

**Aram PACHYAN**

## **On the Body**

In patriarchal societies, the body has a special role and meaning. When I was a teenager, boys with tiny and weak bodies had it rough. It seemed that their fragility and physical weakness was attracting violence.

The physical attributes of a “real man” included a short and round body, a fat neck, muscular arms and legs, and a certain shape of a belly that’s hard to describe—in addition, a face that conveyed anger and aggression.

When growing up, most of the boys were trying to force their bodies to meet these standards. For a lot of them, it wasn’t so much about being a “real man” as it was about making their lives easier in a brutal and violent world that was trying to impose “masculinity” on them.

For a long time, I thought of my body as an enemy, a threat, a trap for pleasure and tragedy.

My father was a surgeon.

The language of surgery is also the language of the body.

The surgery is performed through the body and is aimed at protecting the body, yet it is also a kind of “criminal act” aimed at exposing a hidden reality. Surgery entails crossing the boundaries of the body. In a way, it is a rebellion, an assault, a transgression towards the sacred borders of the body.

On the weekends, my father used to take me with him to the hospital. Walking from one patient to another, I felt a growing alienation towards my own body. I kept repeating to myself, “I don’t want to have a body. There is nothing worse than having a body.”

It is interesting that I always thought of *it* in the third person. *It, my body*, was always someone else.

It occurred to me later in life that this sense of alienation was essentially something physiological, perhaps a result of some complicated and contradictory activity of the neurons.

My sense of the unreliability of my own body reached its peak during my military service. Bullying in the army was quite normal. Patriarchal rules and traditions had penetrated the army, and every soldier followed them. Rejecting these traditions or breaking the rules that were passed through generations meant jeopardizing your body, your health, and ultimately your life.

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ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, September 14, 2018

Al-Nadi (Jordan), Ali (Pakistan), Goldberg (Venezuela), Pachyan (Armenia)

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In the army, there were so-called “dirty territories,” zones that were under a taboo. Dirty territories included toilets, sinks—even groves, benches, or an area of a field. Nobody was allowed to sit or lay down in these territories. If you dropped something there, you weren’t allowed to pick it up. If a soldier broke the internal rule, even accidentally, and was discovered, the “lawbreaker” was isolated from the squad. Nobody was allowed to touch him. He was disgraced and his body was desecrated. For the other soldiers, his body became the “dirty territory.”

In my first novel, one of the narrators who breaks this taboo by accident pays for it with his life. Nevertheless, he believes that he is still alive, that he has finished his service, and has returned home.

“*So what* if your body was desecrated and destroyed? That doesn’t mean you don’t have the right to live on”—this was the core idea of my novel.

Objectively, it is not possible to continue life without the body. Through politics, through laws, it is still possible to reduce vicious behavior in the Army, in Society. However, politics and laws only work within the framework of life—they cannot revive the dead body.

Nevertheless, I found a way to revive the dead body. It was through writing.

I heard my father exclaim many times, “The wound is healing. The patient will live!”

While writing my novel, I had the same feeling. “The paragraph is getting better. I can hear the narrator’s voice. His life continues.”

If what I’ve spoken about today sounds a bit naïve, I am not ashamed. Naivety is often considered a flaw, but there are times when such flaws are empowering.

Thank you.

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