

**MEDICINE AND SOCIETY: PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE**

**Traumatic Imagination in Traditional Stories of Gender-Based Violence**

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**Abstract**

*Traumatic imagination* includes creative processes in which traumatic memories are transformed into narratives of suffering. This article emphasizes the importance of storytelling in victims' mental health and offers a literary perspective on how some women's experiences of suffering can be expressed in the telling of traditional stories, which confer some protection from stigma to individual women in Turkish and Afghan societies.

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**Representing the Unrepresentable**

In war, every word uttered matters. Meanings find expression in stories of suffering that align with one's worldview, perceptions of oneself, and environment. Telling such stories can become effective ways to channel trauma and create landscapes of resistance.<sup>1</sup> Storytelling by women in war, conflict, and hostile environments also symbolizes how "writing from outside power, resists dominant discourses that consistently refuse to include their stories."<sup>2</sup> Arva and Roland, in presenting magical realism as a narrative strategy for representing "unspeakable" historical traumas, state: "[E]stablishing a theoretical link between magical realist writing and trauma requires an interdisciplinary conceptual tool,"<sup>3</sup> which they call *traumatic imagination*.

Traumatic imagination ... is intended to describe an empathy-driven consciousness that enables authors (and readers as co-authors of texts) to act out and/or work through trauma by the means of magical realist images.... [I]t may also be conceptualized as a consciousness of survival to which the psyche resorts when confronted with ... compulsive repetition of images of violence and loss. Through magical realist writing, the traumatic imagination transfers to narrative memory events that have been precluded from narrativization by trauma.<sup>3</sup>

We were drawn to this concept when a colleague in Afghanistan was, as Roland and Arva observed, "struggling to re-present the unrepresentable"<sup>3</sup> after witnessing an act of