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"این نیز می گذرد"

Narrative Plasticity in Rahimi's War Chronicles

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Abstract

This paper examines Atiq Rahimi's war chronicles through the lens of Catherine Malabou's theory of plasticity. It aims to deconstruct his war trauma and understand his conflicted relationship with his motherland: he sometimes mourns it and longs for it, while at other times he stares at it and hopelessly portrays its regretful annihilation. Through novels, films, letters, and photographs, he attempts to sustain a bond with his homeland. The plasticity of his works allows history to be preserved. Malabou's notion of plasticity will be used to demonstrate the precariousness of memory and the fragility of perceptions in times of war. This article will highlight how Rahimi, through his "vision of thoughts," transforms his pain into art and his chronicles into history.

Keywords: Memory; Motherland; Narratives; Plasticity; Trace; War

Atiq Rahimi is an Afghan writer and filmmaker living in France. In 1984, he was compelled to leave his homeland, Afghanistan, because of war; he found refuge in the neighborhood, in Pakistan. Afghanistan, being situated at the crossroad of South Asia and Central Asia, was (and still is) the most conflictual geographical zone of the region. The whole region was characterized by what the scholar Om Dwivedi describes as "a myriad of stories underpinned by a commonality of brutal violence and denial of human rights to millions of people" (*The Other India* 1).

By means of novels, films, photographs and else, Atiq Rahimi as well as several writers and artists, attempt to give shape to their trauma. In that sense, the researcher Itakura underlines the persistence of war trauma and its ever-haunting violence: "This conflation of trauma and resistance stands as powerful – though fictional – testimony to the harsh reality of the war-stricken country where trauma is 'a constant presence', and neither 'pre-traumatized' self nor coherent history is Retrievable » (153).

Indeed, Atiq Rahimi writes so that his people survive in history. The translator of *Earth and Ashes*, Sabrina Nouri asserts that Rahimi's chronicles are meant to be "humane and universal" (*Earth and Ashes* 9). He dedicates his works to those whose earth was turned into ashes because of war. His narratives take different forms: novels, short stories, films, letters and a book of photography. He tries through this variety of genres, to dissect his own pain as an exiled refugee who had to flee his homeland to survive war. He tries to cope with his memory and get rid of the relics of the past. But just like his protagonist Dastaguir, he needs time to

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excavate his pain, as his narrator puts it: “Tu es incapable de décrire ton chagrin: il n’a pas encore pris forme. C’est encore trop tôt” [You are unable to describe your grief: it has not taken form, yet. It is still too early] (*Earth and Ashes* 38).

His insufficiently expressed sorrow and constant nostalgia for his homeland, along with the ongoing process of (re)imagining and reflecting on his past, is what Malabou refers to as “the vision of thought” (2022: 15); an attempt to visualize a remembered past, an envisioned future, or cherished memories. The “I” of the writer embodies more “an eye ‘on the edge of discourse’” (Malabou 2022: 16), which Malabou describes as: “an optical arrangement that language brings up to its edge through its structure, so that talking gives birth to the visibility of its subject matter” (2022: 16). Therefore, Rahimi’s chronicles strive to articulate and schematize his yearning for Afghanistan, and to resurrect his earth from its ashes. Through his works, he visualizes his thoughts in an endeavor to comprehend his turmoil and the trauma he carries due to the atrocities of war he and his people endured, and to attempt to unburden himself from the weight of memory.

Malabou explains that thoughts, as well as expressing them or putting them into words or images, have no “demiurgical powers” (2022: 16) because visualizing them confirms that they are mere illusions or absent presence (Blanchot 30). Rahimi’s attempt at giving form to the past and portraying it in different narratives is a helpless effort to deny war traumas and create bonds with his people. He cannot resurrect the dead, nor stop an already existing war. He nostalgically remembers Afghanistan, and Malabou calls this “idealisation”, as she puts it: “Idealisation appears as presence, in solitude, of solitude” (2022:19). She further explains: “To see thought as someone is to see absence in person; that is, as much as it is to see no one, it is also to touch the limits of the figurable” (2022:19). Thus, Rahimi’s historical discourse (be it in film, photography, or fiction) does not help him reconcile with his memory; it rather intensifies his pain and renders healing impossible. The absent Afghanistan is ever present in his thoughts and works. Instead of grasping the past and deciphering its mystery by means of texts or images, it is the very idea of the longed-for homeland that haunts the writer and resurrects like a ghost in every work. Malabou describes this as “The staring function of thought” and calls it “the superego” (2022:19) that overwhelms and imposes itself; she claims it to be “the eye of discourse in some senses turns back against its subject” (2022:19).

Speaking through the Dead: Lettre à un Réfugié

During his odyssey in search of refuge from war trauma, Rahimi wrote a letter to a refugee in which he narrates his own journey of border crossing from his homeland to exile. He ironically states with a glimpse of melancholy : “Vous rêvez d’un ailleurs, d’une vie meilleure ; vous fuyez la guerre, ou toute autre tragédie humaine. Silencieux, anxieux, vous vous approchez d’une frontière dans l’espoir que la terreur et la souffrance perdent vos traces” [You dream of an elsewhere, a better life; you are fleeing war, or any other human tragedy. Silent, anxious, you trespass a border in the hope that terror and suffering will fail to find you]. Rahimi points out in his letter the impossibility of the quest because refugees live with a triune-trauma: that of war, the one of exile, and the delayed grief that brings back dolorous memories.

Though the letter belongs to the past, its very idea is matured before the writer himself. It was ‘born’ long before the moment he decided to write it and share it. Malabou asserts: “The



thought is born, it was always more mature than us, which is why it stares at us. Furthermore, even when we think that we are modelling it, it has the power to deform or deface us. Scrutinized by the idea, we unfurl ourselves before it, returning to a liminal, embryonic, pre-subjective state through the very activity of thinking or creating” (2022:19). In fact, putting pain on paper allows the writer to see the shape of his trauma and deform the perceived reality. When he is face-to-face with his words, he becomes aware of how much his stored memories took control over his present and impacted him forever. Rahimi writes: “dans votre errance, vous rencontrez d’autres étrangers ; eux aussi tiennent leurs racines dans les mains. Cette nouvelle terre peut vous refuser d’y planter vos racines. Elle est déjà trop peuplée, vous disent-ils” [while wandering you meet other strangers; they too hold their roots in their hands. This new land may refuse you to plant your roots there. It is already too crowded; they will claim]. And here he comes to realize through his own text his state of dislocation and uprootedness. That superego of the very idea of being a refugee becomes performative, confirms the status of the writer, and declares him to be an outsider, a stranger in his homeland, other lands, and narrative. Rahimi is aware of his rambling and stumbling within his own text, he confesses: “sur une nouvelle terre, vous territorialisez votre imaginaire” [on a new land, you territorialize your imagination]. He confirms the impossibility of finding refuge somewhere, in an elsewhere, since the exile lies within the dislocated self. Even the hospitality of the text fails to erase war traumas.

In his letter, Rahimi continues narrating a refugee’s journey to any refugee in whose hands it might fall; he professes: “Vous voilà de l’autre côté de la frontière. Vous avez donc réussi à semer la souffrance et la mort. Mais pourtant rien ne vous réjouit. Vous êtes comme en deuil, en perte de votre terre/mère/identité” [Here you are on the other side of the border. So, you have succeeded in sowing suffering and death. But yet nothing makes you happy. You are like in a state of mourning, losing your land/mother/identity]. Leaving his homeland and surviving the war ironically does not instigate hope and happiness, it is rather described as mourning, a state of orphanage, and of uprootedness. For Malabou, “the crossing occurs through both continuity and contiguity, with the abruptness of a radical break” (Malabou 2010: 35). That painful transitional state, and “radical break”, proves that physically plasticity is exterior, it is possible; but psychologically it does not suggest assimilation and becoming another malleable self and the construction of a new meaning, new identity; it rather implies the destruction of any form and the finitude of being oneself. Thus, a new broken self emerges from the ashes of memory only to strive for a new status, for forgetting. Unfortunately, the pain of war and dislocation is insurmountable, and their presence in Rahimi’s chronicles proves it to be true. Malabou asserts: “The trace is inconvertible into forms” (2010:47). In fact, pain is not convertible; it is neither elastic nor plastic.

Though that internal pain is beyond physical, Rahimi gives it form by writing a letter, portraying what Levinas calls a *face*, “the being that appears, but remains absent” (Levinas 181), a sort of corporeal absent presence of war traumas in an epistle (un)sent to an invisible, unnamed refugee. In Rahimi’s letter the face of the other is unknown, suspected to be the writer himself, or not. The plasticity of the correspondence denies the presence of the absent receiver, and the letter remains in a state of what Derrida calls *destinerrance*.

(No) *Traces of War: Earth and Ashes*

Rahimi also delved into faction (his narratives cannot be categorized as fiction) and films. He first wrote خاکستر و خاک *Earth and Ashes* in 2000 then adapted it to screen in 2004. Both the book and the film narrate the story of Dastaguir whose village was bombarded. He decided to travel to his son's workplace to inform him that his mother and wife were killed and to bring him back to bury them and take care of his surviving son Yassin. His journey was full of high expectations. All along the road he imagined that encounter with his brave son Mourad who saddened by the news, would only think about avenging his family:

En ton for intérieur, tu te demandes quelle peut bien être la logique de la guerre. Tout cela est bien beau mais n'apporte de remède ni à ton chagrin ni à celui de ton fils. Mourad n'est pas du genre à philosopher ou à réfléchir à la logique et aux lois de la guerre. Pour lui, le sang appelle le sang. Il se vengera fut-ce au prix de sa vie. C'est la seule issue ! Et puis, il n'a que faire d'avoir du sang sur les mains.

[Deep down, you wonder what the logic of war could be. This is all well and good, but it does not cure your sorrow or that of your son. Mourad is not the type to philosophize or think about the logic and laws of war. For him, blood calls for blood. He will take revenge even at the cost of his own life. This is the only way out! And then, he doesn't care if he has blood on his hands.]

(*Earth and Ashes* 50)

Dastaguir walks towards his destination, emotionally charged with pain, anger, and hope. He fails to understand his inner feelings; he walks to drain and strain his body so that his brain focuses on his main purpose: reaching Mourad, burying his dead family to properly mourn them. He mumbles: "Pourquoi n'ai-je donc pas été tué par un éclat avant d'arriver chez moi! Quel péché avais-je commis pour être condamné à vivre, à être témoin de..." [Why wasn't I killed by shrapnel before I got home! What sin have I committed to be condemned to live, to be witness of...] (43). Living has become a curse, a punishment for a sin. The cadavers of his family members represent the sole reality, a more than ever present absence; they personify his agony. As he strolls on that earth reduced to ashes, like an apparition in the dust; an absent presence. "C'est nous qui brûlons dans le feu de l'enfer. Les morts sont plus heureux que les vivants" [It is only us who burn in the fires of hell. The dead are happier than the living] (71).

Rahimi's protagonist tries to describe pain; he personifies it as such: "...la douleur, soit elle arrive à fondre et à s'écouler par les yeux, soit elle devient tranchante comme une larme et jaillit de la bouche, soit elle se transforme en bombe à l'intérieur, une bombe qui explose un beau jour et qui te fait exploser" [... pain either manages to melt and flow out through the eyes, or it becomes sharp like a tear and springs from the mouth, or it turns into a bomb inside, a bomb that explodes one fine day, and that makes you fulminate] (37). The plasticity of pain confirms its power; it manifests itself in different forms, and the process is long and dolorous. But unfortunately, the agony of loss and the feeling of helplessness in war leave no hope for suffering to take any other form than that of a destructive bomb.

War annihilates even the sense of being in the world; it is 'plastic', reducing being to nothingness. Once declared, present, real, it destroys all forms of existence: physical and moral. It reduces all forms of presence into absence: people, buildings, stories, dignity, hopes



for a better future, forgetting, dreams and even history. Malabou argues: “But we know that plasticity also means the power to annihilate form. ‘Plastic’ is the name of an explosive material. Plasticity may be used to describe the crystallization of form as well as the destruction of all form (as suggested by the term plastic explosive for a bomb)” (2022: 278-279).

Dastaguir looks at his grand-child Yassin sleeping and thinks: “Il faudrait pouvoir dormir comme un nouveau-né, sans images, sans souvenirs, sans rêves. Comme un nouveau-né, reprendre la vie au commencement. Hélas, c’est impossible. Tu voudrais vivre une nouvelle fois, ne serait-ce qu’une journée, une heure, une minute, une seconde même” [We should be able to sleep like a newborn, without images, without memories, without dreams. Like a newborn, starting life over. Alas, this is impossible. You would like to live again, if only for one day, an hour, a minute, or even a second] (*Earth and Ashes* 27-28). He realizes that the bomb that reduced his village to ashes and killed his wife and daughter-in-law, rendered peace of mind, imagination, and dreams impossible; it transfigured everything around him. He longs to live again. He is dead inside, an empty receptacle; a mere depository of pain.

When his journey began, Dastaguir was not aware of the enormity and fatality of his sorrow. “Tu es incapable de décrire ton chagrin: il n’a pas encore pris forme” [You are unable to describe your grief: it has not taken form, yet. It is still too early] (*Earth and Ashes* 38). until he met his son Mourad and realized that though he had heard about the bombing in his village, he had moved on with his life. He then confesses to himself: “Ta tristesse a maintenant pris forme, elle s’est transformée en bombe, elle va exploser, elle va te faire exploser” [“Your sadness has now taken form; it has turned into a bomb, it will explode, it will make you fulminate”] (85). That bleak reality allowed his sadness to take form, become present, devour all his hopes, and erase all the thoughts he had tried to visualize throughout his mourning journey. Malabou claims this to be, “This simultaneity between the two meanings of plasticity – the creation of form and the destruction of form” (2022: 280).

Embracing Motherland: Le retour imaginaire

His insufficiently described homeland needed more than words to portray how much it was destroyed by war. Atiq Rahimi returns to Afghanistan after 18 years of exile; he thus decides to document his visit in a photography book titled *Le retour imaginaire* that “reveals an exile’s nostalgia for his homeland ravaged by war that has killed his brother and many of his compatriots” (Abdul Wahab 44). In the blurbs of his book he claims: “Je veux photographier ces blessures...je cherche à faire revivre le sentiment que l’homme éprouve en regardant une cicatrice” [I want to photograph these wounds...I try to bring back to life the feeling that a man gets when looking at a scar]. He wanders in his homeland trying to reconnect with his roots and exorcise his past memories and pain. He tries to reconcile with his past self and regain control over his old place, but fails to see hope in the chaos he sees round. The past he longed for as an exiled will never be present again. As Malabou puts it: “The confrontation of plasticity and the trace thus made me aware of the impossible possibility of writing presence” (2010:11).

In fact, Rahimi tries to adjust to his status as a revenant and revive his childhood good memories, but he is confronted by the ever-present trace of war and its wreckage, which makes reappropriation and projection impossible. He argues, “Je n’ai plus personne dans ma terre natale. Le seul lien avec ma patrie c’était le corps de mon frère et les souvenirs que j’avais

conservés si jalousement dans un coin de mam mémoire. Et à présent le corps de mon frère est en exil et tous mes souvenirs égarés dans ces ruines...je suis plus étranger qu'un étranger" [I no longer have anyone in my native land. The only link with my homeland was the body of my brother and the memories that I had preserved so jealously in a corner of my memory. And now my brother's body is in exile and all my memories are lost within these ruins...I am stranger than a stranger] (*Le retour imaginaire* 116). War annihilated every trace of his past and erased any physical bond with his country turning him into a stranger. His memory is his last resort to preserve his past and tie him to his native land. The plasticity of his memories stands in front of the plastic bombs to give shape to thoughts of the past and resurrect the notion of a homeland, *la patrie*, from the ashes of memory.

The writer includes in his book unusual blurry pictures in black and white (or rather greyish), taken with an old pinhole camera, representing his own way of seeing Afghanistan after 25 years of war. They incarnate his sad encounter with his homeland, and the way its presence in front of his eyes suggest an absence, a rupture with the imagined past and the incapacity to see clearly the present moment of that sudden face-to-face with a deceiving image of his homeland. Malabou sees plasticity in that sense as a state of transfiguration and annihilation; she argues: "Plasticity thus appeared to me from the outset as a structure of transformation and destruction of presence and the present" (2010:9). That attempt at building bonds with his origins turns into a time for ending any form of contact with his nostalgic past. It is a moment of realization that the past will never be present again. Rahimi finds himself entrapped within "the fratricidal hand-to-hand battle of presence and the absenting of presence, the present and its withdrawal" (Malabou 2010:8).

During this visit to his motherland, Rahimi wanted to visualize his thoughts about the place and re-member his souvenirs. Indeed, Afghanistan, to his senses is an idea that he tries to recreate in his works, so he goes to its encounter aware that the way he remembers it is no longer its current reality. He expects deception but it does not seem to matter to him: it is his mother-land. Malabou also uses the metaphor of the mother when it comes to visualizing an idea; she argues:

The figure of the mother in the idea is always the photograph of an absence. Like my mother, the idea gazes at me, starting from the possibility of her disappearance, for we are always as afraid of losing an idea as we are of losing our mother. Perhaps also, like a mother, the idea always threatens us with its disappointment. When we feel her harsh stare and regress before it, falling back into childhood, isn't that because we are as afraid of disappointing our idea as we were and will always be of disappointing our mother? (2022: 20)

The writer knows that his motherland, as portrayed in his mind, is not the same as the one he sees before his eyes. But he needed her absence to be present in order not to lose his sense of belonging and not to disappoint the idea of belonging somewhere. That fidelity is similar to what bonds the writer to a mother (land) confirming an absent reality and preserving the history of a place.



Rahimi attempts to re-create ties with Afghanistan; he stares at his surroundings looking for stories. “La navette s’arrêta. Nous étions en train de descendre quand mon voyageur s’arrêta net sur le pas de la porte, captivé par une inscription sur le pare-brise juste en face du chauffeur : *tout finit par passer*” [“The shuttle stopped. We were getting off when my traveler stopped abruptly in the doorway, captivated by an inscription on the windshield right in front of the driver: everything ends up passing”] (15-16). When he read that wall inscription loudly, the traveler who was accompanying him wondered about its meaning. Rahimi felt then that proximity with the homeland he failed to recognize because of war damages the moment he put feet on the ground; he nostalgically recounts the story behind that expression: “il était une fois un roi. Un jour, il demanda à un artiste de sa cour de créer une oeuvre qui saurait le rendre joyeux s’il était triste et triste s’il était joyeux. L’artiste créa une bague sur laquelle était gravé : *tout finit par passer*” [once upon a time there was a king. One day, he asked an artist from his court to create a work that would make him happy whenever he is sad and sad whenever he is happy. The artist created a ring on which was engraved: “everything ends up passing”] (16). He also explains to the traveler as well as to his readers: “Mais oui, cette devise nous a accompagné pendant vingt-trois ans de guerre. Nos malheurs, nos joies, nous les avons vécus avec elle” [Indeed, this motto accompanied us during twenty-three years of war. Our misfortunes, our joys, we experienced them with this statement] (16). Rahimi’s artworks, being it a film, a documentary, a novel, or a photograph, act like the artist’s ring; they stand in the face of memory to store a painful past and at the same time recall joyful souvenirs.

The Banality of War: "این نیز می گذرد"

But though that expression is real, *tout finit par passer* [everything ends up passing], it is also the confirmation that it is not true. Rahimi reads it as the incarnation of an everlasting past, a motto suggesting hope that nothing lasts forever, reminding its readers of the finitude of all things. When written on walls and inscribed in the minds of people, it allows an acceptance of the annihilation the country is subjected to, as it trivializes war. Malabou argues, “We must remember that ‘plasticity’ generally describes the nature of that which is plastic, being at once capable of receiving and of giving form” (Malabou 2022: 278). In that sense, *tout finit par passer* [everything ends up passing] represents a promise of ephemerality and at the same time confirms the persistence of that temporary state of pain, since that motto accompanied Afghan people for more than three decades. Indeed, the very presence of *Le retour imaginaire* embodies the impossibility of forgetting, and guarantees that “*tout finit par passer*” [everything ends up passing] is just an expression; and that though it suggests the plasticity and malleability of memory, but the moment the book itself is in the hands of the reader, it only validates the improbability of its meaning.

Aware of the plasticity of the expression, Rahimi shares with his readers the original inscription in Persian “این نیز می گذرد” which he bluntly explains as related to the reported king’s story. He thus creates, by using it as a recurrent leitmotiv, in his book a kind of coded familiarity with his people. In fact, when the reader attempts to translate it or look for it in the dictionary, they realize that the exact of its translation is debatable. While “این نیز می گذرد” is translated by Sabrina Nouri as *tout finit par passer*, the dictionary emphasizes the plasticity of translation to adapt to the context, as well as the elasticity of meaning that adjusts to the intention. It could be translated as “This sucks” in English and also “C’est aussi nul” in

French. The many possible translations confirm the malleability of the statement and the various meanings hidden behind the Afghan motto.

Hence, we, as readers, should embrace plastic minds and adjust our understanding of Rahimi's plastic narrative to his context. We interpret the past through his language, words, expressions, and experiences which are conveyed to us through translation(s) and thus interpretation(s). We are confronted with a version of war that is unfamiliar to us, shaped by our own imagination and perceived through our limited plastic/elastic understanding and phantasmagoria. War is a reality that could never be fully imagined. Readers are mere spectators, grappling with the plasticity of their imagination as they try to visualize words, ideas, and stories. War as a brutal destructive reality, is inherently plastic in a different explosive sense.

Rahimi relies on his chronicles (stories, photographs, movies, documentaries, epistles) to allow us to visualize through his words and our thoughts the horrors of war, repeatedly stating "*tout finit par passer*". His narrator in *The Patience Stone* describes the banality with which war could be perceived and described in the disinterested way of a voyeur: "Le soleil se couche. Les armes se réveillent. Ce soir encore on détruit. Ce soir encore on tue. Le matin. Il pleut. Il pleut sur la ville et ses ruines... Il pleut sur les corps et leurs plaies". [The Sun sets. Weapons awake. Tonight, we are still destroying. Tonight, we are still killing. Morning. It is raining. It rains on the city and its ruins... It rains on the bodies and their wounds] (*Syngué Sabour* 35).

He thus rises from his text like a phoenix to shake his readers without explicitly stating it: war is not banal, it is brutally plastic, but contrarily to our plastic ideas about it; it erases with its presence all hopes and possibilities of presence. Rahimi's narrator in *Les porteurs d'eau* argues: "nous sommes tous perdants, il n'y a que les salauds qui se croient gagnants" [we are all losers, only the bastards think they are winners] (211).

The Permanence of Form and Persistence of Memory: The Phenix from the Ashes

Refusing to accept any form of war is a plastic ideology that resists any form of malleability, adjustment or discussion. As Malabou puts it: "a plastic material retains the imprint and thereby resists endless polymorphism" (2022: 281). Indeed, the materiality of war is not polymorphic; it only suggests ruination and annihilation. The only permanence of form that it proposes is the scar of memory. Even the persistence of war as a remembered idea (Whether it be a past lived experience or a visualized or imagined reality) is plastic, as Malabou explains:

Paradoxically, the permanence of form and the impossibility of forgetting appear to be specific means of destruction of this same form. If it is true that a conservative instinct exists in the psyche that tends to restore an earlier state of things, that is, the inorganic passivity of matter before it came to life, then the status of the plasticity of psychic life is properly undecidable. The impossibility of erasure or disappearance in mental life expresses equally the liveliness of the trace as well as the inertia proper to the death drive. That is why this liveliness is also the mask of mental disease. (2022: 278)

In the mind of Rahimi and his readers, the war in Afghanistan destroyed the very meaning of life in the country; it turned it into ashes. But the writer tries to preserve the notion of



belonging to his motherland and restore good memories of the place. His trauma is there, but the impossibility of erasure is a fact. War altered the form of the country but not the form of the thought of it in Rahimi's mind. Though his memories are plastic, they did not transfigure his love for his motherland. As Malabou claims, "Plasticity not only designates a new modality of memorization or healing; it also characterizes the way the subject is excluded from these modalities themselves. Because of the way the brain and regeneration function, the possibility for a subject, be it individual or collective, to appropriate or reappropriate their own wounds or traumas, to constitute and read their own archive, finds itself profoundly and definitely challenged" (2022: 293).

Rahimi's chronicles are purveyors of a vivid memory that defies the human and cultural genocide that his country was a victim of. Indeed, in the past, there used to be a saying: "giants come from Afghanistan", but now the region is reduced to ashes, a waste land scarcely remembered, known only for its terrorists, women in burqas, and stoning. He writes to preserve even the ugly aspects of his country so that they will not be forgotten or banned from history. His chronicles give legitimacy to the very existence of his homeland. They act like an ever-present absence, a plastic apparition giving form to memory and history. Malabou explains this by referring to Derrida's notion of the trace as such:

A trace is not necessarily 'graphic' in the usual sense of the term: 'The (pure) trace is *differance*. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic' (Derrida 1997: 62). A trace can be a stain, a breath, or a form precisely. If *differance* is the 'being-imprinted of the imprint', it can also be 'the formation of form' (Derrida 1997: 63). A trace can, then, be considered plastic. Writing itself, Derrida pursues, should not be reduced to the act of writing, that is using letters in order to compose a sentence or a text. Writing can also mean "to scratch," "to engrave," "to scribble," "to scrape," "to incise" (1997: 123). (2022: 288)

So, the formation or form of the trace matters less compared to its ever-present presence. Rahimi uses all forms of art to preserve and visualize the presence of his motherland. He is aware that "All memories change the form of what is remembered" (Malabou 2022: 290) so he contends "I write like a cineaste and make films like a writer" (Rahimi 2012) to prove that a trace takes the form of history; it pertains to the archive that preserves memory and ensures the persistence of existence even in times of absence. He is a "record keeper and a bridge between the society he has been a part of for the past few decades and his Afghan home" (Singh 27). He narrates the devastating war for those who never knew it, and recalls his homeland for those who should not forget it. Indeed, "the personal experiences of war's survivors can shed light on the larger social truths" (Singh 27); they are not mere stored stories but they rather pertain to the archive and provide readers with a vivid version of history. Such record are plastic, they keep memories alive (Singh 31).

War at Dusk: The Plasticity of Discourse(s)

Though it is unacceptable to embrace war, we advocate plasticity in our approach to understanding war by engaging with works like these. While there is a pressing need for a different form of plasticity, as Malabou suggests: "It is therefore a matter of producing readings that are neither traditional nor deconstructive. Of course, this can only happen

through a new writing or a new style, whose name and nature would be termed 'plastic'" (2010:54). Rahimi presents a discourse that promotes innovation in reading war; it proposes chronicles that blend of nostalgia and denunciation, an invitation both to forgetting and reconciliation which only serve to underscore the enduring painful past and the persistence of memory; "plasticity refers to both a new mode of being of form and a new grasp of this mode of being itself, in other words, a new *scheme*" (Malabou 2010:57).

Rahimi's texts, letters, novels, films and photographs capture moments of hope and despair; they depict his visualized thoughts of the motherland at dusk, on the brink of memory, forgetting, and history. Malabou asserts: "Dusk is a time of reprieve. Dusk is a time of mourning. Dusk is a time of melancholy. Dusk is a time of separation. Dusk is a time of metamorphosis. I translate: plasticity is the reprieve of writing; plasticity is the mourning of writing; plasticity is the melancholy of writing; plasticity is the separation from writing; plasticity is the metamorphosis of writing" (2010:62). Therefore, dusk signifies a crucial moment for change to occur and plasticity to be effective.

'Tout finit par passer' [everything ends up passing]: From Earth We Came, to Ashes We Shall be Trans-formed!

We read Rahimi's narratives and take pleasure in the aesthetics of the chronicles, unaware that in doing this, and staring with voyeurism at the horrors of destruction, we are regressing to our primitive state of barbarism. We cannot just stare at the horror of war! This consciousness about our state of oblivion is also what the writer and director wanted us to reach. His plastic discourse takes a variety of shapes to compel us to externalize visualized thoughts about war and transfigure them into action. Thus, "the concept of plasticity is becoming both the dominant formal motif of interpretation and the most productive exegetical and heuristic tool of our time" (Malabou 2010:57). Plasticity in that sense paves the way for many implications when reading it in the context of war, and its flexible interpretations in war narratives. This concept compels writers, scholars, critics, and artists to adopt it and portray war in various forms, aiming to historicize and preserve the traces of the past. It also challenges readers to approach war narratives differently, and to confront the plasticity of war narrative with rigid and obstreperous minds.

Rahimi's narrator reminds us (I am using this quote ironically): "le coran dit que l'homme est fait de l'argile" [the Quran says that man is made of clay] (*Les porteurs d'eau* 260). And thus, plasticity is an inherent feature of human nature, which makes malleability an ever-existing characteristic in humans. This confirms Malabou's assertion that "the concept of plasticity gradually asserted itself as the style of an era" (2010:1). We, as readers, live by the same motto as that of the Afghan, convinced that *'Tout finit par passer' [everything ends up passing]*; we are unaware of the impossibility of the passing of the descent into barbarism when a war is waged against a group of people. In fact, it does not just kill victims then declare victory and peace; it sticks in people's minds and persists through time to invite us all within a scatological vortex without an exit.

We continue to passively consume war chronicles with voyeurism and plastic mindsets. We read books about war, conduct research on war, publish articles on war, and discuss war narratives in media and conferences, but we do nothing to stop it as a curse. When the traveller claimed that all the ruins in Afghanistan should be restored, Rahimi looked around at war wreckages and replied: "Non. Il faut tout laisser tel quel pour témoigner de la grandeur de



l'homme et de sa barbarie" [No. We must leave everything as it is to bear witness to the greatness of man and his savagery] (*Le retour imaginaire* 43).

Until words one day become plastic and turn into actions, I do not think there is any hope of a farewell to arms in the near future. From Earth we came, to ashes we all trans-formed!

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**All translations are mine*