

Freezing-and-Thawing Cycle: Bearing Witness to Trauma in Nahid Rachlin's *Foreigner*

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Abstract

The quotidian phenomenon of freezing-and-thawing cycle is mostly used to elucidate the weathering process, known as physical weathering, of solids in the natural world. But the scope of elucidation expands more than that to the realm of human psyche, particularly those who are besieged with traumatic memory. When or after encountering with a traumatic experience, a person's heart can be frozen, in a figurative sense, that s/he harbors discomfort, dislike, suspicion, and anxiety to the self and the surroundings and gets tightened up as hypervigilant. And what is meant by a frozen heart being thawed is that s/he is able to term with the trauma memory, place it "in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176), and to be loosened from a sense of misgiving at the returning traumatic past to the present and at the unpredictable future.

This paper connects trauma with diaspora (public) and family (secret) from both which the protagonist of Nahid Rachlin's *Foreigner*, Feri, suffers. It intends to analyze the trauma narrative in this novel and how Feri comes to accommodate her traumas and undergoes the freezing-and-thawing cycle through bearing witness. The reunion with her mother Banoo at the end of the story, I argue, has two layers of meaning in terms of Feri's traumas. In regards to familial trauma, the reuniting moment signifies the redemption of Feri's lost time with Banoo. The second layer of meaning is associated with the diasporic trauma: a reconnection with the *motherland* and *mother* culture Feri has long abandoned. Recognizing both positions of neither-nor and both-and regarding Iranian and American identity, Feri at last is comfortable with the uncertain future and is filled with tranquility. But most importantly, the very ending implies the possibility of the continuation of the freezing-and-thawing process: this cycle is ceaseless and Feri is prepared to undergo again.

Keywords: Nahid Rachlin, *Foreigner*, trauma, diaspora, family, freezing-and-thawing