



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
CENTRO DE COMUNICAÇÃO E EXPRESSÃO - CCE
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS - PPGI

Marcelo Silvestre Martinez

**War and Displacement in the Works
of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf**

FLORIANÓPOLIS

2019

Marcelo Silvestre Martinez

**War and Displacement in the Works
of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf**

Dissertação submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para obtenção do Título de Mestre.
Orientadora: Prof.^a Dra. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins.

Florianópolis

2019

Ficha de identificação da obra elaborada pelo autor,
através do Programa de Geração Automática da Biblioteca Universitária da UFSC.

Martinez, Marcelo
War and Displacement in the Works of Charles
Simic and Mohja Kahf / Marcelo Martinez /
orientador, Maria Lúcia Willéo Martins, 2019.
71 p.

Dissertação (mestrado) -- Universidade Federal de
Santa Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão,
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos
Linguísticos e Literários, Florianópolis, 2019.

Inclui referências.

I. Inglês: Estudos linguísticos e literários. 2.
Poesia norte-americana. 3. Poesia de guerra. 4.
Deslocamentos. I. Martinez, Marcelo. II.
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Programa de
Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e
Literários. III. Título.

Marcelo Silvestre Martinez
**War and Displacement in the Works
of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf**

O presente trabalho em nível de mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

Prof.^a Dr.^a Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC

Prof.^a Dr.^a Maristela Campos
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC

Prof.^a Dr.^a Maysa Cristina da Silva Dourado
Universidade Federal do Acre – UFAC (por teleconferência)

Prof.^a Dr.^a Melina Savi
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC (suplente)

Certificamos que esta é a **versão original e final** do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título de mestre em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

Prof. Dr. Celso Henrique Soufen Toumolo
Coordenador do Curso

Prof.^a Dr.^a Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins
Orientadora

Florianópolis, 1 de Julho de 2019.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people who made this study possible and to whom I am indebted for their help and support. Therefore, I would like to thank:

First and foremost, my adviser and personal friend, professor Maria Lúcia Milléo, without whose encouragement and guidance I would never have attempted this journey.

All of the professors at UFSC PPGI whose classes I attended, for their patience and wisdom. Every hour spent with them was a privilege and a pleasure. Also, the professors who otherwise had a part on the long process from my admission into the program up to the presentation before the examining committee.

The administrative staff at PPGI, who have guided me through the mazes of the university's bureaucracy.

My classmates, for their friendship and academic support, in particular Andrey Felipe Martins, whose advice and shared experience were vital to the conclusion of this study.

Finally, credit is due to CAPES for the financial support. Without a CAPES scholarship, I would not have had the opportunity to take part in the program at PPGI.

In my book full of pictures
A battle raged: lances and swords
Made a kind of wintry forest
With my heart spiked and bleeding in its branches
(Charles Simic, "A Book Full of Pictures")

RESUMO

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo uma leitura comparada da poesia de Charles Simic e Mohja Kahf, com foco sobre os usos que os autores fazem dos temas de guerra e deslocamento como vistos sob a lente da "história dos eventos desimportantes" de Simic. Esta pesquisa é o resultado de interesses convergentes em poesia de guerra, o papel da poesia como narrativa histórica, e a conexão entre guerra e imigração/deslocamento. Ao longo deste trabalho, eu investigo a maneira pela qual Kahf e Simic exploram os temas da guerra e outros conflitos, assim como as consequências de tais conflitos para as populações civis. Minha escolha de autores para esta pesquisa foi influenciada pelo fato de ser seu trabalho informado por experiências pessoais acerca de conflitos armados e imigração, assim como seu olhar empático às vítimas civis da guerra. Minha leitura se embasa no trabalho de teóricos como Michel Foucault, James Olney e Hayden White, particularmente em sua teorização sobre a escrita de histórias pessoais e coletivas.

Palavras-chave: Charles Simic. Mohja Kahf. Poesia norte-americana. Poesia de guerra. Deslocamentos.

ABSTRACT

This study aims at a comparative reading of the poetry of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf, focusing on the authors' uses of the themes of war and displacement as read through the lens of Simic's "history of unimportant events." This study results from converging interests in war poetry, the role of poetry as historical narrative, and the connection between war and immigration/displacement. I investigate the way in which Kahf and Simic explore themes of war and other conflicts, as well as the consequences of those conflicts upon civilian populations. My choice of these poets for the research was inspired by the fact that their work is informed by personal experiences regarding armed conflicts and immigration, as well as their empathetic look on the civilian victims of war. My reading is supported by the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault, James Olney and Hayden White, particularly in their considerations about the writing of personal and collective history.

Keywords: Charles Simic. Mohja Kahf. North American poetry. War poetry. Displacement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	15
2	CONTEXTUALIZATION	19
2.1	CHARLES SIMIC: SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE.....	19
2.2	MOHJA KAHF: MIGRANT SELVES.....	28
2.3	THEORETICAL DISCUSSION.....	32
3	CHARLES SIMIC.....	42
4	MOHJA KAHF.....	54
5	CONCLUSION	64
5.1	PHASES OF DISPLACEMENT.....	65
5.2	FOOD AND FAMILY.....	67
5.3	FINAL REMARKS.....	68
	WORKS CITED.....	70

1 INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this research began, perhaps, with an early interest in war poetry, by which I mean poetry written by authors who were at some point in their lives directly involved in armed conflicts, either actively or passively, and either as combatants or as civilians. The poetic record of first-hand experience with war was the main reason for my interest in the genre, as accounts taken from personal memory seemed to add a certain weight to the war poem and make it more relatable. My readings at this early stage included poems by soldier poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Rex Warner, however they included very few accounts of the struggles of civilian life during war.

It was during my undergraduate studies at UFSC that I was introduced to the poetry of Charles Simic. I was immediately impressed by the warmth and humor in his poems, and especially the sensitive and precise images in his themes of war. Simic's work became a valuable addition to my readings of war poetry, precisely for bringing to the fore the experiences and sensibilities of civilians. In his poems, children play among the ruins of bombarded cities, and bodies are found, crucified, at city corners; civilians endure the many horrors imposed on them at wartime, their tragedies not considered tragedies at all in the great scheme of things. Even more impressively, his haunting imagery originates from personal experience, contributing to the genre of war poetry with poetic accounts of civilian life.

Simic's prose contributed with further points in the line of thought leading to this research. His memoir "In the beginning..." complements his poetry with childhood memories of World War II, and his essays "Notes on Poetry and History" and "Poetry and History" introduce his concept of the history of unimportant events, which I wrote about in my undergraduate thesis (Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso) and has critical importance to this research. In Simic's poems and essays, the themes of war and consequent civilian conflicts are connected to memoir and lyrical poetry as modes of historical narrative, as well as to the role of the poet as a witness and a chronicler of history.

Having started with a general interest in war poetry, and having expanded that interest to include the relationship between poetry and history as well as issues

of displacement, I was later introduced to the work of Mohja Kahf. In her poems, the themes of war and conflict are, as in Simic's poetry, connected to forced displacement and migration. Her poetry further expanded my interest in the themes of war and displacement with a closer look upon the effects war and displacement have on the formation of identities. The families separated by war, the fragmented memories of a culture of origin, the struggles of gaining acceptance into an adopted culture and managing cultural clashes are frequent elements in Kahf's poetry. Simic's theoretical perspective regarding history would certainly apply these features, and so I found it appropriate to provide a reading of both authors from that perspective.

As a first stage in my analysis, I offer a reading of selected poems by Simic and Kahf through the lens of Simic's concept of the "history of unimportant events." This concept opposes a positivistic or monumental mode of historical narrative, where the plight of civilian populations—and also, of isolated individuals—is ignored or suppressed by the writers of history for being considered "unimportant." A reading of poems by Simic and Kahf focusing on the themes of war and displacement reveals their positioning within the dialectics of poetry and history. To further that goal, a second stage in this study involves a comparative reading of Simic and Kahf.

This research is greatly indebted to the work of Maysa Dourado, whose M.A. thesis "Charles Simic's uses of his-tory," for UFSC/PPGI, and Doctoral dissertation "Poesia em tempos de mal-estar: Charles Simic e Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna," for UNESP/FCLAR, inspire and inform this work in many ways. Thus, this study expands on previous research, discussing the poetics of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf regarding the themes of war and displacement. As a comparative study on the two poets, this is an original research.

This study has as objectives (a) to analyse how the themes of war and displacement are portrayed in the poetry of Charles Simic and Mohja Kahf, and (b) to argue how Simic's concept of the "history of unimportant events" confers visibility and agency to individuals at the margin of monumental history. In some of Simic's poems, personal histories face the threat of erasure from the historian's narrative; in some of Kahf's poems, migrant identities are generalized and rejected as "others." In both cases there is a call for empathy towards individuals usually absent in the detachment of positivistic historical narratives. There is an intersection between the

poetics of Simic and Kahf, a conception of displacement originating from war as a historical process interfering with individuals' identity formation and agency.

The first chapter in this study, "Contextualization," presents the historical and theoretical context for the poetry of Simic and Kahf related to the themes of war and displacement. It begins with a discussion of Simic's use of autobiography as well as his theorizing about poetry and history, to oppose positivistic or "monumental" history writing. The discussion features Simic's strategies of focusing on "unimportant events" and telling public history from the perspective of personal history to restore visibility and agency to the individuals that monumental historical narratives ignore. Simic's ethical stance that contemporary poets should avoid escapist poetry and strive to give a testimony of their time is also discussed in the first section of this chapter. The following section, on Mohja Kahf, considers how Kahf writes about public and personal history, especially from the perspective of migrant identities. This section introduces Kahf's exploration, in her poetry collection *E-mails from Scheherazad*, of themes of war and displacement and how they affect ethnic and cultural identities of the displaced. The first chapter continues with a section on theory, with a discussion of history writing that examines positivistic modes of historical narrative in contrast with Simic's proposed "history of unimportant events." This section also considers the relationship between poetry and history from the perspective of Hayden White's concept of "emplotment" to discuss the validity of poetry as historical narrative. The chapter closes with an exploration of the experiences of those displaced by war and how these experiences are portrayed by historians and contemporary news media, as well as Simic and Kahf in their poetry.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I provide a reading of Kahf's and Simic's poetry from the theoretical perspectives established in Chapter 1. Chapter 2, on Simic, examines how Simic focuses on personal histories and events that tend to be ignored by monumental history writing. The chapter also explores Simic's use of strategies such as the lyric memoir, his focus on "unimportant events," and his use of the contrast between individual, private pleasures—such as dining and sex—and the collective horrors brought about by history. Simic's ethical stance in relation to the responsibilities of poets to provide a testimony of contemporary history is also discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, the theme of displacement in Simic's poetry is

explored, concluding with an observation about how history, war, displacement, and the lack of empathy towards the displaced may be connected in Simic's poetry.

Chapter 3, on Kahf, starts with a discussion of how poetry and history meet in Kahf's work, especially in the form of narratives of the personal histories of migrants and representations of their identities. The chapter analyses Kahf's use of the themes of war and displacement with especial attention to the effects those events have on migrant selves and how otherizing and identity conflicts may become a part of the cultural heritage of new generations of migrants. Another point of discussion is Kahf's use of language to represent heterogeneous cultural references. The chapter closes with similar remarks as the previous one observing how war and displacement lead to a lack of empathy toward migrant identities.

In my reading, I focus on the themes of war and displacement, investigating the relationships between those themes as expressed in the two authors' poetry. In these chapters, I attempt to draw the basis for a comparative reading by using theoretical perspectives on poetry and history from different authors, including Simic, and evidence from selected poems by both Simic and Kahf. Chapter 4 concludes the study with a comparative analysis of how the two authors make use of the mentioned themes, suggesting paths for further research.

It is my hope that this study will afford readers an appreciation of the works of two contemporary poets who are politically engaged and have a strong ethical stance regarding the roles of poetry in crucial issues of our time. As this study is being written, wars and immigration crises are frequently in the news, often presented in the kind of distanced and unsympathetic narrative that Kahf and Simic resist in their poetic work. Their poems often bring back the reader's attention to relatable—and horrifying—facts and events that are ignored or glossed over by impersonal narratives. As immigrant poets, Simic and Kahf speak from experience and memory about the plight of the displaced and offer an empathetic look on their lives as individuals, restoring historical importance to their personal histories. If war causes displacement, displacement threatens empathy, and a lack of empathy facilitates further war and displacement, in the works of these two authors the possibility of breaking this circle may present itself. I believe it can be found in their call for a

careful look into those personal histories that are often considered "unimportant events."

2 CONTEXTUALIZATION

2.1 CHARLES SIMIC: SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

As a young child, Charles Simic witnessed the invasion of Yugoslavia by Germany during World War II, subsequently living through a period of varied conflicts and repeated displacement until his family emigrated to the United States. Simic became then a high school student in Chicago and discovered a personal interest in poetry that resulted in a fruitful writing and critical career which is still active. Much of Simic's work as a poet and essayist reflects a lingering connection to those years of war and displacement, which manifests an autobiographical inclination and a keen empathy towards individuals who are stripped of their individuality by the overbearing narratives of monumental history.

Simic's poetry and critical works are prominently informed by his own story and the story of others, he himself having said "I speak from experience":

What happens [...] is that the two warring sides become allies against the civilians in the middle. This may sound like an outrageous assertion to someone who has never had bombs drop on his or her head from a few thousand feet, but I speak from experience. That's exactly how it feels on the ground. ("Poetry and History" 166)

Simic's proposed "ground" view of the historic events of which civilians are made passive victims reflects his resistance to the "bird's-eye" view of the historian's writing. Simic values poetry in which there is an involved recovery of small-scale events considered unimportant by monumental history, in "a kind of reverse history" where the personal experiences of the poet are the raw data for his/her historical narrative (164). In this aspect, his poetry diverges from the principle of impersonality cited by Maysa Dourado in her dissertation "Poesia em tempos de mal-estar: Charles Simic e Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna" as she discusses Eliot's essay "Traditional and Individual Talent." Eliot calls for an "emptying of [the poet's] most intimate

experiences" (53) with the purpose of becoming a representative of his/her own times. Simic encourages poets to "give faithful testimony of our predicament so that a true history of our age might be written" ("Notes on Poetry and History" 128). Simic gives great importance to the poets' roles as witnesses and chroniclers of contemporary history. In an interview for the journal *American Libraries* in 2008, when asked about his views on the importance of poetry, his reply foregrounds those roles:

Obviously, it has meant a great deal to individuals and various cultures over the ages. It told stories of their gods, their heroes, and it also conveyed what it was like to be alive on a certain day in a certain year hundreds of years ago. The reason we still read that poem today is that we find in it something we find nowhere else: the record of the impact of some feeling or sensation on a single life. There are plenty of other things that go into poetry, but that ability to draw on our most basic experience of the world is what makes it important. (38)

As I explore the relationships between Charles Simic's work and historical narratives, I will sometimes refer to the autobiographical content of some of his writings as "personal history." The use of this expression in substitution for the term "autobiography" serves a double purpose: it avoids generalizations about autobiography as a literary genre, and highlights the connection between Simic's use of memoir and testimonial and his theoretical argument on historical narrative. In counterpoint to the historian's large-scale, impersonal narrative, Simic proposes the poet's personal account, based on experience.

Much of that personal experience which Simic cites as the point of departure for his poetic voice can be related to his life in Yugoslavia during World War II. In the essay "In the Beginning...", an autobiographical essay, Simic gives an account of his personal experience as a civilian in a country occupied by the nazis, as a survivor of the Yugoslavian civil war, and as an immigrant, first in France and then in the U.S. Throughout the narrative, Simic uses a device that he also uses in his poetry, the telling of public history from the perspective of individuals. The essay can at times be read as a companion of sorts to Simic's poetry, focusing on individual experience and

memory. There are episodes on the essay that can be easily connected to passages in poems, such as: "Columns of smoke went up as the bombs fell. We'd be eating watermelon in our garden, making pigs of ourselves while watching the city burn. My grandmother would cross herself repeatedly. The dogs would get restless." (7). This passage shows similarities to some lines from "Make Yourself Invisible":

That spring we could smell lilacs
 During the blackout.
 Boom! Boom! The bombs fell
 While a dog barked bravely
 In someone's back yard. (Walking the Black Cat 8-12)

The mixture of tragic historical events and innocent child play, as in "The Big War", where the poetic voice recalls "We played war during the war, / Margaret. Toy soldiers were in big demand" (Book of Gods and Devils 1-2), can also be seen in the memoir:

In the meantime, my friends and I were playing war. All the kids were playing war. We took prisoners. We fell down dead. We machine-gunned a lot. Rat-tat-tat! How we loved the sound of machine guns. (5)

The same can be said of poems such as "Paradise Motel," where the similarity to certain passages in the essay "Notes on Poetry and History," on the Vietnam War, serve as evidence to locate the poem historically and connect it to the poet's personal history. In the essay, Simic recounts an instance of watching a television news broadcast during the Vietnam War after returning from a social event, which impressed him with the sharp contrast between the peaceful and familiar setting at his hotel room and the battlefield footage:

It occurred to me that this had been filmed only hours ago, that I was seeing it in my bedroom, that I was tired and sleepy, that the covers had fallen to uncover my wife's nakedness. I remember standing there a long, long time not knowing what to do with myself, feeling the strangeness, the monstrosity of my situation. (124)

Dourado illustrates Simic's association between history and autobiography with a passage from an interview in which Simic quotes Emerson: "There is no

history, only biography" (64). Whenever Simic writes about war (including but not limited to WWII) and its consequences to civil populations, he writes from a background of personal history. That does not mean, however, that Simic advocates a self-centered poetry; rather, he proposes that a personal and humanized perspective be employed by poets in the representation of their own times, a writing of history told in lyrical mode as opposed to an epic one. Simic complements his quote by saying: "There is History too, independent of my life and your life." The complementary influence of that public history upon personal history is also present in Simic's poetry, as in "Two Dogs," where a fearful dog on a dusty road evokes wartime memories. The dog itself is associated with another from the past, one that was kicked by a German soldier as marching troops advanced past the poetic persona's home; the fear in the dog's eyes brings back the memory of the fear evident in the faces of the civilians watching the soldiers march. In this poem, as in "In the beginning...", the past and the present appear intertwined because personal and public histories continuously inform each other. The string of memories culminates in a haunting image. "That's what I keep seeing! / Night coming down. A dog with wings." (The Book of Gods and Devils 19-20).

For Simic, the positivistic stance that favors monumental history (large-scale historical facts) over personal histories reduces the experiences of entire populations to general facts and vague figures. This sanitary mode of narrative distances the audiences of historical writing from the crimes perpetrated upon history's victims:

A figure like 100,000 conveys horror on an abstract level. It is a rough estimate since no one really knows for sure. It is easily forgotten, easily altered. A number like 100,001, on the other hand, would be far more alarming. That lone, additional individual would restore the reality to the thousands of casualties. ("Poetry and History" 167)

Simic proposes that the poet should become aware of the "evils and injustices that are part of his or her own times" and a chronicler of the individual, personal experiences that are ignored by monumental history: a history of "unimportant" events. Simic develops his theoretical stance regarding the relationship between historical and poetic discourses mainly in two essays, "Notes on Poetry and History" and "Poetry and History." In these texts, Simic establishes as his object of reflection

and historical chronicle the so-called "unimportant events" that make up individual lives and that are, for the most part, ignored by detached historical narratives. As a point of view from which such events are to be examined, Simic proposes a personal, experiential, involved look, resisting the supposedly objective view of the historian.

"Poetry and History" presents a reflection on the value of poetry as historical narrative, the ideology underlying positivistic or monumental historical narratives, and the role of the poet as a chronicler of historical experience. One of the central ideas in "Poetry and History" is that the major masses of civilian populations experience history as a process of violent effacement and victimization: a "history of murder" (164). This victimization is perpetrated by powerful individuals ("everyone who made history in the last century") (164) with ideologies that sacrifice the common individual for the sake of utopias: "Deranged leaders with huge armies and brutal secret police out to kill, gas, and imprison every one of us for the sake of some version of a glorious future" (163).

Simic quotes Foucault to point out that those utopian ideologies are aided by a positivistic approach to history, which creates a narrative in which history follows a natural and internal logic. "History written by historians" focuses on large-scale events and outcomes in detriment of "conveying the pain of individuals caught in the wheels of history." From that argument, Simic builds a case for a history of "unimportant" events, which constitutes part of the contemporary poet's role as a historical chronicler (164). Poets should avoid escapist poetry and give an account of contemporary life, producing poetry that restores the historicity of "unimportant" events and individuals. According to Simic, those poets who ignore the historical experience of effacement, oppression and violence of their own age are "living in a fool's paradise" (163).

"Poetry and History" expands on the previous essay "Notes on Poetry and History," revisiting some of its passages and reflections, such as the episode about watching scenes from the Vietnam war (124). However, "Notes on Poetry and History" retains some important observations by Simic that were not incorporated in "Poetry and History." He offers the term "pressure of reality" and elaborates on this concept, discussing the feeling of immediacy in the daily stream of news about the world's tragedies, "with the accompanying suspicion that all that suffering is

meaningless" as the news cycle continuously brings us new and different tragedies (125). This pressure, which is part of the historical experience, is one of the things a contemporary poet must not ignore. Another important concept in "Notes on Poetry and History" is the theoretical stance Simic assumes when he selects Sappho (the lyric) as his poetic model instead of Homer (the epic). This choice is connected to Simic's poetics of "unimportant events" as opposed to a mythical and distanced account of history, and he explains his choice with the statement: "In place of historian's 'distance', I want to experience the vulnerability of those participating in tragic events." Simic chooses Sappho instead of Homer as his poetic model of resistance against the ideals of impersonality and impartiality promoted by the historian's discourse.

Simic's conception of history as a process that victimizes individuals is also intimately connected to his personal history during the second World War. Growing up in Belgrade under German occupation and having witnessed the various forms of attack on the city by both Axis and Allied forces, Simic acquired first-hand experience on the consequences of being part of the "unimportant" civilian population. Simic's poems about war, and specifically WWII, are distinctive for presenting the standpoint of the civilians, caught as victims in a series of large-scale events that are planned and executed with no regard for individual lives.

In his poems and reflections about the Vietnam War, Simic calls attention to the role of mainstream contemporary media in the individual's experience of historical events, news media in particular. The opening line in "In the beginning..." completes the ellipsis with an evocation of broadcasting technology: "was the radio." For Simic, the impact of the technological achievements adopted by the media seem to limit the individual's ability to distance oneself from the historical process. Photography, the radio, and television brought the full impact of each historical moment back to individuals who had been alienated by sanitized ideological representations or willful ignorance. As the Vietnam War represented a new era of media coverage of violent conflicts, Simic's poems about this war portray civilians who find themselves unable to ignore the historical horrors of their time. When Simic refers to human history as the "history of murder," he is making simultaneous statements about the political implications of monumental history and the ideology that supports that mode of

historical narrative. In both cases, the average civilian is rendered "unimportant" and accounted for only as statistical data. As a result, the death of civilians during violent historical periods is understated and isolated from empathetic responses of the audiences of historical narratives.

History appears as a process that victimizes individuals, being characterized as a universal experience that has, as its final result, the "massacre of the innocent" ("Poetry and History" 163). Simic points to ideology as a central impulse to historical process as it is regarded by historians: "Nearly everyone who made history in the last century believed that the mass killing of the innocent was permissible" (164). Ideologies that represent civilian populations as historically unimportant permit those in power to set in motion a process of victimization; if history is, for Simic, especially the "history of murder," it is ideology that allows and drives forward the cycles of war and displacement constituting that murderous experience.

Simic's writing on poetry and history suggest that there is an exploitative ideology behind the way in which history is recorded and composed as a narrative. The few powerful entities capable of directing large-scale historical events or, at least, victimizing a large number of people are interested in doing so without facing the difficulties involved in dealing with the solidarity of their victims. An ideology is then put into place, according to which the majority of individuals, as well as the events of their lives, are considered unimportant in the face of history, which creates a generalized lack of empathy towards the powerless masses. That lack of empathy, in turn, keeps in place the power structure originating that ideology. Simic's stance on the role of contemporary poets can be seen as a countermeasure against that ideology. As he insists poets avoid the willful ignorance of escapism and proposes a history of unimportant events, he defends a poetics of awareness, one capable of restoring importance to personal histories and evoking empathy towards individual dramas.

In Simic's writing, themes of history, war, and displacement appear as connected by ideology. On the one side, the few personages or entities with the power to make history have employed ideologies that justify war (and/or mass murder) and rationalize the erasure of the civilian populations who are the victims of war on the basis that those individuals are "unimportant": "Nearly everyone who

made history in the last century believed that the mass killing of the innocent was permissible" ("Poetry and History" 164). On the other side, the victims of "ideological bloodbaths" (163) experience history as a complex process of exclusion, the events of individual lives are robbed of historical agency because they are relegated to "unimportant" status. In relation to the individual, history appears as completely alien, neither derived from personal histories nor particularly friendly to them: a "history of murder." (163) In poems such as "Reading History" and "Sunday Papers," this concern about the murderous nature of history, and the fate of its victims, is made quite explicit. In "Reading History," the tranquility of a reading session in a library, as well as the detachment from the brutality of history afforded the reader of a historian's narrative, are disrupted by the reader's awareness of the individuals who were victimized in the historical process:

At times, reading here
 In the library,
 I'm given a glimpse
 Of those condemned to death
 Centuries ago,
 And of their executioners. (The Voice at 3:00 A.M. 1-6)

"Sunday Papers" opens with the harsh statement that the same historical brutality may be more pressing and more concrete than the daily pleasures of life, symbolized by cooking and dining:

The butchery of the innocent
 Never stops. That's about all
 We can ever be sure of, love,
 Even than the roast
 You are bringing out of the oven. (The Voice at 3:00 A.M. 1-5)

In the face of such "history of murder," the role of the poet assumes a simultaneously resistant and restorative quality. On the one hand, the poet must resist the monumental historical narrative that erases the plight of the individual from historical chronicle. On the other hand, poetic discourse needs to discover and restore the lost empathy towards the events of individual lives, rescuing them from the de-historicized condition of statistics and focusing on them as sources of ethical concern and historical meaning. Simic provokes the poet to stop ignoring the

oppressive and effacing historical experience, lamenting that "there have been more than a few fine poets in the history of poetry who had no ethical feelings or interest in other people's suffering" ("Poetry and History" 169) while proposing a strategy of empathetic portrayal of individual suffering akin to that of early photography and film, as opposed to former modes of representation such as certain kinds of propaganda material. In "Notes on Poetry and History," Simic contrasts the stylized representations of history in "nineteenth-century painting and Soviet Revolutionary posters" with photography, which offers a less idealized depiction of historical events (124). Those modes of representation in paintings and propaganda posters, according to Simic, often favor the distanced bird's-eye view of the positivistic historian and lead their audiences towards aesthetic detachment: "Even the burning villages and firing squads in such illustrations, if you have ever seen them, have an idyllic air about them. We end up being more interested in the artist's skill in rendering the event than in the horror of what is taking place." (165) Taking a stance within the large and complex field of the relations between poetry and history, Simic's concept of the "history of unimportant events" involves aesthetic and ethical (political) choices on the part of the poet, directing the focus of the poetic discourse towards otherwise ignored subjects.

Another side to the coin of escapism can be found in Simic's imagetic blending of an oppressive history and the small and personal pleasures of life. Many of his poems bring together images of history as a violent process and images related to the pleasures of cooking, eating, and sex. This clash of opposites most often does not represent an attempt to offer an escape from the "pressure of reality" but a foregrounding of the beauty and pleasure of personal experience against the cold, violent background of history. In an author's profile by Craig Morgan Teicher for the website Publishers Weekly, Simic is quoted as explaining the presence of meat and slaughterhouses in so many of his poems in the following terms: "The killing of animals has always upset me. (...) At the same time, if you like to eat—and I love to eat—you go out to eat, and you look and say, 'Yummy!'"

2.2 MOHJA KAHF: MIGRANT SELVES

A first reading of the poetry of Mohja Kahf, specifically through the lens proposed by Simic in his concept of the history of unimportant events, seems to show many similarities to Simic's poetry in the exploration of war and displacement as themes. Kahf writes about the disruptions on ordinary people's lives brought about by large-scale conflict and forced dislocation, often examining their effects on the formation of individual identities and the dynamics of foreignness and acceptance. In Kahf's poems, references to war and other conflicts are sometimes as delicate as the dust shaken from a scarf, other times as violent as an explosion interrupting a wedding; in either case, they appear connected to the individual (and collective) experiences of their victims and the empathetic representation of personal histories focused on by Simic in his work. Kahf was born in Damascus, Syria, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1971, when she was three years old. Her family has been involved in politics and activism for generations, and she is an activist herself and a member of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement. Kahf began to write in the decade of 1990 and her first poetry collection, *E-mails from Scheherazad*, was published in 2003. Until the beginning of the decade of 2010, Kahf's poetic and fictional work mainly explored the themes of immigration, hyphenized identities, double-consciousness, and representations of muslims in the West, especially women. Around the time she visited Syria with her daughter in 2011, her poetry started to shift focus to the struggles of the Syrian people in the ongoing Syrian Civil War.

In *E-mails from Scheherazad*, Kahf explores, among other subjects, aspects of the displacement and alienation brought about by war. As civil victims of armed conflict are forced to abandon their homeland to escape the horrors of war, they find themselves subjected to new forms of conflict. The connection between war and migration can be seen in poems such as "Voyager Dust":

She'd hold one end, my brother or I the other,
and we'd stretch the wet georgette and shake it out
We'd dash, my brother or I, under the canopy,
its soft spray on our faces like the ash
of debris after the destruction of a city,
its citizens driven out across the earth. (15-20)

Poems such as "The Passing There" portray the rejection and mistrust faced by those migrants:

The man who owned the field was no Robert Frost
 although he spoke colloquial. "Git
 off my property," he shouted, "Or I'll—"
 The rest of what he said I do not care
 to repeat. It expressed his concerns
 about our religion and ethnic origin.
 He had a rifle. We went on home. (16-22)

According to Kahf's poetic discourse, a kind of interruption occurs in the formation of individual identities in their process of re-adaptation into a new culture. The sense of fragmentation or suspension caused by being in between cultural and ethnic identities, by partially belonging (or not fully belonging) to either culture is a common theme in E-mails from Scheherazad. The poem "The Cherries" is evidence for this:

What happens to a child who can no longer speak
 the language of its mother?
 What happens to a bird when it can no longer fly
 in its natural habitat? (97-100)

The poems in E-mails from Scheherazad carry themes that suggest displacement and disruption related to identity, as well as a threat to empathy and acceptance. In this, an intersection with the work of Simic can already be seen. Correspondent themes of displacement brought about by war and large-scale conflicts, where individual lives are effaced and considered unimportant, can be found in the works of both Simic and Kahf. In Kahf's poem "Hijab Scene #3," the invisibility of the displaced continues after the immigrants reach their destination. In this poem, a Muslim mother attending a PTA meeting tries to volunteer for the association but fails to be noticed by the recruiting teacher. The poem adds American popular culture elements to the mother's inner monologue, evidencing that the cause for her invisibility is her appearance identifying her as a "foreigner," not her lack of adaptation to American culture. The teacher repeatedly invites those present to join

the PTA, and the Muslim woman becomes comically aggravated as she struggles to be noticed:

"I would, I would," I sent up flares,
beat on drums, waved navy flags,
tried smoke signals, American Sign Language,
Morse code, Western Union, telex, fax,
Lt. Uhura tried hailing her
for me on another frequency. (10-15)

In Kahf's poetry, the historical context for the theme of war is more clearly specified due to its connections to Eastern nationalities and Kahf's own background and history. In E-mails from Scheherazad, war is portrayed through representations of the effects of war upon the Syrian people and at times, more specifically, upon Kahf's family and contemporaries. From references to the first Balkan war in the poem about the Skaff family to personal references to the difficulties of emigration in "The Passing There" (in which the memory of past conflict makes immigrants into threatening trespassers in the eyes of a native citizen), Kahf establishes war as a strong historical force behind the dislocation of civilian populations and the formation of their identities at the places of arrival. In another poem, "We Will Continue Like Twin Towers," scenes from the Lebanese Civil War and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center are brought together as parallel narratives, evidencing the history of unrest in the Middle East and its connections with Arab-American relations.

The historical process of war and displacement, loaded with ideology and politics all perceptions of arriving foreigners, brings as consequence the continuity of the invisibility of the displaced. New arrivals, be they migrants, refugees or displaced persons, can be easily categorized as "alien" and given inferior status. Some of Kahf's poems make such a connection between history and geopolitics and a lack of empathy towards monumental history's "unimportant" victims. One example is "Descent into JFK," where a Palestine girl reflects on the resistance and rejection many Arab migrants experience in America:

This is no fluffy white dreamfield
for thirteen-year-old schoolgirls anymore
but a tight grid of world tensions
replicated to scale [...]

.....
 Here everyone believes only Israel
 is real; the people living in its shadow,
 her clan and family, do not exist. (2-5, 10-12)

Kahf's poetry reveals a concern with the atrocities committed by the makers of history, as Simic puts it, upon the unimportant civilians. In "Parturition 1999," she writes about enduring consequences of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Iraqi civilians are suffering from a surge in birth defects after the American invasion is over, due to the use of depleted uranium by the invading military. The poem makes a connection between the deformed Iraqi babies and the victims of radiation from Hiroshima, and says "Everyone in the world today / belongs to the age of deformity" (14-15). Those lines carry an indictment on inhumane war efforts (as well as on the correspondent practice of ignoring consequences to civilian populations) which proved to be historically accurate. In 2012, The Independent reports that "Iraq records huge rise in birth defects" centered around Fallujah, a health crisis that the World Health Organization links to military action. Kahf examines in "Parturition 1999" not only the horrors of war for civilian populations, but also the lasting effects of war upon those populations.

E-mails from Scheherazad uses the medium of poetry to chronicle personal histories that would be otherwise ignored by historians. Kahf tells those stories through experiences and memories that belong to either herself and other individuals or to a more collective dimension of memory: family, community, and cultural identity. Like Simic, she also takes away her focus from monumental history and places it onto personal histories, and instead of aspirations of objectivity and impartiality favors a lyric appreciation of the particular and the personal. By eliciting empathy towards the so-called "unimportant" events of individual lives, Kahf's poems restore historical importance to the individuals who are often the subjects of history but not as often the subjects of history writing.

2.3 THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The distinction between monumental history and Simic's notion of "unimportant events" holds theoretical and critical importance to this study, as well as the validity of poetry as historical discourse. The relationship between poetry and history was discussed as far back as the Ancient world. Aristotle discerns and compares, in the ninth book of his *Poetics*, poetry as a representation of "universal" events, or "the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity" (59) in contrast to history as a record of "particular", or actual, events (59).

It was during the 19th century that scientific thought effectively established history as a scientific discipline aiming at objectivity, separating it from Literature as a poetic art with subjective strategies. The positivistic view of history determined that the historian should collect, interconnect and put in order historical events while assuming a so-called neutral stance. It was a rejection of the idea of fiction in historical writing. Critics such as Russel Nye (1966) and James Longenbach (1987) point out the linear quality of such model; positivistic history implies progress by writing history as having an internal logic independent of the historian's personal selection for his narrative. In the first half of the 20th century, existentialist thought contributed to the discussion over the writing of history by reaffirming the value of artistic and literary representations in historical narrative. The positivistic notion of history is also criticized by Nietzsche in *The Use and Abuse of History* (1957). He problematizes the supposed detached objectivity of the historian and the distinction between "a 'monumental' past and a mythical romance" (15).

In the chapter "History" in *The Order of Things* (1966), Michel Foucault criticizes early 19th century history writing by saying that "the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is 'dehistoricized'" (369). Foucault presents his analysis of Ancient World historiography (as opposed to contemporary history writing) as the source of a continuous historicity that included both nature and the artificial activities of humankind. According to this model, Ancient World cosmologies integrated human life into a coherent stream of historical events that included "all men, and with them things and animals, every living or inert being, even the most

unmoved aspects of the earth" (367). In contrast to this conception of history, Foucault places the 19th Century positivistic conception, a mode of historical narrative that breaks the Ancient World unity and investigates the particular historicities of nature, of animal species, and of human activities such as labor and language (367), finding them incompatible with the idea of a coherent history of all things, as in the Ancient model. As consequence, humankind is "dehistoricized," meaning that the human being "no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him" (369).

This separation of human history from a supposedly independent history of "nature" forces upon individuals the roles of victim, bystander, and member of a crowd, as only the very powerful personage or the statistically relevant collective may have significant contributions to history. Individuals are generalized by this logic, their very individuality suppressed. As Simic observes in "Poetry and History," historians will omit or manipulate numbers in the construction of their historical narratives in order to gloss over the horrors of history and present a detached, and so-called scientific, account. This is the mode of narrative that Simic's and Kahf's focus on the individual may help resist, as attention to personal histories in the face of the historian's account restores visibility and empathy towards the victims of violent conflicts and displacement. Simic's and Kahf's poems present individuals whose lives make history as they happen and thus escape being de-historicized by the positivistic narrative. By focusing on the particular and the personal without failing to account for the public and the collective, Simic resists the exclusion of the "unimportant" events from the writing of history.

Another theorist in counterpoint to positivistic history, Hayden White proposes that historians by necessity adopt literary strategies for the writing of history. In her M. A. thesis "Charles Simic's uses of His-tory," Dourado examines White's reflections on poetry and history in *Tropics of Discourse* as a part of her arguments destabilizing the distinction between history and poetry and establishing a reading of the historical text as a poetic artifact. According to Dourado, in *Tropics of Discourse*, White challenges the conventional separation of historical and poetic discourses by pointing out the presence of "an element of poetry in every historical

account of the world" and by arguing that the relationships between historical events are a product of imaginative (poetic) work by historians (Dourado 14).

White's text mentioned above is Chapter 3 in *Tropics of Discourse*, titled "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." In the chapter, White writes about the historian's reluctance to recognize the elements of fiction present in historical narratives, the traditional separation of history and poetry (or myth), and his own concept of "emplotment." As White explores the process by which historical events are made by historians into a story, he suggests history writers would benefit from a greater awareness of the techniques of fiction writing and figurative language they are unavoidably employing. The positivistic view of history as an impartial reproduction of past events, as well as the notion that the chronicle of said events carries in itself the explanatory effect in historical narratives are challenged by White. Instead, he points to the value of fictional and poetic constructions to historical narratives.

"The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" questions the clean-cut separation between history and fiction, presenting as one of the effects of history writing a "translation of fact into fictions" (92). White attributes the "reluctance" of historians (as well as some literary theorists) to consider historical narratives as works of fiction—whose contents are "as much invented as found"—to the intended approximation of History to the sciences rather than the humanities, and the consequent "interest in appearing scientific and objective" (99). According to White, historical narratives "have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). In this, White is alluding to the positivistic turn in History as a discipline.

The opposition between history and poetry, or history and "myth," is discussed by White, who affirms that those narrative modes contribute to each other, there being always "an element of poetry in every historical account" and vice versa (98). According to him, the supposed opposition between poetry and history relies on the distinction according to which history describes real or actual events, while fiction describes possible or imagined events. White points out that history shares with fiction the element of exploration of what might have happened: "it is always written as part of a contest between contending poetic figurations of what the past might consist on," (98) and he suggests that the traditional distinction must be resolved so

that history may recover its "origins in the literary imagination," which constitute "its greatest source of strength and renewal" (99).

White's main argument for the reapproximation of poetry and history is related to his concept of "emplotment," which he introduces in *Metahistory*. He argues against the traditional (positivistic) view that history may be an objective chronicle of historical facts exempt from fictional construction. However, "histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles" (83). The process by which the historical data is made into a story is called by White "emplotment." An understandable historical narrative explains the historical facts, not merely exposes them to the reader. This "explanatory effect" can be achieved when the historian "emplots" his/her narrative, that is, when they construct a fictional account that familiarizes the reader with those unfamiliar facts, via a culturally accepted form. White argues that, since "historical situations do not have built into them intrinsic meanings," it is the historian's task to provide a meaning by emplotment:

How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation. (85)

White makes the case for historical narrative being as much about historical facts as it is about the relationships between those facts and their fictionalizing by historians. In his stance, there is already an argument not only for the validity of poetry as a mode of historical narrative, but also for the testimonial and discourse of personal histories.

Such testimonials often take, in the works of Kahf and Simic, the form of autobiographical accounts, which are part of the authors' strategy of portraying history through the emotionally involved point of view of the individual. In *Metaphors of Self: the Meaning of Autobiography*, James Olney establishes a connection between history and biography, stating that "writers of history organize the events of which they write according to, and out of, their own private necessities and the state of their own selves. Historians impose, and quite properly, their own metaphors on

the human past." In this way, Olney establishes the historian's account not only as influenced by personal history but also as an unavoidably personal point of view on historical facts, in contradiction to any positivistic delusions of objectivity (36). For Olney, autobiography is by necessity part of historical writing, just as collective history is necessarily part of autobiography. In a sense, the historian is for Olney a cultural autobiographer composing through "imaginative cultural or racial memory" narratives which are analogous to the narratives poets and autobiographers compose through the use of personal memory.

The lyrical modes of accounting for personal history against the background of collective history employed by Simic and Kahf restore empathy towards history's victims in more than one way. The horrors of history reacquire their emotional impact against the sanitized positivistic narrative, and large scale depictions of geopolitics reacquire their finer human details as much in the case of war as in the case of one of war's immediate consequence, displacement. Among the most evident effects of armed conflicts on a civilian population, it is displacement in its various forms that are currently under the spotlight of the media. In 2015, over a million migrants sought refuge in the European Union at the critical point of what has become known as the Migrant Crisis. The refugees came into Europe, legally or illegally, from several Middle-eastern and Eastern European countries devastated by wars—unsurprisingly, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo (BBC 2016). Furthermore, it is not difficult to establish a historical relationship between armed conflicts and migratory movements of civilians throughout history, as the forced relocations and large-scale waves of migration, as both Great Wars of the 20th Century can exemplify.

For the states of the countries affected by the Migrant Crisis, displaced populations can mean a series of economic and policy problems, and news reports from mainstream media tend to present the crisis from the point of view of the State. The migratory movements are described in terms of numbers of refugees and asylum applicants, their points of entry into host nations, their final destinations (BBC 2016, ABC 2015). European countries, not migrants, are presented as being affected by the displacements, with policy measures and data regarding asylum requests taking precedence over the human drama of homelessness, alienation and the many dangers of a migrant's journey (BBC 2016). In this way, mainstream news agencies

can be said to take on the role of the historian concerned with monumental history, building a narrative that, in Simic's words, can be "indifferent to the fate of the blameless" ("Poetry and History" 169). The journalistic chronicle appears, in these cases, as a version of that type of historical chronicle, only in the real-time pace provided by the internet.

As Alexandra Cutcher observes, for the migrant or asylum seeker, being displaced means more than a financial setback or an unfortunate confrontation with immigration policies. Displacement, since place and identity are intimately connected, poses a real threat to the migrant's sense of selfhood. The move from the mother nation into an intended place of safety from the horrors of war or persecution often means a drastic degradation in status, a move from the social position of influential majority in the country of origin into the social margins of the adopted country. Even that level of assimilation often demands a radical stripping of ethnic identity, demanded by a notion of acceptance based on the melting-pot theory (126). The issue of belonging, with its potential for cultural and physical violence which includes human trafficking and racism (Amnesty International 2018), further complicates the already tense state of the migrant; even in countries relatively open to asylum seekers at the state level, there is a great deal of rejection to be faced at the level of human interaction, not to mention the precarious palliative of refugee camps (Time 2016).

In spite of all those threats to the well-being (and, in many cases, to the human rights) of migrants, governments (and the media) direct their concerns towards administrative issues such as border control, often representing the arrival of displaced civilians as "smuggling" (Independent 2018). The millions—currently 21 million, according to Amnesty International—of individual lives affected by the Migrant Crisis remain "unimportant" in the face of the "historian's broad sweep" ("Poetry and History" 164).

Both Kahf and Simic write poetry that bring the reader in touch with experiences of displacement, in various forms. Simic started writing poetry in the decade of 1950, and his poems about war and displacement as a central theme cover a wide historical period, being motivated by his personal experiences and observations of events such as World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Yugoslav

Wars. In contrast, except for the First Balkan War, Kahf's poetry on war and displacement appears, for the most part, centered around more recent events such as the Arab Spring along with its contribution to the Migration Crisis, as well as the 2011 terrorist attacks on the US and the subsequent War on Terror campaign. Despite the different historical backgrounds, both poets portray the disruptions caused by conflicts to civilian life, individual identities and sense of belonging. Having experienced migration motivated by violent conflicts at an early age, Simic and Kahf also offer insights on the effects of displacement on the formation of an individual's identity and worldview.

In poems such as "For the Sake of Amelia" (Unending Blues), Simic establishes the connection between the destruction caused by war and the ahistorical condition of its victims. In a hotel "In a country ravaged by civil war" and left in a dilapidated state, a dream-like and inconsequential environment is set for its inhabitants:

A hotel in which one tangoes to a silence
Which has the look of cypresses in silent films...
In which children confide to imaginary friends...
In which pages of an important letter are flying... (17-20)

In Simic's poetry, the same ideology that justifies war and results in physical displacement of civilians eventually produces individuals alienated from each other and less capable of mutual understanding and empathy. An example of Simic's portrayal of lack of empathy can be found in "The City," where a couple "lingered on kissing lustily / Right where someone lay under a newspaper" (The Voice at 3:00 A.M. 9-10).

Kahf explores displacement largely from the point of view of identity and the recurring references to the native culture that arise in the efforts of migrants to integrate into a new culture. In poems such as "Voyager Dust," "Word from the Younger Skaff," and "The Roc," the poetic persona observes that migrants carry bits and pieces of their homeland and its culture with them, and that these elements are reflected in their identity. In these poems, migrant identities are informed by their original cultures and are otherized in the cultures they adopt. In "My Grandmother

Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears," an elderly migrant lady is condemned for the act of washing her feet in the public restroom's sink, which leads the observer to assume the breach of etiquette can be explained by the elder's foreignness:

an affront to American porcelain
a contamination of American Standards
by something foreign and unhygienic (17-19)

The historical context for the theme of migration in the works of Simic and Kahf can be said to occupy more than one dimension. It contains a geographical aspect that encompasses Europe, America, and the Middle East; a chronological aspect spanning from the Balkan War to World War II to the Syrian civil war; and a semantic aspect coinciding with the semantic field of the word migration.

In order to narrow down the theoretical scope of my analysis, I will restrict my discussion of migration and displacement to the aspect of forced displacement, more specifically the forced displacement originating from violent conflicts such as wars and civil unrest. The importance of war as a source of displacement to both individuals and populations is evidenced by data from the United Nations Development Programme, pointing to "conflicts" as responsible for almost three times as many cases of displaced individuals due to "climate change and disasters." As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, the works of Simic and Kahf also allow for a reading correlating war and displacement.

Given the serious and lasting psychological effects of displacement on displaced individuals and populations, I looked into the field of Trauma Studies for a theoretical basis for my analysis of how the authors write about displacement. My purpose in doing so is not to use a psychological approach to forced displacement or its representations, but to make use of this theory as complementary to the understanding of themes of displacement found in the authors' work from the perspective of life writing, autobiography and personal history.

In their 2018 Masters thesis "Traumatic Movements: A study on Refugee Displacement and Trauma in Contemporary Literature," Isaksen and Vejling present a framework where the refugee experience is considered as a three-part process

consisting of a pre-displacement phase in which "the home [...] is violently assaulted," a displacement phase in which "the refugee will flee their country," and a post-displacement phase marked by "feelings of non-belonging." This structuring of the refugee experience in distinct phases with their own kinds of effect on refugees is a useful analytical tool for my reading of Simic's and Kahf's explorations of the displacement theme and a comparative reading of such explorations. For example, when Simic writes about the military conquest of Belgrade by Nazi troops during World War II, he is depicting events that can be related to the "pre-displacement phase," so is Kahf, when she writes about forced conscription during the first Balkan War. In these instances, both authors are portraying the violent background of the displacement to come, and already making a link between war and displacement. In my analytical chapters, I will give further examples of how this three-part model of displacement can contribute to a reading of both Simic and Kahf.

In Kahf's poetry, the main context for migration is family history. Her own migration from Syria to the United States as a child, as well as the stories of other families who emigrate or are left behind, feature in several of her poems. In "The Roc" she writes "Here's my mom and dad leaving / Damascus, the streets they knew," (1-2) and "The Cherries" begins with the verse "I left Syria many years ago, as a child," in a thematic choice that brings her poetry in contact with Simic's, making it a biographical, personal and empathetic view on the effects of history on "unimportant" individuals. Kahf speaks about migration in her poems as a process that can separate families and communities, leaving migrants with a sense of discontinuity in relation to public and personal histories. The displaced are forced out of their social and cultural environment, with consequences to their identities and sense of belonging. In "The Pistols of Emir Abdel Qader," Kahf writes about Algerians being displaced by the colonizing French:

The grandfather of your grandfather
fled his Algeria when the French
invaded it, emptying its cities,
battering the sides of its mountains with bullets
The people bled and tumbled down the mountainsides
The ones who emigrate tell only half the story (1-6)

And a later line complements the last one above by saying: "The ones we left behind have the other half of our story" (23).

As much as E-mails from Scheherazad has migrant identities as a central theme, the causal relation between war and displacement of civilian populations is also established in the recalling of individual histories. In the lines talking about the water spray being shaken from her mother's scarf, the poet compares the falling droplets to "[...] the ash / of debris after the destruction of a city" ("Voyager Dust" 18-19). Similarly, in "The Skaff Mother Tells the Story," the young members of a Syrian family flee Ottoman conscription because of the First Balkan War (1912-1913), leaving their mother to wonder whether they had reached their destination. Through family relations and memories about their homeland, the characters in Kahf's poems tell the story of their displacement.

I find it necessary to also acknowledge that some of Kahf's poetic voices can be read as celebrating foreignness. Wisam Abdul-Jabbar writes in "The Question of Foreignness in Mohja Kahf's E-mails from Scheherazad" (2014) about the celebratory stance of the representations of hyphenated identities in the volume. Abdul-Jabbar contrasts this celebration of foreignness to the reading of critics such as Abdelrazek (2007) and Abdurraqib (2009), which focuses on the issues of resistance to stereotypes, exile, and diasporic tensions.

On the one hand, my own reading of Kahf does not interpret her representations of foreignness as celebratory, partially because it focuses on displacement by design. On the other hand, the positive affirmation of hyphenated identity in some of the poetic voices in E-mails from Scheherazad is undeniable and, in my view, not so sharply contrasting with the political stances of resistance, in the sense that it complements it. Abdul-Jabbar also recognizes the presence of both stances in Kahf's poetry when he argues that "hyphenated identities in most of these poems are celebrated for their self-assertion, imparting a sense of immediacy and kinship that dispels the feeling of anxiety and alienation that are also expressed." (242) In my reading of Kahf I aim at focusing on those feelings of anxiety and alienation without ignoring the countering self-assertion and kinship.

Further reason to consider both approaches to the issue of foreignness can be found in Sirène Harb's "Arab American Women's Writing and September 11:

Contrapuntality and Associative Remembering" (2012). In the article, Harb argues that after the events of 9/11 in the US, Arab American women's writing took a turn towards the representation of Arab American identities in terms of solidarity, multiplicity and relationality. This turn represents an attempt to counter "the Manichean logic of US official rhetoric and mainstream projections of selfhood and otherness, which opposes a homogeneous American 'Us' to an equally homogeneous Arab 'Them' and presumes that these two ways of being and belonging can never meet." (15) I consider as one of the consequences of Harb's argument that a simplistic focus on alienation and rejection when examining the themes of displacement in Khaf's poetry will represent a failure to recognize that empathetic turn in Arab American women's writing.

Besides the experiences of crossing frontiers in physical dislocation, Kahf and Simic also explore in their poetry the cultural borders that both separate and connect, in dynamic tension, the native and immigrant identities within national borders. The creation of cultural contact zones¹ and the conflicts and possibilities that arise from that creation are present in Simic's and Kahf's poetry as further complications of migratory movements, and as further complications on the formation of migrant identities.

3 CHARLES SIMIC

In "Have You Met Miss Jones?" (Walking the Black Cat) it is possible to see a convergence, a meeting of some of Simic's recurrent themes and their relation to his poetics of unimportant events. The poem sets a scene during a funeral service attended by Miss Jones and presents the recollections and meditations of the persona about her. The first line of the poem answers the question of the title by stating "I have. At a funeral," evoking elements of memory and personal experience. Thus, from the start, the poem is established as a form of lyric memoir, a typical Simic strategy.

The character of Miss Jones is presented as both unknown by the other guests at the funeral and evidently uncomfortable in the performance of the social conventions of the funeral gathering. She is described as "A complete stranger,

wobbly on her heels," (6) someone who attracts attention for being attractive without receiving any benefits from the attention, having her behavior harshly judged and disapproved. The funeral is a social event that holds little significance from the point of view of monumental history, and serves as a context to Miss Jones "unimportant" status. Even within this context, her identity is ignored by the other guests and the legitimacy of her presence is questioned. Simic's use of irony is highlighted by the fact that Miss Jones holds the attention of the other funeral guests for being an attractive woman. Her personal beauty restores to her a degree of importance, despite her role as an unimportant character in an unimportant event.

The persona then interpolates a reflection about large-scale history in the background of the funeral, expanding the context in which Miss Jones is remembered:

Presidential hopefuls
Will continue to lie to the people
As we sit here bowed.
New hatreds will sweep the globe
Faster than the weather.
Sewer rats will sniff around
Lit cash machines
While we sigh over the departed. (11-18)

In mentioning the rats among the ruined machines, the passage demonstrates the use of "unimportant events" as a poetic strategy, offering a contrast to the wide scope of political maneuvers and the spread of epidemics. The episode with the rats stands out as the one likely to be ignored by monumental historical narratives, however the lyrical gaze captures the unimportant events and the poem-as-memoir, as a record of personal history, restores their importance. Despite the judgmental attitude of the funeral guests towards Miss Jones, her beauty will "live on" because, beyond her transgressions of social conventions, it retains lyrical value and personal interest.

Along the poem, it is clear that the focus of attention of the persona expands from the singular person of Miss Jones, to the socially conventional and lightly hostile group of mourners, to the monumental events in which the previous characters have no participation and that continue to happen independently of the "unimportant"

individual's desires or behavior. The connection between personal histories and Simic's project for historical chronicle is pervasive in his poetry, as noted by Ketlyn Rosa and Janaína Rosa in their essay "World War II and Vietnam War in Poetry: Charles Simic and Yusef Komunyakaa as Eyewitnesses." The authors note: "The focus on the use of individual stories that are inserted into major events in history shows the desire to look for the most effective ways to portray stories of pain that otherwise would be lost in the vast ocean of historical data" (114). I would like to expand on Rosa and Rosa's notion of effectiveness and specificity presented here by adding that Simic uses personal histories to propose a mode of historical narrative that favors empathy and involvement as important elements of history writing in order to oppose monumental, positivistic, and detached modes of narrative.

In many of Simic's writings, there is a pairing of pleasurable sensorial experiences along with the horrors brought by historical events. These themes are evidenced especially through images related to eating, drinking and cooking, on the one hand, and the female body on the other. Women's legs and breasts figure on Simic's poetry as instances of scopophilia, frequently enhanced by the erotic appeal of their unexpected or impossible exposure to the poet's gaze. The pleasures of looking and eating, along with other sensorial pleasures represented in the poems, do not serve to romanticize or redeem their historical backgrounds. They appear as contrasting elements that, rather, highlight the menacing pressure of history upon individuals.

The main images in the poem "Gourmets of Tragedies" (That Little Something) relate to sophisticated culinary arts and some associated customs and conventions about dining. A restaurant setting is established by the presence of a waiter, and the romantic attitude of the diners can be inferred by the lighting of candles. The persona addresses the reader, offering descriptions of dishes that are appealing to all of the senses, being both "mouthwatering" (2) and "arranged to seduce the eye" (6). However, the sensorial bliss in the romantic setting is revealed to be symbolic of historical tragedy. The "mouthwatering" dishes are, in fact, "new evils," (2) and the delighted attitude of the pleasant company may be due to a satisfaction in religious violence. To further the sense of threat hidden under the

pleasurable dining imagery, the opening lines make it clear to the reader that the sophisticated dishes of evil are reserved for them—"on the way to your table" (3).

"Come Winter" (That Little Something) presents a social landscape that is divided into opposing camps. The rich and powerful—"the rich" (2), "the swells" (10)—are portrayed as occupied in expensive and refined hobbies, while the unimportant individuals—"The mad and homeless" (1), "the huge crowds of the damned" (14)—live in fear and shame amid ruins. One element of how this steep socioeconomic separation is represented is the image of fancy dining, which being juxtaposed to an image of mayhem highlights the indifference of the "rich." They "gourmandize and sip wines, / While they roll through burning cities" (12-13) where the victims of history struggle to survive. In this example of Simic's use of culinary imagery, the sophisticated pleasures of civilization are reserved to those in power: gourmandizing is used as a symbol for a privileged lifestyle, and power itself.

Several other poems also use language related to eating and cooking to a similar effect. In "House of Horrors" (Jackstraws) the march of History, called here "Infinity" (1), appears as a cruel diner. It "devours us" and is described as "The beast with serene table manners" behind white curtains (5-6). In "An Address with Exclamation Points," (Walking the Black Cat) the association of excessive, decadent pleasures with monumental history and its effects on individual lives appears as a direct accusation: "I accuse History of gluttony; / Happiness of anorexia!" (1-2).

The aesthetic pleasures of art are also explored by Simic to create contrast with the horrors of monumental history. In "History" (Unending Blues), Art (with a capital "A") is mentioned by a widow whose husband was arrested and executed, probably for ideological reasons: "History loves to see women cry, she whispers. / Their death makes Art, she shouts, naked" (22-23). In this instance, so-called high art, with its aesthetic sophistication, is used by Simic in a similar way to the gourmandizing experiences of other poems, as a contrast to the widow's poverty and misfortune. Victimized by impersonal History, she is robbed even of a personal account of her sufferings, which are destined to be represented in grandiose and idealized form. The poem ends with her lamenting how "pretty are the coffins and instruments of torture / In the Museum" (24-25), a denouncement of the use of refined aesthetics to erase the horrors of history.

Besides associating pleasurable sensorial experiences with the callousness and distancing of the powerful few in charge of history, Simic also uses them as a device to contrast the small pleasures of life with a harsh historical reality. In "For the Lovers of the Absolute" (Unending Blues), for instance, the characters are a couple who are lying in bed together after making love. The tone of the poem is intimate, erotic, as the bodies and attitudes of the lovers are described. However, the tone abruptly changes as war makes itself present. The male lover is asleep, and before falling asleep the woman is presented with signs of war coming from somewhere in the city: "Still, instead of snores she hears / The distant artillery fire / That makes the blinds rattle." (17-19) The contrast between public and personal history in this poem is stark. It is a lyric poem that would be well placed in the category of erotic poetry were it not for the last stanza throwing a light on the tragic historical background. However, the simple yet meaningful pleasures of intimacy are in this poem a part of the foreground which is inhabited by the "unimportant" lovers. Therefore, it is possible to say that the devices of gourmandizing and using eroticism are also used by Simic to represent the intimate, personal experience that gives voice to individuals who are unimportant for monumental history.

In some of his poems, Simic uses elements of memoir to oppose positivistic historical accounts with personal memory and involved testimonial. One such case is "House of Cards" (That Little Something). The poem starts with the suggestion of a nostalgic memory, a winter evening in which the persona plays at making a house of cards with his mother. The suspense involved in building the fragile puzzle is represented by the "shut lips" (3) of the mother, a sign of concentration, and the "held breaths" (4) of the two characters. The poem later reveals that those are, simultaneously, signs of fear, of an attempt to remain undetected by menacing forces. In the next stanza, "The sound of boots in the street" (9) is mentioned, recontextualizing the familiar scene under the weight of an invading army. The tension in the scene acquires new meaning, however it retains personal value in the face of the large-scale geopolitical event: the child still misses similar winter evenings.

As with many other of his poems, in "House of Cards," Simic brings facts of personal history into the composition. The carefully preserved tension in the poem

can be read as reflecting the emotional dynamics in Simic's own family during their World War II years in Belgrade. In his interview for *The Paris Review* (2005), Simic points out the different outlooks (his mother's and his own) in relation to the harsh historical events of the war. Simic tells about his mother's sense of defeat and her feeling that life had been "made meaningless by historical events," while his own outlook was marked by boyish positivity—in several instances, he recalls having fun as a child in wartime. However, maturity and reflection eventually changed Simic's feelings about what he calls the pressure of history, as evidenced by his answer to the interviewer's follow-up question:

INTERVIEWER

And you? Did you ever feel oppressed by history?

SIMIC

Not when I was younger. Now, I'm not so sure. The same type of lunatics who made the world what it was when I was a kid are still around. They want more wars, more prisons, more killing. It's all horribly familiar, very tiresome and frightening, of course. (273)

Another example of a poem that brings the focus to the otherwise ignored individual experience is "Cameo Appearance" (*Walking the Black Cat*). In this poem, the poetic voice shows a film of a crowd listening to a speech from a prominent political figure ("our great leader") and tries to help their children locate them in the crowd. The children are unable to, the speaker's image remaining indistinguishable "In that huge gray crowd / That was like any other gray crowd" (16-17). Right after the events depicted in the film, the speaker remembers an aerial attack happened, complementing the carefully recorded, almost staged historical images with a narrative grounded in personal experience. The effacement of the common individual from monumental history is evidenced not only by the speaker's invisibility among the crowd, but also by their reflection that "I had a small, non speaking part / In a bloody epic" (1-2).

Simic's use of certain conventions of memoir to resist positivistic narratives shows an interesting parallel with another one of his poetic strategies, the use of lyric poetry in opposition to the epic. "Toward Nightfall" (*Unending Blues*) describes characters who are under the "weight of tragic events" (1). Defensive, afraid,

intimidated characters see menacing signs around them or fall ill in the general environment of obscurity, fear and impotence. They walk among bare trees or live in "one of those dying mill towns" (29), and share a deep sense of "fear of the approaching death" (39). The opening stanza classifies the tone of the poem as tragic,

Just as tragedy
In the proper Greek sense
Was thought impossible
To compose in our day. (3-6)

Despite mentioning classical Greek literature as a "proper" form for tragedy, the poem tells personal stories about ordinary characters, whose sufferings reflect the tragic historical events around them. Simic's preference for the particular experiences of individuals can be seen in the closing lines of the poem, where the unimportant events ("that day's tragedies" (69), even though the date is not given) are seen as carrying a sense of tragedy and are worth registering despite not being worthy of the historian's attention. Such scenes of personal histories are not supposed to be considered tragedies because they are not experienced by "Figures endowed with / Classic nobility of soul" (72-73).

War as a theme is sometimes approached in an oblique way by Simic, who uses suggestive imagery and impressions that are articulated through memory to bring the "pressure of reality," as he calls it in the essay "Poetry and History." In poems such as "Fiordiligi" (That Little Something), a contrast is established between the comforting world of close personal relations and the menacing background of impersonal historical processes. The poem opens with a recollection of the persona's mother, of how she "sang opera all day long" and dedicated herself to household chores, establishing a theme of peaceful familiar life. However, the second stanza brings the historical background of war into the poem with a single comparison: "Her voice like an air-raid siren" (5). From that point on, the reality of death makes itself present in the relationship of mother and child. They visit a cemetery; townspeople react to meeting the mother as they would to a possibly insane person who were "pleading for news of her lost love" (20). These images of an air-raid siren, a

cemetery and a person grieving the loss of a loved one all relate to the theme of war without explicitly mentioning any war, a common strategy of Simic's to bring the focus of the lyric voice to the personal experiences of history's victims.

The threat of war is present in "Talking to Little Birdies" (Walking the Black Cat) through a combination of a suggestion that the idyllic setting ("our sweet setup" (14)) is soon to be disrupted by a "new horror I haven't heard about yet" (12), and the image of children playing at war. The birds in the poem are the ones who sense the incoming historical danger, and also the ones who may be "sneaking weary looks" at the children at play (17). "Modern Sorcery" addresses someone who, against all odds, survived a destructive event (most probably related to bombing during a war). The speaker in the poem describes this individual holding on to a woman while "Outside, there was a flash of lightning / like a tongue passing over a bloody knife" (13-14). In the familiar setting of "Empires," the poetic persona watches their grandmother iron clothes while listening to the radio. There is some sort of commotion happening in the background—"The earth trembled beneath our feet" (4)—that may be related to war, to bombings. The program being broadcast is the coverage of a public celebration of a political leader the grandmother calls a "monster," bringing the reader back to Simic's practice of making connections between political ideology, the callous nature of individuals in power, and the widespread violence of war.

In other poems, Simic depicts the horrors of war in a direct manner and in vivid images, especially in scenes relating to bombings of civilian populations. "Encyclopedia of Horror" (That Little Something) offers the brutal image of corpses and debris left after a bombing raid: "The corpses like cigarette butts / In a dinner plate overflowing with ashes" (8-9). "The History of Costumes" (Jackstraws) contains the image of a sailor suit floating down "Among bricks and puffs of smoke / In a building split in half by a bomb" (7-8). In "Medieval Miniature" (Jackstraws), Simic compares the artful representation of the torments of hell in a painting to the real image of a firebombed city, and the latter seems to the speaker in the poem to represent a greater kind of punishment.

The speaker in "Two Dogs" (The Book of Gods and Devils) recreating one of Simic's personal experiences, remembers the day when the German army marched

triumphantly through their hometown, "The earth trembling, death going by..." (15). In the poem, the persona listens to a story told by "a woman going blind" (3) on a pleasant New Hampshire evening. The historical menace looming over the bucolic scene is suggested by the main elements in the first half of the poem: the woman, a symbol of the obscurant action of time; the mention of creeping shadows; the vulnerability of a dog who is old and "afraid of his own shadow." (1) These elements overshadow, for the persona, the story being told by the woman. Memory associates the timid dog with another, met years before, during the German occupation. In this way, history emerges in the poem as a narrative that is capable of suppressing the woman's narrative; the story told by the woman is never revealed or mentioned again. The past emerges as a creeping shadow, with a vivid description of the fear in the eyes of bystanders, and an image of violence of a soldier assaulting a passing dog:

A little white dog ran into the street
and got entangled with the soldier's feet.
A kick made him fly as if he had wings.
That's what I keep seeing!
Night coming down. A dog with wings. (16-20)

As an important corollary to Simic's poetics of "unimportant events," he discusses the ethical responsibilities attached to the poet's role as a narrator of history. Simic proposes for the poet an awareness of history and of the "pressure of reality" on individuals, which brings to Simic's critical and poetic works an element of resistance against what he considers escapist poetry. It is possible, then, to find a critique of such escapism in Simic's poems. One example is the poem "Listen" (That Little Something). "Listen" shows the kind of distraction that the satisfactions of personal life may bring, obscuring from the individual point of view the menace of the historical context. In "Listen," a couple escapes to a rooftop to enjoy the silence and solitude of the relatively isolated place, however they do so at the expense of a larger awareness. The fact that this sort of escapism involves a numbing of perception is indicated by the stealthy attitude of the couple—"Come quietly,' one says / To the other" (7-8)—and their active search for silence, which can be achieved "if one listens / Long and hard" (13-14). The poem, nevertheless, reveals to the reader what the

couple is escaping from: "One can hear a fire engine / In the distance, / But not the cries for help" (15-17).

The exercise in selective perception on the part of the couple is complemented by a suggestion that their livelihood may depend on creating an escapist narrative for their lives; the opening stanza states that they work the night shift in "a bomb factory," and that their story can be a metaphor for personal history:

Everything about you,
My life, is both
Make-believe and real.
We are a couple
Working the night shift
In a bomb factory. (1-6)

The persona presents life as "both / Make-believe and real," at once subjective and objective (2-3). The couple, however, focuses on personal experience in a way that allows them to avoid considering the historical moment. They go to the rooftop to be alone and admire a view of the city, and from that point of view they are absorbed in the intimate setting and the sensorial experience without having to take into account the darker aspects of city life:

At this hour, if one listens
Long and hard,
One can hear a fire engine
In the distance,
But not the cries for help, (13-17)

As the first stanza implies, the couple in the poem are symbolic stand-ins for the persona and their own life. Therefore, the poem affords a reading as Simic's criticism on lyrical poetry that focuses on subjective experiences in order to avoid a concern with history. The use of irony by Simic is also evident here, as the couple in the poem enjoys escapist pleasures while working in a bomb factory.

Such an avoidance is treated by Simic as having ethical implications, as can be seen in poems like "Those Who Clean After" (That Little Something) and "The City" (The Voice at 3:00 A.M.). In the former the denouncement of escapism is incisive, with the opening lines warning that "Evil things are being done in our name" and that, by looking away, by allowing evil to remain invisible, we (the victims of

historic horror) become complicit with evil. The latter is set in a city where cruel acts of violence (represented by crucifixion) are being committed upon the local population by what seems to be a recently established authoritarian regime: "a new doctrine" (13). There are those who can not or will not take notice of the atrocities. The poem shows a couple kissing next to a corpse and a man walking the streets, "as if nothing had happened" (15), amid the crucified bodies.

In my reading of Simic's poems and other writings, war is a recurrent theme, emblematic of the historical process. Simic writes about monumental history as a kind of narrative that justifies and produces oppression and violence to individuals, and war as its companion manifestation in the geopolitical arena. Simic's poems and essays draw a connection between the history of "important" historical facts and events and the wars that so often figure in monumental history, both of which serve an ideology of power which aims at making the individual irrelevant and, therefore, expendable. Among the tragic effects of these synergic processes, Simic mentions displacement.

In the essay "Poetry and History," Simic talks about what he calls the "history of murder" and makes a connection between the ideology behind the massacre of the innocents and the resulting displacement:

The problem for those constructing heaven on earth is that there is always an individual, a class of people, or a national, ethnic, or religious group standing in the way. Communism alone killed between 80 and 100 million people. It is also worth remembering the millions of displaced people, all those made destitute for life as a result of these ideological bloodbaths. (163)

As Simic writes about war from the perspective of experience and memory, the theme of armed conflict leads to the theme of displacement. There are many instances in his narrative of personal history "In the beginning..." and other essays where Simic recollects events related to escaping the violence of the war, the hope for a better life associated with the intended destination, and the feeling of otherness after the arrival. In the essay "In the beginning..." Simic recreates his experiences as a young migrant, his relations to family and the new cultures he was supposed to

integrate. Simic writes about his family's arrival in Paris after a long and difficult journey across Europe:

It was a shock. We were poor, I realized. That first evening strolling along the Champs-Élysées, and many times afterwards, I became aware that our clothes were ugly. People stared at us. My pants were too short. My jacket was of an absurd cut. Waiters in cafés approached us cautiously. We had the appearance of people who do not leave a tip. In stores they eyed us as potential shoplifters. Everybody was surprised when we brought out the money. Even young girls at the open market selling apricots kept raising the bills to the light. After a couple of weeks in France, I knew I had a new identity. I was a suspicious foreigner from now on. (32)

Another view on the issues of displacement and belonging faced by immigrants can be seen in "Fearful Paradise," in which Simic writes about living in Chicago in the fifties, among other working class immigrants. In the essay, Simic tells about migrant's high expectations ("We all came to America expecting to play a part in a Hollywood movie") in contrast with his own uncertainties and doubts ("Do people really live like that?") and also insecurities about being accepted ("What will they say about my bad teeth and my funny accent?") (109). The effects of immigration to America on the immigrants' identity are conveyed by their struggle to adapt to the new culture and to find community among immigrants from various countries:

An immigrant would come to Chicago, get a job in a factory, and keep it for the rest of his life. He would speak some English, some Polish, some Hungarian, and some Italian because these are the people he worked with. Once, you could say, he knew what he was, to what culture he belonged. Now he was no longer sure. (109)

Despite its associations with violent conflict, displacement has lasting effects that do not disappear after the migrant or refugee has escaped the "[bombs] falling from the sky, armies slaughtering each other, civilians fleeing for their lives, the orphan factories working around the clock" ("Poetry and History" 164) and other horrors. The world the displaced people find can be unwelcoming and unsympathetic, if found at all. In some poems, the persona is nomadic, never finding a place to settle after fleeing the war. An example of this fate of displacement is the prose poem "I am the last Napoleonic soldier" (The World Doesn't End), in which the persona laments: "It's almost two hundred years later and I am still retreating from

Moskow" (9). In other poems, where a destination is found, the persona presents himself as someone living in an obscured, empty or emotionally arid world that denies the acceptance and familiarity a displaced person could have hoped for. One example is "The Implements of Augury" (Unending Blues). In this poem, the persona is a wanderer of the streets at night, visiting places that are supposedly lively during the day:

In a huge nightbound city
Of many churches, hospitals,
Prisons and high tribunals
All equally deserted now. (9-12)

An additional example of such an inhospitable setting can be found in "Streets Paved with Gold" (Jackstraws), where the persona talks about a small town who is in a state of abandonment: "Store windows with out-of-business signs. / Even the Star Theater is boarded up, / Its marquee blank save for the word MONSTER." (4-6)

The connection between war and displacement is easy to spot in contemporary news media, with daily reports of populations being driven from their homelands by war—civil or otherwise—, political persecution, as well as other violent conflicts. Displacement is a very frequent subproduct of war, when it is not an outright consequence. Simic has witnessed the displacement associated with war first-hand during the various conflicts between Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia. Furthermore, displacement appears in Simic's works as having lasting effects of their own, first felt as the forced dislocations and political tensions that so often make their way into world news and, later, as a form of lack of empathy and indifference to the plight of individuals. Similar associations will feature in the following chapter on Mohja Kahf.

4 MOHJA KAHF

The relationship between poetry and history in E-mails from Scheherazad is evident in many of the collection's poems. First of all, because some of the poems

reference public historical events. For instance, "Snowfall on the Colossal Ruins" portrays the harsh living conditions of refugees in the city of Amman after the 1991 Gulf War. "We Will Continue Like Twin Towers" references the terrorist attacks of September 11 on the World Trade Center, as well as a bombing in Beirut. There is also a sense of historical chronicle in the way in which Kahf portrays the geographical and cultural movements of successive generations of immigrants. From the elders in the "old country" to the first generation born in the new cultural environment, to the hopes for the development of future generations. "The Dream of Return" questions: "What is the riddle of father and mother? / What was the shell of knowledge / that encased her on the day of her birth?" (8-10) and later affirms the permanence of such inherited knowledge:

They drive through new cities
in the four directions,
but the tracery of gold

remains in the belly of their hands. (48-51)

When Kahf tells the personal histories of immigrants in her poetry, her focus remains on events that can be considered a part of the dimension of "unimportant events." Like Simic, Kahf contrasts family scenes and childhood memories against the background of monumental history in a number of her poems.

The first poem in E-mails from Scheherazad, "Voyager Dust," presents themes that are recurrent in Kahf's work and serve as a useful introduction to her poetic treatment of displacement. The poem starts by speaking of voyagers and hinting at their lingering connection to their home countries and cultures: "When they arrive in the new country / voyagers carry it on their shoulders, / the dusting of the sky they left behind" (1-3). At first glance, this portrayal may seem like a romanticized view of travel referring to tourists. However, the noun "voyager" is soon complicated in the poem by its use to describe the journey of migrants. The persona uses the word to describe her mother, who came from Syria: "My mother had voyager's dust in her scarves" (10) and "It was Syria in her scarves" (25). In Kahf's poetry, immigrant selves keep their original heritages as a part of their new, hybrid, identities. This may

lead to a state of liminality, as in "The Passing There," where the persona and her brother struggle to bridge their original and new sources of culture and identity:

My brother knows this song:
 how we have been running
 to leap the gulch between two worlds, each
 with its claim. Impossible for us
 to choose one over the other,
 and the passing there
 makes all the difference. (58-64)

"The Fork in the Road" also brings the feeling of being divided among two journeys and two cultural heritages. The persona urges herself to either return to the "old country" or remain in the "new world", and the poem ends with a warning that a choice must be made between the two, since "You only get one journey":

To find the salve
 for this wound you carry
 without knowing its name,
 you must return to the house
 where you were born

in the old country. Go,
 get to Damascus.

.....

To find the grave of your lost brother
 whose blood you carry,
 you must stay in the new world
 no matter what happens.
 You must go into the vein

and heart of America. Go
 into Indianapolis [...] (1-7, 31-37)

As in other poems, in "Voyager Dust" Kahf establishes for the migrant a compound rather than a fragmented identity, one in which something is carried over in between cultures, through the migrant's voyage. This composition does not result in a homogenization but in a "motley / miscellany of the land" ("Move Over" line 18). The original heritage can always be recovered. The "voyager dust" in the poem holds a promise of reunification with the homeland:

It was voyager's dust from China
 It lay in the foreign stitching of her placket

It said: We will meet again in Beijing,
in Guangzhou. We will meet again. (6-9)

There are other poems in E-mails from Scheherazad where the steps of the migrant can be retraced, or at least there is a hope that the reconnection will be possible. "The Cherries" tells of the persona's hope that leaving Syria many years ago does not diminish her belonging there. The persona confesses "I don't remember Syria," adding in a hopeful note "but Syria remembers me: / I am sure of it." (2-4) This hope for a preserved belonging continues along the poem, even if by the end there is some doubt cast on it. Those hopes of return do not mean the immigrant is always able or willing to return, though. "Voyager Dust" already hints at the link between migration and violence in the persona's childhood memories:

On washing day my mother would unroll her scarves
She'd hold one end, my brother or I the other,
and we'd stretch the wet georgette and shake it out
We'd dash, my brother or I, under the canopy,
its soft spray on our faces like the ash
of debris after the destruction of a city,
its citizens driven out across the earth. (14-20)

There are other poems in which this correlation between war and displacement appears. "The Pistols of Emir Abdel Qader" makes the correlation clear in its depiction of the civilian population escaping from Algeria: "The grandfather of your grandfather / fled his Algeria when the French / invaded it, emptying its cities" (1-3). The poem mentions following generations and how the forced displacement may have affected the descendants of the refugees. The dead, who were unable to escape war, are as much a part of the immigrant's history as the ones who lived and did escape. One of the bodies, abandoned "at the foot of a mountain" represents a missing piece of history and "could have become the father / or the mother of a girl like you" (18-22).

As one of the lasting effects of displacement, immigrants have to endure the lack of empathy and understanding that comes with being an "other." In E-mails from Scheherazad, a series of short poems titled "Hijab Scenes" tell of the breaks in communication, the distrust, and the rejection immigrants experience in their adopted homes. Specifically, these poems speak of the difficulties a muslim woman has in

navigating the American social conventions and mindset towards foreign cultures. The Hijab Scenes are numbered, which highlights their recurrence and hints that there is more to come. However, these scenes do not appear in order and their numbers do not form a complete sequence, suggesting that they are only a few examples among many others that are not mentioned.

The first scene to appear in E-mails from Scheherazad is "Hijab Scene #3." The persona is attending a PTA meeting in which the association is looking for new members. There is a representative who repeatedly asks whether anyone would like to join. The persona tries to accept the invitation, but is consistently ignored:

"Would you like to join the PTA?" she asked,
tapping her clipboard with her pen.
"I would," I said, but it was no good,
she wasn't seeing me.
"Would you like to join the PTA?" she repeated.
"I would," I said,
but I could've been antimatter. (1-7)

It soon becomes clear that the reason why the persona is being ignored is because she is not perceived as American enough by the representative. A "regular American mother" is mentioned, contrasting with the perceived irregular quality of the persona. The poem moves on to make references to science fiction as the persona expresses her exasperation at being treated as an alien:

Lt. Uhura tried hailing her
for me on another frequency.
"Damn it, Jim, I'm a muslim woman, not a Klingon!"
—but the positronic force field of hijab
jammed all her cosmic coordinates. (14-18)

Another "Hijab Scene" makes use of the traditional veil covering the head as a device for migrant identity and includes the perceptions that otherize the immigrant. In "Hijab Scene #3," the veil confuses and repels the PTA representative. In the poem, the hijab "jammed all her cosmic coordinates," which suggests the sense of displacement immigrants face: the representative sees the veil as exotic and is unable to properly place the persona as a legitimate member of the

community. "Hijab Scene #7" presents answers to suspicious questions that may be asked of immigrants:

No, I'm not bald under the scarf
 No, I'm not from that country
 where women can't drive cars
 No, I would not like to defect
 I'm already American
 But thank you for offering (1-6)

The opposite effect from what is told in the "Scene" with the PTA meeting appears in "Hijab Scene #5," where not wearing the veil makes the persona unrecognizable to members of her own cultural background. When wearing the veil, the persona seems to meet other muslims everywhere:

"Assalam-O-alaikum, sister"
 "Assalam-O-alaikum, ma'am"
 "Assalam-O-alaikum" at the mailbox
 "Assalam-O-alaikum" by the bus stop (1-4)

However, when the veil is not worn, the approaching muslims seem to disappear and the persona realizes that "[...] (if you're light) / you suddenly pass (lonely) for white" (11-12).

"Voyager Dust" touches on the generational aspect of cultural identity as it portrays a passing of the dust from the mother to the children ("Now it is on our shoulders too"). There are other poems in which Kahf represents migrant identity as stemming from cultural heritage within the family. In "Fayetteville as in Fate," herb-picking in Fayetteville triggers memories of this cultural heritage: "I hear that people pick 'poke' here / and my family memory stirs with people / who picked the wild herbs, the khibbezzé, of other mountains" (23-25). In this lyric narrative of personal history, the persona recognizes in her own identity a meeting of Western and Eastern cultures, represented by Damascus and Fayetteville, and expresses a hope that north-american natives and immigrants may "recognize each other" (52) through their similarities. At the end of the poem, the persona points out similar behaviors between members of cultures ("here" and "there") that may otherwise see each other as an exotic other, and also notes the power of poetry to bring attention to those

similarities, attributing to poets the power—and responsibility, as the use of the word "fate" implies—to restore empathy lost by a focus on cultural shock:

Their names and their languages are wildly different
and they believe improbable, vile things about each other
But see the turn of wrist when a woman from here
or a woman from there kneads dough

.....
But who will coax them close enough to know this?
Darling, it is poetry
Darling, I am a poet
It is my fate
like this, like this, to kiss
the creases around the eyes and the eyes
that they may recognize each other [...] (35-38, 46-52)

This aspect of cultural heritage reveals the importance Kahf places on family relations. When Kahf writes about displacement, she often uses images of lost family relations and the inherited cultural values which are represented by family members, quite often elders. Among the poems that use such imagery, two especially notable examples are "The Skaff Mother Tells the Story" and "Word from the Younger Skaff," appearing in sequence within the collection. The former focuses on war and displacement, the latter on the inherited values which, when successfully embraced, may help to lessen the effects of the separation.

In "The Skaff Mother Tells the Story," a mother helps her children escape forced conscription during the First Balkan War. The boys are given tokens from their culture to take with them, and smuggled by ship to an uncertain destination:

Word came. I had barely time to wrap a bundle
For them: my mincemeat pies, a scarf of wool.
Their father gave them golden liras to survive.
That night, their cousin smuggled them away.
The Safar Barlik had begun—the Balkan War—
And the Turks were conscripting all our boys,

Wasting their lives. We wanted them to live, our boys. (1-7)

Even though the boy's final destination is not known clearly by the family, there is a hope that their connection will not disappear entirely. This hope is expressed in the poem by the mother urging her sons to survive and return "to share the bundle of mother, father, kin, house, bread, and wool" (16-17), all elements of their culture and

family life. After forty years, the mother has received no communications from her sons, who in the meantime arrived in Brazil and made new lives for themselves. The poem ends with the mother lamenting that the family's intention to preserve her sons from the mortal dangers of war caused their irreversible separation:

[...] I don't know if I will

See them again in life. Have they found wool
To keep them warm in their new land? We sent them away,
I swear, to keep them with us; they were only boys.
Fourteen and fifteen is too young to suffer war
And maybe die. But what is it to survive
Like grafts cut off a tree, a child without a bundle? (30-36)

The following (and complementary) poem, "Word from the Younger Skaff," gives voice to the youngest of the two sons, now a parent himself. He addresses his mother, without hopes that real communication will be possible. He speaks of his yearning for a connection with homeland and family, referencing his cultural heritage in his speech:

Yumma, that hunger's never left me,
even though I'm big as an ox,
fifty-five now, married,
and master of a house
with a good larder.
Hunger still lurches
inside me, like the sea voyage
from Beirut to Brazil.
Sometimes I think
I could eat the house out,
heart, oven, gate, and all. (12-22)

Despite the lack of contact with the family, the youngest son still sees that some connection survives in the cultural heritage that has reached his daughter, and that this passing of tradition onto a new generation could serve as a consolation to the distant mother:

Wherever you are, O mãe,
I bet it fills your belly to know
there's a twelve-year-old Brazilian girl
with your hair and eyes, who,
though she's never seen

you or your kitchen fire, makes
 Syrian meat pies proper,
 baked golden and sealed
 with your same thumbpress,
 precise as an Ottoman coin. (33-42)

In the poems in E-mails from Scheherazad, migrant identity is marked by displacement and the dilemma of the hyphen, however it resists homogenization. Original and new cultural features coexist, the embracing of the new never preventing the original from being recovered or expressed. One of the main devices Kahf uses for this construction of migrant identity is language. Throughout E-mails from Scheherazad, words and phrases in languages other than English inhabit the expression and representation of the identity of immigrants. The English language itself is challenged, in "Copulations in English," by an influx of migrant languages, as the persona ascertains the inevitability of its change: "English will never be the same and will never regret us" (39). The persona in this poem celebrates the radical changes the English language may undergo in its contact with Eastern languages as immigrants (called "us" by the persona) mix it with Arabic, Hindi or Farsi words in their speech. The poem creates a linguistic contact zone by the insertion of lines in Arabic characters, forcing English-only readers to confront their ignorance of Eastern languages, while it threatens to "bewilder English in the Aramaic of Jesus" (19). Another example of this use of language by Kahf is the combination of terms and references from the migrant's original culture with those from American popular culture. "Lateefa" puts Egyptian-American teenagers in suburban communities where they "lose their shib-shibs," (68-69) and the persona tells of neighborhood mosques "where 'Allahu akbar' alternates / with 'doo-wop, she-boom, she-boom'" (74-76).

As an expression of the heterogeneous cultural references that help form immigrant identities in Kahf's poetry, there is a sharp contrast between Old World and New World elements. "My Babysitter Wears a Face-Veil" shows, with exuberant humor, the traditionally attired Eastern babysitter behind the wheel of a characteristically Western "four-by-four / on mountainous truck tires" (3-4) dashing through traffic "with the confidence of a teenaged driver" (9). The image seems to complement the observation, in "Hijab Scene #7," that a woman wearing traditional headwear is not necessarily "from that country / where women can't drive cars" (2-3).

As much as the migrant self in E-mails from Scheherazad may represent a celebration of hybrid identity and a preservation of cultural heritage, there is also an aspect of this identity that is critical of accepted tradition. When strict adherence to social and cultural tenets (especially religious ones) leads to further alienation of immigrant selves and complicates the "negotiation of foreignness," as Abdul-Jabbar puts it, then traditional views may be criticized. In "Redwoods," the persona criticizes a discourse from the Old World that condemns New World values. The first stanza establishes such a discourse as reactionary and outdated: "We are tired of your ancient language / When will you learn to speak new words?" (1-2) The discourse of such "ancient language" insists on praising only its own family history and landmarks, however the persona asks that the New World features also be considered meaningful:

We are sick of your outdated poetry,
beating its breast for the old palm trees
Your ancient palm oasis is not here but see,
the redwood trees have majesty and grace
and beneath them rivers flow (6-10)

The next stanza calls into question historical and religious narratives, placing them in the past ("seventh-century victories," "ninth-century liturgies") (11-12). The poem ends with the persona expressing a need for recognition of the hybrid immigrant identity:

We no longer hate your ancient enemies
Your enemies' children have become our lovers
We are having their babies, haven't you heard?
Still you deny the revelation of the redwoods,
magnificent, underneath which rivers flow (21-25)

In E-mails from Scheherazad, migrant identities are represented through narratives of personal history and a portmanteau of diverse cultural tokens, reflecting their multiplicity of cultural heritages and influences, as well as the tensions and difficulties involved in immigration and displacement. The poems in the collection show the movement of collective history from war to displacement, and further to rejection and hostility towards its victims. Against this background, Kahf presents an

appeal for empathy and a celebration of diversity supported by the "unimportant events" of family life, childhood memories, and cultural heritage. By focusing on the personal histories of the displaced, Kahf resists the distancing resulting from monumental history writing about war and its civilian victims.

5 CONCLUSION

In my reading of the work of Simic and Kahf I found that their poetries share a few important elements. The themes of war and displacement, which drew my attention to the possibility of a comparative reading in the first place, are certainly in the foreground. Both authors write about war in its brutal and dehumanizing aspects, presenting each conflict as a historical (both personal and collective) event. Simic and Kahf give testimony of the destruction and terror in war, never allowing its portrayal to slip into the sanitized generalizations or vague geopolitical statistics. In their poetry, war slaughters innocents en masse, reduces childhood neighborhoods to rubble, breaks families apart, and generates xenophobia and indifference.

In some of Simic's poems, war can be seen as it would appear through the eyes of a witness, with terrifying oppression, mayhem and death surrounding the persona. In others, war is a dark chapter of history underlying (and threatening) the personal lives of those who do not experience it directly, as in "Late September," where the threat is so clearly present: "There is a menace in the air / Of tragedies in the making" (6-7). In both cases, Simic gives in his poetry a testimony of contemporary history and portrays it as a dual phenomenon: at once the history of the historian, with its large movements that ignore and erase the small events of individual lives, and the personal histories of those who are caught in the wheels of history. These two perspectives are maintained in Simic's poems with the restoration of the particular "unimportant" events, which resist suppression by monumental history. Perhaps, this may be to some degree a reflection of Simic's immigrant identity, forged in war and displacement but, nevertheless, sharply aware of the survival of his Serbian identity alongside his American one.

In the poems from *E-mails from Scheherazad* I examine in Chapter 3, immigrant identity is partially the result of cultural heritage and partially the result of

the tension introduced by displacement. Kahf populates her poems with displaced selves that exist in between the struggle to belong in a New World and the hope that their Old World identities will not disappear. That tension is originally brought into play by war, which disrupts the personal histories of those it forces into exile. As in the poetry of Simic, in *E-mails from Scheherazad* war appears as a constant threat, a violent intrusion of monumental history into biography.

5.1 PHASES OF DISPLACEMENT

In Chapter 1, I introduce an analytical framework related to trauma theory. This theoretical background not only guided my reading but also suggested points of comparison between the poetry of the two authors in this study. Therefore, I want to use that same framework to organize some of my concluding remarks. It is worth reinstating that the three phases of the experience of displacement discussed in this chapter serve here as categories or parameters for my analysis and not as theoretical background for a psychoanalytical reading.

The phase of pre-displacement, in which the old life is disrupted by war, is represented in Simic's poetry by depictions of the Nazi invasion of Belgrade and various poems in which a peaceful and pleasant existence is threatened by the destructive power of history. In this phase, even though displacement has not yet taken place, the effects of having home and life assaulted are already felt by the future refugee. Simic frequently writes about the pre-displacement phase in the first person, i.e., the persona in such poems directly experiences the events.

Kahf prefers to exercise a certain distance, giving a testimony of pre-displacement in the form of a chronicle of family history, for example, or an outright historical narrative. Isaksen and Vejling point out that a nostalgic view of the country of origin is a common result of this first phase, and in *E-mails from Scheherazad* it is certainly possible to perceive feelings of nostalgia towards Syria and a longing for a return.

Kahf is more prolific than Simic in writing poems about the phase of displacement itself. Simic writes a good deal of prose about displacement, his memoir "In the beginning..." the most notable example, however his poems tend to

focus on the pre- and post-displacement phases. Kahf writes poetry about the journey of the displaced, their hopes regarding what may be found in the host countries, and their fears that the connection to the original country may never be recovered.

The phase of post-displacement, also called "resettlement phase," is commonly marked by cultural shock, disappointment of refugees' expectations, and issues of reception and belonging. As this is the phase that may last for the rest of the immigrant's life, I have included in my reading of themes of displacement those poems which explore issues of belonging and identity even when war is not directly mentioned. In the case of Kahf, it is not difficult to identify where these issues appear, as E-mails from Scheherazad contains several poems foregrounding Eastern cultures and identities in the West and the accompanying difficulties faced by migrant selves. In "The Roc," for example, the persona recalls her mother's impressions of her initial years in America:

[...] It was,
my mother said, as if a monstrous bird
had seized them up and dropped them
in a fantastic, lunar terrain (23-26)

In the case of Simic, I believe the same issues are expressed in a subtler way. Issues of belonging in Simic's poetry emerge as images of emptiness and abandonment: the empty street, the window at a deserted shop, the city offering no refuge. In "For the Sake of Amelia," for instance, the persona finds himself

Tending a cliff-hanging Grand Hotel
In a country ravaged by civil war.
My heart as its only bellhop.
My brain as its Chinese cook. (1-4)

Without psychoanalyzing his poetry, I would argue that Simic writes about post-displacement in terms of the lack of empathy I discussed in Chapter 2. War causes displacement, which in turn creates a colder and less hospitable environment.

5.2 FOOD AND FAMILY

As Simic and Kahf write about war and displacement, the themes of food and family appear in their poems as complementary elements. The different ways in which Simic and Kahf explore these elements provide comparisons between their writing. A clear contrast is in the way Simic writes about food as an intimate sensorial experience, while Kahf writes about food as a cultural asset and a symbol for community. Simic writes about the attention to recipes and ambiance in relation to the dining experience, often pairing the emotions and stimuli associated with food with those of romance and sex. Food appears in Simic's poetry as one of the small, particular happinesses of individual life which escape the bird's-eye of the historian in history writing. However, cooking and eating are also sometimes used as metaphors for how the "history of murder" devours the individual: the ending line in "Memories of the Future" reads "A hand in a greasy potholder gropes after us over the rooftops," and the opening lines in "Folk Songs" refers to those who have the power to make history "Sausage-makers of history, / The bloody kind."

Kahf writes about food as cultural tokens, which serve as landmarks for the construction of immigrant identities and also as something to be exchanged in the interactions of immigrants and natives. Sometimes, a recipe will re-emerge generations after the stream of family heritage has been broken, as in "Word from the Younger Skaff," and revitalize the Old World facet of immigrant identity. Other times, members of the newer generations sharing life in the New World will be encouraged to "download each other's mother's bread recipes," as can be seen in "Fayetteville as in Fate." Food appears as a symbolic complement to the jilbab, which is a much more threatening token to the natives of the New World.

In this study, I have focused on similarities and differences between Simic's and Kahf's poetry in relation to selected themes and elements. In the process of researching and writing, I came across other potential issues for comparison that could have been explored. However, they would fall outside the scope of my proposal for this analysis. I would like to offer one of these possibilities as opportunities for further research: a comparative reading through the lens of gender theory. When Simic says that he speaks from experience, as I commented in

Chapter 1, he gives critics an opportunity to investigate the extent to which gender issues can be read in his poetry. I do not intend to discuss how much of Kahf's poetry may reflect female experiences with war and displacement, however one of the main themes in her work has been identity issues faced by muslim women, including those related to immigration. One interesting example of further research would be a discussion on how Simic and Kahf portray parenthood in their poems, especially in light of what I commented above regarding their use of family as a theme.

5.3 FINAL REMARKS

One of my original motivations to start this investigation was the issue of the poet's responsibility towards history, as expressed by Simic in "Poetry and History": "Bombs falling from the sky, armies slaughtering each other, civilians fleeing for their lives, the orphan factories working around the clock—that's what the poet has to think about or ignore." (164) Following that principle, Simic writes, as Kahf also does, with a sharp sensibility to the hardships and suffering faced by those civilians who need to flee for their lives. In particular, Simic writes about the constant threat of destruction faced by individuals and the feelings of abandonment of those who have been displaced; Kahf writes about the effects on family history and personal identity faced by the displaced.

There are a few places in this study where I mention the lasting effects of displacement in both Kahf's and Simic's writings. However, they do not limit their scope to an indictment of war and displacement: besides exposing the plight of civilians during armed conflicts, Kahf and Simic also offer possibilities of restoration to the suffered consequences. Kahf's poetry expresses the rejection, the distrust, and the hatred that continue after refugees have fled the violence of war, but it also presents a celebration of the multiplicity of immigrant identities and their potential for the enrichment of the host culture. Simic's poetry answers the unimportance of the marginalized, the uncaring nature of contemporary civilians, and the emptiness of city streets with a plead for empathy and attention. In that, I think lies another important similarity between the two authors. Their writings insist on the power of focusing on

empathy and involvement as a response to bigoted, callous or totalizing looks on individual lives.

Works Cited

- Abdul-Jabbar, Wisam Kh. "The Question of Foreignness in Mohja Kahf's *E-mails from Scheherazad*." *Arab Studies Quarterly*, no. 36, 2014, 242-259.
- American Libraries. "Charles Simic." *American Libraries*, no. 4, 2008, 38.
- Aristotle; Demetrius; Longinus. *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*. Loeb Classical Library 199. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Cutcher, Alexandra J. *Displacement, Identity and Belonging: An Arts-Based, Auto/biographical Portrayal of Ethnicity and Experience*. Sense Publishers, 2015.
- Dourado, Maysa. "Charles Simic's uses of His-tory." *Estudos Anglo Americanos*, no. 39, 2013, pp. 62-79.
- . "Poesia em tempos de mal-estar: Charles Simic e Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna." USP Araraquara, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Random House, 1994.
- Harb, Sirène. "Arab American Women's Writing and September 11: Contrapuntality and Associative Remembering." *MELUS*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2012, 13–41.
- Isaksen, Ane T.; Vejling, Thomas V. "Traumatic Movements: A Study on Refugee Displacement and Trauma in Contemporary Literature." Aalborg University, 2018.
- Kahf, Mohja. *E-mails from Scheherazad*. University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Longenbach, James. "Modernism and historicism." *Modernist Poetics of History*. Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich W. *The Use and Abuse of History*. Cosimo, 2005.

- Nye, Russel. "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree." *Essays on History and Literature*. Ed. Robert H. Bremner. Ohio State University Press, 1966.
- Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1994.
- Rosa, Ketlyn; Rosa, Janaína. "World War II and Vietnam War in Poetry: Charles Simic and Yusef Komunyakaa as Eyewitnesses." *Estudos Anglo Americanos*, no. 41, 2014, 111-125.
- Simic, Charles. "In the Beginning..." *Wonderful Words, Silent Truth: Essays on Poetry and a Memoir*. Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- . "Fearful Paradise." *The Life of Images*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015.
- . *Jackstraws*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1999.
- . "Notes on Poetry and History." *The Uncertainty Certainty: Interviews, Essays and Notes on Poetry*. Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- . "Poetry and History." *The Life of Images*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015.
- . *That Little Something*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2008.
- . *The Book of Gods and Devils*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1990.
- . *The Voice at 3:00 A.M.: Selected Late and New Poems*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2003.
- . *Unending Blues*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1986.
- . *Walking the Black Cat*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1996.
- Teicher, Craig. "Pessimist? Not Really..." *Publishers Weekly* vol. 260, no. 14, 2013, 34-35.
- White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

News Articles

"8 Ways to Solve the World Refugee Crisis." *Campaigns*. Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/10/eight-solutions-world-refugee-crisis/>

Emily Shapiro. "Refugee Crisis: What You Need to Know." *ABC News*. ABC, 8 Sept. 2015, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/latest-refugee-crisis/story?id=33600722>

Ian Bremmer. "These 5 Different Camps Tell the Story of the Global Refugee Crisis." *Time*, 27 Oct. 2017, <http://time.com/4547918/refugee-camps-calais-zaatari-dadaab-nakivale-mae-la/>

Lizzie Dearden. "Britain's strategy to target smugglers sending migrant boats across Mediterranean doomed to fail, study suggests." *Independent*, 22 Jan. 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/refugee-crisis-libya-migrant-boats-smugglers-mediterranean-uk-strategy-fail-study-campana-cambridge-a8170301.html>

"Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts." *BBC News*. BBC, 4 March 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>

Sarah Morrison. "Iraq Records Huge Rise in Birth Defects." *The Independent*, 14 Oct. 2012, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/iraq-records-huge-rise-in-birth-defects-8210444.html>