



Toward a literary genre of 'neither peace nor war'

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Abstract

While numerous studies have attempted to define forms of communication for the experience of eye witnessing the atrocities of war, little has been written on the inverse experience: how can one bear witness to not seeing warfare? I propose that this question has a profound ethical and political importance in the present, as the elimination of war's demolition from the European horizon is essential to understanding the political situation that contemporary authors are witnessing. Retracing recent adaptations of the constructions of peace and war in the field of international studies may serve as a point of departure for determining a literary genre of 'neither peace nor war' related to contemporary French life-writings of writers such as Jean Rouaud and Jean-Yves Jouannais. Without being physically present for the events of extreme violence their writing describes in a first-person narrative, this genre creates a space for a reappearance of the war through the reconstructed European horizon of the present and opens a window toward a mode of resistance to the adverse political situation of 'neither peace nor war'.

Keywords: War literature, 'neither peace nor war', peace studies, testimonial writing

Résumé

De nombreuses études ont tenté de définir des formes d'écritures relatives à l'expérience du soi face aux atrocités de la guerre. En revanche, peu d'analyses portent sur

l'idée inverse : comment témoigner une guerre que l'on n'a pas vue ? Cette question concerne aujourd'hui des enjeux éthiques et politiques importants. L'occultation de la guerre menée par le monde occidental est essentielle pour la compréhension de la situation politique dont de nombreux auteurs contemporains témoignent. La définition de la situation de 'ni paix ni guerre' dans des théories d'études internationales, peut servir de point initial pour définir un genre littéraire nouveau de 'ni paix ni guerre', relié au corpus littéraire des Life Writings d'auteurs contemporains tels que Jean Rouaud ou Jean-Yves Jouannais. La définition de ce genre de « ni paix ni guerre » que propose l'article présent, permet d'évaluer à sa juste valeur l'engagement politique des récits étudiés. Le point de vue d'auteurs qui ne sont pas impliqués directement dans les conflits et qui ne peuvent que contempler les paysages reconstruits depuis la fin des guerres mondiales, les conduit à proposer une écriture testimoniale novatrice sur d'autres aspects de la guerre qu'ils situent au-delà de sa localisation dans le temps et l'espace.

Mots-clés: Littérature de guerre, 'ni paix ni guerre', études sur la paix, récit de témoignage

The hypothesis of this research argues that whereas life-writing by witnesses of the world wars articulated a rhetoric of self-fragmentation in order to express the atrocities of war, contemporary French life-writing tends to constitute an inverse movement; authors such as Jean Rouaud and Jean-Yves Jouannais have formed a fragmented construction of the war in order to define a coherent position of the self that opposes current injustices.

Examining contemporary theories of Peace Studies may support our understanding of the ethical and political values of this tendency. Contemporary theorists suggest abandoning the geographical and temporal dichotomy between war and peace and moving towards an understanding of the contemporary global political situation as a 'mosaic of fragments in perpetual recomposition'.¹ This definition tends to characterize the position of millions of individuals who are living in a 'neither peace nor war' climate of permanent conflict, which obeys a rationality of war framing in a stable political order.² While war itself had been banned from the Western immediate horizon since the World Wars, the reappearance of its fragmented figure reveals how, both directly and indirectly, the West continues to participate in those wars.

I wish to suggest that the ‘mosaic of fragments’ finds for the first time a personal language in the work of pioneering twenty-first century authors. Without being physically present for the events of extreme violence during both the world wars and in current times their writing describes in a first-person narrative, these texts create a space for a reappearance of the war through the reconstructed European horizon of the present. This tendency does not relate to the experience of various authors who left the ‘stable and peaceful’ European territory toward visits in conflict zones. It is, instead, related to literature that aims to articulate new affinities between the immediate field of vision of French authors and the act of participation in the war. Facing landscapes that have been renovated and from a body that was not injured or hurt, contemporary life-writing reproduces the conventions of fragmentation and spatio-temporal discontinuities formulated in the life-writings of direct witnesses of world wars, toward a constitution of a literary genre of ‘neither peace nor war’.

A piece of literature from the ‘neither peace nor war’ genre is defined in this article as carrying a standard in which the characters are preoccupied with the preparations for, suffering the effects of, or resisting the situation of neither peace nor war. Using a first-person narrative, intimate language, and detailed writing, these writers observe events from various conflict zones, although they have not witnessed the actual conflict. They do not provide testimonies from a perspective external to war. Their writing is not based on scientific and professional literature, nor does it rely on the first-hand testimonies of survivors. They do not need to travel outside of France to distant conflict zones to become an eyewitness to the injustices that occur in these places. Instead, the fact that they have not participated in war builds a new approach to the current political situation. The viewpoint of the witness who is absent from the battlefield – observing the landscapes reconstructed following the world wars – opens a window to the pioneering transmission of eyewitness testimonies on the aspects of war, transcending the borders of space and time wherein war occurred.

Introduction: An Alteration in the Construction of Peace and War

While numerous studies have attempted to define forms of communication for the experience of witnessing the atrocities of war, little has been written on the inverse experience: how can one bear witness to not seeing warfare? I propose that this question has a profound ethical and political importance in the present, as the elimination of war’s destruction from the European horizon is essential to understanding the global political situation that contemporary authors are witnessing. Retracing recent adaptations of the constructions of peace and war in the field of international studies

may serve as a point of departure for determining a literary genre of ‘neither peace nor war’.

Conventionally, definitions from the field of international studies defined ‘war’ as the reciprocity of armed violence between two organized groups, one opposing the other. ‘Peace’ has been defined inversely as an absence of reciprocal violence between them. Through this binary definition of war and peace, the total absence of violence and its unilateral employment were equally defined as states of peace.³

As illuminated by Dominique Linhardt and Cédric Moreau de Bellaing, this binary characterization of peace and war may facilitate the analysis of historical situations within major wars. Meanwhile, it prevents a full understanding of the current international political conditions, defined as a ‘neither peace nor war’ situation. In the present, millions of individuals – particularly in Africa, the Middle East and North America – live in a permanent political situation of conflict, which obeys the rationality of war in the frame of a relatively stable political and social order.⁴ While war itself has been banned from the immediate Western horizon since the World Wars, the West continues to participate in those wars. This participation is firstly executed directly, by military intervention, by turning refugees into ‘illegal migrants’⁵ and by arms trafficking: in 2018, for example, the top five largest exporters of arms were the USA, Russia, France, Germany and Spain,⁶ which authorized arms transfers to various states accused of human rights violations.⁷ The four largest nuclear forces were the USA, Russia, the UK and France.⁸

Inseparably, the participation of the West in ongoing conflicts is achieved by indirect means of ignoring, disregarding, and forgetting. As explains Virgil Hawkins, most of the world’s conflicts take place today largely unreported by the media, and the deadliest conflicts are among those ignored. By ignoring conflict, the media contribute to the lack of policy response. With few chosen conflicts and many ‘off the radar’ stealth conflicts, the stakes of such media choices are high. The consequences of the lack of attention is unchecked conflict-related death tolls since little progress is made in achieving conflict resolution, the waging of the conflict is unrestrained, and relatively little humanitarian aid is forthcoming.⁹

Opposing these violent conflicts – which are not formed by large tectonic ensembles, but instead are reinforced by various employment – requires new terminology related to the constructions of war and peace. Therefore, in his book *Un monde en miettes. Les relations internationales à l’aube du XXIe siècle*¹⁰, the theoretician Serge Sur proposed replacing the constructions of war and peace in favour of an understanding of the political situation as a ‘Mosaic of fragments in a perpetual recomposition’.¹¹

Through this determination, Sur suggested a non-linear and unchronological instruction of international study of the contemporary global political situation. By replacing the linear sequence of events with non-chronological analyses and disregarding the frontiers between ecological, economic, energetic, and financial factors, the form of these fragments allows profound analyses of the contemporary political situation. This examination of the political situation of ‘neither peace nor war’ through a fragmented form tends to reveal both the direct involvement of political and financial factors in zones of conflicts and the impacts of forgetting and neglecting the conflict once it occurs out of sight of the population its leaders are interfering with.¹²

This paper proposes that the new methodology related to the ‘neither peace nor war’ political situation may have immense importance not only to the field of international studies but also to understanding the relationship between constructions of peace and war and methods of life-writing in contemporary literature. This form of fragmentation allows writers to reflect and oppose both the experience of participating in war and the consternation of forgetting the atrocities of war after it has ended, long before it appears in the academic field of international studies and the present. The positioning of the self at the centre of this writing may expand the understanding of this ‘neither peace nor war’ situation. This expansion is achieved by questioning the constructions of peace and war through the self-expression of authors who consistently demand to observe and to resist these acts of forgetting and disregarding.

The theoretical field of life writing may have particular value in the investigation of this position. Susanne Gannon illuminated the textual strategies that evoke fractured, fragmented subjectivity and provoke discontinuities and displacement in the text. These strategies, according to Gannon, expose a distinction between two substances participating in the text: the ‘being’ and the ‘there’.¹³ This detachment of the gesture of participation – embodied in the term ‘being’ from the physical, geographical position expressed in the term ‘there’ – may have immense importance for the analyses of the ‘neither peace nor war’ situation in life writing, which provides forms of ‘being’ a part of conflicts without physically being in the warzone.

Additionally, studying the representation of the ‘neither peace nor war’ situation in the field of life writing may have value as an analytic tool of contemporary literature. Current research related to the construction of peace and war in literature forms a binary categorization between two genres. The first genre is ‘war literature’. Catharine Savage Brosman defined this genre by the presence of a duplicated expression in the text, an expression of the individual who wrote the text and an expression of collective values. This expression of values, which may support or resist the war, is addressed to comrades, dead and alive, and a broader anonymous audience, for

whom the text’s values – supported or rejected – are significant.¹⁴ Through this duplicative expression, the writer narrates what he or she has seen, felt and experienced during his or her participation in the war as a soldier or civilian victim. As a result, war literature tends to create unity between the two meanings of the French term ‘Histoire’, the historical (Histoire) narrative that claims reality and the personal story (histoire) of the witness, shaped as memoirs.¹⁵

The other literary genre related to the construction of peace and war, which has been established in recent years, is the genre of ‘peace literature’. Antony Adolf defined peace literature as a genre and field of study aiming to understand peace-related subject matter and how peace is made and maintained. Through a simultaneous focus on the text, the contexts of its production, and the contexts of its consumption, peace literature can ‘create unity in diversity’ within persons, groups, and collectives.¹⁶

It appears that both ‘war literature’ and ‘peace literature’ are defined by a similar gesture of forming unity between the self and the collective, between the text and the context, between the history and the personal story. Analysis through unity may have an immense value for the understanding of the confliction and collocations of binary political factors. Meanwhile, I propose that an examination of the fragmented, devised situation of ‘neither peace nor war’ obligates an inverted articulation, an externalization of the non-united essence of the political situation, an essential detachment between the landscapes one sees before the eyes and the conflictual situation that is witnessed.

The categorization of a novel as a ‘war novel’ or a ‘peace novel’ determines forms of analysis, which have immense value for the understanding of a given socio-political situation. As Catharine Savage Brosman explains, the signification of a novel as a ‘war novel’ demands an analysis of the moral, social, and political values of the text and a consideration of the relations between the individual who wrote the text and the collective values specified in the novel.¹⁷ Similarly, when a text is classified as ‘peace literature’, it questions in what manners the moral, social, and political values in the text create unity in diversity within persons, groups, and collectives.¹⁸

Literary texts referring to a ‘neither peace nor war’ political situation cannot be included in one of the above-mentioned two categories. Different from war novels, these texts are not told from a survivor’s perspective but from the vision of a narrator who has not seen the warfare. Distinctive from a peace novel, these writings refuse to determine the political condition in which they live as a situation of peace, although they are not living in war. It is not the peace or the war that stands in the background or at the heart of these novels, but rather a ‘neither peace nor war’ situation of conflict in the frame of a relatively stable political and social order.¹⁹ Since these writings fail to

adjust to one of these two categories, they are being read separately with a lack of attention to established political values.

This new category of ‘neither peace nor war’ literature may illuminate the political value of these writings (which can easily be read as unpolitical texts since they are not providing the perspective of a survivor). It will allow for articulation of a form of analysis consecrated via the moral, social, and political dimensions of this specific corpus related to ‘neither peace nor war’ circumstances. Furthermore, it will consider the relations between the expression of the individual who wrote the text and the communication of collective values provided in the novel. Gathering these texts under the new category of ‘neither peace nor war’ literature will permit an understanding of ‘neither peace nor war’-related subject matter. It will also motivate awareness of how such political situations are created and maintained, and how we can resist this scenario through contemporary life-writing.

As illuminated in the volume ‘Writing War, Writing Life’, various forms of life writing break their boundaries under the pressure of war. The impulse to tell, to understand and to memorialize, challenges standard forms of life writing and leads to the emergence of new modes of life writing.²⁰ These new modes of life writing created during periods of war may allow self-expression not only to direct witnesses of war but also to future generations who tend to adopt these new modes created during war to express both the intergenerational consequences of war and aspects of contemporary political conflicts in which the life-writing author was not corporally harmed.

An examination of life-writing from two generations that articulated new constructions of war and peace through the form of fragmentation may allow a signification of a new genre of ‘neither peace nor war’ literature. The life-writing of the first generation examined is composed by two pioneering writers of the New Novel movement; Claude Simon and Marguerite Duras. As clarified by Margaretta Jolly, the life-writing of these authors is characterized by a fragmented, non-linear structure, associative logic, multiple points of view and metatextual commentary.²¹ Due to Jolly, these forms of life-writing articulated new methods of self-expression related both to the destruction of war and to life in post-war France.

The second generation of life-writing authors who concentrate on the experiences of war and peace examined in this study are Jean Rouaud and Jean-Yves Jouannais. These contemporary authors are generally presented in the theory of contemporary French literature as the successors of the New Novel movement and were sometimes characterized as the ‘New New Novel’ movement (Nouveau Nouveau Roman)²². The adaptation of the New-Novels forms of fragmented structure of life-writing to express the ruined world of the post-world-wars era is commonly associated both with Jean-

Yves Jouannais²³ and with Jean Rouaud.²⁴ As seen above, contemporary theorists suggest abandoning the geographical and temporal dichotomy between war and peace and moving towards an understanding of the contemporary global political situation as a ‘mosaic of fragments in perpetual recomposition’.²⁵ I wish to propose this fragmented ‘mosaic of fragments’ finds an echo in the fragmented structure of life-writing. The characterization of the relations between the self and the constructions of peace and war in the life-writing of these two generations of French authors may lead us toward an understanding of the political value embodied in this form of fragmentation in contemporary life-writing. Without being physically present for the events of extreme violence their writing describes in a fragmented form of writing, these authors create a space for a reappearance of the war through the reconstructed European horizon of the present. This viewpoint of the witness who is absent from the battlefield, opens a window to the pioneering transmission of eyewitness testimonies on the aspects of the current political situation of ‘neither peace nor war’.

Self-Fragmentation in Life Writing of Direct Witnesses of World Wars

The hypothesis of this study argues the current global political situation is best defined as a ‘Mosaic of fragments in a perpetual recomposition’, finding a language in the literary field starting in the post-war period, long before international studies began to understand the political situation through the structure of fragments. In this manner, this article suggests it is the authors of the New Novel movement who refused to communicate in linear, fluent, and coherent narratives their experience of experiencing the destruction of war, inadvertently giving today’s contemporary authors a voice to express the new situation of ‘neither peace nor war’. Analysing the relationships between the self and the constructions of peace and war in the life writing of two representative authors from the New Novel movement – Claude Simon and Marguerite Duras – may provide an understanding of this pioneering political position that is gaining momentum in the present era.

The value of the exceptional literary forms articulated by the New Novel movement on the development of the field of life writing has been studied a great deal. Claire Boyle claims the New Novel movement brought a high degree of self-consciousness to the sphere of life writing by articulating a literary means of fragmentation, conspicuous metanarrative elements, sensitivity to the textual medium through which the text operates, and re-examination of the possibility of a fixed self and, thus, of self-representation in the text.²⁶ I propose that these literary means not only brought a new sense of self-consciousness to the sphere of life writing; these literary means also

brought a new sense of political consciousness to the field of life writing. The effect of questioning the possibility of a fixed self is a new determination of a non-fixturing world. By constructing a non-fixture self, living in a non-fixture world, these writings permit the formation of new constructions of war and peace, which can only be conceived through the self-expression of life writing. An examination of four indicative forms of fragmentation of the self in favour of the construction of the war may allow an understanding of this value from the New Novel movement.

The first form of this fragmentation of the self is the identification of the interiority of the self through the material demolition of war. An analysis of the congruity between the fragmented text and the divided political situation in Claude Simon’s life-writing related to his experiences in World War Two may serve as a point of departure for this examination. In Claude Simon’s writings, the fragmentation – the provisional relations between the self and the world and the disintegration of the text – are unseparated from the material situation of the post-war. Simon defined these relations in his autobiographical text *Album d’un amateur* in which he presents a selection of photographs and photo collages:

Ruins are the manifestations of life in its greatest vigour, and every past is an addition of ruins to which time, mutilations, confer a lasting majesty that the ennobled edifice did not have in its original state. We are all constituted from ruins: those of civilizations from the past, those of the events from our lives that are not sustained in our memory but as fragments.²⁷

[Les ruines sont des manifestations de la vie dans ce qu’elle a de plus robuste, et tout passé est une addition de ruines auxquelles le temps, les mutilations, confèrent une majesté durable que l’édifice ainsi ennobli n’avait pas à l’état neuf. Nous sommes tous constitués de ruines : celles des civilisations passées, celles des événements de notre vie dont il ne subsiste dans notre mémoire que des fragments.]²⁸

Declaring ‘We are all constituted from ruins’, Simon joins together the historical saga of wanton destruction and a disintegrated personal chronology of life events. The expression of the self through the fragmented textual medium, therefore, not only allows Simon to express his personal memories from the battles he experienced but also places the divided fragments from his private life within the broader context of all ‘abandoned civilizations’.

The second form of fragmentation of the self in favour of the construction of the war is the minimalization of the involvement of the self in war. In this manner, while amplifying the context of his life writing to the ruins of past civilizations in general,

Simon’s writing consistently dispute what it means to participate in a war. For example, in his autobiography *Le Jardin Des Plantes*, Simon wrote:

When I said I was ‘making war’, I should have made clear that the word *making* was entirely relative, regarding the fact I never even had the opportunity to make a lousy gunshot. Therefore, it would be more precise to say that I was not making war but rather simply found myself inside of one.

[Quand je disais que j’avais fait la guerre je devais préciser que le mot « faire » était tout relatif étant donné que je n’avais même pas eu l’occasion de seulement tirer un malheureux coup de fusil donc qu’il serait plus exact de dire non pas que j’avais fait la guerre mais que je m’étais simplement trouvé dedans.]²⁹

Contradicting the heroic phrase ‘making the war’ – which affirms a fundamental association, participation and involvement – Simon prefers the passive, unresponsive description ‘I found myself inside of it’. The modes of disintegration and disorientation not only represent the consequences of the destruction of war, but they also affirm the causes that brought him into war in the first place.

Whereas the construction of the personal life story, based on the participation in a specific linear war, revels in a declaration of a ceasefire and honours a period of peace, the ‘constitution from ruins’ avoids this celebration of peacetime. Instead, Simon consistently forms a banalization of the end of the war through constant comparisons between the duration of peace and war and the period of a haphazard collection of objects: ‘There is a beginning and an end of a man, of a war, of a typewriter, of an ant’ [‘Il y a le commencement et la fin d’un homme, d’une guerre, d’une machine à écrire, d’une fourmi’].³⁰ The term of peace, as well, is excluded from its mystical and enthusiastic connotations, toward a materialistic and dejected lexical field: ‘The peace of the stones. A painful, overwhelming peace. The human shadows. Phantoms’. [‘La paix des pierres. Une paix douloureuse, écrasante. Les ombres humaines. Fantomatiques’].³¹

The third form of self-fragmentation in favour of construction of war is a reversion of peace and war’s connotations in life-writing. In this approach, the adjective of a ‘dolorous peace’, articulated by Simon, seems to achieve a fundamental status in Marguerite Duras autofictional writing ‘La Douleur’ related to her experiences of the Nazi Occupation of France, with fictional elements:

Peace is already appearing. It is like a profound night that comes; it is also the commencement of oblivion. The proof is already there: Paris is lit at night. [...] I went

out, and peace seemed to me imminent. I went back home rapidly, pursued by peace.

[La paix apparaît déjà. C’est comme une nuit profonde qui viendrait, c’est aussi le commencement de l’oubli. La preuve en est là déjà : Paris est éclairé la nuit. [...] Je suis sortie, la paix m’est apparue imminente. Je suis rentrée chez moi rapidement, poursuivie par la paix.]³²

Duras uses an etymology that generally refers to the horrors of extreme violence in war when she describes the approach of peace. ‘Pursued by peace’, Duras defines the appearances of the first significant daily routines at the tail end of war as if they were the calamity of warfare, referring to peace as if it was her sworn enemy.

This lexical reversal between peace and war is acute because the appearance of peace indicates a point of commencing the act of forgetting. Facing this fundamental threat to the self and its perceptual processes of remembrance and lamentation, the configuration of peace as an enemy seems to serve as a counter-reaction to the act of forgetting. It is, therefore, not the commemoration and monumentalization of events from the war that allows opposing the act of forgetting the atrocities of war. It is, rather, the innovative construction of peace as a polymorphic entity that commences in times of war and peril, coping with its destruction during the period of reconstruction, when the metropole is ‘enlightened’ and the atrocities of war can no longer be seen.

The fourth form of fragmentation of the self in favour of the construction of war is an amalgamation between the interior experience of the horror and shared experience of battle. The expression of the atrocities of war that pass through the landscapes of peace is not objectified as a personal perception of a singular writer. Contrarily, in *L’été 80*, an autobiography composed of ten texts she wrote for the journal *Liberation*, Duras articulates a plural adjective of undermining the construction of peace and war:

People talked, they were afraid, they said: It is the sound of convoys, it is the sound of war. They have seen in the complaints of the wind the signs of the East, these signs of death, you know how they are, as we are, in what trouble of our spirits, in what oblivion, always, for any reason, how we are always ready to join the black cavern of our fear of wolves. But no, it was nothing, nothing but sounds of the sea and the wind. And you see, the sun rose over the world.

[Des gens ont parlé, ils avaient peur, ils ont dit : c’est le bruit de convois, c’est celui de la guerre. Ils voyaient dans les plaintes du vent des signes de l’Est, ces signes de mort, vous savez comme ils sont, comme nous sommes, dans quel trouble de nos esprits, dans quel oubli, toujours, de toute raison, comment nous sommes toujours

prêts à rejoindre la caverne noire de notre peur des loups. Mais non, ce n’était rien, rien que bruits de la mer et du vent. Et vous voyez, le soleil s’est levé sur le monde.]³³

Moving constantly between the adjectives ‘we’, ‘they’, and ‘you’, the description of a fraction of a moment of sudden horror is triggered by a vast wave during a summer vacation on the shore, exceeding his interior and private status toward a communal shared experience of the atrocities of war in times of peace. The act of ‘forgetting’ – forgetting the war or forgetting ‘we’ are not in a war – responds not to the redeclaration of peace, but rather a trivial indication on substances exterior to the construction of war and peace: a reverberation of the sea, the sensation of wind, and light from the sun.

This ambiguity between periods of peace and war, between the interior experience of horror and the shared experience of battle, is not only temporal but also spatial:

Television always very faithfully presents images of hunger. Film crews go and film it, and in this manner, we see it in action. I think it is better to see it than to hear about it. Thus, we see Uganda, we see ourselves in Uganda, and we see ourselves in the hunger. Certainly, they are very far away already in their journey of hunger, but we still recognize them, we have experience with this information, we saw Vietnam, the Nazi camps, I watched it in my room in Paris for seventeen days of agony.

[La télévision montre toujours très fidèlement les images de la faim. Des équipes partent et vont la photographier, de cette façon nous la voyons agir. Je pense que c’est mieux de voir que d’entendre dire. Ainsi nous regardons l’Ouganda, nous nous regardons dans l’Ouganda, nous nous regardons dans la faim. Certes, ceux-ci sont très éloignés déjà dans le voyage de la faim mais nous les reconnaissons encore, nous avons l’expérience de cette donnée, nous avons vu le Vietnam, les camps nazis, je l’ai regardée dans ma chambre à Paris pendant dix-sept jours d’agonie.]³⁴

Through the invalidation of the spatiotemporal construction of peace and war, Duras forms the same direct, immediate, unmediated affinity, with two atrocities. The first is related to horrors caused to her closest person – her husband, who had been deported to the Nazi camps Buchenwald and Dachau while Duras did not know whether he survived. The second is related to a distant horror: anonymous individuals in Uganda suffering from starvation. Unexpectedly, it is because Duras could not ap-

proach any of these horrific situations – the closet and the distant – that Duras has direct access to the horror through the anonym and reproducible images of the commercial television.

As demonstrated, the quotations from Simon’s and Duras’ life-writings – the regular movement between singular and plural adjectives, banal images and scenes of extreme violence, the material demolition and self-destruction – do not just form a new sense of self-consciousness in the sphere of life-writing. These means also constitute a new understanding of the construction of war and peace, which permits the expression of sentiments that cannot find a place in the stable and chronological structures of peace and war. In this manner, the method of fragmentation allows for the identification of the material ruins of war with the fragmentation of the self-expression, a passive representation of the figure of a combatant and an expression of the menace of peace on the self due to the force of forgetting.

War Fragmentation in Contemporary Life Writing

The fragmentation of war in the life-writing of the New Novels’ first generation of war is supported by the direct experience of both events of extreme violence in times of war and the reconstructed landscapes of periods of peace. Meanwhile, French contemporary life-writing authors confront renovated landscapes and express the atrocities of war from a body that was neither injured nor touched by war. Retracing the main characteristics of two contemporary, pioneering life-writing authors – Jean Rouaud and Jean-Yves Jouannais – who express the contemporary political situation of ‘neither peace nor war’ by reforming the affinities between war and peace and understanding their relations with the life-writings of authors from the first generation of war – may allow for the constitution of a new genre of ‘nor peace neither war’ literature.

The first form of fragmentation of peace and war indicative of this genre is the formulation of renovating definitions of war and peace as an integral part of the life-writing text. An examination of several quotes from the literary corpus of Jean Rouaud may allow for an understanding of this characteristic:

‘The war never stops. When we tell it to stop, when we sign an armistice, it manages to continue by other means’. ‘And missile flights cross over our heads that no Maginot line, no star shield can ever stop, **the war, it was youth**’.³⁵ ‘Europe, it is war. Since when? Since always, since stone markers had been erected. [...] **That air is**

mine. How come, yours? Something further is missing. Already, forever. The invaders arriving in waves, confronting the natives, conflating, coming into conflict with the newcomers. Never peace on this continent, and not even a Roman peace’. [**La guerre n’arrête jamais.** Quand on lui dit stop, qu’on signe un armistice, elle s’arrange pour continuer par d’autres moyens’.³⁶ ‘(...) Et que croisent au-dessus de nos têtes des vols de missiles qu’aucune ligne Maginot, aucun bouclier des étoiles ne pourra jamais arrêter, **la guerre, c’était la jeunesse**’.³⁷ **L’Europe, c’est la guerre.** Depuis combien de temps ? Depuis toujours, depuis qu’on y dresse des bornes de pierre. (...) Cet air est à moi. Comment ça, à toi ? Manquerait plus que ça. Ça déjà, ça toujours. Les envahisseurs arrivant par vagues, affrontant les autochtones, s’amalgamant, entrant en conflit avec les nouveaux arrivants. Jamais de paix sur ce continent, et même pas romaine.]]³⁸

Common constructions of peace and war would not allow Rouaud to use a plural adjective while he, as a writer who grew up in post-war France, is writing about the war. Meanwhile, by articulating a series of new interchangeable and fluid definitions of war without relying on a spatiotemporal order – the war is youth, the war is Europe, etc. – Rouaud gives himself authority to write in the first person about the atrocities of war.

While writing about the war in the past tense or third person from outside of the conflict forms the war as an external subject of commemoration, Rouaud’s life-writing in a plural adjective and first person about both historical and current conflicts is directly re-actualizing the war as an acute phenomenon in contemporary France. If ‘the war never stops’, even after signing an armistice, it seems to be the new constructions of the relations between himself and the conflicts that allow understanding and opposing the new ‘means’ and ‘arrivers’ of war to which Rouaud is pointing.

Whereas in Rouaud’s writings, the definitions of peace and war are articulated through its self-narratives, Jouannais invented a form of life-writing which is internal to the lexicographic practice of archiving peace and war. Since September 2008, Jouannais has documented the process of compiling an Encyclopaedia of Wars [*Encyclopédie des guerres*]. The encyclopaedia, described by Jouannais as an ‘infinite book’, is being presented at a series of lectures given by Jouannais at the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the *Théâtre de la Comédie* in Reims, but it has not been assembled in an encyclopaedic volume. Whereas the goal of the traditional encyclopaedia is assembling knowledge and preserving general knowledge for future generations, both the theoretical methods and the objective of the Encyclopaedia of Wars are a means of life-

writing related to the author’s personal fascination with war since childhood up to the present:

The form of the Encyclopaedia of Wars is not fixable. It is always a bricolage. *Bricole* is one of the entries in the encyclopedia. A bricole was a war machine that was built in front of a besieged city with materials found in the area. However, I do not do anything else; I build with what I randomly find [...] For me, the encyclopaedia, it is a kind of coming out because I can finally admit that what has always fascinated me was war. After I invent, I ‘bricole’ more and always. During my first lecture, I said that my affinity for wars was related to a trip I had made with my grandfather to Verdun when I was nine years old. This was a lie. I justified myself, I took precautions, I was a little ashamed, so I invented stories.

[La forme de l’Encyclopédie des guerres ne se fixe pas. C’est toujours du bricolage. "Bricole", c’est d’ailleurs une des entrées de l’Encyclopédie. La bricole était une machine de guerre qu’on construisait devant la ville assiégée avec ce qu’on trouvait sur place. Or je ne fais pas autre chose, je construis avec ce que je trouve au hasard. [...] Pour moi, l’Encyclopédie, c’est une sorte d’outing parce que je dis enfin que ce qui m’a toujours fasciné, c’est la guerre. Après j’invente, je bricole encore et toujours. Lors de la première conférence, je disais que mon goût pour les guerres était lié à un voyage que j’avais fait avec mon grand-père à Verdun à l’âge de neuf ans. C’était faux. Je me justifiais, je prenais des précautions, j’avais un peu honte, donc j’inventais des histoires.]³⁹

The Encyclopaedia of Wars takes the form of a bricolage which analyses the self and the construct of war equally. With the goal of framing the fascination with war in a self-narrative text, Jouannais must reinvent his childhood and filial relationships in a fictional manner which provides a conventional, established rationalization for his fascination with war. Meanwhile, the archiving of war liberates the author from the prerequisite of a direct or filial affinity with a particular war, toward a profound and reflective investigation of his inner tendencies of attraction to and involvement with war. Therefore, the formulation of an encyclopaedia appears to be a new mode of life-writing which could not be expressed by traditional autobiographical forms of self-expression.

Nonetheless, Jouannais’ practice of bricolage opens a new window to the affinities between the self and the construct of war in the present. In this manner, the non-fixed bricolage of the Encyclopaedia of Wars is distinctively comparable to the suggestion made by the theories in the field of international studies examined in the opening of

this paper to abandon the geographical and temporal dichotomy between war and peace towards an understanding of the global political situation as a ‘mosaic of fragments in perpetual recomposition’. Similar to the academic studies on the situation of ‘neither peace nor war’, Jouannais provides an understanding of war through a fragmented and disintegrated configuration, independent from temporal or geographical borders. Also, by refusing to indicate an ending to his project or to publish the encyclopaedia as an arranged volume, Jouannais creates a mode of life-writing that inherently prevents the characterization of the political situation in which he exists as a situation of war or peace. Meanwhile, diverging from the academic mosaic of fragments method, the position of the self, with war deliberately occurring in his field of view, serves as a centre point to this constructive analysis of war:

The Encyclopaedia of Wars is not supposed to comment on the phenomenon of war, but to explain to myself how this subject concerns me.

[L’Encyclopédie des guerres n’est pas censée commenter le phénomène de la guerre, mais m’expliquer à moi-même en quoi ce sujet me concerne.]

The second form of the fragmentation of peace and war is questioning the relations between peace and war through the differentiation between the participation in and the witnessing of war. In Rouaud’s writing, this form serves as a key for the introduction of a dialogue. For example, in his autobiography *Kiosque* related to his experiences as a worker in a newspaper shop between the years 1983–1990, Rouaud wrote:

War everywhere, for everyone. But not the same, of course. For us, born here, it was the Second World War. Saying before or after the war meant before 1939 or after 1945. My childhood had passed in its shadow; our parents had lived it in its brutality [...] Hence my surprise in my first days at the kiosk when this Asian man (I have learned later that one could be Chinese but not necessarily from China) told me about an event of his life ‘before the war’ [...] so that at the moment, by his evocation of ‘before the war’, I looked at this man with a different gaze, as if an X-ray of his body was directly delivering to me the greenish images of the Cambodian tragedy.

[La guerre partout, pour tout le monde. Mais pas la même, bien sûr. Pour nous, nés ici, c’était la seconde guerre mondiale. Dire avant ou après la guerre signifiait avant 1939 ou après 1945. Mon enfance s’était passée dans son ombre, nos parents l’avaient vécue dans sa brutalité. [...] D’où ma surprise dans les premiers temps du kiosque quand cet homme asiatique (je devais apprendre par la suite qu’on pouvait

être Chinois et pas forcément de Chine), me situa un événement de sa vie ‘avant la guerre’, [...] De sorte que dans l’instant, par son évocation d’un ‘avant la guerre’, je portai sur cet homme un regard différent, comme si une radioscopie de son corps me livrait en direct les images verdâtres de la tragédie cambodgienne.]⁴⁰

It seems like the replacement of the active and operational verb ‘making’ the war, with the passive and reflexive term ‘simply found myself in it’, proposed by Claude Simon, embodies a potential that exceeds the direct experience of the soldier in the battlefield. In this manner, while he is physically participating in his kiosk in Paris, Rouaud claims he found himself facing the Cambodian tragedy directly and totally.

This experience is not a result of a visit to Cambodia nor of a comprehensive interrogation of a witness to the Cambodian genocide. It is instead the constructive term ‘before the war’ that permits communication between three detached positions. The first position is the period preceding the Cambodian genocide. The second position is the period before the world war as was affirmed in the familial sphere in which Rouaud grew up. The third position is Paris of the present time, in which Rouaud is living. It appears that because Rouaud never participated in a war, he knows by heart the experience of living ‘before the war’. While sharing the events of extreme violence from the genocide could create a barrier between the Cambodian victim, Rouaud – who never participated in a war and his family members, who witnessed the world war, the creation of new structures of war, as a radioscope that allows examination into the inside of a body – creates new affinities and, thus, new responsibilities in the contemporary text. In this manner, through the replaceable, non-chronologic, and fragmented constructions of peace and war, one silenced tragedy from the present gives voice to another atrocity from the past, and muted dimensions in the self find an incarnation in the experiences of the other.

Whereas in Rouaud’s autobiographical writing *Kiosque*, the trite ‘before the war’ served as a means of sharing the experience of war without participating in the violence, Jouannais designed the commonplace of the ‘post-battle’ as a new mode of witnessing war without participating in the battle. In the book of the exhibition he curated *Topographies de la guerre*, Jouannais questioned the relations between peace and war through the differentiation between the participation in and witnessing of the war as the central theme of a collaborative exhibition:

Each time, regardless of the era, what is captured Marguerite the moment of the confrontation, the speeding up of the bodies, their fall, the fright, the blood. Always the bodies, still alive or already dead. Often the bodies of wounded soldiers borne

by their comrades in arms. And then, the civilizations that are killed. The children. The landscape is only an incidental setting here. Not so much because it is considered as such, but because the action gives it this secondary status. It might seem heretical to imagine that something else from the battle might represent war. However, the exhibition *Topographies of war* has opted to consider war through its setting alone. [...] What is left to remove on these battlefields devoid of action, abandoned to the ‘nothing’, on these sites which survive in the memory of a few individuals, tied to the excitement of victory or the despair of defeat, the sealing of a national, familial or personal destiny? In fact, this ‘nothing’ only corresponds to a first impression.⁴¹

A general observation of war through the moment of the confrontation seems to form an essential boundary between combatants and civil victims, those who were corporally injured by war, and the rest of the world, who did not actively participate in the battle. Meanwhile, by considering the war through the form of setting instead of the act of combatting, Jouannais articulated a mode of witnessing the war without participating in the battle.

Through the assemblage of various contemporary art pieces related to conflictual zones from the past (as battlefields from World War One and World War Two) and the present (such as Ethiopia, Palestine, and Afghanistan), which avoid representing the act of fighting, Jouannais’ writing fundamentally disputed what it means to participate in a conflictual position and who has the authorization to share his experiences from war. In this manner, images of shopping areas, road junctions and industrial sites of locations where battles took place decades ago were accompanied by photographs of demolished landscapes, combat vessels and ruined houses of zones that had been bombed a few moments before the documentation of the image. By this identical reconfiguration of ‘zones of peace’ and ‘zones of war’ as ‘battlefields devoid of action’, Jouannais aligned the end of the battle as a point of departure for an unceasing duration of witnessing war.

The third form of the fragmentation of peace and war is a configuration of intertextual literary forms as a means of war re-actualization. This form may be understood through an examination of Rouaud’s essay *Eclats de 14* and Jouannais’ work *Moab: Épopée en 22 chants*. The name of the essay *Eclats de 14* simultaneously defines two historical moments: the years 1914 and 2014, the year of the essay’s publication. The book is composed of four chapters related to each of the four elements: the first chapter is ‘the war of the ground’, the second ‘the war of the water’, the third ‘the war of the air’ and the fourth ‘the war of the fire’.

Through the classification of poems, art pieces, testimonial writing and childhood memories, catalogued via their material association to one of the four elements, Rouaud undermines the common characterization of peace and war. While generally, the year 1914 is described as a period of war and the year 2014 as a period of peace, the conception of the four different ‘wars’, which depend on a material designation instead of a spatiotemporal description, articulates a definite duration of war which is valid equally to 1914 and 2014. Within this new duration of four wars, Rouaud simultaneously analyses the sociological, political and ecological destruction caused by the events of WWI and the appearance of injustices and misfortunes in the France of 2014.

This material conception of war authorizes Rouaud not only to investigate the political situations of 1914 and 2014 simultaneously but also to define himself as a witness of war. In his essay *Éclats de 14* related to the culture of great War remembrance in the French environment in which he was born and raised, Rouaud wrote:

Who is the fulgurant witness who would have kept a trace in his body of the history of these four years of war if not the body poisoned to death of the country, the four poisoned elements, the poisoned memory, the poisoned imagination.

[Quel est le témoin fulgurant qui aurait retenu trace dans son corps de l’histoire de ces quatre années de guerre sinon le corps empoisonné à mort du pays, empoisonnés les quatre éléments, empoisonné la mémoire, empoisonné l’imaginaire.]⁴²

An analysis of war based on the chronological order of the historical events of 1914 would describe a witness of war as a figure who directly participated in these events. However, Rouaud’s conception of four wars describes the new figure of a fulgurant witness of war. This witness, who can both participate in the battles of 1914 and live in the France of 2014, attests to the poisoning of the memory and the imagination, legitimate damage that remains silenced in the frame of the general definition of war.

Comparably, Jouannais’ *MOAB: Épopée en 22 chants* is a conceptual work composed of 22 chapters entitled by wide-ranging general terms such as *forest*, *click*, *assembly*, *flag*, *coquetry* and *colours*, which can all be representative of both times of peace and war. Each chapter is composed of a series of fragmented citations from various historical events related to the term mentioned in the title of the chapter. This innovative construction allows reading descriptions of multitudinous battles independently from their geopolitical context. This rearrangement of the text of war according to general terms which are also indicative of times of peace formulates a new understanding of the international political situation and its associations with the self:

It could never have been a way to go into war because we never got out of it; MOAB translates it as ‘battle is a battle is a battle is a battle’ [...] ‘Declaring the war’ and the use of the defined article signifies much – it does not mean to make a war begin but to illuminate a reality that preexisted this clarification. A declaration of the war is not at all a debut. This is the declaration of a permanent state of war.

[Il n’a jamais pu s’agir d’entrer en guerre parce que nous n’en sommes jamais sortis ; MOAB traduit cela par ‘Battle is a battle is a battle is a battle...’ [...] ‘Déclarer la guerre’, et l’usage de l’article défini signifie beaucoup —, ce n’est pas faire en sorte qu’une guerre commence, c’est mettre en lumière une réalité qui préexistait à cet ‘éclaircissement’. Une déclaration de la guerre n’a rien d’un début. C’est le constat d’une permanence de l’état de guerre.]⁴³

In a previously mentioned quotation, Claude Simon subverts the idiom of ‘making war’ by suggesting the passive term ‘found myself inside’ to reflect his approach to war. Meanwhile, in Jouannais’ contemporary text, it is the construct of war itself that must be redetermined in order to illuminate the mode of participation of the self in war. By understanding the term ‘declaring war’ as a gesture of shedding light on a pre-existing permanent political situation, Jouannais constructs himself as a witness to a non-declared war. In this manner, the composition of a series of fragmented citations from numerous historical battles in MOAB (Mother of All Battles) appears to be a new form of ‘declaration’ of war.

These forms of fragmentation of peace and war in contemporary French life-writing do not indicate a random interest in the constructions of war and peace of two writers. The formulation of renovating definitions of war and peace as an integral part of the life-writing text, the differentiation between the participation in and witnessing of the war and the configuration of intertextual literary forms as a means of war re-actualization are all forms of fragmentation of peace and war indicative to numerous life-writing authors such as Pierre Bergounioux, François Bon, Emmanuel Carrère, Pierre Michon and Annie Erneaux. Signifying and analysing this literary corpus through the constructions of peace and war the texts embody, the affinities between these constructions and the expression of the self is undermining the binary classification of ‘war literature’ and ‘peace literature’ genres and allow a determination of a new genre of ‘neither peace nor war’ literature.

Conclusion

In an era when warfare had been eliminated from the European horizon, the fragmented form of analyses related to the ‘neither peace nor war’ situation aims to uncover a variety of direct and indirect participants in current conflicts who reside inside and outside of the conflictual sphere. The field of international studies has the means to effectively signify the direct modes of participation and profit from external employment in these permanent situations of conflicts. In this manner, international studies research may ascertain the periods of military intervention of Western armies in war zones, calculate the financial profits gained from arms trafficking, and indicate the number of refugees arriving in Europe to escape the violence. It may also indicate the manners of involuntary involvement of individuals in this political situation by meticulous analyses related to the percentages of taxes going to the military and the revenues from these interventions and trafficking. Meanwhile, within the framework of these analyses, the indirect profits of individuals from the ‘neither peace nor war’ situation consistently rest under the vague significations ‘forgetting’ and ‘disregarding’. While resistance to direct measurements of the ‘neither peace nor war situation’ concentrates on distinct operations (arms trafficking, military interventions, etc.), an additional question rests unsolved: what are the profits of disregarding war and how can one resist them once war deliberately occurs of his or her field of view?

This question is today finding an answer in an unexpected sphere: the intimate and disintegrated personal language of French authors who cannot express themselves but through fragmented structures that incessantly undermine the distinctions between periods of war and peace, between the inner experience and the external world. It is the self-expression of those who are facing renovated horizons, who have not been corporally wounded by war, who persist in questioning the measures of fears, hopes and desires incarnate in forgetting both peace and war, which opens a window toward an understanding and mode of resistance to the destructive position of ‘neither peace nor war’.

A writing from the ‘neither peace nor war’ genre is carrying a standard in which the characters are preoccupied with the political situation of neither peace nor war. In contrast to the image of ‘68 years of peace’ in France – while the arms trade and the number of dispossessed refugees and military interventions were only increasing – the ‘neither peace nor war’ literature embodies two tendencies of the re-objectification of the war. The first is the re-externalization of the intergenerational consequences of the world wars on the self. The second is the re-externalization of the direct and indirect responsibility of the West for current situations of conflict, while war itself has

been banned from the immediate Western horizon since the world wars. Distinct from war literature, in which the war narratives are shared from a survivor’s perspective, ‘neither peace nor war’ literature is told from the perspective of a witness who has not seen warfare. This is because ‘neither peace nor war’ narrators are confronting the European landscapes of ‘peace’ while indirectly participating in situations of conflicts. The fact that they are not adopting the survivor-oriented perspective does not mean they are not participating in a conflictual situation. Rather, the viewpoint of the witness who is absent from the battlefield – observing the landscapes reconstructed following the world wars – allows the pioneering transmission of eyewitness testimonies on the aspects of war, transcending the borders of space and time wherein war occurred.

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under the supervisors Prof. Michele Bokobza Kahan and Prof. Alexandre Gefen. Her doctoral research investigates the question ‘How can we bear witness to a war in which we were not present?’ through the literary corpus of Jean Rouaud. Hadas Zahavi is grateful to her supervisors for the scientific guidance, to the Azrieli Foundation for the award of an Azrieli Fellowship, to the French Embassy for the award of a Cha-teaubriand Fellowship and to the Fulbright Program for the Fulbright scholar award.

Notes

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