ReSciLac

Revue pluridisciplinaire Lettres, Langues, Arts, Communication, sciences humaines et sociales
ISSN : 1840-8001

1er semestre 2025

(juin 2025, vol.10)

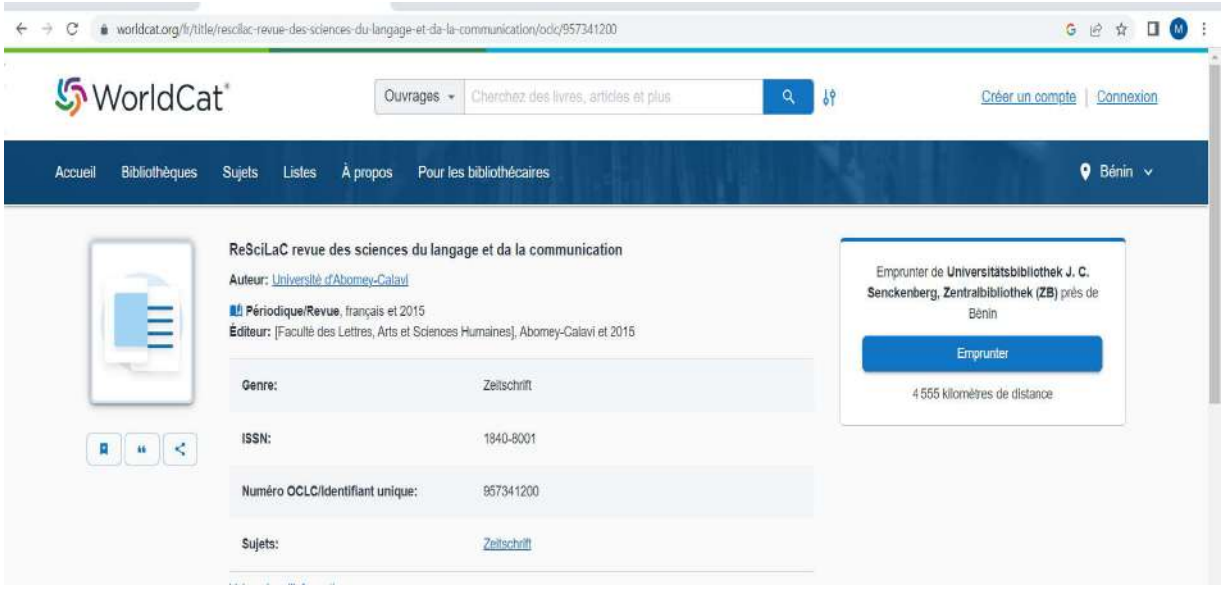
Université d'Abomey-Calavi

Indexation : Worldcat, Stanford Libraries, Penn Libraries, Zeitschriften DatenBank

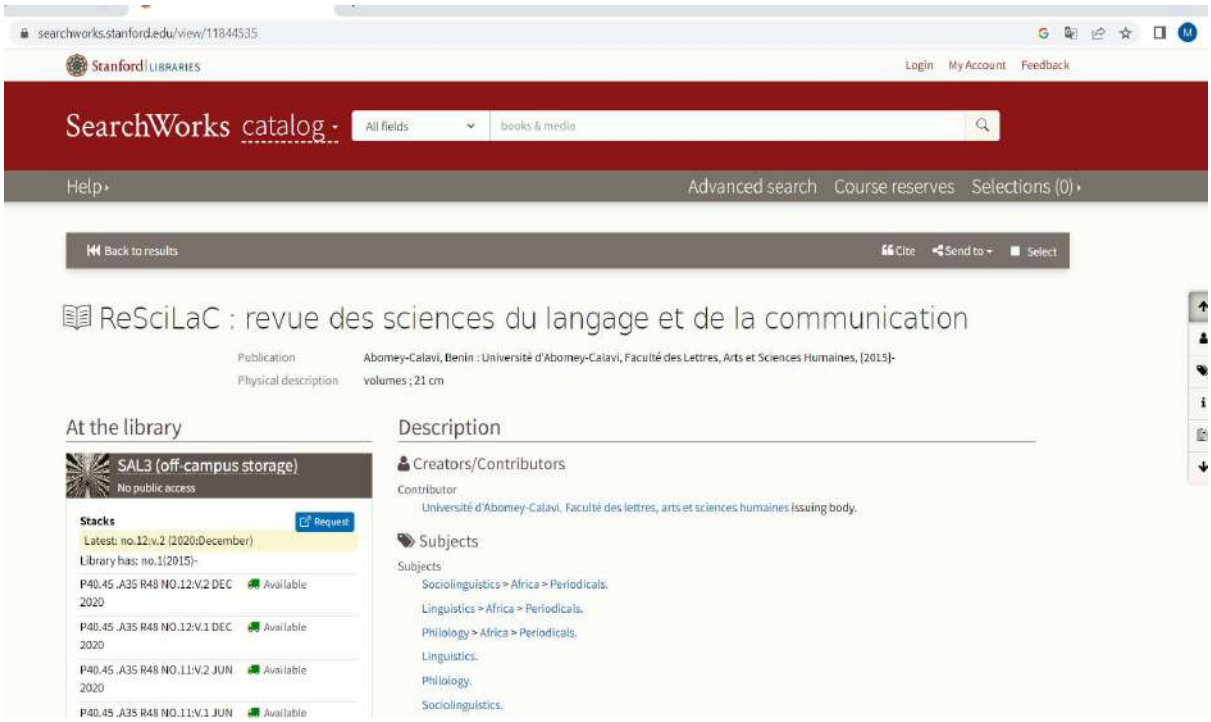
Preuve de l'indexation

- http ://www.worldcat.org/title/rescilac-revue-des-sciences-du-langage-et-da-la-communication/oclc/957341200
- https ://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/11844535

Indexation ReSciLaC (WorldCat)



Indexation ReSciLaC (Stanford)



Université d'Abomey-Calavi
Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication
Laboratoire des Sciences du Langage et de la Communication
SODYLARY / UAC – 2025

ReSciLaC Vol.10

1er semestre 2025 (juin), vol.10

Adresse
Unité de recherche en Sociolinguistique, Dynamique des Langues et Recherche en Yoruba
Laboratoire des Sciences du Langage et de la Communication (LaSciLCom)
Université d'Abomey-Calavi.
laboratoiresociolinguistique@yahoo.fr
Site : https://revues-uac.org

Consignes aux auteurs

Modalités de soumission

Les articles doivent être envoyés au directeur de publication à l'adresse suivante : **laboratoiresociolinguistique@yahoo.fr ou directement à partir du site de la revue (https://revues-uac.org/).**

Chaque proposition est évaluée par deux instructeurs anonymes dans un délai d'un mois (les propositions sont anonymées pour la relecture). Un article proposé pourra être refusé, accepté sous réserve de modifications, accepté tel quel. Les articles peuvent être rédigés **en français, en anglais, en allemand, en espagnol et en yoruba.**

Ils doivent comporter un résumé de 20 lignes maximum en français et en anglais, ainsi que 5 mots-clefs en français et en anglais. Le nombre de pages ou de caractères d'un article n'est pas limité. En revanche, un minimum de 8 pages est requis.

Présentation des contributions

Mise en forme

Format A4 ; Marges = 2,5 cm (haut, bas, droite, gauche) ; Reliure = 0 cm ; Style normal (pour le corps de texte) : Police Centaur 15 points, sans couleurs, sans attributs (gras et italiques sont acceptés pour des mises en relief) ; paragraphe justifié, pas de retrait, pas d'espacement, interligne simple.

Titre de l'article : Police Centaur 16 points, sans couleurs, majuscules, gras ; paragraphe centré, pas de retrait, espacement après = 18 points, pas de retrait de première ligne, interligne simple.

Titre 1 : Police Centaur 14 points, sans couleurs, gras ; paragraphe gauche, espacement avant = 18 points, espacement après = 12 points, pas de retrait, pas de retrait de première ligne, interligne simple.

Titre 2 : Police Centaur 13 points, sans couleurs, italique ; paragraphe gauche, espacement avant = 12 points, espacement après = 6 points, pas de retrait, pas de retrait de première ligne, interligne simple.

Titre 3 : Police Centaur 13 points, sans couleurs, italique ; paragraphe gauche, espacement avant = 12 points, espacement après = 3 points, pas de retrait, interligne simple.

NB : notes de bas de page, numérotation continue, 1…2…3… ; Police Centaur 10 points, sans couleurs, sans attributs (gras et italiques sont acceptés pour des mises en relief) ; paragraphe justifié, pas de retrait, pas d'espacement, pas de retrait de première ligne, interligne simple.

Références bibliographiques : Police Centaur14 points; paragraphe justifié, pas d'espacement, interligne simple. Retrait d'une tabulation à partir du début de la deuxième ligne de chaque référence.

Exemples :

Blakemore, D. 1992. Understanding Utterances. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers.

Braconnier, C. 1993. Quelques aspects du passif mandingue dans saversion d'Odiène. Linguistique Africaine 10 : 29-64.

Casali, R. 2008. ATR harmony in African languages. Language and Linguistics Compass 2/3 : 496–549.

De Korne, H. 2007. The pedagogical potential of multimedia dictionaries. Lessons from a community dictionary project. The 14th annual stabilizing indigenous language symposium in Michigan on 1-3 June 2007. Consulté le 1er février 2012 sur http ://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILR/ILR-11.pdf.

Présentation

ReSciLaC (Revue des Sciences du Langage et de la Communication) est une revue de l'Unité de recherche en Sociolinguistique, Dynamique des Langues et Recherche en Yoruba (UR-SODYLARY) du Laboratire des Sciences du Langage et de la Communication (LaSciLCom) de l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC). ReSciLaC est une revue pluridisciplinaire en Lettres, Langues, Arts, Communication. Elle accueille des contributions abordant un grand nombre de champs d'études des sciences humaines et sociales.

ReSciLaC permet de faire la diffusion de travaux de jeunes chercheurs ou de chercheurs confirmés en sociolinguistique, en linguistique, en didactique des langues, en communication, en littérature, en philosophie du langage, en sciences de l'éducation, en sociologie, en histoire des sciences et techniques, en histoire de l'art, en histoire contemporaine, etc.

L'objectif de ReSciLaC est d'encourager des discussions scientifiques et théoriques les plus larges possibles portant aussi bien sur les sciences humaines, les sciences sociales.

Ethique et authenticité

Pour lutter contre le plagiat, nous utilisons l'application en ligne **Grammarly – plagiarism-chercker** pour vérifier les contenus des articles publiés. Un code QR pour la revue. Ce code QR personnalisé contribue au renforcement de la sécurisation et de l'authentification des articles.

SOMMAIRE

SCIENCES DU LANGAGE & LETTRES

LANGUES

SCIENCES DE L'INFORMATION ET DE LA COMMUNICATION

Langues

NO FUTURE FOR THE INNOCENT: GENDER, WAR, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD IN PAT BARKER'S *THE SILENCE OF THE GIRLS*

Nannougou SILUÉ
Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire)
silue_nannougou@yahoo.fr

Résumé
The Silence of the Girls (2018) de Pat Barker dépouille la guerre de Troie de son vernis héroïque. Le roman met à nu la manière dont la conquête patriarcale dévaste la vie civile, efface l'enfance par des massacres préventifs et une exclusion narrative, manipulant l'autonomie reproductive par la contrainte sexuelle, et fait s'effondrer la continuité générationnelle en exterminant les héritiers de sexe masculin et en s'appropriant l'avenir reproductif des femmes. Barker étend l'engagement littéraire britannique sur la guerre au-delà du traumatisme des champs de bataille, dévoilant l'illusion fragile de la protection des civils sous un régime militarisé. La conquête patriarcale ne se limite pas à la victoire territoriale ; elle infiltre les corps, fracture les liens de parenté, et anéantit la possibilité même de survie générationnelle. Les garçons sont neutralisés – avant même d'atteindre l'âge d'homme –massacrés s'ils sont jugés aptes au combat, réduits en captivité comme menaces latentes, ou effacés entièrement de la mémoire narrative, comme si leur existence même devait être éradiquée pour assurer la suprématie ; l'autonomie reproductive s'effondre ; les liens de parenté se désagrègent sous l'emprise du pouvoir impérial. À travers Briséis, qui parle depuis les marges fracturées de la captivité, le récit capture la désintégration de la lignée et de l'autonomie provoquée par la subjugation du genre. Cette analyse s'appuie sur la polémologie féminine pour canaliser la critique du patriarcat militarisé (Sjoberg, 2017 ; Enloe, 2017) et mobilise la théorie du traumatisme pour montrer comment la guerre défait l'identité et la continuité civile (Malabou, 2012 ; Hirsch, 2019). Les analyses de Russo (2020) sur l'enfance assignée enrichissent encore cette lecture. Ensemble, ces perspectives ancrent *The Silence of the Girls* dans le canon évolutif de la fiction britannique sur la guerre, en retraçant comment la violence patriarcale s'étend jusqu'aux structures les plus fragiles de la survie générationnelle.

Mots-clés : Littérature, genre, guerre, enfance, patriarcat, génération

Abstract
Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) strips away the heroic veneer of the Trojan War. The novel exposes how patriarchal conquest devastates civilian life, erasing childhood through pre-emptive slaughter, and narrative exclusion, manipulating reproductive autonomy through sexual coercision, and collapsing generational continuity by extinguishing male heirs and appropriating female reproductive futures. Barker extends Britain's literary engagement with war beyond battlefield trauma, unveiling the brittle illusion of civilian protection under militarized rule. Patriarchal conquest reaches beyond territorial victory; it infiltrates bodies, fractures kinship, and extinguishes the possibility of generational survival. Boys are neutralized before they become men – slaughtered if of fighting age, taken captive as potential threats, or erased entirely from narrative memory, as if their existence itself must be extinguished to ensure imperial domination; reproductive autonomy collapses; kinship disintegrates under imperial control. Through Briseis, speaking from the fractured margins of captivity, the narrative captures the disintegration of lineage and autonomy wrought by gendered subjugation. This analysis foregrounds feminist polemology to frame the critique of militarized patriarchy (Sjoberg, 2017; Enloe, 2017) and draws on trauma theory to expose how war unravels identity and civilian continuity (Malabou, 2012; Hirsch, 2019). Russo's (2020) insights on childhood under siege further expand the interpretation. Together, these perspectives anchor *The Silence of the Girls* within the evolving canon of British war fiction, tracing how patriarchal violence extends beyond the most fragile structures of generational survival.

Keywords: Literature, gender, war, childhood, patriarchy, generation.

Introduction

Feminist theorists have long argued that war reshapes not only nations but bodies, identities, and generations as well. Yet literary representations of how conquest dismantles childhood remain comparatively underexplored. Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* addresses this silence, reframing the Trojan War as a narrative of gendered violence, reproductive control, and the systematic erasure of civilian futures in literature, cultural memory, and gender studies. Rather than celebrating heroic conquest, Barker's novel under study traces how patriarchal militarism preys upon those excluded from the battlefield: women, enslaved civilians, and children. Through the voice of Briseis—a woman stripped of freedom, family, and lineage—the novel exposes how boys are pre-emptively slaughtered, unborn children are reduced to instruments of political dominance, and the very fabric of generational continuity collapses under conditions of war.

This analysis situates *The Silence of the Girls* within a broader tradition of British civilian war literature, while contributing to evolving debates in feminist polemology, and trauma theory. Drawing on Laura Sjoberg's (2016) work on gendered violence, Cynthia Enloe's (2017) critique of militarized patriarchy, and Katherine Russo's (2020) cultural analysis of childhood under siege, this article examines how Barker dismantles the cultural ideal of childhood innocence and reveals its strategic destruction within imperial conquest.

Further, the analysis draws on Catherine Malabou's (2012) concept of destructive plasticity and Marianne Hirsch's (2019) work on generational trauma to argue that the novel constructs family collapse and lost futurity as central, rather than incidental, to the logic of war. In doing so, *The Silence of the Girls* challenges the narrative silencing of children and uncovers how conquest extends beyond visible violence, targeting both the present and the unborn as tools of imperial power.

The following close reading of how Barker's narrative constructs gendered war as an assault on childhood, lineage, and generational survival will explore this process through three interconnected prisms: the weaponization of children, the collapse of reproductive agency, and the disintegration of familial structures –each illustrating how patriarchal conquest dismantles civilian futurity at its roots. The first section traces how boys and unborn children become targeted objects within a militarized system of conquest.

1. Erasing the Future : Insight into Patriarchal Conquest and the Assault on Lineage

The erasure of civilian future in *The Silence of the Girls* does not begin at random. It follows a clear patriarchal militarism logic. It begins with boys, eliminated before they can inherit power or lineage. In Barker's world, the assault on childhood is not incidental. It is a calculated act of conquest, where the destruction of the future generations reinforces male dominance.

I.1 Targeting Boys as Embryonic Threats: Gender, Power, and Generational Erasure

In *The Silence of the Girls*, Pat Barker – a writer firmly situates within Britain's long tradition of war literature – dismantles the classical narrative of heroic conquest by exposing the systematic targeting of boys within patriarchal militarism. Through Briseis, whose dual status as both queen of a fallen city and enslaved concubine positions her at the margins of gender, power, and resistance, Barker reveals how civilian childhood is not

spared, but weaponized within structures of domination. This narrative approach aligns with the broader trajectory of British literature's engagement with hidden casualties of war. From the trench poetry of Sassoon to Barker's own *Regeneration* trilogy, British writing has interrogated how militarism fractures not only soldiers but civilian structures—here, the erasure of childhood marks the deepest wound. Briseis reflects through these words: "For once, women with sons envied those with daughters, because girls would be allowed to live. Boys, if anywhere near fighting age, were routinely slaughtered. Even pregnant women were sometimes killed, speared through the belly on the off chance their child would be a boy" (Barker, 2018: 11).

The juxtaposition of *"allowed to live"* and *"routinely slaughtered"* reframes survival as a politically contingent outcome, not a biological given. Briseis speaks not as an omniscient observer but from the liminal space of the defeated. Formerly royal, now captive, her insight is shaped by the collapse of familial structures. The phrase "if anywhere near fighting age" collapses the boundary between child and soldier, underscoring how patriarchy annihilates male civilian potential before resistance can materialize.

Such narrative destabilization reverberates with British war literature tradition, where the illusion of civilian protection repeatedly fractures under the realities of empire and conflict. Laura Sjoberg's *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (2016) on gendered militarism clarifies the mechanism at play. She shows how patriarchal warfare constructs domination by feminizing perceived threats, eroding boundaries between civilians, soldiers, and even children. This is profusely deciphered in the following words: "the manliness of soldiers is proved by the degree to which they are able to feminize other soldiers – either directly or by taking dominion over 'their' women" (Sjober, 2016: 17).

Barker's manipulation of narrative perspective reinforces this critique in a very blatant way. Unlike Homer's epics, where war unfolds through heroic masculine lenses, Barker centres on Briseis, a woman severed from both power and kin – as firsthand witness. Her gaze captures the tragic futility of boyhood resistance which is clearly expressed as follows: "A couple of boys – ten or eleven years old, too young to fight – occupied the top of the stairs and pretended to drive back the invaders" (Barker, 2018: 11).

In the same drive and more importantly in terms of indelible impacts, the action verb 'pretended" – imagining, faking, or acting as if true – reveals the impossibility of agency within militarized conquest. The boy's performance of defence appears as both symbolic and fatal. Their actions stripped of efficacy by the same structures that simultaneously render them symbolic defenders and reclassify them as threats. These boys, products of the elite Trojan families, embody the spectral remnants of civilian future, eliminated before adulthood. Here, the British literature tradition of interrogating empire's casualties is undoubtedly embedded here. Baker, like many British novelists before her, reframes mythic warfare to expose its civilian erasures, particularly among the young. This logic is genuinely expressed in Briseis' observation in these words: "No pregnant women among them, I noticed. And no mothers leading small boys by the hand. Agamemnon had been as good as his word" (Barker, 2018: 251). Agamemnon –military leader, patriarchal emblem, and narrative symbol of imperial power – enforces erasure through biological

control. The absence of "pregnant women" and "small boys" signifies more than strategic victory; it signals the obliteration of generational continuity. This absence illustrates a calculated elimination of both reproductive potential and future male resistance: unborn children are prevented from existing, and young boys – seeds bearers of the future warriors –are eliminated to secure imperial dominance. In this way, biological control becomes a mechanism of conquest, where fertility is suppressed and lineage is deliberately severed.

Barker's choice to channel this erasure through Briseis, an enslaved narrator stropped of status however embedded within the conqueror's household, aligns with Britain's literary tradition of exploring war through marginal, civilian perspectives. From Sassoon's disillusioned soldiers to Barker's reimagined classical figures, British literature has persistently interrogated how militarism obliterates the most vulnerable.

Thus, *The Silence of the Girls* reconstructs the patriarchal warfare not as a tale of battlefield glory, but as a narrative of generational annihilation, exposed through the silenced, civilian gaze. The destruction of boys, and the targeting of unborn male heirs, prefaces the broader manipulation of women's reproductive autonomy –the next axis of imperial control to which the analysis now turns.

I.2 Reproductive Violence and the Erasure of Unborn Generations

Briseis, once the daughter of a ruling house in Lynessus, narrates her own reduction from royal kinship to reproductive capacity**.** Consequently, it displays a trajectory that reflects how patriarchal conquest dismantles civilian futures through gendered biological control. Her fall from power could not be seen as an isolated act or an unconnected element to any related action… is not isolated**.** It is a familiar arc within Barker's world, where the enslavement of women, the forced erasure of their autonomy, and the manipulation of reproduction converge to sustain imperial dominance; The following first-person narration testifies: "If I'd had a baby – a son – everything would have changed, but at the end of a year I was still wearing my girdle defiantly tight until at last Maire, made desperate by her longing for a grandchild, pointed at my slim waist and openly jeered. (Barker, 2018: 13). This clear statement illustrates how Briseis' value was explicitly tied to her reproductive role, and how failure to produce a male heir triggers both personal contempt, familial shame, and political replacement. It reinforces the novel's portrayal of female autonomy as contingent and disposable under patriarchal imperialism.

It is no coincidence that Barker – a leading voice in contemporary British war fiction–places this narrative at the heart of *The Silence of the Girls.* As with earlier works which tackle issues like psychological trauma, repressed memory, and the moral injuries of war, notably *Regeneration,* Barker draws upon Britain's long literary tradition of interrogating the hidden scars of the conflict. However, in *The Silence of the Girls,* she reorients that tradition toward the mythic past, shedding light on the erased voices of women whose suffering has been marginalized or romanticized in classic narratives. Rather than focussing on soldiers' mental breakdowns, Barker here chronicles the psychological rupture of civilian women subjected to conquest, capacity, and reproductive violation. The novel thus not only extends the thematic concerns of her earlier work but also critiques the gendered frameworks through which war is typically remembered and recorded. In

doing so? Barker reclaims myth for feminist historiography, exposing how violence against women is fundamental – not at all peripheral –to heroic warfare.

The destruction of lineage is not just limited to visible heirs. It invades the womb because patriarchal conquest seeks not only to dominate territory, but to seize and control reproductive futures. Barker articulates this most clearly in the quiet terror surrounding Ismene. This is explicitly demonstrated with cleverness as follows "I noticed Ismene, who was four months pregnant with my husband's child, pressing her hands hard into her stomach, trying to convince herself the pregnancy didn't show" (Barker, 2018: 11). This moment encapsulates how war weaponizes the female body – Ismene's attempt to hide her pregnancy reflects a desperate bid for survival in a regime that targets unborn boys as future threats. Her gesture is both instinctive and futile, and also highlights how imperial power reaches into the most intimate and interior of space: the womb. Barker thus shows that reproductive autonomy becomes a battleground, where pregnancy is not a private condition but a visible and politicized risk under militarized rule.

The following statement – "pressing her hands hard into her stomach" - exposes the visceral intersection between fear and biology. Ismene, once a civilian, now an enslaved pregnant woman, embodies both maternal potential and political threat. Her attempt to "convince herself the pregnancy didn't show" underscores the false hope that concealment could protect against patriarchal violence. Still within the socio-military hierarchy of the Greek camp, visibility marks vulnerability. Pregnancy, far from sacred, becomes the grounds for annihilation or appropriation. Cynthia Enloe's insight captures this condition precisely. It reveals how militarized systems systematically instrumentalize women's bodies to reinforce patriarchal control:

> Look at any government's military bases anywhere on the globe. Each of those military bases – American, Russian, Chinese, French, British, Saudi – depends in part on governments controlling soldier husbands' relationships with their civilian wives, who usually are left back at home (see Chapter Six). Simultaneously, each of those bases relies on cooperating with host government officials to regulate sexual relationships between military men (and militarized contractor men) and local or refugee girls and women in the vicinity. (Enloe, 2017: 83)

Barker's narrative structure reinforces this vulnerability through Briseis' reflective, constrained voice. As a narrator, Brisieis does not possess the omniscience of epic heroes. Her perspective is partial, fragmented by trauma, and shaped by social displacement. Even so, it is precisely this limited, gendered focalization that lays bare the mechanisms of reproductive control in times of war. Barker's choice to filter mythic events through an enslaved woman's eyes reflects a distinct trajectory in British literature – one where canonical myths are reframed to expose the gendered silences of history.

This manipulation extends beyond physical threat to the realm of psychological disintegration. The effects of gendered domination are internationalized, reaching into the private rituals and bodily autonomy of the captive. Briseis admits: "I still washed him out of me every morning – against my own best interests, Ritsa would have said" (Barker, 2018: 47). This simple act – washing – is loaded with meaning: it is both a symbolic rejection of the sexual violation she endures and an embodied resistance to erasure. Albeit her acknowledgement that this habit defies "her own best interest" reveals the complexity

of survival under subjugation, where preserving one's inner self may conflict with the external performance of submission necessary to avoid punishment. Barker uses this moment to show trauma is not only inflicted but also negotiated daily through repetitive acts that blur the lines between agency, coping, and despair. In that perspective, the novel powerfully illustrates how conquest dissolves the boundary between inner and outer life, making even one's body and gestures sites of contested meaning. Barker uses

The ambiguity of related to the use "him" "him" – being simultaneously invader, captor, and the biological imprint of enforced intercourse –illuminates the collapse of self and body under imperial domination. The phrase "washed him out of me" rejects the imposed lineage and personal violation. All the same, "against my own best interest" reflects the impossible calculus of survival: submission promises limited safety; resistance invites obliteration. Erin Baines (what is he or she? Mention it please) articulates this tension with conflict zones as clearly expressed here:

> Every girl who had reached the age of menstruation was forcibly married into each unit of the LRA, an deach unit replicated the familial compound […] Women could continue to fight alongside their commanders/husbands during this period, but were demobilized once they became pregnant and forced to live in LRA defence bases in Sudan (Baines, 2017: 38).

In Barker's camp, these biological futures populate the space with unsettling familiarity as it can be remarked in these words: "all over the camp women were pushing big bellies in front of them or carrying tiny, mewling babies in their arms" (Barker, 2018: 46). The imagery – "pushing big bellies" – strip motherhood of sentimentality, exposing reproduction as a visible extension of patriarchal warfare. These pregnancies do not signify joy or legacy, they manifest imperial control over the conquered. The women, uprooted from their social bonds –from kin, territory, and autonomy – now bear the next generation of the oppressor. In such a context, it appears quite significant that Barker, while writing within…. is meant to transform… It is significant that Barker, writing within the British literary tradition of post-war disillusionment, transforms the epic genre to foreground such corporal vulnerability. The Trojan War, long mythologized in Western culture, becomes, in her hands, a canvas for interrogating the silences around gender, captivity, and reproductive violence – silences equally present within Britain's own literary history of empire and conflict. Catherine Malabou's theory of destruction plasticity clarifies this ontological rupture in these coming lines:

> "The recent intensification of interest in the inherent plasticity of the brain – its developmental openness, its always evolving structure in the adult phase, and its often-startling ability to reorganize itself after significant trauma – puts considerable pressure on the technological conceptualizations of the brain (Malabou, 2019: 114).

Nonetheless, as Malabou's work suggests, trauma is not only destructive but also carries a paradoxical potential for structural reformation at the neurological, bodily, and socially levels. This capacity for reorganization extends beyond a neutral adaptation; it penetrates the corporeal and reconfigures the social world. Through enforced reproduction, Barker shows how women's bodies become sites where survival and annihilation coexist– the child carried as both life and evidence of conquest. This coexistence blurs the lines between agency and violation. The body becomes a

battleground. What appears as regeneration is, in fact, a restructuring imposed by violence. Trauma, in Barker's narrative, is not simply endured; it is rewritten into the flesh.

Brisies, Ismene, and countless others become unwilling participants in the re-engineering of generational continuity. Their reproductive futures are hijacked by the same imperial logic that slaughtered their families and razed their cities. Their bodies serve as instruments through which lineage is redirected toward the conqueror's image. In this system, maternity becomes a function of conquest, not of kinship. The logic of domination persists through the womb.

The destruction of childhood and the manipulation of reproductive autonomy operate together as pillars of imperial domination. Yet these mechanisms of control do not only dismantle bodies. They also dismantle time. They cut off the transmission of names, stories, and cultural memory that give meaning to survival. This is more than trauma; it is a form of temporal collapse. Children are not only killed but unremembered. Grief becomes unspeakable when lineage itself has been obliterated. The narrative does not merely observe this process –it stages it.

2. Aftermath of the Conquest: Wounds of Motherhood, Silenced Memory, Collapse of Kinship

The collapse of kinship structures in Barker's retelling is not limited to broken families or silenced memory. It is extended to the most intimate level – the female body itself – where forced motherhood becomes both a personal trauma and a mechanism of imperial conquest. This assault on reproduction, and its consequences for bloodlines, is the focus of the following section.

2.1 Bloodline Under Siege: Highlights on the Inheritance of Forced Motherhood

In the *Silence of the Girls*, Barker – working within Britain's established tradition of reimagining classical narratives – unveils how patriarchal conquest infiltrates civilian life, not only merely through violence, but also through the systematic reconfiguration of lineage. Forced motherhood becomes both personal violation and a political mechanism through which imperial power rewrites the conquered body. Cases of illustration are plenty and chronology of events lead to a better understanding of the inheritance of forced motherhood in question. Consequently, Briseis, a former queen reduced to an enslaved concubine, narrates this generational manipulation from a position of fractured identity. Her voice reflects both insider knowledge of elite Trojan kinship structures and the eroded status of a captive woman. This dual positioning recalls a lineage in British literature, where reworking mythic or historical materials serves to interrogate imperial legacies –Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* or Jeanette Winterson's classical revision come to mind, though Barker's focus lies squarely on gendered war trauma. Her reflection remains unequivocal as paced in these terms:

> Some of the younger women had since had children by their Greek owners, and I'm sure they loved those children too – as women do – but when I spoke to them, it was the Trojan children they remembered, the boys who'd died fighting to save Troy. (Barker, 2018: 178).

The contrast within "loved those children too [...] but [...] it was the Trojan children they remembered" articulates the bifurcation of maternal identity under conquest. Love persists. But it does so in fractured, politically charged ways, where maternal attachment is divided between emotional bonds and the imposed hierarchies of imperial violence. In this context, maternal memory becomes selective, shaped not only by affection but also by the collective trauma of loss and the ideological weight of loyalty to one's own kind. Barker uses this split to show even the most intimate human emotions are filtered through the binaries of conqueror and conquered, memory and forgetting, survival and complicity.

Nethertheles, loyalty, memory, and generational belonging remain tethered to the defeated lineage. Barker's distinction between "Trojan children" and "children by their Greek owners," underscores the political weaponization of reproduction – a theme resonant across Britain's literary engagement with imperial control. Cynthia Enloe's scholarship illuminates this dynamic with precision as mentioned in this statement:

> Patriarchy has continued to depend on creating and sustaining an elaborately designed gendered cat's-cradle among these gendered actors. The strings forming this web of relationships can become frayed. They need constant reinforcing. While inattentive, non-feminist political scientists were monitoring elections, reading the fine print 131 in trade agreements, and eavesdropping on war-room debates, these patriarchal actors were devising new self-serving racialized and classed formulas for controlling marriage, divorce, reproduction, child custody, sexuality, and inheritance (Enloe, 2019: 130-131).

Furthermore, and still in the same vein, Barker complicatess this tension within the camp's altered domestic sphere. He profusely says: "Those who'd been here longest had children already fending for themselves around the fires" (Barker, 2018: 46-47). The expression "already fending for themselves" reflects the accelerated erosion of childhood, where survival supersedes developmental innocence. These children, born of forced unions, embody a generational rupture – neither wholly of the conquered, nor of the conqueror's society. Their presence destabilizes familial structures, echoing Britain's broader literary tradition of examining fractured lineages under imperial systems, from postcolonial narratives to contemporary rewritings like Barker's. The erasure of generational boundaries is crystallized in Barker's portrayal of the youngest captives in the following sense: "Of all the women in the camp these were the most wretched. Many of them carried the curious circular bruises that came from contact with the butt end of a spear. They lived around the fires, slept under the huts at night; the youngest of them were no more than nine or ten years old" (Barker, 2018: 47) The image of "circular bruises", coupled with the devastating youth of these girls, reveals how conquest preys upon bodies long before biological maturity, folding even prepubescent girls into cycles of domination. Barker's decision to focus on their visibility and social positioning aligns with a distinctly British literary concern for exposing the invisible violence beneath mythic or national narratives. This project is familiar in Britain's war literature, yet in *The Silence of the Girls* it is intensified through gendered and generational erasure. Through this layered portrayal of reproductive violence and coerced maternity, Barker positions forced motherhood not as incidental to war, but as a calculated mechanism through which patriarchal militarism

dismantles familial identity, weaponizes the body, and reconfigures lineage in the conqueror's image. However, generational erasure extends beyond biology. It fractures memory by severing intergenerational transmission – stories, names, rituals – that anchor personal and communal identity. It silences grief by denying the social frameworks that made mourning possible, reducing loss to a private burden without witness or cultural recognition. In this way, Barker's narrative underscores how conquest obliterates not only bodies and bloodlines, but also the symbolic systems that sustain memory, legacy, and civilian futurity.

2.2 Mourning, Memory, and the Silencing of Civilian Futures

In *The Silence of the Girls,* Barker extends her reimagining of The Trojan War beyond gendered conquest to expose the erasure of mourning itself –the obliteration of the emotional, familial, and cultural scaffolding that sustains generational continuity. Viewing things in such a way, she situates her narratives within Britain's enduring literary concern with the silences left by empire, war, and systemic violence. Briseis, whose status as both former elite and present-day captive sharpens her role as witness to trauma, reflects on the destruction of her family: "I thought of the corpses piled high in the marketplace and hoped the flames would get to them before the dogs, but even as the thought formed, I saw my brothers' dismembered limbs being dragged from street to street" (Barker, 2018: 21). The dismembering of her brothers literalizes the fragmentation of lineage. The imagery of "plied high" and "dismembered limbs" evokes not only physical ruin but also the collapse of generational structures.

Barker's decision to render these deaths through the constrained, subjective voice of Briseis mirrors a technique that stands at the center of British war literature – foregrounding marginal, civilian perspectives to critique grand narratives of conquest, much like Madox Ford's Parade's End or Barker's own Regeneration trilogy. Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory deepens this reading by unveiling how traumatic histories can overwhelm identity and fracture collective consciousness across generations. As she explains, "To grow up with overwhelming inherited mem ories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors [...] shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. (Hirsch, 2012: 5). Barker's narrative strategy aligns with this idea, as Briseis's voice channels not just personal memory but the spectral echoes of a dismembered lineage. Her experience is shaped by a past that resists closure, and her mourning becomes the site where familial continuity collapses under the weight of inherited violence. In this light, the silence that surrounds her loss is not absence but a resonant trace of generational rupture.

Through this lens, Brisieis's narrative becomes not merely a personal recollection of traumatic memory, but also a spectral echo of a disrupted lineage and shattered collective identity. Her voice stands in for those severed from kinship, history, and coherent futures. The wounds of loss(sts) are so profound that she abundantly laments as follows: "when so many other memories have vanished, I still get flashes of that smell, tugging at my heartstrings, reminding me of everything I lost. Then it was gone – and we were holding

on to each other again, slipping and slithering along alleys cobbled with our brothers. (Barker, 2018: 21)".

At this narrative juncture, Utban space collapses into human debris. This phrase "cobbled with our brothers" fuses geography and grief, transforming the ruined city into a landscape inscribed with human loss. The survivors' movement – "slipping and slithering along alleys" – further dehumanize their existence. The verb "slithering" – evokes involuntary motion, stripping survivors of dignity, agency, and coherent identity. The phrase "cobbled with our brothers » collapses the boundary between environment and loss, recasting the city as a terrain of government annihilation. Yet, in Barker's rendering, this devastation exceeds mere physical ruin: it encodes the city itself as a living monument to fracture kinship and erased futures.

This entanglement of environment and trauma resonates with the broader British literary tradition of spatializing devastation –rendering landscape as a living archive of loss. Thus far, in Barker's reworking of the classical canon, this tradition is intensified through a gendered, generational lens, exposing how conquest dismantles not only the physical city but also its lineage, its kinship structures, and its futures. Catherine Malabou's theory of ontological trauma, particularly her concept of destructive plasticity deepens this reading. It stipulates that trauma does not merely wound the body but fundamentally disrupts the continuity of selfhood, serving memory from identity and producing an existence detached from historical belonging. As Malabou argues, trauma can give rise to "a new, unprecedented persona… whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors noting to come" – a subjectivity born entirely from rupture and discontinuity (Malabou, 2012: xx).

> As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An recognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbours nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation. A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. (Malabou, 2012: 1)

In Barker's narrative, *The Silence of the Girls*, such ontological rupture is not abstract; it manifests directly through generational erasure and the collapse of civilian futurity. It is this severing of self from history that Malabou gives voice to, asserting that this condition produces existence without historical anchoring:

> We must all of us recognize that we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again, someone who will be this form of us without redemption or atonement, without last wishes, this damned form, outside of time. These modes of being without genealogy have nothing to do with the wholly other found in the mystical ethics of the twentieth century. (Malabou, 2012: 2-3)

This notion of "being without genealogy" resonates acutely within Barker's portrayal of war as a force that extinguishes both lineage and the psychological scaffolding of grief. Barker literalizes this annihilation of genealogical continuity in one of the novel's most devastating moments which is this: "Looking at her face, you could see how little it mattered to her. Less than an hour ago, Odysseus had picked up her small son by one of his chubby legs and hurled him from the battlements of Troy" (Barker, 2018: 251).

The image of *"chubby legs"* momentarily restores the child's vulnerability, evoking the innocence systematically obliterated patriarchal conquest. Yet Barker swiftly undercuts this fragility, positioning the child's death as both an intimate loss and a deliberate, strategic annihilation of civilian futurity. The mother's vacant expression – *"how little it mattered to her"* – signals more than personal devastation; it reveals the obliteration not of the very cognitive and emotional architecture required to grieve.

Such silencing of grief, the erasure of both lineage and mourning, echoes Britain's broader literary tradition of interrogating war's private, unspoken devastations. Barker's decision to filter this atrocity through Briseis – a marginal, enslaved woman severed from kinship – continues a trajectory seen in British narratives from Sassoon's trench poetry to Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy. Her reworkings of myth exposes how conquest obliterates not only cities and bodies but also familial continuity, memory, and generational identity. This mutilayered erasure – of kinship, lineage, and the psychological scaffolding of grief – reveals conquest not simply as territorial domination, but as a form of total control over life, death and generational continuity. Such domination reflects what Achille Mbembe theorizes as necropolitical power: the authority to dictate the very terms of life and death, and to render entire populations dead even before biological death occurs. He succinctly explains:

> Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely death's medium. It ever seeks to abolish the distinction between means and ends. Hence its indifference to objective signs of cruelty. In its eyes, crime constitutes a fundamental part of revelation, and the death of its enemies is, in principle, deprived of all symbolism. (Mbembe, 2019: 38).

In *The Silence of the Girls*, patriarchal warfare extends beyond visible conquest, infiltrating civilian futures by erasing children, collapsing lineage, and destructing generational transmission. Barker's novel thus inscribes itself within Britain's evolving literary reckoning with war – one that resists the romanticization of conquest, foregrounding instead its most profound civilian erasures. This destruction is no incidental by-product; rather, it lies at the heart of Barker's reimagining of mythic war. While her novel continues the long tradition of British war literature, she moves beyond the battlefield to expose the silent devastations of conflict. Her focus falls on the systematic erasure of civilian generations under patriarchal conquest, where the future itself becomes an ungrievable casualty.

Conclusion

In *The Silence of the Girls,* the destruction of kinship, lineage, and civilian futurity is total. It is deliberate. In Barker's hands, collapse is no side effect of war – it is its core strategy. Her novel joins Britain's tradition of war literature but lifts the focus beyond the battlefield, revealing how patriarchal conquest targets not only territory, but also bodies, reproduction, and generational survival. Like her *Regeneration* trilogy, Barker reframes mythic warfare not as a stage for heroic masculinity, but as a system of biological, generational, and psychological annihilation.

This article has traced how *The Silence of the Girls* pulls to pieces the myth of childhood protection in war. Barker demonstrates how boys are neutralized before they become men, how women's bodies are reduced to tools of conquest, and how family lines unravel under imperial violence. Through Briseis – both a fallen queen and an enslaved woman –we witness this slow erasure from within. Barker's work belongs to the broader British literary reckoning with empire and war. But she widens the lens. The obliteration of children, the silencing of grief, and the destruction of generational continuity advances this literary tradition, compelling readers to confront war's most private and concealed scars. This erasure does not end with ancient Troy. It speaks to Britain's own history – its own conquests, occupations, and control over civilian lives. Barker's use of myth exposes how deeply war invades bodies, fractures kinship, and steals the promise of the next generation.

Grounded in a close textual methodology, this article has drawn on feminist polemology to interrogate patriarchal militarism, trauma theory to explore fractured identity and generational rupture, and the tradition of British civilian war literature to contextualize Barker's intervention. In this regard, *The Silence of the Girls* extends British war fiction beyond heroic myths. It forces us to confront those deliberately silenced by conquest: the young, the unborn, the conquered. In such a perspective, Barker reminds readers that the deepest wounds of war fracture not only bodies, but extinguish the very foundations of generational survival. In her world, for the innocent, there is no future – only erasure.

References

Baines, E. K. 2017. Buried in the Heart: Women, Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barker, P. 2018. The Silence of the Girls. London: Penguin Random House.

Enloe, C. 2017. The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy. Oakland: University of California Press.

Hirsch, M. 2019. School Pictures in Liquid Time: Reforming Difference. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Hirsch, M. 2012. The Generation of Postmemory Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust. New York: Columbia University Press.

Malabou, C. 2012. The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity. Cambridge: Policy Press.

Mbembe, A. 2019. Necropolitics (Trans. by Seteven Corcoran). Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Russo, K. E. 2020. Children, War, and the Afterlife of Innocence: Narrating the Lost Future. *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 13 (1): 56-74.

Sjoberg, L. 2016. Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping. New York: New York University Press.