

Affect, Violence, and Sovereignty: Reading Collective Isolation in Post-Catastrophic Trauma  
Writings

by

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Defense Date: April 2, 2024

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

As the twenty-first century has entered an era of catastrophes, post-catastrophic trauma writings in world literature bear witness and give testimonies to the moments of crisis. With a comparative literary study of the post-catastrophic trauma writings and other forms of representations that respond to the 9/11 terrorism in the United States and the Covid-19 pandemic outbreaks in China, this research explores the question of how the collective traumas develop dynamic relationships with individuality and influence individuals' mental lives affectively. In the catastrophic aftermath, the collective traumas shared by the individuals act on their interiority and form a sense of collective isolation, which means that an individual staying in a collectivity remains unconsciously isolated affects. The research will illustrate the embodiments of collective isolation at an individual level and delve into its social causes at a collective level.

On an individual level, collective isolation is recognized as a traumatized subject's sense of detachment from the chronological present, showing a dislocation with time. On a collective level, collective isolation is an exteriorization of a traumatized society by two types of violence: subjective violence and objective violence. The intensive conflicts around subjective violence directly by catastrophes may transform into invisible objective violence, which constantly and implicitly influences politics, cultures, and human affects. This research would land at the point that collectivity and individuality as two spatial concepts could be interpenetrated through affects, illustrating that the collective traumas represent dynamic relationships among violence, affects, public spheres, and the individual's mental world.

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# **1. Introduction: Collective Traumas in World Catastrophe**

The 9/11 event that happened in 2001 marked the first large-scale horrific event outbreak since the turn of the millennium, which indicated to us that although human history had entered a new era, the legacy of world violence had never ceased. In addition to terrorist attacks, the ensuing ecological disasters, nuclear contaminations, and pandemics in the last two decades all have signaled that the twenty-first century has entered an age of catastrophes.

Over the last three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the socio-political and spiritual life of people worldwide. The pandemic period was not only recognized as the time when people suffered physical pain and mental anxiety because of the disease but also a witness to the implicit political disasters. From the scarcity of medical resources, the irrationality of lockdown policies, the increase in racial discrimination, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor classes to the worldwide economic crisis and restricted international mobility, the impacts of the pandemic alongside the disease meanwhile brought catastrophic influences on humans' socio-political life.

Standing at the two points of the last two decades, even though the 9/11 event and the COVID-19 pandemic both happened far apart, the two catastrophes bridge dialogues on the dimension of laying out the collective traumas as a shared community disaster in the catastrophic aftermath. As an initially internalized term that describes the personal mental process, how are traumas modified by the adjective collective? What are trauma's socio-political meanings when it is examined in the post-catastrophic realm of a whole community? How do collective traumas reconstruct the relationship between the public and the individual through a mental process in community-scale catastrophes? With the research questions of how individual traumas are socialized as political responses, this thesis examines collective isolation as an expression of

collective traumas with a comparative study of post-9/11 and post-pandemic literary representations.

Emerging with the collective traumas rooted in post-catastrophic politics and culture, collective isolation confirms an emotional flow from the body to the psyche and from society to the individual, which indicates a relationship that explains how individuals share collective traumas in a society in an affective way.

### ***1.1 Collective Isolation***

Collective isolation is closely related to collective traumas, which construct the premise of its emergence. According to Sigmund Freud's ideas of traumas in a subject's mental topography, trauma is primarily understood as a concept that is highly individualized into the subject's unconsciousness (Freud 1917[1986], 253). Cathy Caruth examines traumas by engaging a subject's traumatic responses to cultural events. She informs that trauma is recognized as a latent and repetitive formulation enfolded in subjects' traumatic reactions in their social life (Caruth 1996, 4). Michelle Balaev extends the ideas of personal traumas into a collective realm when exploring the catastrophic events that shock a collectivity and indicates that "the traumatic experience of the individual and group become one" (Balaev 2008, 2). Therefore, collective traumas that are led by community-scale events could be simultaneously infected by an individual who shares the same nationality and social identities among or defined by this group. In an individual level, I would argue that the collective traumas may find the embodiments as a collective isolation.

Collective isolation is initially a medical term created and employed to describe an experimental measure to avoid a further large-scale collective infection of the COVID-19 virus during the pandemic. For example, in South America, researchers who worked on the medical



cases of protecting indigenous groups from the harm of the disease when there was backwardness in local medical conditions concluded the practice of collective isolation action as “The consensus among the Tsimane is that collective isolation is the most viable strategy for minimizing COVID-19 exposure until vaccines or treatments become available” (Kaplan, 2020). As a government’s medical policy that was mainly taken among particular groups or communities in the early stage of pandemics when the production of vaccinations was limited, the actions of collective isolation mean the individuals’ collective agreement on a physical separation from the public under varying enforcements.

The original collective isolation as a policy of public health emphasizes a physical distance among individuals from the public, which serves a macroscopic political aim. Therefore, in one’s perceptions of this medical action, the collective isolation shows that individuals’ consensus of physical isolation becomes a collective identity. The collective identity is a cultural phenomenon that shows that the consciousness of the recognition of self-isolation spreads around society and becomes a collective consciousness. Therefore, there is a consensus on isolation conditions in the individual’s cognitive realms. Beyond the identifiable actions of self-isolation in a pandemic, collective isolation also shares a collective sense of self-isolation, referring to a collective perception, feeling, emotion, or affect that responds to the atypical behaviors in social life.

Suppose collective isolation refers not only to a social behavior but also represents an emotional perception of the agent of the behavior in pandemic time. In that case, this emotional perception is necessarily accompanied by a great deal of complexity. At this point, the understanding of isolation becomes the understanding of feeling isolated. Therefore, interpreting this complex emotional response is often accompanied by capturing and recognizing the negative emotions that are always evoked by the isolated feelings. For example, in an online exhibition

named *Collective Isolation* of a contemporary art space named *The Showroom in London*, the curator framed the sense of collective isolation that was reflected by the paintings that responded to the pandemic physical distance as “the idea of singularity within a context of collaboration.” An exhibited artwork reflects two women (a mother and her daughter) sitting in two closely back-to-back sofas reading newspapers without conversations in a common room; the domestic scene represents the situations of collective intimacy. This work symbolizes how the ideas of interactions, belonging, togetherness, and loneliness were challenged during the period of collective isolation. The work named *Mothering Memory* implies that the scene reflects an imaginative fragment in one’s consciousness, and the soft lighting room shows the space is tranquil. The whole painting is a metaphor that visualizes the sense of collective isolation through an intimate relation in domestic life, which gives meaning to collective isolation, which refers to one’s sense of still feeling isolated while staying in a collective relation and shared space.

The *Showroom* case and other relevant works inform that the collective isolation refers to the sense of staying connections with the others while feeling isolated inside. Extending this collectivity of individual sense into the public sphere during the pandemic, Phillip Vannini concludes that collective isolation is an atmospheric disease from a perspective of affect study. With his 40-day dairy track of the effects of the self-isolation period during the pandemic, he paints pictures of how this action may lead to a mental contagion through the atmosphere around the physical body. He calls the affective malaise caused by self-isolation a kind of social dis-ease. This term indicated by Vannini draws the relationship among the public sphere, body, and affects, which reveals how the individuals’ mental disorder is transformed from the physical isolation and the collectivity’s atmospheric sickness. As he argues, collective isolation is an atmospheric disease that is “a shared mode of attention and a mix of effects permeating a place with the

diffused rhythms, shared sensations, contagious moods, and common orientations typical of self-isolation” (Vannini 2020, 1).

No matter whether it is considered medical or affective terminology, collective isolation emphasizes a relationship that meticulously examines and represents the dynamic interactions between individuality and collectivity. This relationship also works intimately with the other agencies like the bodies and the minds, as well as the affects and the spaces. In the COVID-19 cases, collective isolation informs how individuals are physically and mentally separated from public normativity. Even in some extreme cases, the enforced self-isolation actions by the local governments show how the individuals’ bodies and minds are manipulated for a collective and political aim, which demonstrates that the individuals’ bodies are considered carriers of the immersed power that serves political sovereignty.

Collective isolation’s affective sense makes its realms of employment possibly extended into interpreting the other catastrophic events outside the COVID-19 cases, mainly when we discuss the catastrophic events that evoke traumatic feelings. These resonant affective responses to traumas relevant to the collective isolation allow this terminology around affects to serve as an entry point for examining the causes and manifestations of collective trauma from different catastrophic events from a perspective of affect study. In these contexts, collective isolation represents a relationship between the individuals and the collectivity and indicates a relationship between two contradictory affects. The feeling of isolated while in a collective realm blurs the boundary between the feeling of singularity and collectivity. In the cases I explored in this thesis, the collective isolation in this dimension represents a process of the complicated affective flow and transformations among different affect prompts when a subject faces post-catastrophic traumas.

This thesis will explore collective isolation as an affective response to the collective traumas that emerge alongside world catastrophes and their aftermath. Starting from a close examination of the representations of the recent Covid-19 pandemic situations to a retrospection of the literary works reflecting on the 9/11 terrorism, I will illustrate how collective isolation is considered as a terminology that represents the post-catastrophic traumatic reactions and how it demonstrates and explains the effects that the collective traumas bring to the individuals. In this thesis, the Chapter One would explore the individual's intimate relationship, and understand the question of how the collective isolation perceived in an individual's life is embodied as a psychological disorder named the dislocation of a subject. The Chapter Two would explore the social causes of a collective isolation sense in a post-catastrophic realm through an entry point of recognizing the subjective and objective violence. Through a close analysis of the post-catastrophic representations of traumas, this thesis will illustrate the collective traumas in the catastrophic aftermath would be shared by individuals and embodied as an affective testimony called collective isolation.

## **2. Chapter One : A Dislocated Subject in the Collective Intimacy**

Among the representations of the events and their traumatic aftermath, the national traumas are generally recognized as collective and beyond the individuals. Meanwhile, the studies of representations of the personal traumatic feelings of catastrophic events are usually examined through individual testimonies. My research explores the dynamic relationality between the national traumas and the personal traumatic responses, experiences, and reactions. I investigate how the collective traumas of the globally influential catastrophic events are shared by the individuals in their ordinary lives in representations. Reading the American post-9/11 trauma writings and the Chinese post-pandemic melodramatic stories comparatively, I focus on the poetic narrations, and the dramatic plots imply the traumatic interiorities embedded in the protagonists' domestic lives and inspect how the sexuality that constitutes the daily rituals show the traumatic dislocations of the subjects.

### ***2.1 A Detachment to Sexual Present***

Taking inspirations from Lauren Berlant's *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, which considers that the particularities in private intimacies reflect the political sovereignty (Berlant 2023, 31-74), my entry point of this research is the intimate relations in domesticity that gives testimonies to the collective traumas. Engaging with the subjects' mental disorders exteriorized by the intimacies rooted in the spatial metaphors of domesticity, I examine how collective isolation that derives from the medical lexicon exists as an affective terminology that attaches the individual traumatic feelings with the collectivity, transforming the meanings of the subject's body-mind incoherence resulting from the traumatic destructions into a political incongruity in the self-other relationships. To explore this literary phenomenon, the psychoanalytic approaches

to the collective isolation would reveal the political sovereignty of the traumatic subjects through the dynamic interactions of the affects, spaces, and traumas.

Domestic lives are structured as both private and public, and both individual and collective. Starting from the explorations of the domesticities and the intimacies in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* and Chinese melodramatic TV series *Delicious Romance* (爱很美味), I investigate the common sense when answering the question of how domesticity bears witness to the aligned sexual forms as the testimonies to the traumatic aftermath of the 9/11 event and Chinese pandemic lockdown. Domesticity is situated in the individuals' ordinary lives, preserving the privacies for self-mourning while leaving the public spaces open for the outside gaze from the otherness. In her *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich offers an intellectual argument that considers domesticity a theoretical fundamental of studying negative feelings in a political dimension. She compares domesticity to the "political arena" and a "semipublic sphere," arguing that domesticity is "a location that doesn't always announce itself or get recognized as public but which nonetheless functions as such" (Cvetkovich 2012, 156). Considering the domesticity's spatial functions of articulating the unspeakable affects and negative feelings, Cvetkovich's argument challenges the general views of considering domesticity as a purely private space in terms of its limitations of sociality. This limitation of sociality refers to a lack of mental and social interactions and physical and social activities. However, it is this limitation of sociality that prompts domesticity to function as a spectacle for intimate relations and sexuality.

Suppose we realize that the causation of the negative feelings is the exterior political failures and notice their corresponding with the subjects' sexuality in domestic lives. In this case, we may interpret the misconducts of domestic sexuality in an alienated form, which are perpetuated with these negative feelings as the traumatic reactions to political violence. In this

dimension, the traumatic feelings are personal and result from the political concept of collectivity. Therefore, the domesticity that bears witness to the intimacies enfold with traumatic feelings caused by the political misconduct engages the private testimonies with exterior effects, which functions as a semipublic conjunct.

The misconducts of sexuality in subjects' domestic lives are not only perceived as a traumatic reaction but a dislocation of the subjectivity that is detached from the internal beings in a stable time and space. As Lorena Preta puts it, "A dislocated subject, indeed, which has lost its customary centre and which finds itself living in an unstable way, the experience of self, of its body, of its history, of the community's history to which it belongs, as if it were involved in a spatial and time move, alienating it from the internal place appointed to ensure a sense of belongings" (Preta 2018, 95). According to Preta, a dislocated subject perceives the self as a being beyond the present times. In their conscious of recognizing themselves reflectively, they fail to realize their mental and physical presence in a concrete chronological place that offers proof of their belongings. Preta's views of the subject's dislocations are more concerned with the sense, which interpret the sense of detachment between the internal self and the other self that is created, imagined, and situated in the imaginaries beyond the times.

The narrations of the sexuality in the *Netherland* and the *Delicious Romance* illustrate that the representative sexual misconducts are dislocated. The sexual misconducts in these two works, embodied as sexual impotence, sexual tortures, and being numb and distracted when having sex, display the absence of the subject's concentrations on their sexual present. Instead of directly analyzing the scenes of the dislocated sexuality and considering the misconducts as protagonists' traumatic reactions in the representations, I am mainly concerned with the reason why conducting the dislocated sexuality consciously is meaningful to the subjects' survival in the traumatic aftermath.

This concern means that beyond simply considering a causal relationship between trauma and traumatic responses, I would explore the reason why these traumatic responses occur in a specific form to allow the traumatized subjects to continue to survive in this way. With a psychoanalytic reading of the texts, I aim to answer the question of why such a form of occurrence like dislocated sexuality makes sense for the traumatized subject's survival.

Reading the scenes of the dislocated sexuality closely in these two trauma narrations either in texts or through the camera lenses, I elaborate the sense of collective isolation of the traumatized subjects who survive in domestic lives as paradoxical beings. The paradoxical living forms initially refer to the dilemma that the subjects living in the same domestic space reach a consensus of keeping a delicate physical distance. More importantly, the paradox of the traumatized subjects refers to an inner conflict of living as a domestic being. In other words, the mental struggles of the literary protagonists are represented as the contradiction of experiencing the inability to feel attached to domesticity as a coherent collectivity while living in it. This inability to perceive the attachments in consciousness is not the embodiment of traumatic feelings like emotional numbness or the lack of a sense of belongingness because of mental precariousness. Instead, I argue that just like the semi-public domesticity, the ambiguous mental conditions of living in the collectivity but still feeling isolated don't aim to show the inability of the mental attachment but emphasize an ability to both feel collected and isolated simultaneously. Therefore, the mention of the paradoxical mental condition here is to focus on the ambiguity of the subjects' affects that respond to the traumas. The ambiguity in this context means the boundary between the sense of collectivity and isolation is blurred, which means the traumatic affects in unconsciousness may be anatomized into tiny fragments and have the intention to be dynamically transformative into each other.



To clarify the relationship between the dislocated sexuality and the collective isolation, I argue that a dislocated subject emphasizes an absence of the body and the mind in the present reality. Collective isolation also encapsulates a sense of absence. The embodied dislocation leads to the traumatic affect collective isolation. Reading the relationship between the traumatic reactions of dislocated sexuality and the collective isolation in the traumatized subject's unconscious, I argue that the dislocation, which emphasizes the sense of absence and not being there, echoes the situations that the subject feels mentally isolated even they are engaged with a collective relation.

In this research, I would explore how the collective isolation comes into the lexicon of affects studies because of the human-power relations that correspond intimately to the fantasies and failures of the political sovereignty. To further analyze this question, I will start from a psychoanalytic reading of the representations of the traumatized subjects' dislocated sexuality in domestic lives, which is the embodiment of collective isolation – an affective response to traumatic events in catastrophes.

## ***2.2 Gazing from the Other Self***

Like most trauma writings, Netherland speaks to a theme of seeking a trauma sanctuary. Hans van den Broek, an immigrant moving from his hometown, Holland, to London, pursuing a financial job, and then settling down in New York City as a successful banker, lived in a flat just a few blocks from where the 9/11 terroristic explosions took place. Deeply traumatized by the 9/11 terror and immediately experiencing the intensive symptoms of PTSD, Hans and his wife moved from their previous apartment to the Chelsea Hotel, which seemed like a safer place that could help them get over their traumatic feelings. However, things got worse when Hans encountered his nightmares, feeling that the bomb would explode every time. He became

sensitive about the sounds, thinking even the tiny sounds made by the traffic outside the window and the extraordinary acoustics that destroyed his nerves. He mistook the sound of a lorry unloading for an explosion and confused the cries of the sirens with his son's cries. He rushed into his son's room, helplessly kissing him, even awakening him at midnight. Tortured by the nightmares every day, he stood on the balcony looking at the sunset of New York City, imagining it would be the last twilight in New York. "The pallor of the so-called hours of darkness was remarkable" Hans said despairingly (O'Neill 2018, 2).

Among these direct narrations of Hans' miserable sufferings of the traumatic aftermath, we read the haunting sense of unsettlement, uncertainty, and instability that tortured Hans physically and mentally. As a result of the intense anxiety and melancholy caused by the catastrophe, Hans showed that he struggled with his inability to stay in his household. Because of the inner hallucination that anticipating the next attack was going to happen at any moment, his body kept moving around the small rooms. In this ongoing mental torture of living in the coming threats that had not arrived, Hans lost his connections to the chronological present. His bodily restlessness revealed that he displaced himself into a conscious illusion, which was constructed with the fear of the implicit sense of crisis.

I illustrate this question by discussing the literary representations of Hans' angle of recognizing himself, which is more like extracting himself from the other and gazing at himself from the other's perspective, but not his own, behind the poetic narrations. In *Netherland*, the narrator narrates Hans' separation from the world by creating the balcony scenes. We, readers, make a self-narrating cinematic-like scene in our minds that shows Hans standing lonely on the balcony where the cold wind brushed his face; he helplessly gazed at the sunset, considering that it would be the last twilight of the city. Looking at these poetic narrations and imaginations both by O'Neill and us as watching a cinematic scene, I argue that the scenes that implied the sense of

the cinematic aesthetics were not firstly created by our mental imaginations but awakened by Hans' imaginations of the self by putting himself into a cinematic scene of the apocalypse. With the first person I in this narration, Hans imagined himself as the male protagonist of a disaster film, standing in the bleak atmosphere of the catastrophe, breathing the painful airs of the pale aftermath. Not only do we readers watch Hans standing on his balcony as a cinematic scene of domestic lives responding to traumas, but Hans himself narrated an epic-like or heroic story of his tragic situations as a cinema and gazed at himself from the third-person angle as if he was gazing at his miserable presence from another self.

The narrations of gazing oneself as if it is from the angle of the other self, which is briefly concluded as gazing from the angle of the otherness, are frequently captured by us when reading the narrations of Hans' domestic intimacy with two women. In these two sexual relations, Hans was embodied as the distracted subject. Every time he tried to engage himself with the sexual present, he failed to focus on his erotic actions. He acted as a numb machine, with neither enjoyment nor pain, and aimlessly roamed his consciousness outside these sexual affairs. As a traumatic reaction, he experienced his sexualities as if he were forced under the conditions that his body and mind were dualistically separated. Hans' sexual inability is displayed in two stages. Firstly, experiencing his sexual impotence with his wife Rachel, Hans felt dull and numb when he was in sexual intercourse and conducted his despairing sexual intercourse without passion. In a first-person narrative tone, he recalled this memory of sexual failure as:

*“And yet that night we reached for each other in the shuttered bedroom. Over the following weeks, our last as a family in New York, we had sex with a frequency that brought back our first year together, in London. This time round, however, we went about it with strangeness and no kissing, handling and licking and sucking and fucking with dispassion the series of cunts, dicks, assholes and tits that assembled itself out of our successive yet miserably several*

*encounters. Life itself had become disembodied. My family, the spine of my days, had crumbled. I was lost in invertebrate time.*” (O’Neill 2008, 37-38)

In Hans’ storytelling, his impotence happened right after the 9/11 event, the period when his family was covered by the extreme horrors and anxieties that anticipated the next attack would come at any time. As traumatic reactions right after the horrific explosions, with a strong sense of fear, Hans lost his ability to concentrate on complete sex. Acting like a working machine, he was distracted when having sex with his wife, as if he got lost in some meaningless and hollow moments in his consciousness. The catastrophic traumas caused the sexual failure recalled repetitively in Hans’ memories. He lost consciousness beyond the timely present, leading him to be a disassembled self. The disassembling of his subjectivity is shown as his consciousness of the self was splitting into a different timely dimension far away from the mere present. Instead, his present became out of consciousness. Similar to what Preta mentioned in her *“The Time Is out of Joint” New Subjectivities*, the dislocations caused by the traumatized terrorism generate the multiple identities for the traumatized subject, settling them in other times that are not the time they are living. (Preta 2018, 95-99). Hans experienced his dislocated sexuality because of his encounter with his dislocated subject.

Hans’ distraction from their sexuality gets worse when he realizes his sexual misconduct with his lover after his divorce. Double traumatized by the catastrophe and his domestic life with his wife, after the miserable divorce, Hans fell into melancholy and mentally refused to attend public spaces for social networking. By chance, he met with one of his previous admirers when they were both in London; immediately, Hans released his repressions and depression through their sexuality. During his sex with his lover Danielle, he aimlessly played as a sexual abuser, being mechanically manipulated by Danielle’s suggestions. Being a lack of consciousness of what he had done to Danielle as a sadistic player in sex, Hans acted as if he was seduced to

complete the whole process with numbness. Everything seems to be not coming from his consciousness originally. Hans' sadistic sexuality with Danielle is depicted as:

*“Then she breathed into my ear the assertion, ‘Remember, I trust you,’ and produced with a little jingle the belt she’d removed from my trousers. I took the belt, a length of black leather that was at once familiar and strange, and saw Danielle lying face down on the bed, and began to perform the act I understood her to need. Every lash was answered by a small moan. If this gave me some unusual satisfaction, I can’t remember it now. I do recall a tunneller’s anxiety as to where and when it would all end, and that my arm began to tire, and that eventually, as I worked at beating this woman across the back, and the buttocks, and the trembling hams, I looked to the window for some kind of relief and saw the lights of distant apartments mingled in a reflection of the room. I was not shocked by what I saw – a pale white hitting a pale black – but I did of course ask myself what had happened, how it could be that I should find myself living in a hotel in a country where there was no one to remember me, attacking a woman who’d boomeranged in from a time I could not claim as my own. I recall, also, trying to shrug off a sharp new sadness that I’m only now able to identify without tentativeness, which is to say, the sadness produced when the mirroring world no longer offers a surface in which one may recognize one’s true likeness.” (O’Neill, 151).*

From this depiction of Hans' sexual sadism, what we read from this paragraph is the double “distractions” in Hans' consciousness. On the one hand, as his sex with Rachel, Hans' sex with Danielle is also filled with a sense of meaninglessness. Danielle led him to complete every step, being confused and dispassionate; this was the first distraction he brought into the sex. On the other hand, with solid anxiety from the start to the end, his attention was suddenly caught by the reflections on the glass window. He was watching his sexual sadism with Danielle as if he was watching a film about the sexuality of others. He was shocked by and later became painful

about the window scenes; a pale white man numbly tortured a pale black woman. Their depressed feelings did not come from the strange and violent scene. However, they came from his miserable realization that he did not recognize the man in the window and admitted to identifying the pale man as himself in his consciousness. He was confused about what had happened and who he was simultaneously when he looked at his reflections in the window. Watching himself from the mirror-like glass window, he encountered disidentification. Even worse, when he was watching the self-action as watching a film of the others, he became the other self as an audience and lost the self that was presently situated in the sexual moment.

This distraction from the present beyond the times and being another self with different identities clearly displayed what Preta called the dislocated subject in sexuality. The distractions caused by traumas, demonstrates the existence of the isolated status even when the dislocated subject was being in a collective relationship, which implied that the dislocation of the subject was simultaneously an embodiment of the self's splitting.

However, the landing point of my argument would not be the distractions from the sexual present embody the subjects' mental dislocation caused by the traumatic events. Instead, I would go further on the way the narrator embodies the dislocated instant of sexuality and the dislocations of subjectivity and identity through the texts. Observing the literary fragments we read above, it is easy to discover that the narrations of the sexual distractions often accompany "a dislocated angle of gaze." This argument means we, the audience, read the protagonists' dislocated sexuality as a traumatic reaction. The narrator completes his narration by embodying the protagonist's dislocated subject by putting the protagonist into a position that is mentally outside his true self-being in reality and prompting himself to watch their sexual actions. Either imagining himself on the balcony, like watching an apocalyptic cinema with the self as the protagonist, or watching the window reflections of his sexual misconducts, Hans watched his

actions through the other gaze, from the other angle of the other self. He put himself in the imaginaries far away from the present and observed his actions reflexively. Therefore, I argue that the dislocated sexuality of the traumatic subjects is successfully embodied by the narrator's creation of the dislocated angles of gaze, which means the self could be gazed from the other self in a dislocated position in a conscious imagination.

Similarly, in the Chinese TV series *Delicious Romance* (爱很美味), a melodramatic story reflecting the Chinese pandemic lockdown, we audience examine the dislocations of three young ladies' love, desire, and sex through the dramatic embodiment showing their domestic lives are gazed from the other. *Delicious Romance* is different from the general light comedies in Chinese soap operas that profusely emerged in the Chinese television market, which mainly depicted the city girls' retrospections of love, sex, and the conflicts between modern thoughts and the traditional social forms the young girls encountered in the transformative urban areas. Instead, *Delicious Romance* concentrates on the family scenes in a Chinese tradition, laying out the debatable topics that are widely discussed regarding women's love and sex in current Chinese families, like being pushed to get married (催婚), age anxiety (年龄焦虑), discrimination to the "strong women and weak men" (女强男弱), and their partners' extramarital love (婚外恋). Moreover, it also challenges the gender stereotypes of contemporary Chinese society. The domestic scene in *Delicious Romance* deeply integrates with the harsh debates on women's private lives, and the stories are focally embodied in the background of the Chinese pandemic lockdown since March 2020, when it was at the height of the epidemic in Shanghai city.

The first ironic scene depicts the self-satisfying fantasy of the family life of the young lady Fang Xin (方欣), one of the three female protagonists. During the long-term and unpredictable Chinese pandemic lockdown, everyone felt repressed and attempted to find an

outlet in the blockaded life to communicate with the outside world. Born in a wealthy family and living with her husband, who seemingly loves her very much, Fang Xin's outlet was to live-stream her beauty and find joy in her viewers' admiration. However, the seemingly bitter-sweet life was shattered by the epidemic-prevention staff. Wearing thick protective clothing without distinguishing their faces, the epidemic prevention staff (防疫人员) knocked on Fang Xin's door and told her that in the quarantine, a young lady who was in a suspected infected case had reported that Fang Xin's husband was her close contact. Fang Xin was confused because the quarantine policies claimed that everyone should be locked in the neighborhood, the only people who could be contacted were those in the neighborhood. In this way, Fang Xin's husband's extramarital affair with the owner of the flat in the neighbor unit was exposed. In Fang Xin's husband's denial, the epidemic prevention staff took out the building's surveillance video, and the video is Fang Xin's husband and the next unit of a hostess in the intimacy footage.

Watching her husband conducting intimate affairs with the other woman directly from the video, Fang Xin was strongly shocked. She was regret about her honesty and trust in her husband and hated herself because she had said confidently during their lockdown time about their family lives with "if a couple's love is deep, through an epidemic to see the truth." ( "夫妻感情深不深, 一次疫情看的真" ) (from *Delicious Romance*, episode one). The phrase by Fang Xin reads in Chinese is rhyming and its tone is more like a political propaganda in the Chinese revolutionary time rather than the phrases that a modern girl expresses. The irony was that Fang Xin, who expressed her extreme confidence about her happiness in marriage, watched the video that recorded her husband's betrayal of her love. However, instead of being concerned about the tricky and sarcastic plots of Fang Xin's tragic marriage, I focus on the scene of the embarrassing instant when Fang Xin and her husband watched the video of intimacy together in front of a



crowd of epidemic prevention staff who even did not show their faces and bodily appearances to the couple.

Like *Netherland*, *Delicious Romance* shows the dislocated intimacy of Fang Xin's husband through the angle of gazing from the other people. Not only was the video extracted from a private surveillance video, but Fang Xin and her husband's act of going to repeat viewings of this "incriminating footage" was under a crowd of human surveillance, scrutiny, and examinations. Unlike how *Netherland* displayed Hans' intimate dislocations through his retrospective angle of gazing at himself in his imaginaries, *Delicious Romance* shows the gaze that was forcedly conducted under a monitoring power. The power was unseen and was concealed behind the articulations of the fake "politeness." The politeness with the claim that the epidemic prevention staff have to show a video of one's intimacy in front of the public because of the needs of the policies of epidemic prevention ( "防疫需要" ), which is another propaganda-like phrase during Chinese pandemic lockdown time.

From this angle, what we see is that the protagonist's intimacy implies that he released his repressed desire during the harsh lockdown period, which led to the dislocations of his sexual affairs. More importantly, it implies how the political power forced privacy to be displayed in public and ignored the individuals' mental shaming. Just like the harsh and strict lockdown policies that lasted for a long time during the Chinese pandemic, individuals were forced to believe a political fantasy that all their sacrificed freedom and mobility would be a massive contribution to the soon-coming victory of the battle of the pandemic and were forced to ignore the personal traumas that the power brought about.

*Delicious Romance* showed the celebrations that the lockdown regulation was so scientific that it could help the young lady recognize a bad guy and immediately stop her

miserable marriage. However, I focused on the deprivation of the individual's liberty by the power of sovereignty and their dislocated intimacy caused by the unseen traumas resulting from the harsh policies of forced isolation. They were deprived of freedom and a space to move, which was the capacity of mobility. The political power and lockdown policies acted as the epidemic prevention staff could come and take people away from home at any time for the collective quarantine and access private materials like the security footage, restricting personal activities in private and public spaces. This series of harsh policies implied that the political power immersed and occupied all the individuals' moving spaces, as well as their rights to articulate the traumatic testimonies with mourning.

Even worse, the public showing of one's sexual misconduct demonstrated that the collective power ignored the individuals' traumatic reactions to the catastrophe. These traumatic manifestations, such as dislocated intimacy, were placed in a moral dimension for public censure, and the political fantasy that was created was used as an excuse to turn the harm to individuals' feelings and the encroachment on space into a dimension that served a collective and grand political purpose. The occupied domestic lives by the collective power bore witness to how the boundaries and concepts of privacy and collectivity were blurred, meanwhile giving testimonies to the traumas brought by the law-making violence based on the pandemic traumas, which was an artificial catastrophe by power.

In both *Netherland* and *Delicious Romance*, the protagonists' dislocated sexuality or intimacy are embodied as their traumatic reactions in the aftermath. My argument focuses on the way of how they perceive their dislocations in sexual relations through the angle of the other self, both in their imaginations and in the reflective scenes from their direct gaze. According to Jacques Derrida's theory of gazing in his *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the self who is naked and feels gazed by the other one may have the strong sense of shaming. Later, this shaming sense

is doubled when he realizes that he feels shaming from the other's gaze (Derrida 2018, 1-51). I would argue that Derrida informs a sense of shaming when someone's privacy is displayed to the public without cover, and the shaming would be doubled into a traumatic level when the subject regrets the shaming sense of the self. In *Netherland* and *Delicious Romance*, the protagonists gaze their dislocated intimacy from the angle of the other self, and their traumatic feelings would be intensified when they feel shamed about their shown intimacy to the public. Therefore, the splitting between the traumatized subject's selfhood and his other self, not only creates the dualistic angles of gazing the self, but also lays out the double traumas from both the traumatic event and the painful shaming gaze.

In this chapter, I interpret collective isolation as an affective embodiment of the power effects that work for political sovereignty. The mental dislocations in subjects' domestic intimacy act as an individual testimony to the traumatic events. The dislocated sexualities share a similar form with the embodiment of collective isolation, showing a subject who is collected in a sexual relationship is simultaneously isolated from the sexual present. In both *Netherland* and *Delicious Romance*, the dislocated sexuality and affects of the collective isolation are represented by the scenes that create a splitting of the other self, which makes the self be gazed at by the other and encounter a mental separation beyond the chronological times.

Moreover, *Netherland* and *Delicious Romance* imply the cruelty of the political fantasy through the individuals' dislocated intimacies that respond to the traumatic events. This political fantasy, which criticized the power relation echoing Michel Foucault, lays out the power effects on controlling individuals' bodies and mental expressions. The political fantasies concealed the political failures in the traumatic aftermath. They named the personal depression to be political and bring about the double traumas forced on the traumatized subjects, existing both in American and Chinese societies. In this dimension, the political responses to the catastrophic events

contradict individuals' testimonies to the traumas. The traumatized subjects share the collective traumas in a community but bear the aftermath isolated because of the traumatic dislocations and other mental disorders, as well as the political interventions on the body and the mind by the power to accomplish the sovereignty. Therefore, the collective isolation, as an affect that responds to the double traumas caused by the catastrophes and the political violence, is a conjuncture of the events, affects, spaces, and politics.

### **3. Chapter Two : A Transformation from Subjective Violence to Objective Violence**

On a collective level, collective traumas may find their causes from the realms that have been changed by the catastrophes and the latent damages that hides behind the catastrophic moments, which would transform into more severe forms in the future. This Chapter explores the social impetus that extends the period of the traumatic influences and the collective traumas' multiple causes in the catastrophic aftermath.

#### ***3.1 Post-9/11 and Post-pandemic Trauma Writings***

In addition to Chinese government documents and the official media's reports of public policies and the official voice's (主流声音) orientations on public opinions on Chinese pandemic conditions, individualized and personalized accounts of the COVID-19 situations in China have disseminated mainly relying on various online social media platforms. Weibo (微博), Xiaohongshu (小红书), Zhihu (知乎), Douban (豆瓣), and Sina Blog (新浪微博) became the central platforms for sharing and exchanging the pandemic news, stories, opinions, and feelings reported from personal lenses during the quarantine period. Among these self-representations that remained critical voices that contradicted the positive eulogization for the governments' actions, literary works, documentaries by professional journalists, lyrics of the songs, and online self-writings in postings (推送, 词条) were the primary forms.

On December 5, 2022, the Chinese government declared that the COVID-19 period was over, which marked the historical hinge that China went into a post-pandemic period. In the literary market, quite different from the situation in which literary works tend to follow a trauma writing trend in the post-9/11 period in the United States and worldwide, the number and genres of written accounts that reflect the Chinese pandemic sharply decreased rather than increased.

This unusual situation implied that the history of the Chinese pandemic was gone since an enacted policy came. Additionally, the word “pandemic” (疫情) no longer appears as a professional keyword in Chinese mainstream media campaigns, under the strict political censorship which orients the trans-media representations and with the means of channeling public opinions like compulsory forgetting, the literary and artistic markets for literary, cinematic, and journalistic works that represent and rethink the Chinese pandemic are not developed. Therefore, most literary and artistic works that reflect Chinese pandemic situations were created during the pandemic. This creation time objectively affected and contributed to the work’s styles and genres, making most of them non-fictional writings and documentary subjects.

In the constrained literary market of representing the Chinese pandemic in the post-pandemic period, the term Chinese *post-pandemic literature* used in this thesis refers to literary works created during the pandemic but remain a far-reaching implication in Chinese post-pandemic period. These works include a strongly critical sense of Chinese pandemic situations through a direct reflection on people’s ordinary lives during the lockdown. Given situations of Chinese post-pandemic literary market, works that directly discuss the pandemic period and individuals’ sufferings become a sensitive area. This limitation changes the meaning of the phrase Chinese *post-pandemic literature* from a term that refers to a period of producing to a period of the works’ functions of rethinking a historical event in the future.

During the Chinese pandemic, there has been a long lull in all walks of life. Even if we assume for a moment that literature about the pandemic has been produced in large numbers during Chinese pandemic period, or even if aspects of the pandemic itself have been captured in large numbers and recreated in literary form by its creators, the physical books publishing industry, which has been affected by the nation-wide Chinese lockdown policies and has suffered from inefficiencies in production, has not been able to assume the responsibility of effectively

contributing to the dissemination of the pandemic and post-pandemic literature. Therefore, out of the need for expression, avenues of literary dissemination relying on online social media as a platform for communication emerged during the pandemic and reached a climax of dissemination effectiveness during the Chinese lockdown period. Rather than serving the creation of more storytelling and lengthy literary works, Chinese mainstream online social media platforms initially existed primarily for individuals to engage in brief sharing of daily life, the expression of refined opinions, and the dissemination of anecdotes and influential news. This disseminating feature of the online social media platforms requires that the contents of each posted item update themselves to a concise size with eye-catching headlines and prompt the online writers to compose the sentences with either a unique literary style, vigorous emotional intensity, or a refined point of view.

Based on the new rising avenues of reporting the pandemic lives online through social media, online self-writing flourished during the pandemic time and became more private due to the more documentary nature of writings on social media and these writings' properties of exchanging information, the written works and postings were non-fictional primarily writings. As online self-writings on social media also vary according to the social contexts, Chinese pandemic online writings also experienced several different stages, creating them in distinctive forms and genres.

In the initial stage of online self-writing's rise, online self-writing's purpose was mainly to exchange information about the pandemic disaster among residents of different places or to share the situation of the blockade of Wuhan with people outside the city, assuming part of the responsibility of conveying anxiety about the unknown nature of the new disease, sharing the worrying that the end of the blockade was far away, and seeking material assistance from outside the city.

As pandemic outbreaks occurred nationwide, the Chinese government's lockdown policies became more stringent and spread to most political areas. The sudden and strict lockdown of the significant areas of the cities and the inside communities led to the emergence of short pieces among the online self-writings, which were primarily created for documenting everyday domestic lives during the nationwide quarantine. However, with a sudden lockdown in Shanghai and unprecedented scarcity of living materials, social media became central platforms to articulate the voices of anger. Self-writings articulated critical voices to the harsh policies and expressed depression around the residents' suffering.

From a platform of objective reporting and exchanging of real-time information to the space that bore witness to the positive emotional exchanges that encouraged each other with warm personal stories, to the final hot spot for mourning the painful sufferings, Chinese online social media and self-writings went gradually far away from the "eulogization" by the official voices. Therefore, with the development of the pandemic situation, Chinese post-pandemic literature was divided into two branches. The online self-writings by individual writers completed their departures from the official artistic works serving political aims and ideology.

In the past two decades, Anglo-American writers completed a large number of post-9/11 trauma writings around their re-imaginings of the violent moments and their articulations of the unspeakable mental sufferings of the survivors. Besides the abundant resources for writing about the 9/11 event's aftermath that spreads and affects other parts of the world, the novels that concentrate directly on responding to the attack on New York City are in a large number. Among these representations, most of the works were written and finished during the first decade rather than the time when it was right after the event, which confirms that post-9/11 trauma writings aptly demonstrated the latent and repetitive nature of traumas (Cathy Caruth 1996, 4).



In a report that discusses the significance of rethinking the 9/11 event in today's context, Roxane Cohen Silver, a psychologist in post-catastrophic trauma studies, reported that the world and the society of the United States had changed a lot in the past two decades in every aspect. For example, Silver indicated that the government's setting up the entire Department of Homeland Security changed how aircraft security is checked and how citizens get information, changing from watching television news to in-second online reports (Silver, 2021). The societal milieu that is affected by the event and has intensively changed just goes to demonstrate that the retrospections of the 9/11 event have been going on for at least twenty years. The ongoing discussions of the event, both as a political debate and among the personal touches, all implicitly demonstrate that the traumas that had haunted the nation are collective and are shared by the individuals who identify themselves with the national culture and live alongside the nation's social context over a long time. Silver's research demonstrates the variety of ways in which people have been exposed to and repeatedly thought about the trauma of the 9/11 event in their memories over the past two decades and have externalized the manifestation of this process of reflection in various media. As an overview of this collective behavior, Silver's study demonstrated that over the past two decades, and particularly in the years immediately following the catastrophic attacks, a wealth of works has emerged that responded to the collective traumas in the aftermath of the terroristic event and lead to the cultural concerns of the movement of the War on Terror.

Among the large number of works that reflect on the traumas in the aftermath, literature like novels and short stories thoroughly examined the various categories of mental disorders that the victims who have either directly witnessed or were indirectly influenced have suffered. Riccardo Gramantieri, a psychoanalytic scholar, summarized the situation of the literary market of the post-9/11 trauma writings: "During the following decade, the account of the events of

Ground Zero was such an emotional literary topos for many Anglo-American writers that critics coined the term post-9/11 literature to indicate a series of novels that, directly or indirectly, describe the feeling of loss, terror, and catastrophe ascribable to the event” (Gramantieri 2018, 1). Gramantieri’s research concludes that post-9/11 trauma writings emerged on a large scale as novels, and these novels represented the theme of traumatic senses, feelings, or emotions.

With a comparison between the Chinese post-pandemic and Anglo-American post-9/11 literature markets, we discovered that either the amount or the genres of the trauma writings are varied. However, we should keep our eyes closely on the detailed contents, such as the literature’s themes, sentences, and vocabulary. In that case, we may recognize a similarity as a literary phenomenon. These post-catastrophic trauma writings all have the immediate documentation of the traumatic events and express solid humanistic care for the subjects’ traumatized spirits. These similar features of representing the traumatized subjects’ post-catastrophic mental disturbances around the emotional traumatic responses like depression, melancholy, and the sense of loss, insecurity, vulnerability, and unsettlement not only bridge the dialects between the two events and give the ways to rethink how one event could inform us to respond to another one but emphasize the significance of an essential concept: the collectivity.

Most of the Anglo-American post-9/11 trauma writings started with a close-up of one individual’s life details on an ordinary day in the aftermath of the event, without any depiction of the day’s particularity. For example, some novels may start with a depiction of a gloomy sky or a bleak stadium in an ordinary day. From an individual’s angle to look out the traumatized society in ordinariness. From the individual’s various social relationships with other people, these categories of post-9/11 novels imagined the traumas of a collectivity by engaging with a single person’s charge of the whole society’s traumatized atmosphere. Similarly, in Chinese post-pandemic self-writings, the personalized storytelling of the pandemic memories exchanged the

shared traumatic feelings, which are polarized as both hopefully expectations and intensive anxieties.

### ***3.2 Collective Traumas in Literature***

As we mentioned in the first section, post-9/11 trauma writings tend inward to reflect the collective feelings through delicately narrating an individual's ordinary life and spiritual conflicts. Among these writings that focused on individuals' psycho and political reflections on violence and terrorism that swept the whole society, capturing and narrating the traumatized individuals' domestic lives became a literary trend. In this section, I will closely examine a post-9/11 novel, *A Gate at the Stairs*, that employs domesticity to respond to the 9/11 traumas by Lorrie Moore and compare it with the selected online postings that documenting the social tragic events because of the quarantine policies from the Chinese social media platform Weibo.

*A Gate at the Stairs* tells the story of a college girl, Tassie Keltjin's messy life after the 9/11 event. Neither a direct witness nor the one who had lost something in that event, Tassie still suffered multiple sense of traumas under the nationwide repressed atmosphere. As she noticed in the novel's beginning:

*"The cold came late that fall and the songbirds were caught off guard. By the time the snow and wind began in earnest, too many had been suckered into staying, and instead of flying south, instead of already having flown south, they were huddled in people's yards, their feathers puffed for some modicum of warmth"* (Moore 2009, 15).

Nothing directly from the terroristic attacks had severely affected her life but the unreasonable depressions evoked by the bleak and frozen environment. Tassie was offered a part-time job as a babysitter in a hostess Sarah's house while she confusingly discovered that the woman had no child. Living in that house behind a heavy gate on a series of stairs, Tessie and

Sarah quietly waited for the adopted child Emmie's coming. However, when a series of strange things happened, Tessie received one blow after another from the world. Her intimate relationship was abruptly ended when she found the truth that the boy had committed a crime and cheated on her. Her love of the cared child Emmie was forced to end because of Sarah's illegal status of adopting a child. Her admiration of Sarah was helplessly over because she realized the truth that she and her husband were committed to their little son's death on a highway by mistakenly asking him to walk on it. Finally, her last line of psychological defense collapsed when her brother died in the war in Afghanistan as a result of his military service.

In Tessie's stories, except that the story takes place right after 9/11, we hardly see any direct descriptions of the 9/11 event and the traumas it brought to the protagonist. The only depiction we have from the text is:

*"From our perspective that semester, the events of September-we did not yet call them 9/11-seemed both near and far. Marching poli-sci majors chanted on the quads and the pedestrian malls, 'The chickens have come home to roost! The chickens have come home to roost!'"* (Moore 2009, 17).

In the only direct depiction of the 9/11 event, the event is represented as a recall of Tessie's ambiguous memories. For Tessie, it was more like a background of a series of personal stories rather than a history that severely affected her life. However, it is noteworthy that the whole story revolves around the protagonist's traumatic stories, feelings, memories, and mental disorders. Both the national legal system, the policies around the war, and the causes of Tessie's traumas indicated that a collective power exists on a collective basis. The collective power accomplished a decisive influence on the individual's destiny at a height beyond the reach of a person's power. The decisive influence was usually done invisibly. Moore wrote about Tessie's multiple traumatic tragedies after the 9/11 event instead of writing a direct emotional response to

the event from her. Therefore, Moore's writing metaphorized one of the natures of the 9/11 event, which was brought not only to Tessie but also to the whole of society, which is that the influence was inaccessible but always existed and was destructive. The violence that Tessie had suffered led by the social governance right after the 9/11 event was also a metaphor for how society was disturbed by the violence of terrorism.

### ***3.3 A Transformation from Subjective Violence to Objective Violence***

Catastrophes are often accompanied by significant physical and psychological devastation in individuals' lives. The perception of disaster is often accompanied by the belief that it is a form of violence. However, the devastating effects of violence do not stop at visible or sensible destruction. In most of the moments, the violence and its traumatic influences are invisible, unspeakable, and inaccessible. In the American 9/11 event and the Chinese pandemic, social violence shows a trend from intense behavioral and physical conflicts to invisible and mental oppression. Therefore, the violence brought about by catastrophic events is not a set of actions but a constantly developing and continuing phase.

As a vengeful terrorist attack, the 9/11 explosion violently destroyed the World Trade Center, claiming thousands of lives and directly or indirectly sending eyewitnesses into a state of extreme emotional shock that seriously challenged the credibility of the Bush government. The traumatic effects of the violence evidenced by the events of 9/11 event on the whole of society went beyond the loss of life, the destruction of families, and the traumatization of the spirit, but also in the significant risk of violence to social order, security, law, and morality within the country.

In the early stage of the Chinese pandemic's outbreak, thousands of people died from infectious diseases and the after-effects of infection. The onset of symptoms such as respiratory

distress, high fever, vomiting, and severe fatigue not only attacked the patients but also the society's collective sense of security. The high initial mortality rate made people all over the country feel fearful of this highly contagious disease. However, the violent impacts of the disease in the early stages were not equal to the impacts of the traumatic events followed later when the policy of the city's lockdown was enacted to prevent the spread of the disease. Therefore, during the Chinese pandemic period, the tragedies caused by the menacing disease were not the only sources of violence.

Closely observing the American 9/11 event and the Chinese pandemic from the outbreak moment to the aftermath period, we realize that both catastrophes reveal that violence emerged in two forms that break our general belief that violence is only around the intensive physical destruction. The two forms of post-catastrophic violence echo what Slavoj Žižek called subjective violence and objective violence.

According to Žižek, subjective violence refers to a certainly recognizable conflict between groups that represent different interests. Meanwhile, relevant to subjective violence, the terminology named objective violence mentioned by Žižek in his 2009 monograph *Violence* considers the violence that is sensible but is usually invisible. To further understand Žižek's interpretations of the two forms of violence, Ben Weiss draws the terminologies: "Subjective violence refers to violence inflicted by a clearly identifiable agent of action, as in the case of criminal activity or terrorism. Objective violence, on the other hand, has no clear perpetrator and is often overlooked in the background of subjective violence outbreaks" (Weiss, 2015). Weiss reviews Žižek's violence, and he indicates that Žižek's emphasis on violence is his focus on exploring objective violence and its effects on subjective violence. In his view, objective violence is the critical factor, and the deeper issue is hidden behind the surface of social actions. Therefore, the hot and direct conflicts that are generally recognized as subjective violence may not only lead

to objective violence as a consequence but also result from the more profound attention to objective violence.

Analyzing the literary representations of the two catastrophic events in this thesis, I observed that both subjective and objective violence emerged in these literary reflections, and the two forms of violence indicate a dynamic relationship. Based on Žižek's primary ideas of the relationship between the two forms of violence but apart from it, I would argue that the relationship between these two forms of violence is not that the occurrence of one leads to the emergence of the other but that one is transformed by the other. I will explain this argument by giving examples from a close reading of the literary details.

In the literary representations we discuss in this part, I would closely look at the stories around legal matters and policy-making in the post-catastrophic period. In Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs*, Sarah, a restaurant owner, adopts Mary, an illegitimate daughter who bounced around from one foster home to another through an agency and gives her the new name Emmie. However, this adoption would be the beginning of a series of tragedies and unravel the secret, painful, traumatic memories of everyone around. Protagonist Tessie, a college student seeking a part-time job to enrich her life and avoid the unreasonable melancholy after the 9/11 event, was hired as a babysitter by Sarah to care for the adopted Emmie. As an only two-year-old girl, Emmie was extremely scared and anxious when she first met with Sarah in a welfare agency. As was told by the manager there, according to the state law, the child who has been adopted but abandoned once again should stay in a so-called transfer stop for a period and wait for the next possible parents' coming to pick them up.

Additionally, the potential parents have the right to select the proper child by bringing them to test for genes and infectious diseases, knowing the educational background of their biological parents, and considering more about their racial background. In this way, the law

maximizes the protection of all rights and interests of adoptive parents. Unfortunately, Emmie is a black child, which makes her an unwelcome member of the children who are waiting for adoption. She was adopted and abandoned several times, which makes the manager of welfare shamefully say there is a lack of white sources. In everyone's eyes, Emmie, as well as the other adopted children who are fragile and lack the laws' protections, are seen as a commodity to be traded.

In the first half of the story, Moore's depiction of the coldness of the characters' language hints at the cruelty of the law and the bleak atmosphere after the 9/11 events, making the whole novel's tone seem grey and despairing. However, Sarah's adoption of Emmie and their cozy family life gradually soften the novel's tone. For some inexplicable reason, Sarah seems to show extraordinary love to Emmie. Unlike other adopting parents, Sarah ignores the risk of discrimination associated with the adoption of a black child by a white parent and takes Emmie to the public. They go for parties, ice skating, snowboarding, enjoying gourmet food, music, and all the other things a natural parent should do. One day, when Emmie gets used to her new family and "mother" and soothes herself from the nerves of being abandoned and transferred from one place to another, Sarah tells Tessie that she has to give Emmie back to the welfare agency once again. The truth that has surfaced is desperate. Tessie realizes that the reason for this compulsory abandonment is that everything she has met is illegal. Sarah and her husband committed a crime that accidentally led to their own son's death several years ago, which means that they are never legal to adopt a child according to state law. The agency that introduces Sarah to meet with the welfare institution is also an illegal business. Even the adopted child, Emmie's biological father, is suspected of committing a crime of rape. In order to prevent prosecution, Sarah decisively relinquishes the continuation of Emmie's adoption. Accompanied by depictions of the fragile and fearful cries of a two-year-old girl at the time of the separation, as well as the traumatized account



of Tessie's sadness and powerlessness to fight back, Moore writes in chilling terms of the vulnerability of the weak groups in the face of the law.

Just like Tessie's despairing mourning: "What about the feelings of a two-year-old girl?" (Moore 2009, 250). Tessie's hopelessness shows how individuals' spirits are gradually destroyed by invisible social pressures.

Instead of directly stating the law's insensitivity and cruelty, Moore sarcastically points out that it only protects the interests of the strong and the capital but does not protect the interests of the weak and pushes the weak into even more brutal situations. Meanwhile, Moore is more interested in emphasizing that violence is not only brought about by fierce combat conflicts but can be caused by untouchable, invisible, and unchangeable conflicts of interest, often related to ideological formations and political sovereignty.

With many depictions of Tessie's shock, Sarah's hopelessness, Emmie's scarcity, and the agency manager's numbness, *A Gate at the Stairs* deeply reveals how depression becomes a universal emotion that permeates the atmosphere silently. Law-making violence brings traumas to every individual who shares the identity in the traumatized collectivity. The concept of family is frequently mentioned in the novel, which emphasizes that the members of Sarah all pursue a sense of togetherness. Having mistakenly lost their son several years ago, Sarah and her husband deserve a complete family. This willingness is similar to Tessie's hope for belonging to a city far from her hometown. Even little Emmie, who has not been able to speak a sentence, expresses her strong willingness to stay in a settled family to feel a sense of security. Everyone seems to seek collectivity in settling down. No one breaks away from a collectivity before and after Emmie is taken away. Sarah still runs her restaurant, Tessie returns to college, the agency's illegal business is still secretly underground, and Emmie returns to the welfare agency again. However, the spread of depression caused by the invisible traumas exacerbates everyone's sense of isolation, a sense

of mourning for what was once cozy and beautiful, and a resistance to the invisible social pressure. Therefore, under such objective violence's force, no one can genuinely belong entirely to a collectivity, and each person's spirit within the traumatic feelings will defend itself with isolation.

Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs* is written in a metaphorical way to depict the mental traumas that the 9/11 event inflicted on the individuals and the collectivity. The author deliberately sets the story in the months immediately after the 9/11 event and describes the protagonist's unreasonable melancholy and the bleakness of the rendering environment. The story revolves around a series of traumatic events in the protagonist's life, which are relevant to issues like illegal adoptions, racial discrimination, and the war in Afghanistan that led to her brother's death. In her writing, she emphasizes that the indirect traumas brought by social objective violence are even more drastic than the direct violence in the human spirit. Through the story, the author not only strongly criticizes objective violence but also represents it as a metaphor for the fact that the harm caused by the 9/11 event is not only to the directly affected witnesses but indirectly to the entire collectivity. This indirect harm lays out the collective traumas and brings collective isolation as a consequence and a social disease. At this moment, the sense of collective isolation implies a kind of passive detachment from a society that the individuals are actively approaching but failing to do so. Feeling collective but isolated becomes a subjective choice rather than a natural affective response to the collective traumas. Through Tessie's memories around the post-catastrophic traumatic events, Moore shows her deep concerns about the debates on the bourgeois social contradictions of law, race, war, capital, and cultural hypocrisy that may have contributed to the 9/11 terrorism.

Similarly, in the self-writings about the Chinese pandemic, the traumatic events that were not directly related to the suffering caused by the disease appeared like a chain reaction of the

catastrophes. Most of them were reported as the indirect consequences of the disease. Let us initially see a self-writing posted on one of the Chinese primary social media Weibo, on November 25, 2022:

“那些在转运方舱过程中车祸身亡的贵州同胞，那些在隔离酒店坍塌时遇难的湖北同胞，那些在静默中遭遇大火罹难的新疆同胞，他们每个人都有名字，自己的人生故事，他们都死于愚蠢、冷漠和残忍，难道我们不能知晓了解吗？”（巨流棹影于微博发表于 2022 年 11 月 25 日）

*“Those compatriots from Guizhou who died in a car crash during the transfer of the square cabin, those compatriots from Hubei who were killed when the quarantine hotel collapsed, those compatriots from Xinjiang who died in a fire in silence, each of them has a name and a life story of their own, and all of them died of stupidity, indifference, and cruelty, can't we know and understand that?”* (written by Weibo user Juliuchuoying and posted on Weibo, on November 25, 2022)

In this post that expresses anger and skepticism, we can see the author reflecting on and questioning the successive quarantine accidents in several sentences, expressing the survivors' sympathy and humanistic concern for the lives of those who lost their lives by accident. What is more important is the author's frustration with the limited transparency when the mainstream media reports and disseminates the incidents.

On the following day, 26 November 2022, another writer, like the one mentioned above, posted on Weibo about a series of tragic events during the quarantine period:

“新疆乌鲁木齐火灾、北京疫情爆发、北京体育大学学生发烧无人问津、广州防控冲卡事件、贵州大巴事故、兰州煤气中毒的3岁小孩、步行回家的富士康员工……感觉我们的家园已经病了很久，我们却无能为力……”

一些今天的 pyq 摘抄

‘此内容因违规无法查看’

‘此内容暂时无法查看’

‘此内容已删除’

‘站方已开启评论精选’ ”（篮球之声于微博发表于2022年11月26日）

*“Since the fire in Urumqi, Xinjiang; outbreak of epidemic in Beijing; unattended fever among students at Beijing Sport University ; Guangzhou’ s prevention and control of barrier-raiding; the bus accident in Guizhou for transferring the quarantined patients; the 3-year-old child poisoned by gas in Lanzhou during quarantine; Foxconn employees walking home ..... It feels like our homes have been sick for a long time, and we cannot do anything.....*

*Some stories have been extracted from WeChat Moments.*

*‘This content cannot be viewed due to an offense.’*

*‘This content is temporarily unavailable.’*

*‘This content has been deleted.’*

*‘The site has opened a selection of comments.’”* (written by Weibo user Lanqiuzhisheng and posted on Weibo on November 26, 2022)

In this posting, there was a similar questioning of the tragic events in the quarantine period that led to the pain of traumatized people because of the lockdown, and there is a similar

sense of anger at the lack of transparency in the dissemination of information. The author is more direct in pointing out that it is not only the people who experienced the sickness during the pandemic but also the society. Therefore, this posting indicates that the outbreak of the disease is a subjective violence that traumatized people for a moment. At the same time, the long-lasting pain derives from the objective violence that drives the emergence of a sick society. The sickness of society is what Lu Xun uses in his metaphor for the *Iron House*. In his preface of the *Call to Arms*, he stated that his literature aims to expose the sickness and suffering of society and draw attention to healing. This social sickness is as contagious as an infectious disease, which leads to traumas for individuals who identify themselves with the cultures of the sick society to become collective.

After reading the novel and the self-writings that reflect on the collective traumas of the 9/11 event and the pandemics, we realize that, in either event, the embodiment of the catastrophes is more than the catastrophic event itself. Subjective violence in the catastrophic aftermath transforms into the objective violence, which gives the traumatized subjects a secondary trauma. In the representations we read about the 9/11 and pandemic aftermath, such objective violence is mainly manifested in a form of an invisible social surveillance. Under the invisible pressure, individuals who experience the objective violence are unable to resist because they cannot find the objects of resistance. However, they are plunged into great political depression because of the inability to resist. This kind of indirect mental trauma, which is also recognized as a secondary trauma in a catastrophic aftermath, exacerbates individuals' mistrust of the collective politics, which leads to a sense of collective isolation in a socio-political realm.

## 4. Conclusion

From a medical term to a cultural expression, collective isolation shows a dynamic relationship between individual and collective traumas. Collective isolation is not merely a term that depicts a traumatized mental state interiorly. Moreover, it shows that the traumas may grow intensively when a traumatic event continuously has effects on an individual's physical body. Therefore, the catastrophic events may lead to collective traumatic reactions by persistently affecting the individual bodies. Therefore, the embodiments of personal traumatic reactions are initially captured through one's bodily actions. In this thesis, the dislocation of one's subjectivity when engaged in an intimate relationship becomes a primary point of exploring the sense of collective isolation.

In most catastrophic events, the destructions brought by the catastrophic moments are not the only sources of the individuals. Instead, the tragic events that happen followingly as a catastrophic aftermath will be an invisible hand that puts the traumatized individuals to a deeper hole. At this moment, the subjective violence transforms to an objective violence, which continuously leads to the mental disorders of a traumatized subject. The unspeakable melancholy deepens the sense of isolation and deconstructs the ideal concept of a collectivity. Therefore, the collective isolation becomes an embodiment of the individuals' political depressions under sovereignty.

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