood flies everywhere. I always read in books about violent scenes with blood everywhere but I was never able

> to imagine how blood can fly everywhere. Khalid pushes me down and tries to cover my eyes but I have seen everything and now I am shaking. How could this happen? Why did they do that to them?' (*BA*, 123).

Hence, apart from the protagonists' relative awareness and depiction of the acts of violence, there is still room for an inquiry into what else is needed for an in-depth understanding of the Syrian tragedy. The puzzle, I would argue, foregrounds the reader crossing the threshold of Adam's limited perspective. Should one corroborate the validity of Brigit Neumann's claim that '(…) literature is not a closed system, but a part of the principal meaning-making processes' (2008a, 335), then on the basis of Sukkar's narrative, and particularly in light of such fragments as the one about the 'blood all over the place', it is exactly up to the reading public to position themselves in a way as to acknowledge the conflict's barbarity.

Regardless of their potentially deficient insights into Syrian matters, Western readers would probably agree with Tilly's (2003, 75) assertion that whenever 'the boundaries' of a given socio-political order (working rather effectively in pre-war Syria) 'are blurred, violence increases and becomes more salient'. Equipped with this knowledge, we follow Sukkar's story as unfolding within the remaining parts of the novel, wherein Adam leads the narrative by painting the real through dull and depressing colors; and more importantly, by posing and leaving some groundbreaking questions for *others* (namely us) to answer:

> I remember when blood made me vomit and made my head spin, now blood is like water and body parts are parcels. I don't even know why there's war. Why is there a revolution? Why are they taking my family? What happened while I was painting and going to school? Why is everyone suddenly talking about politics when they used to talk about art, fashion, religion and travelling? 'What happened!' I shout and scream. 'What happened!' (*BA*, 148).

As underlined by Neumann, 'literary texts, alongside other artistic and non-artistic objectifications such as newspapers, Web sites, pictures or films, are products of their contexts' (2008b, 134). In this sense, the novel centers on Syrian war experiences trying to unveil the brutality of life in Aleppo,

which serves as a symbol of the local humanitarian catastrophe. To recognize the situation, in political/legal/moral terms, as an aberration, and to bring the atrocities to an end, one must be confronted with some of the most disturbing pictures of that distant, yet deepening crisis. Thus, the objective of Sukkar's narrative to highlight the intensification of Adam's thoughts by references to certain colors of despondency like ***dark blue***, ***brown*** or ***black***:

> I am painting the scene outside today. It looks scary. There is blood and in the distance there's a collapsed building. I'm painting the blood on the floor with real blood. I'm happy that I'm painting even though I am painting a sad scene. I finish the painting (…) taking a pencil and sketching Baba [Adam's father] holding Khalid's hands with blood dripping. I fill him in with different colors especially ***navy blue*** and ***black***. Because that's the way he made me feel (…) (*BA*, 171).

Beyond doubt, the reality of Syrian (non-)existence, as depicted by the author, seems to bring a devastating effect first on individual and further on collective mindsets. Particularly, the idea of collective consciousness might be of interest to this research. Astrid Erll or Ansgar Nűning, who reiterate their views on literary fiction as molding national experiences/mindsets, point out that narratives of this kind give room to '(…) conceiving of shared values and norms, establishing and maintaining concepts of collective identity' (2005, 275). Sukkar's fiction seems to play the role of an inverted version of such literature. Instead of highlighting a sense of shared Syrian identity, her work provides a national framework of Syria as shattered into pieces, thus bereft of any normative standards of socio-political coexistence. Syria today, as 'painted' in the text, appears as a reflection of Eliot's 'Waste Land'. With death, immorality and the lack of sympathy towards fellow-men, the author denied any presence of the imperative for interhuman (national) unity. The only constitutive element of the aforementioned identity, by means of which one has a chance to understand Syrian (mis-)fortunes, boils down to a sort of spiritual atrophy of the socio-political fabric. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Adam's young mind, trapped in this world, eventually loses the distinction of colors: 'I wanted to get up and paint but I had nowhere to paint. We were all rolled up under one cover like sardines. If someone had come in and seen us they might even have thought we were dead. Nobody

moved and hardly anybody breathed. There is no more color in Aleppo. Everything is ***grey***' (*BA*, 195) (emphasis mine – R. B.). In the end, most vexing of all is the question regarding any resolution to this nightmare. Some of the scenes, however, which end the novel provide us with ambiguous answers. Yasmine and Khalid have been reunited with the family. We see them leave Aleppo and head towards a potential safe haven in Damascus, with a chance to be relocated later on to one of the refugee camps in Turkey. Unfortunately, only Yasmine and Adam do reach their destination. No definite conclusion is given. Instead, Sukkar projects upon Adam a vision of the future, with a faintly projected optimism of the 'final chapter' to be nonetheless underlined with lingering pessimistic undertones.

Again, one observes Adam's shift of perspective as marked by another change of colors that serves to define his current mental condition. The protagonist's mind, at this point, is set on an '***apricot***' mode of thinking. Prior to such envisioned brightness, there is Adam's narrative which reveals how devastating effect that war in fact has had on him: 'I feel like I'm drowning. There are so many holes in my heart. I can't feel them up. I only have Yasmine left now. I miss the thought of mama smiling at me (…). I miss the look on Baba's face (…). I miss watching my brothers argue and tease' (*BA*, 245). At the very end of the story, in the final paragraph of the book, the reader observes Adam sitting in his aunt's home, in Damascus preparing himself once again for painting: 'He picks the color red and starts to fill in the sketch of Baba's face. He is smiling in the picture and there are no bags under his eyes. Our house is in the background. There is ***no grey color in sight***' (*BA*, 251) (emphasis mine – R. B.). An immediate interpretation might suggest that a victimized individual holds on to the vivid imagery where death, desolation and darkness have been superseded by life, high spirits and clarity. In a paradoxical twist, Adam tries to reestablish the colors of Syria, from which I infer that Sukkar places 'everyone involved' either in the realm of struggles for or resistances to groundbreaking experiences, a tactic rather typical of (post-)conflict societies.

Erin Daly and Jeremy Sarkin underline that what matters in a myriad of public narratives, wherein the dynamics of a socio-political changeover happens to be 'vividly' thematized, relates to the wrongs of the *seemingly* bygone. In accordance with their claim, what any post-conflict society '(…) takes from the past will determine in part how it brings its history into the future' (2007, 18). Given that, averting one's eyes from traumas of the past

turns out to be ineffective. Also, by assuming an escapist attitude to embrace a less discomforting prospect of the present, one is destined to be led astray. From a certain angle, what we find in the final section of Sukkar's story is a 'resolution' formulated accordingly. By leaving behind the 'conflict zone', people become ready and willing to acknowledge the (un)articulated policy of forgetting and denial. Therefore, the ultimate change of colors, the protagonist's abrupt dismissal of 'what-is-not-bright', though understandable, should be in fact read as a red light/a warning not to embrace a misguiding principle of non-remembering about the dark shadows of the Syrian war. By analogy, a good lesson has been provided by post-Troubles Northern Ireland, wherein some anonymous authors of recently painted Belfast murals hail a constructive approach to the nation in crisis. In a nutshell, it could be worded as follows – 'building our future, we need to examine what happened to us/with us in the past'.[17] In other words, any form of intentional amnesia has to be reckoned detrimental to healing both the individual and collective mindset.

Overall, it seems of utmost importance to conclude with the status of the author and her narrative. To answer the question, posed for the entire analysis, I would like to draw on Nadine Gordimer's conclusions pertaining to 'political writing'. From her perspective, it is crucial not to forget, even if inadvertently, that 'morals and politics have a family connection. Politics' ancestry is morality (…). If fiction accepts the third presence within the sheets it is in full cognizance of (…) politics' in writing should denote (Gordimer 2000, 5). First, our understanding of what is political in fiction must be consistent with her stipulation that such narratives cannot be constructed and construed as siding with 'politicized' standpoints. As she claimed, literature of the kind which gets involved in matters of public significance has more to do with ethical intervention. Especially, if an author has been nurtured in an 'unsafe environment' or identifies him/herself with a similar milieu. When his/her mindset perfectly understands the logic of a given war/conflict, he/she becomes part of a certain historical context and finds it paradigmatic to 'document' the pain and suffering. It merits a quick reminder that Sukkar, when interviewed, went so far as to reveal – *expressis verbis* – that

[17] See Belfast tourist guidelines, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IZF0E8deEI, date of access: 03.06.2017. For a detailed analysis of contemporary Northern Irish fiction, which deals with that troublesome legacy of the past, see Bartnik (2017).

she 'felt compelled to write it all' (2014); that the objective was to speak her mind and raise awareness about the Syrian predicament by constructing an unorthodox but sincere presentation of the local trauma. In this manner, she has placed herself in line with those novelists whose moral standards of decency have never allowed them to remain indifferent towards humanitarian crises/human tragedies/war apocalypses. Therefore, I recognize Sukkar as a moralist and her novel as an important fictional framework for ethical reflections on the disconcerting atrophy of life in contemporary Syria.

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