

## Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 10 (2017)

The Cyprus Problem in Literature and Theory



### The Representation of Cyprus's Trauma in Andrea Busfield's *Aphrodite's War*: Conflict or Dialogue?

*Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė*

doi: [10.12681/syn.16242](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16242)

Copyright © 2017, Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## **The Representation of Cyprus's Trauma in Andrea Busfield's *Aphrodite's War*: Conflict or Dialogue?**

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė

### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to examine the representation of the events in Cyprus in the middle and second half of the twentieth century as depicted in Andrea Busfield's novel *Aphrodite's War* (2010). The article discusses the methods and narrative strategies of disclosing collective trauma and considers the fact-fiction dimension, arguing the presence of it in a trauma narrative. Narrative strategies in trauma fiction are discussed and the author's approach to the restatement of the national trauma is analysed. It is debated whether the novel can be described as a post-trauma testimony and whether the narrative is constructed on unified memory concepts. Postmemory is viewed within the framework of transgenerational trauma and the role of collective memory in the transmission of trauma is emphasised. Based on the ethical charge of the narrative, the reader's status in the relationship with a trauma novel is questioned.

### **The author's proximity to a collective trauma**

The representation of a collective trauma in fiction often faces the danger of falling into the 'fact versus fiction' trap. The reader of this type of fiction may search for the exact representation of his/her traumatic experience, expecting to find the discussion of similar emotions and consequences. Thus, authors who take up the topic of collective traumas, face many challenges: these novels examine transpersonal dimensions of collective memory that spread beyond the individual. A trauma novel often includes a definite realistic and/or historical dimension, and may be based on personal experience or general knowledge. In many cases, the readers of trauma fiction may impose high demands on the authors: first, the aforementioned census of objectivity and, second, the proximity factor (the author's closeness to the described trauma(s) and its effect on the writing process as well as the reader's knowledge or attachment to that particular trauma). Unsurprisingly, the question of reliability becomes an urgent one in discussing trauma fiction.

Andrea Busfield is a British journalist and novelist, born in Warrington, England, in 1970 ("Busfield"). She was two years old when her father was posted to Cyprus; however, two years later, in 1974, the family was evacuated from Cyprus. In 1986 the family revisited Cyprus to find their holiday home and family friends from the past. After that Andrea Busfield visited the island regularly. As she acknowledges on her personal website,

The events of 1974 exacted a heavy toll on Cyprus. Thousands of lives were lost and approximately half of the population became refugees, fleeing homes on both sides of the divide. To this day, there are a number of mothers who still don't know what happened to their sons forty years ago—and those that do know cannot easily forget. ("An Island Divided")

Therefore, setting her second novel in Cyprus during the turbulent twentieth-century events in the country, Busfield reinforces the role of postmemory. In doing this, the author steps on the long and complicated road of restating transgenerational trauma. The sensitive issue of the transmission of trauma becomes an important one in discussing different aspects of the multi-layered traumas in Cyprus. Moreover, the author's proximity to trauma leads to many unresolved questions: the obvious emotional attachment to the island may interfere with the readers' expectations.

Busfield's first novel *Born Under a Million Shadows* (2009), which focuses on the traumatic events in Afghanistan in the early years of the twenty-first century, gained immediate success. In October 2001, Busfield travelled to Afghanistan as a reporter for the *News of the World* to cover the fall of the Taliban. Four years later, in 2005, she got a job as editor at one of Kabul's newspapers and spent three years in Afghanistan, a period which later materialised in the Kabul-set *Born Under a Million Shadows*, based on the author's experience there. Although Busfield points out that the novel is not autobiographical, she has acknowledged the fact that many events in the novel had happened in reality ("Busfield"). In the novel, set in one of Kabul's districts, the story is presented through the eyes of an eleven-year-old boy. The novel describes a complicated and dangerous life in Kabul with a touch of humour and irony and centres on how many children like Fawad, the protagonist, have seen a lifetime of violence. The focalisation in the novel is of particular significance: the traumatic experiences of a small boy symbolise the trauma of the whole country. In this way, Busfield critiques the contemporary situation in Afghanistan. The novel includes many realistic details about Afghanistan which, in some episodes, makes the story similar to a journalistic article or series of articles. Busfield's professional career as a journalist seems to have made a strong influence on her writing style and this influence continues in her second novel. Busfield has

worked for different journals and newspapers such as *News Team International* in Birmingham, *The Sun* and *News of the World* in London, *Sada-e Azadi* in Kabul, and *Gulf Times* in Doha, Qatar. Now she is a full-time writer living in Bad Ischl, Austria.

Busfield's second novel, *Aphrodite's War* (2010), is a historical trauma novel, in which the author tells a story of tragic events in Cyprus during the second half of the twentieth century (a violent campaign for 'Enosis,' guerrilla warfare, riots, the war and subsequent Turkish invasion that divided the island, massacres, the end of British occupation, independence from foreign rule, and other circumstances). Contrary to the first novel, the tone is quite different in the second one: it is definitely more solemn, serious and intense. The author admits that she first decided to start the action in the novel in 1974, the year of the war; however, later she understood that such a start was not an easy one:

My connection with the island has always been strong and when it came to thinking about a second novel I knew beyond doubt that I wanted to write a love story set in Cyprus. More than that, I wanted the year to be 1974. And that's when things started to get complicated. ("An Island Divided.")

In order to provide the reader with an accurate picture of the situation in Cyprus, Busfield decided to choose a much earlier period as a starting point for her novel—1955, "the year that EOKA was formed. EOKA was a Greek-Cypriot resistance movement that aimed to liberate the island 'from the British yoke.' Another goal was 'enosis,' or union with Greece" ("An Island Divided"). Although the author seems to undertake as neutral a position as possible in describing the situation in Cyprus, the question of the author's proximity (and, therefore, the in-depth understanding of the country's trauma) influences the narrative structure and the author's approach in disclosing the collective trauma.

The above explanations only confirm the closeness of the novel to historical fiction. However, in this study another aspect will be considered: as the novel focuses on different kinds of traumatic losses, different degrees and levels of trauma will be analysed to demonstrate the novel's dimension as that of trauma fiction. The country's trauma consists of many multi-layered traumas, first of all the personal ones: the trauma of losing close people, the trauma of losing a home, or the trauma of losing one's country. First, this article discusses the characteristic features of a trauma novel and gives examples of them in Busfield's novel, surveys the sociocultural, political and historical context of Busfield's novel and, finally, examines the impact of the collective trauma on personal and national identity, searching for the forms of restated traumatic experience and considering the effects of the trauma novel on readers. The author's approaches to rendering the collective trauma are analysed, emphasising the author-reader relationship.

### **The role of the “learning witness”**

The diverse field of trauma studies covers a variety of topics, ranging from psychoanalysis and narrative therapy to the analysis of various literary forms of trauma representation. This article examines the transpersonal dimension of collective memory and traces the movement of memory beyond the individual and across an entire culture. The relationship between individual experience and the collective one is explored, discussing the representation of this relationship in a literary text. The key question is whether a work of fiction makes it possible to empathise and identify with those who have experienced trauma. Dori Laub states that massive trauma, described in the “narrative of extreme human pain,” psychological and physical, bears “historical evidence” of the traumatising events (“Bearing Witness” 57). Thus, it is possible to consider that a trauma novel, which discloses collective experience, includes a definite realistic and historical dimension, and is often based on documents and testimonies of the victims. The reader of this work of fiction, Laub argues, becomes “a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event” (“Bearing Witness” 57). The proximity of the reader is equally important. In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead observes that “the desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction” (3). In the trauma novel, the reconstruction of massive trauma becomes a process of restatement, during which the response to the work of fiction contains both a personal and transpersonal or transgenerational dimension. Whitehead observes that it is difficult to exactly predict the true scope of the on-going and future effects of any traumatic experience or foresee the end of “transgenerational haunting” (*Trauma Fiction* 29). Amidst the numerous testimonies of witnesses, sometimes the absence, or relatively small number, of fictional narratives itself becomes an important factor: to many survivors it seems impossible, according to Whitehead, to “narrate the unnarratable” (*Trauma Fiction* 4), while others may consider it sacrilege to fictionalise traumatic events. Therefore, the author, especially, as one who does not directly belong to the traumatised community, steps on a frail and unstable rope that links two edges of an abyss—the reader of a novel on the collective trauma and the collective memory of it. The ‘fact-fiction’ trap also becomes one of the dimensions in the analysis of trauma fiction. What if the readers were there at particular moments described in the trauma novel? Are their memories the same or different? Have the processes of postmemory been equally acknowledged? Who is the author who dares to narrate atrocities that may have

been deeply 'buried'? These and many other similar considerations demonstrate the complexity of issues surrounding the construction of a trauma novel.

The 'collective memory,' including both memoirs and fiction, can in itself become a valuable object of history (Nora 303; my translation from French). Drawing on Caruth's statements, Whitehead further acknowledges the fact that a non-straightforwardly referential fictionalised narrative "offers a powerful mode of access to history and memory," so that "referential truth or experience is no longer opposed to fiction but is inextricable from it" (*Trauma Fiction* 13). In her novel on Cyprus, Busfield keeps to these principles: the author records her research into the county's history and shares her findings with the reader. Although not avoiding certain stereotypes, Busfield's novel still presents a valuable point of view and challenges the reader with insights into the postmemory processes. LaCapra observes that trauma fiction can "offer significant insights...suggesting lines of inquiry for the work of historians" (*Writing History* 15). Reader-response criticism remains of significant value in the interpretation of contemporary trauma fiction. According to Whitehead, in trauma fiction the "community of witnesses" (*Trauma Fiction* 8) includes several possible types of readers: (1) a reader-victim, still haunted by traumatic events; (2) a person whose family members were victims; (3) a person who remembers the period of the traumatic events but was not a victim himself/herself, however still belongs to the collective trauma; and (4) a present-day reader of the narrative who becomes emotionally involved and turns into a partial participant in the processes of postmemory of the trauma, becoming "a learning witness" (*Trauma Fiction* 8). It can be added that the author himself/herself can either appear as that "learning witness" or can become a 'learned' one. In this sense, when working on this novel, Andrea Busfield became a "learned witness" and her readers "learning ones." Therefore, the approaches that the author of a trauma novel undertakes influence the reading process and the reader's approaches to a trauma novel. Identifying a special role for the author of trauma fiction, Vickroy has noticed that "transference of traumatic responses can continue for generations" (19). It is, then, possible to expect new forms of fictionalised narratives of multidimensional trauma as well as various forms of the restoration of truth. In addition, the author's role can be viewed in many different ways: as the source of information, as posing a challenge to the readers, as transferring transgenerational mourning or as the provider of empathy.

### **Features of a trauma novel**

A trauma narrative always includes both the reader/listener, whose role may be the one in whom the victim/narrator confides or the one with whom the victim/narrator shares the traumatic experience. Laub observes that "the listener to

[or the reader of] the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation" ("Bearing Witness" 57). Laub discusses the acknowledgement of the password, which signals the mutual recognition of shared knowledge. This password may be a reference to a location of trauma, a traumascap (for example, Cyprus and different locations in it as described in Busfield's novel), which immediately conveys the status of transgenerational effects and questions the layers of postmemory. Thus, reading traumatic narratives may result in the "re-externalization" and then, later, in "historicization" of the event (Laub, "Bearing Witness" 69-70). Busfield's research into the history of Cyprus in the twentieth century certainly achieves the "re-externalisation" effect. In the "Acknowledgements" that appear at the end of the novel Busfield makes the scope of this research clear to the reader:

Before writing *Aphrodite's War* I consulted a number of websites, books, documentaries, articles and people. I acknowledge the most helpful here, but this should not imply that the authors and persons named accept the version of events as described within these pages. The aim is to give credit where it's due –and ideas for further reading.

Laub defines the testimonial process as one needing "a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears" ("Bearing Witness" 70). Often a trauma novel originates from published memoirs, diaries, reminiscences or manuscripts of the experiences or may result from the closeness of the author to the traumatised community.

A general understanding of the term 'trauma novel' refers to a work of fiction that represents an emotional and/or cognitive response to profound loss, disaster, disruption, or devastation on an individual or collective level. In choosing Cyprus, Busfield weaves the personal and collective traumas together and describes their intertwined influence on the individual and the country. Vickroy states that trauma narrativists "sharpen victims' pain with readers, shifting between what can and cannot be revealed" (4). In other words, the author can be even seen as the manipulator of real circumstances and their effect on the characters in the novel and the reader's emotions. First, starting with the life story of an ordinary family, Busfield gradually prepares the readers for the main character's involvement in the dramatic events and, therefore, creates conditions for the reader's attachment. Vickroy observes that the aim of trauma fiction is "to reshape cultural memory through personal contexts" (5). In his book *History in Transit*, Dominick LaCapra determines "empathic or compassionate response" as an implied and expected distinguishable feature of trauma narratives (76). This idea is further investigated by Vickroy, who proposes different approaches undertaken by trauma fiction writers: (1) the transfer of traumatic responses, an *informational approach*, or (2)

an *empathic approach* since “literary texts can provide pathways for reader empathy” (21). Busfield applies these two approaches equally: the novel starts with the map of Cyprus and the United Nations Assembly Resolution 814 (IX), 17 December 1954, an event which later evolved into turbulent and destructive processes in Cyprus. Thus, at the very start the reader becomes involved in the trauma of the country. At the same time, the story line of the personal trauma of the main character over losing his lover continues throughout the novel. The main character (Loukis) naively and stubbornly rejects the love of the woman (Praxi), his childhood friend, allows her to marry another man, and, thus, as if seeing no other way out, joins the EOKA, becoming “a member of Cyprus’s resistance force” (77). In this way, the empathic approach is combined with the informational one.

LaCapra discusses the role of “empathic unsettlement” in disclosing a historical trauma that a reader of a trauma novel is likely to experience (*Writing History* 78). Busfield’s novel clearly asks readers to consider the effect of the trauma on the construction of memory. From this aspect, a statement that a trauma novel is based on different levels of “affective memory” and the author’s and reader’s approach to the dimensions of postmemory becomes a significant issue (307; my translation from French). Although different types of readers may possess different emotions, the degree of empathy is one of the factors in better understanding the scope and effects of the traumatic event. Vickroy emphasises dialogism (especially, the narrator-reader dimension) as a structural element of trauma fiction, which becomes particularly significant in describing historical traumas (183-85). In rendering the story of Cyprus’s trauma, Busfield shares her insights into deep memory and common memory with the reader. Making a reader experience, or rather re-experience, a traumatic event, a trauma novel, in this case, turns a reader not only into a witness, but also into a victim of a shared collective trauma. Whitehead has pertinently observed that “trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection” (*Trauma Fiction* 8); therefore, these various forms of reflection can also be interpreted as ways of coping with or restating trauma.

Indeed, an accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without the recreation of traumatic event(s). This becomes especially important in descriptions of collective traumas of a big scope. A textualist approach or, according to Tom Toremans, “a-historical textualism,” can supply the readers with other forms of access to history, while the reference to a traumatic event is an “ethical charge” that is present as a code in the process of rethinking or restating trauma (337-39). Facts, or elements of referential truth, are emphasised in trauma fiction. For example, the premonition of disaster is emphasised in Busfield’s novel: “Cyprus



was dangerous for boys. They grow up and die" (66). In the trauma novel, the dimension of transmission or even translation of trauma happens simultaneously with the recognition of reality, referential truth, and the "duality between cognition and trope" (Toremans 340). The aim of this dimension is to achieve a better understanding of a historical reference to the traumatic event: "a process of imaginative elaboration," which may happen in the collective memory, aims not at excluding historical facts, but, on the contrary, turns history into a tool to help comprehend the scope of a traumatic event, its consequences and its representation in a literary text (Hartman 260). Busfield's novel contains many facts, names of political figures, names of locations of tense situations and traumatic events. In a way, it is possible to argue that the author is providing the reader with a history lesson on Cyprus. Thus, a trauma novel as a cultural artefact bears witness to traumatic histories, and contains a series of "retroactive shocks (the *après coup* dimension), complicating any monocausal picture of that 'first' happening" (Hartman 262). Hartman goes on to observe that a literary text can also represent "its [trauma's] double and redoubled blow" (262). In this way, readers and critics can gain access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation, and consider their delayed effects on those traumatised. In the case of the collective (and extended) trauma of Cyprus, the dimension of time becomes equally important in comparison to the dimension of place. The time span that separates the traumatic event(s) and the time of reflection on the traumatic experience of those events often determines the tone and style of narration. In addition, the dimension of time directly influences the concept of the place of trauma and may determine symbolism connected with the place. Busfield's choice was to start the novel in 1955 and then continue the action in it until the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this way the dimension of time is locked in with the dimension of place. The dimension of time can also be viewed from the perspective of the duration of the posttraumatic period. This leads us as readers to ask whether it is possible to determine the end of the posttraumatic period. Moreover, the posttraumatic period in itself can be even considered a part of the collective trauma. Inevitably, the dimension of time is related to the generational transmittance of trauma and, thus, shapes national identity. According to Laub, the basis or starting point for a literary text may be the testimonies of the survivors, which, if being "receivable only *today*" means that "the event begins to be historically grasped and seen" ("Truth and Testimony" 69).

In trauma fiction, the protagonist becomes "a historical marker to unspeakable experience" and "a marker for potential change if healed" (Vickroy xiii). S/he expresses a unique personal traumatic experience and may also function to represent and convey an event that was experienced by a group of people. The

traumatised protagonist brings to awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values. Busfield deliberately points at the futility of the main character's death, which may also signify the futility of the death of many others in Cyprus. As Geoffrey H. Hartman states, "a larger, transhistorical awareness of the incidence of trauma, personal or collective, should make us realize the extent of human suffering" (262). Constructing the story of the collective trauma on the story of the person's or family's trauma, Busfield aims at spreading out and constructing the big picture of Cyprus's history. The main character, although drawn quite accidentally into the turbulent, disastrous events, alludes to many other senseless deaths. The fictional figure magnifies a historical event in which thousands of people have suffered similar violence. Therefore, the personalisation of collective trauma is a convenient method for disclosing massive trauma in fiction.

Consideration of the multiple models of trauma and memory presented in the trauma novel draws attention to the role of place (a signifier and a password), which functions to portray the trauma's effect through metaphoric and material means. Although much attention is given to the history of Cyprus in Busfield's novel, the relationship between people and their land is equally emphasised. When being driven from their homes, Cypriots understand each other's grief over the loss of their places. Thus, descriptions of the geographical place(s) of traumatic experience and their remembrance may express a larger cultural context, built on the clash of different social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self. The description of the physical environment offers an opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories attached to the described landscapes. Thus, in the trauma novel, the place or setting becomes a structural element that organises the memory and meaning of trauma. Petar Ramadanovic states that "what makes literature into the privileged, but not the only, site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully" (1). In this way, fiction with different forms of character development and figurative language becomes "a channel or a medium for a transmission of trauma" (1). The author (in this case Busfield) reaches out to the readers, turns them into the witnesses of traumatic events, and extends the links of postmemory. In contemporary literature, new perspectives on traumatic events and/or their representations, and different forms of restatement appear, describing not only the traumatic events, but also suggesting and questioning the meaning of their description.

### **Empathic and informational views on collective trauma**

As a trauma novel is often based on certain traumatic historic events, it is often ascribed to the genre of historical novel. Certainly, Busfield's novel *Aphrodite's War* contains distinct elements of the historical novel; however, these are mostly related to the rendering of collective trauma. The novel contains several plot lines: the historical plot line (the fundamental one) and several plot lines focused on the personal stories of the characters. One core plot line follows the conventions of a romance or love story, personalising the historic trauma. During the turbulent events of 1974, Praxi loses her husband (he is killed during the Turkish attack) and her lover Loukis (the main character), who thirty years later is discovered to have been executed by Turkish soldiers. Praxi's loss is much more complicated: she loses not only close people, but also her home and is driven to the Greek-Cypriot controlled section of the island. This series of losses become the central issue towards the end of the novel.

The action in the novel starts with the events in the Economidou family in a village near Keryneia in northern Cyprus, in 1955. The normal and peaceful life of the family is disrupted by increasing tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots—events that would soon turn violent. The five brothers in the family become gradually involved in the events. The main character is the youngest brother, Loukis Economidou. The name of the main character is symbolic: "*Mikros Lykos*. Little Wolf. That's what Georgios had called him when he first set eyes on their fifth and final child" (11; original emphasis). A reference to Greek mythology is implied in the name—the dangerous character of a warrior, of good and evil existing together. In a similar manner, the symbol of the wolf denotes a guardian as well as a warrior (Cirlot 431). The symbol of the wolf also brings to mind the mythological figure and sculpture of the Capitoline Wolf with Romulus and Remus in Rome. The latter image may inspire the symbolism of the country, which nurtures co-existing (?) communities. Thus, the duality of the character and the binary relations in the country set the tone of the narrative. The exceptional nature of the main character is emphasised: the child was noticed as different from his other brothers at the moment of his birth—he was very different in his appearance and attitude to the parents. When growing up, although reserved and silent, he was strong-willed and determined. His sensitivity to other people and his country (its natural beauty and history), and a great sense of responsibility are the significant markers on which his character is built. Later, already a matured man, he takes care of his mother Dhespina and his childhood friend (and later lover) Praxi. Minding family issues, he does not immediately get involved in the events of the mid-1950s: the British presence in Cyprus is causing increasing tensions

between Greek and Turkish Cypriots—tensions that will erupt into violence. Shaken by the death of one of his four brothers and insulted by Praxi's apparent rejection of him, Loukis runs away to join a resistance (EOKA) unit, with consequences that will last for decades. There are two reasons for his decision: the rejection by Praxi and his brother's brutal death, the latter of which he avenges by proving his masculinity. The two most significant plot lines (the historical one and the one tracing the strained relationship between Loukis and Praxi) symbolise the division of the island, which is in tumult as a result of the war for independence from British colonial rule. Moreover, the island seems to be torn from three international sides—Greece, Turkey and the UK. When Loukis eventually returns from long years of fighting, he finds out that Praxi has married a local well-to-do owner of a pub; however, the close link between them remains until the end of the novel. Certainly, the novel demonstrates the informational approach undertaken by the author: in turning the reader into a learning witness, the author provides the reader with the knowledge of the Greek-Turkish Cypriot tension:

when rioters set fire to Government House, the British had ruled the island in relative peace since 1878, but now church bells were rallying hundreds to the streets in protest against laws which brought detention without trial, stop-and-search insults and six months in jail for possession of firearms. When the new laws were passed, the capital raged at the news; buildings burned and British troops answered with tear gas and bullets. Now, it seemed there was a riot taking place every other week; fifty-seven Greeks had been arrested so far. In a few short months, the governor had managed to transform Lefkisia into a war zone. (26)

An impersonal and quite detached tone in the above description may demonstrate the author's journalistic style: throughout the novel the multiplicity of facts are displayed in the form of news announcement, avoiding sensitive attachment or partisanship. As LaCapra observes, "objectification is bound up with reality-testing that does not eliminate affect or involvement in one's responsive attempt to understand the other" (*History in Transit* 71). To use LaCapra's terms, Busfield both informs the reader and tests his/her understanding of the collective trauma on the island. Moreover, she employs this method of testing even in the title: first, through the use of the direct semantic connection in the name 'Aphrodite,' which is usually linked to the understanding or description of Cyprus, as already mentioned above. There is, however, another meaning employed—an ironic and a shocking one. A donkey, called 'Aphrodite' jokingly by the Turkish family, is drastically slaughtered by Greeks as an insulting sign to the Turkish community to move out. The slaughter of Aphrodite suggests the futility of the island's raging war. The burial of the animal is likened to the burial of hope in both communities: gradually, "the island's two communities turned their backs on each other, the only common ground that remained was one of hostility, and the troubles were spinning out of

control, creating a spiral of atrocity and counter-atrocity (161). Thus, the novel may even appear as a legacy, to use Schwab's term, to future generations to search for forms of communication and mutual understanding (*Haunting Legacies* ix). Interestingly, the issues of legacy and transfer of trauma are included on the print novel's front cover tagline (publisher Black Swan, 2010): "A war that would never end | A love that would never die | A legacy that would live for ever."

The author also guides the reader through the country's troubled history, taking up a descriptive mode of narration:

The island, whether they chose to accept it or not, *was* divided. It had always been divided: by history, by religion and, ultimately, by differing dreams. Even the towns had multiple personalities: Greek, Turkish and now British. Where else in the world could you find three names for one place? (29)

As if sensing the expectations of readers, the author plunges us into the dangerous waters, posing a multitude of questions and then letting the readers discover their own answers or a 'personalised' truth. The enumeration of ethnic groups in the quotation above, for instance, exposes the constituent parts of what it means to be 'a Cypriot.' This multiculturalism may have been intentionally implied by the author, but it may also produce a totally different effect on the reader: instead of the multicultural coexistence implied by the "multiple personalities" of the town, the unifying sense of Cypriot diversity is prone to disappear. Describing the modes of coexistence of different groups on the island, through the journalistic prism, the author makes the readers ponder over the complexity of the issue.

The detached and journalistic tone becomes disrupted by the emotional outpouring of both sides. For example, Stavros, the Turkish neighbour of the central Greek family (the Economidous), has lived close to Greeks all his life: even his Turkish name Mehmet was turned into the Greek one, Stavros. However, surveying the split of the two communities on the island, he becomes apprehensive of the island's future:

I see disaster hurtling towards us with the speed of a bullet. The world has already washed its hands of this problem; the United Nations won't even discuss it. And I tell you, this war against the British will spread like a cancer through our island and it will eat away at our two communities. Look at us! Look at my people. See how the Greeks already think of us! In a matter of years we have gone from being Muslims to being Turks. This is just the start, you mark my words. (28)

The author delivers a premonition of separation and of the terrifying events to come. Thus, it is not surprising that Stavros thinks that blood will be pouring until the country "drowns in a red sea of her own making" and that this war "will spread like a cancer...and it will eat at...two communities" (28). The friendship between

these two families, Greek and Turkish, endures the hardships of the devastating years of war: the communication between them remains the same; the members of the Economidou family help Stavros and his wife until the division of the island.

This communicative link between the two communities is built around questions of mutual understanding and experience, as Mehmet/Stavros declares:

We have a crisis of identity on this island. We, the Muslims, think of ourselves as Cypriots and *then* Turks. But your people, they will always be Greek first and Cypriot second, and that is why Cyprus will suffer in the end: because your eyes are locked on the past while the rest of us are looking to the future. (29-30)

Although the author chooses a seemingly objective stand to voice the problem, clearly certain forms of dialogism with the reader become obvious. Perhaps most evidently here, Busfield engages the reader as a learning witness and, consequently, points at alternative or contradicting opinions.

Step by step the author recreates the initial moments of conflict on the island. Busfield first employs the informational approach, a mode favoured by many authors of trauma fiction, especially those who describe collective traumas:

And it wasn't just the British. Every week Greek mothers were mourning sons drawn into a fight masterminded by a handful of men now in exile or hiding. Grivas, with his rhetoric and patriotic demands, was throwing more and more boys to their deaths, and the more who died, the more followed them; joining a cause that had long mislaid its reason. The battle for *enosis*—the island's union with Greece—had lost its simplicity. It was no longer about ridding the island of the occupiers, it was about killing all those who stood in the way of the grand idea, be they British, Turkish or Greek. The conflict had broken its boundaries and was running untethered along the length and breadth of the island. (48)

Busfield seems to pose the question of trauma's consequences for individuals and the wider cultural landscape. Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts: Part One, "Cyprus 1955"; Part Two, "1963"; Part Three, "Pissouri, 2007." This division marks the three historical periods that are at the centre of the narrative: the period of 1955-1959, which concerns EOKA's formation by Greek Cypriots; the rebellion of the Turkish community in 1963 and the events that followed are described in Part Two; and Part Three appears as the consequence of these earlier series of dramatic events and their traumatic outcomes, which emphasises the scope of the on-going trauma of the country. The whole novel seems to be set on a pair of scales: events at either side, caused by opposing communities become in turn more prominent, never levelling. The personal trauma of loss (happiness, love, homeland, family) transforms into collective trauma, a collective trauma experienced by thousands of the island's inhabitants. Although Arthur G. Neal argues that "hearing or reading about an event does not have the same implications as experiencing an event directly," he comes to the conclusion that "the traumas of the past become

ingrained in collective memories and provide reference points to draw upon when need arises" (7). From this aspect Busfield's novel becomes a form of the restatement of a country's trauma, transmitted from one generation to another or even from one culture to another. It may be added that this restatement, occurring in the form of a novel, reaches a global form of restatement, constructed on the forms of global postmemory and transmitted from one country to another. This last fact underlines the global significance of trauma fiction.

The gradual collapse of the island's unity in *Aphrodite's War* distorts communication links built through centuries. The unifying strings have been stretched apart with an impossible force and therefore finally break:

Equipped with guns, mortars and bazookas, three thousand soldiers descended on Kophinou and unleashed everything they had. Within fifteen minutes of the first explosion, UN peacekeepers capitulated and pulled back, and the gunfire spread to every corner of the village. As bullets bounced off walls and tore through flesh, mothers ran screaming for their children, cut off and stranded in fields, while their fathers and older siblings reinforced wooden barricades with antiquated rifles that could only spit in the face of the inferno that had come to eat them. Kophinou was pounded with mortars and heavy artillery until every street crackled with flames and every mother was stunned into silence. At 9 p.m. the village fell—exhausted, depleted and defeated. Boys and men lay dead; bodies burned like torches on doorsteps; and in the heart of the Turkish village Greek voices barked their victory. (347-48)

The visualisation of this scene employs different degrees of postmemory. The author takes up the informational approach to tell the sad story of Kophinou, a village in the Larnaca district of Cyprus. The area was controlled by TMT, a Turkish-Cypriot paramilitary group set up in response to EOKA, so that the main road from Nicosia to Limassol was blocked and Greek-Cypriots civilians could not pass through the area without UN escort. The village was savagely destroyed on the 15th of November, 1967, by General Georgios Grivas' battalion. This event is a part of collective Turkish-Cypriot memory, but often elided by the shared Greek-Cypriot psyche; therefore, returning to it, the author seems to return to questions that still need to be answered. Neal states that "the enduring effects of a trauma in the memories of an individual resemble the enduring effects of a national trauma in collective consciousness" (4). Here, Busfield seems to re-open the crypt of traumatic experiences and their attendant memories.

The above-mentioned principle of the scales remains until the end of the novel, so that the author's position becomes clear: Busfield tries to depict the multi-fold, or rather two-fold, trauma and examines its transitional mode:

Homes and factories burned as the Turks pushed ever southwards. Huge plumes of smoke billowed over the island, and queues of cars laden with mattresses and suitcases stretched for six miles as more refugees sought sanctuary at the Brits' Dhekelia airbase. Still the Turks ploughed on. Their jets dropped 500lb bombs on

National Guard positions, and warships pounded coastal towns throughout the night. Within two days, the island lay scorched and broken. (474)

In portraying shattered communities, Busfield also points at what LaCapra calls “the status of a shared memory” (*History in Transit* 66). In this case, the questions posed by the author may include the role of mourning and ability of the traumatised to mourn. It is not surprising that at the end of the novel Busfield's narrator says that, “instead of a finish, the discovery brought only more questions, and they were questions without end. There would never be any answers, there would never be justice nor any attempt to make the perpetrators pay” (499). Returning to the issue of dialogism between the author and the reader, as outlined by Vickroy, it is necessary here to point out the leading motif of postmemory and its scope in the novel. The central part of the imaginary scales of events is built on the impossibility to forget. The repetition of the words “*We do not forget*,” a phrase that entered the everyday language use of Cypriots after 1974, becomes the most prominent stylistic device in the third part of the novel. The sentence is echoed in Praxi's reminiscences of all the events she has endured until she finally decides to choose death in the place (now in the Turkish-controlled north) in which she had been most happy with Loukis. Before dying, she says that “so much time has been wasted and so much beauty destroyed” (502). Here quite clearly we see the role of memory in understanding national identity. At the same time, in the repetition of “*We do not forget*,” the reader's attention is drawn to the meaning of “we” and related issues of collective memory. The island's identity is likened to the identity of the people: the island on which dry trees look “sad and defeated” and sigh “with lost happiness” resembles the psychic state of its people (501-502).

To conclude, it seems appropriate to return to the title of this article. In her novel, Busfield poses many questions. She addresses the reader in both empathic and informational approaches, questioning the limits of shared memory. Her journalistic experience comes to the surface in discussions of Cyprus's history: from the Ottoman to Greek, Egyptian, British imperial rules to the fights for independence and later events. Excerpts from the United Nations documents also demonstrate the author's ‘journalistic’ attitude towards rendering these events in a work of fiction. Consequently, Kaplan's idea that “politics intervenes in how [collective] trauma is ‘managed’” (6), points at limitless, and, therefore sometimes dangerous, ways of approaching a collective trauma. Whatever label is being put on the novel (trauma, historical, war, love, and so on), it centres on the discussion of loss—loss of love, loss of family members, loss of home or even loss of the native country as such.

Stories of collective traumas emphasise common values and the limits of human endurance. They also raise a question for the reader: what can be learned from the



representation and testimonies of traumatic events? Readers face fragile boundaries between empathy and identification with the victims. As a result, perhaps the typical or defining feature of trauma fiction is of it as a “mourning function,” one that documents the “continuing legacies of pain” which still need to be resolved (Vickroy 218-22). However, this mourning function becomes particularly important in the case of unfinished or previously suppressed mourning, an issue which emphasises different steps and stages of the recognition of trauma or even the inability to mourn due to externally inflicted factors. According to Schwab, “trauma can never be completely silenced since its effects continue to operate unconsciously” (*Haunting Legacies* 79). Discussion of the historical and political origins of massive trauma may inspire changes in the “cosmopolitan form of memory” (Whitehead, *Memory* 150). Thus, different interpretations of any trauma narrative (in any aesthetic form) may help to understand the effect of a collective trauma on personal and national identity, and to reveal the potential significance of fictionalised narratives of collective trauma to historical analysis. Trauma narratives in any form can heal, inflict further suffering, or become pillars on which we construct our collective memory. At the same time, a trauma narrative can have a unique role—that of filling in the gaps in the collective memory of a community, even a global one.

In *Aphrodite's War* Andrea Busfield employs the empathic approach, sensitively describing the country and its people, their relationship, mode of life, and even her own knowledge of and affection for the island. In doing this, she makes herself a learned witness and addresses readers as learning witnesses of the collective trauma. The personalisation of this trauma, described through the lives of the characters in the novel, results in a new or alternative understanding of its historical dimensions. Schwab's formulation of “opening of the crypt” used to describe the process of narrating the traumatic experience is a useful phrase in the discussion of the author's role: “secret pathways into the crypt...hold the promise of transformation and social recognition” (*Haunting Legacies* 56). Schwab states that

the process of traumatic encryption and its impact on psychic and social life, thus...brings a different social recognition to histories of violence not by revealing the silenced violent act but giving testimony to its lingering toxic effects and its transmission to those forced to suffer the silence. (*Haunting Legacies* 56)

In the light of such an allegoric view on the traumas of the past, it is possible to view the author's role differently: there is certainly some danger included in this process of coming closer to the national crypt, opening it and uncovering the wounds of the past. Should it be done? Who has a right to do it? What is the purpose of this whole process? Will the opening of the crypt mark the end of the post-traumatic period or will it extend still further? Schwab has noted that the

“literary forms, discursive strategies, rhetorical devices, styles and modes of composition literature uses in order to transmit cultural knowledge... generate entirely different modes of reception” when the emphasis is put on “affective, emotional, and unconscious response” (*Imaginary* 56). Thus, Busfield’s novel, although constructed of many informative details, makes the reader question his/her own capacity for affective response to the described collective trauma. The challenge of receptiveness to information and shared affectivity and empathy make the reader take a coherent position in the longitudinal understanding of the collective trauma and its continuous effects.

### Works Cited

- “Busfield, Andrea.” *Macmillan*.  
<<http://us.macmillan.com/author/andreabusfield>>. 17 August 2015.
- Busfield, Andrea. *Aphrodite’s War*. London: Black Swan, 2010.
- . *Born Under A Million Shadows*. London: Black Swan, 2009.
- . “An Island Divided.” *About Me. Books, Dogs, and a Horse*.  
<<http://www.booksdogsandahorse.com>>. 10 August 2015
- Cirlot, Juan Eduardo. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. Jack Sage. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge, 1971. Online.
- Hartman, Geoffrey. “Trauma Within the Limits of Literature.” *European Journal of English Studies* 7. 3 (2003): 257-74.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2005.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, Critical theory*. New York: Cornell UP, 2004.
- . *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.
- Laub, Dori. “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening.” *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. New York: Routledge, 1992. 57-74.
- . “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle.” *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. Ed Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 61-75.

- Neal, Arthur G. *National Trauma and Collective Memory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: M. E. Sharp, 2005.
- Nora, Pierre. *Présent, nation, mémoire*. Lonrai: Éditions Gallimard, 2011.
- Ramadanovic, Petar. "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis." *Postmodern Culture* 11. 2 (2001). <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2introduction.txt>>. 25 October 2014.
- Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.
- . *Imaginary Ethnographies. Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012.
- Toremans, Tom. "Trauma Theory – Reading (and) Literary Theory in the Wake of Trauma." *European Journal of English Studies* 7. 3 (2003): 333-51.
- Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 2002.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Memory*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- . *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004.