

Somewhere, Home: Three Lebanese Women Suffering War and Displacement

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Abstract:

Somewhere, Home by the Lebanese writer, Nada Awar Jarrar, represents the unresolved traumatic effect of war and displacement on the individual memories of Jarrar's female characters. It gives an unconventional translation of the psyches of ordinary women "whose names did not survive in the history books and who could not influence the grand scheme of things" (De Mey 17). These women feel that the course of their lives has been controlled by the outside world rather than by themselves resulting in "the existential condition of post modernity [characterized by] uncertainty, displacement and fragmented identity" (Buruma np.). By that way, Jarrar exemplifies the Lebanese women writers who shy away from the overt description of war violence that the majority of their male peers stick to, and instead, investigate the less overt psychological dimensions of war through three female protagonists, each of whom is given a voice in one of the three sections into which the novel is divided. Beside the previous psychological disturbances, Jarrar tackles the ties to the 'home' land which lie at the heart of the novel's nostalgic memories. In this research, the researcher proves that the protagonists' nostalgic memories do not describe the actual past but the tensions of the present and their attempts to escape it.

The Lebanese Psychological trauma of the Civil War:

Memory is the last gasp of life...Here in this sea
of despair and waste and
sadness that is Beirut, events call up moments
that flash out of my past and
interpret the present. I am led by them through

a corridor of mirrors into
which I have wandered, looking for understanding.
Impelled by my own
private agony as I flail against the overwhelming
and pitiless force of
things around me, I am brought up short sometimes
by the reflection and
sometimes by the reality. I cannot always tell
which.

Jean Said Makdisi, *Beirut Fragments* 97

Series of power conflicts between competing religious and political Lebanese voices as well as external factors constitute what is habitually known as the drastic Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Each sect strives to maintain its power and autonomy by forging its own laws and by establishing its own schools and societal cleavages as 'apparatuses' to its own ideologies and then tries to mold Lebanon's present and future by enforcing its visions over the others. This makes Lebanon a platform for long periods of destruction and short periods of revival.

During the years of the Civil War, violence overwhelmed everyday life. Innocent civilians suffered irrational cycles of mass violence. Violence came in the form of mass killing, torture, kidnapping, random bombings and assassination on the basis of people's sectarian identities. Celine Righi estimates the number of victims in her study, *Lebanese Youth: Memory and Identity* (2014), as "144,240 people died [...] 197,506 were wounded, and 17,415 disappeared" (20). Those who were lucky were shocked by the destruction of what had constituted the memories of their pre-war lives.

As a reaction to all these traumatic changes, the war generation established:

nostalgic visual forms to refashion the country's imagination in a way that is represented by 'happy' and 'sanitised' memories of the pre-war period. The image of Lebanon as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" or the "Paris of the region" is demonstrated in the many postcards, calendars, advertisements and other visual forms that tend to display the city of Beirut in its former 'pre-war glory'. (Righi 24)

Although the Lebanese see the sites of destruction, upon looking they try to remember the pre-war condition of the place and their memories related to it. Righi believes that these past images however "have little to offer in terms of visions for the future" (25); it is life of absence through memory.

Moreover, many Lebanese families have been displaced during war which is, as Königstein indicates, "a distressing event in itself" (20). It includes both mourning for leaving the old country and struggle to adapt a new one about which they knew very little. Arturo Roizblatt states that displacement is "a process that poses risks for mental health" (513), as many of these families were psychologically unprepared to cope with the displacement experience; they lived in unfamiliar places, mostly under tough conditions, and lacked any social network. This led to an idealization of the past, escape from the present and desire to return to their native land. Yet, after the end of the Civil War, the Lebanese who returned to Lebanon had to go through a second adaptation since the pre-war country that they kept in their minds and fantasies had changed a lot, and to their surprise, not in line with their idealized images. The returnees rejected all kinds of changes "as an impulsive reaction to the erosion of familiar landmarks and icons" as Craig Larkin writes in his article, "Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory Experience" (2010). He explains this phenomenon as resistance memory, and in the case of the Lebanese, "it is the growth of Lebanese nostalgia as a means of resisting post-war changes and [even] the globalizing and homogenising forces of reconstruction" (618). In their exile, they expected that one day they would return to their 'home' country that would honour them for the hardships they went through. Instead, they faced an exhausted post-war country that did not remember them nor give attention to what they had experienced at home or in exile. Thus, returning to exile was the choice left to many Lebanese.

The Lebanese authors write about this drastic national experience and its traumatic outcome that is imprinted not only in their own individual memories, but in the collective memory of the Lebanese population. As the distinction between the personal and the public has been blurred, Lebanon becomes a suitable representation of Caruth's words, "[o]ne's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (8). Their works prove that during wars, the individual trauma is no more the person's own, but it becomes a small piece in the collective mosaic of tragedy.

Beirut Decentrists:

Danuša ČIŽMÍKOVÁ writes about the female Lebanese writers, "women surpassed their male colleagues in the outcomes of their creative activity as well as exceeded them in number" (146). According to Miriam Cooke, these women are "Beirut Decentrists" (3); they are decentered by the fragmented nature of the Civil War chaos along with the aftermath exile

experience. They belong to Arabophone, Francophone and Anglophone cultures, of different languages and ways of expression. Yet, the Civil War trauma unifies them.

Female Lebanese writers like Nada Awar Jarrar, aim at catching the hidden moods of war. They, like their male peers, revive the individual and the collective memories about war, but who, unlike them, present an alternative to the masculine pure war narratives. They take on a journey of creative writing to transfer the personal lives, the inner struggles and the traumatic experience of women in particular. In other words, their narratives are "character driven [narratives] in which the personal experience forms the focal point of the tale" (De May 20); their narratives are meant to be about ordinary human beings and not about faceless political events or direct preaching adopted by their male peers.

In their writings, they focus on the daily life of war and exile, on life that must be lived whatever the circumstances are. The narrator of *Beirut Nightmares* by Ghada al-Samman, for example, laments the displacement condition that overtakes her personal life because of war, and contemplates on things of daily usage that had once constituted her everyday routine:

So here I was again, hanging up my clothes on a clothes rack that didn't belong to me and washing my face in a bathroom whose tap I didn't know exactly how to use, not being sure just how much to turn it so as to keep water from either gushing out in torrents or coming down in a feeble trickle. I was using unfamiliar soap, drying my face on a towel that I was seeing for the first time[...]. As I lay there, I stared at cracks in the ceiling, which were different from the ones I'd grown used to in my own house. (37,38)

To emphasize the alienation of the individual from the surroundings, they zoom in the details that once would have been considered too trivial to write about, especially during the big times of war.

From a postmodern approach, these narratives refuse to follow the hegemonic war narratives. The aim of these women authors is to give a wake-up-call to the readers to notice the blind spots of war; to draw the reader's attention to a new kind of reality which is the unnoticed everyday facts of life. By presenting the psychologically complicated fictional characters, they "searched for human undercurrent; thus, transcending the individual experience to render it universal" (ČIŽMÍKOVÁ 147). For example, in his analysis of the mu'allaqa of Umru' al-Qays, Adunis points out that while the poet asks his two friends to share him his sorrow, the

mu'allaqa addresses all who sympathize with al-Qays' experience (78). Adunis suggests that in all these novels the writers draw the same effect in which the personal memory is shared with the greater public audience.

Belonging to the more complicated 'exilic' Lebanese female writers gives extensive significance to the questions of displacement, nostalgia and identity crisis present in Nada Awar Jarrar's writings. Syrine C. Hout, a professor of English and comparative literature in the American University of Beirut refers that there has been a rise of "a full-fledged branch of Lebanese exilic (mahjar) literature" (190). Despite the social and the political peculiarities of the Lebanese context, these female Anglophone and Francophone writers achieve a wall-to-wall reaction in the universal readers. They help different readers access traumatic experience of whom for long considered as marginalized women in a marginalized part of the world. Being read worldwide, they use the sheer act of writing to make the others aware. Jarrar mentions this point in her interview in *The Daily Star* with May Farah. She expresses her happiness that *Somewhere, Home* has been published and distributed in Britain, because, as she puts it:

it gives people in the West a chance to read about the Arab world [...]. Hopefully, they will understand that our lives are like theirs, that we too are human beings with similar feelings of happiness, anger, frustration, joy, and people with histories [...]. This is the only way things will change: when people in the West see us as equal. (Farah 6)

The geographical distance from Lebanon does not end her up in an ivory tower nor break the psychological bond with her point of origin. Instead Jarrar expresses the complicated relationships with Lebanon and the notion of 'home' in general with nostalgia figuring prominently in the text.

Jarrar grew up in Lebanon but since the Civil War, she and her family have been in a continuous movement among different Western countries. Since then, her idea of a fixed home has been replaced by "dwelling in travelling" (Clifford 36). She feels that she must write about her 'home' country in order not to be totally uprooted; a feeling she will perfectly portray through her fictional characters. Fitting in a place where she does not belong to and belonging to a place where she does not fit in produce complex and non-linear narratives with psychologically split selves. By the mid of the 1990s, she found it possible to return to her 'home' land; to the place that she describes as "the only place in the world where I've ever felt the connection, where I feel home" (Farah 6). Jarrar's history of migration and diaspora makes her *Somewhere, Home* not a flash product but the fruit of long years of exile.

Rayyan al-Shawaf in the Lebanese *Daily Star* states that Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* addresses the broader postmodern condition: "the melancholic drama of exile, both physical and emotional, and the insistent pang of homelessness that gnaws at so many of modernity's abandoned and confused progeny" (8). This sense of in-betweenness or hybrid existence enlarges the symptoms of identity crisis. Trauma in general and the trauma of displacement in particular, "involves a radical sense of disconnection and isolation as bonds are broken and relationships [...] are put into question. Survivors feel, often justifiably, abandoned or alienated because of their differences with others" (Vickroy 23). In *Somewhere, Home*, the three female protagonists: Maysa, Aida and Salwa repeat Fanon's question in *Black Skins, White Masks*, "Where am I to be classified? or if you prefer, tucked away?" in their struggle with the experiences of departure and eagerness to find 'home' (113). The work asks what constitute home in such a fragmented nation and a deformed life. Even its notion of return echoes Edward Said's "all of us speak of *awdah*, 'return', but do we mean that literally or do we mean we must restore ourselves to ourselves" (*After the Last 3*). Thus, the work presents to the readers three complex female figures forced by war and displacement to be "out of place" (Said, "Reflections" 362); to be foreigners to others and to themselves.

Somewhere, Home is weighed down by memories and disruption of identities that keep the heroines in continuous search. That is why the reader finds the three heroines revisit the past in their desperate search in their roots and people from their past for home and for their inner selves. Maysa clarifies at the beginning of the novel, "I have returned to the mountain to collect memories of the lives that wandered through this house as though my own depended on it [...] I nurture a secret wish that in telling the stories of those who loved me I am creating my own" (Jarrar 4). Maysa, as the case with the other protagonists, hope to be entirely herself out of all these sufferings. For Jarrar's characters, identities spun by "nostalgic memories" is the salvation. However, the question that should be asked: Are these memories a kind of self-realization away from the surrounding bizarre circumstances or self-destruction keeping them imprisoned in the past?

Never entirely herself:

Somewhere, Home is a mixture of three different stories of three Lebanese women and other minor female characters that have no control whatsoever over their own stories. The narration shifts between the first-person present tense narration and third-person storytelling. Psychoanalysis

is obvious in the novel through Maysa's, Aida's and Salwa's traumatic effects of the periods of war and displacement on their selves, behaviours and decisions in life. The few months pregnant, Maysa abandons her husband, Wadih, and the war-torn Beirut and escapes to her ancestors' old village house in Mount Lebanon hoping to find her lost self in the corners of her ancient house and in the stories of its deceased residents. Being drawn as an outsider and faceless, Aida who left Lebanon with her family during the Civil War to the West cannot deal with her present life. As a result, she decides to cling to her childhood memories in Lebanon in the person of Amou Mohammed. From her hospital bed away from Lebanon, the old Salwa recalls and evaluates her past life and the consequences of being choiceless and voiceless in front of her husband's decisions to move endlessly in exile. Each of the mentioned characters struggles to find security and meaning in the reminiscent of the past. This keeps them in dire need to understand who they are or more accurately who they want to become.

Beirut of the Civil War no more resembles the old Beirut to Maysa. It is this unfamiliarity that transforms Maysa's homeland into exile and thus herself into "the yolk of an egg" characterized by weakness, emptiness and loneliness (Jarrar 10). Maysa could not preserve her identity in the midst of this chaos: "I am nothing like my former self, less poised and more vulnerable" (Ibid 27). Thus, she turns to define herself in reference to another person, her grandmother Alia. In such process, Maysa is not entirely herself, giving space to "Alia's spirit to stir in [her]" (Ibid 57). Alia is imprinted in Maysa's memory as a strong and hard woman who raised five children without her husband's presence. She never softened even to her five children to the extent that Maysa's father, says about her, "All those years, I only ever saw her cry once" (Ibid 56). Maysa hopes that she has inherited such strength from Alia to face the war out there, abandon her husband in Beirut, and raise her not-yet-born baby girl alone exactly as her grandmother did.

In a worn notebook, Maysa writes her own vision of Alia's history beside the story of Maysa's mother Leila and aunt Saeeda, in third-person, believing that their stories are her therapeutic means to nurture her sense of belonging and self-understanding. Yet, the researcher believes that these female figures in the notebook give an insight into Maysa's psyche as they share her psychological disturbance. As if she paints the unknown lives of her female ancestors with her own pains and disappointments. The notebook displays successive Lebanese generations of choiceless and voiceless women who hoped for a life but lived another. The result is psychologically suppressed women who are not entirely themselves including strong Alia.

Alia's children are the centre of her universe as she is to theirs. The father, Ameen, who is working in Africa does not exist in the children's lives except financially. Being entirely responsible for five children, four of whom are boys, Alia "harden[s] her resolve" and forgets her tenderness as a woman (Jarrar 28). She becomes her children's source of admiration, pride and strength, not knowing that behind her hard personality lies a weak one that "wish[es] herself far away and free of [the children]. She could never bring herself to tell anyone about her fear of waking up one day and abandoning her children, choosing instead not to allow herself to love them too much" (Ibid 20). Nobody ever knows that she was about to abandon this kind of life for new beginnings and new opportunities, a decision she forever ignores after being exposed to her boys' school collapse. Nobody knows that she has written a letter to her husband after the accident asking him to come home as she cannot bear that life alone anymore:

When the sun begins to set and the boys are washed and fed and preparing to sit quietly over their school work [...] That is when I think of you most, of the scent of you [...] I cannot see your face; your features, fine and grave, escape me [...]

Then other questions come to mind about what your life is like so far away and whether you have found your own comforts there, your own release. (Ibid 23,24)

Ameen and the majority of the male characters in the novel are absent physically and emotionally from home for professional success. "The men" Jarrar says "went off to war or to work and the women had to stay and cope" (Farah 6). Jarrar portrays them as not present to support their female counterparts against the hardships of life, but on the other hand, they create more psychological hardships by their absence. The pain of loneliness is Alia's secret like the other female characters in Jarrar's novel. She has never sent the letter and she has never told anybody about it not because she is a secretive woman but because she cannot speak them out except to silence and darkness when everybody is asleep in the "secret hour between dawn and waking" (Jarrar 24). She keeps silent and "accept[s] her fate like most women did in those days" (Ibid 28). As long as she cannot achieve her wishes to search for her own independent self, she has no choice except to be, as Jarrar puts it, "half-wife, half-mother and never entirely herself" (Ibid 65).

For Alia, having a girl without the supervision of a father is a burden that she will not get rid of except by marrying her off very young. Alia's feelings for Saeeda are that of clouded love but unclouded worry about the

girl's future. "She promised five-year-old Saeeda's hand in marriage to a first cousin's son", because she will never leave the girl to fall in love in her own (Jarrar 32). Young Saeeda is never aware of the overwhelming depression awaiting her future because of her mother's concerned plans. Young Saeeda, like all the girls her age, thinks that the world is hers. That is why, she shows a glimpse of resistance even if they turn out to be vulnerable to her mother's will: "I don't want to cover my hair", Saeeda insists, "I won't cover my hair" (Ibid 33,34). Her burial of the veil without her mother's knowledge is her answer. However, like all the women in the family, Saeeda wears the veil with or without her will as her will is not of much importance to others.

"We can't all be loved the way we want to be" is Saeeda's way to describe her tragedy (Jarrar 42). Her marriage at the age of fifteen dims the light in the child's eyes:

He was dressed up, his hair combed back, and after the wedding was sent home with a child on his arm, a child unaware of the dramatic turn her life was about to take. The marriage lasted less than a year, cut short by the groom's sudden departure for South America. He was never heard of again.

Saeeda lost her little-girl look and took on the responsibility of caring for her departed husband's parents. Until their deaths the old couple took from her all the attention they thought their due. (Ibid 34, 35)

After this experience, Saeeda is not entirely herself anymore to the extent that Alia herself cannot imagine the woman Saeeda has become. She turns to be a silent ghost, a robot more than a person moving in a nonstop routine of house work and caring for her old in-laws and parents: "If Saeeda noticed her mother's sadness, she didn't comment on it, discreetly handing the older woman a handkerchief and then moving on to something else" (Ibid 36). Unconsciously, Saeeda repeats her mother miserable life of wishing for new beginnings, new life, new chances and a new character: "Saeeda looked at her mother and felt a deep, wide anger moving through her body. She had a sudden urge to get up and run, anywhere, away from her mother's indifference, beyond the house and the village and everything", but her final words, "I don't want to leave our home. I never have" echoes Alia's by the end of her section, "our home"(Ibid 41, 42, 25). Both of them, like Maysa, Aida and Salwa, do not have the courage to change their lives to face the unknown out there; they try to find justifications for their own withdrawal states in their enduring connection to the house.

Leila, the last woman in Maysa's notebook, is a different kind of woman with a different kind of problem: hybridity and inbetweenness. On her first arrival to Lebanon after living in America since her early childhood, she feels "out of place"; a feeling that is strengthened by her ignorance of the country's language. Leila is wavered between two kinds of homes, a home that she does not know but only referred to by her parents as "back home", and a home she has lived in but without "a stirring weighted past" (Jarrar 49). Fitting in a home that she does not belong to and belonging to a home that she does not fit in lead to Leila's search for somewhere home. She does not share her parents' happiness on their return to Lebanon because she does not share their memories that can strengthen her bond with the land. Through her quick consent to Adel's marriage proposal, Leila believes that she can put an end to her confusion by creating her own bond and memories in Lebanon with her future husband. Yet, Leila's marriage deepens her dilemma. Her bond with her Lebanese husband does not prove to be strong enough because of his long goings for professional success, leaving loneliness and alienation overwhelming her. She tries hard to resist these feelings by moving in an endless circle of housework:

Just before Adel's return from work, she would stand on the bedroom balcony and ponder about the lives of those she saw walking past, thoughts of her parents and sister in Virginia hovering dangerously near [...]. Leila feeling the distance from her husband like a tearing at her heart, reminding herself again and again of the ties that bound them together. (Ibid 53)

Like the other women in Jarrar's novel *Leila* does not live the life she aspires to and, thus, does not become the character she wants, making her a woman not entirely herself and out of place.

Years after writing their stories in the notebook, Maysa's attempts to belong seem to be "half hearted" (Jarrar 71). The problem with Maysa's experience is that she continues to stand at the doorsteps of the mountain home, and completely imprisons herself in the past stories of others. She rejects any contact with anything related to the present, even with her husband and her now sixteen-year-old daughter, Yasmeena, who unlike her mother, knows the stories in the notebook by heart but then puts the notebook away in a cupboard and leaves the old house to post-war Beirut. "She knows who she is, Maysa", Wadih demands, "don't confuse the child" (Ibid 72). Maysa's infatuation by the past, as an escape from the traumatic war, takes over her personality instead of giving meaning to it. Through Maysa, as well as the other novel's heroines, Jarrar reveals the effect of war amnesia and escaping reality on the Lebanese identity: "This tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar

situations. When people come to concentrate selectively on reminders of their past, life tends to become colourless, and contemporary experience ceases to be a teacher" (der Kolk 4). Being imprisoned in the pre-war memories provides no sustainable identity, but it demands that they deny their present realities. Dayton adds: "the present comes to mirror the past and the torch of dysfunction gets passed down for one more generation" (1). Yasmmina, on the other hand, rejects her mother's world and she is "strong-willed" to accept the present and the future as it is with no comparison whatsoever with the far gone past (Jarrar 59). Yasmeena belongs to a generation that wants to learn from the Civil War mistakes and she is looking forward to "making a life of her own", writing her own story and being entirely herself (Ibid 59).

In the second story in the novel, Aida leaves Lebanon to Europe at the age of seventeen when the Civil War broke out. Running for her life with her family leaves her with the sense of guilt and shame for not participating her people in the struggle. "Thus guilt intensified [her] attachment to [her] native land [... and] led to an active rejection [...] of the new culture or to a lack of investment in embracing it" (Roizblatt 516). Feeling as an outsider in her new community leaves its heavy weight on her identity. The story shows Aida as a woman who prefers isolation, loneliness and secrecy, or as Foucault puts it "divided inside [herself and] divided from others" (777). For other people, she is defined as "brilliant Sara's younger sister" (Jarrar 95). Surprisingly, Aida does not mind being anonymous and voiceless to others and instead of facing her present, she seeks comfort in living in her classic books and her pre-war memories:

In her mind's eye she saw the sea, a soft, blue Mediterranean, and smelled the air that floated above it, a mixture of hope and God's breezes. She recalled the sounds that had once greeted her mornings, voices and places and the unrelenting hum of activity, so that even now, whenever silence came after her, echoes of a home long gone would rush into Aida's ears and fill her heart. (Ibid 76)

Lebanon is always in her mind through the imagined encounters between herself and the ghost of the deceased Amou Mohammed, the family's kind and honest servant, who has been murdered by a militiaman. Beside using his figure to restore an idealized version of the past, Aida's conjuration of Amou Mohammed indicates clinging to a mournful attitude out of her guilt of him meeting such a horrible end without being there.

Aida's life is paused at her childhood period to the extent that she works in a nursery to deal only with children and to lose any contact with her

surroundings, as if the Civil War has paralyzed her life at a certain point: the point before exile. She is an example of Dayton's psychological analysis:

The trauma survivor is reacting to the trigger situation with an intensity of emotion that belongs to another time and place which makes whatever is happening in the present confusing and difficult to work out. We're *projecting* our distorted thinking and our emotional pain from a past situation onto a situation in the present. (2)

That is why Aida has not fulfilled any achievements in Europe. Unlike Sara who has studied medicine, got married, had children and had a good job, Aida "put[s] [her] life on hold while waiting for the war to end back home" (Jarrar 108). In her exile, Aida's life takes on "a reassuring pattern" (Ibid 91): going to the nursery, having a walk in the park and eating dinner at home.

Her star child in the nursery is the three-year-old new student, Julian, because the reader finds out that he mirrors her invisible character. As a displaced child, Julian cannot be part of the students' circle and he treats everybody with "gracious detachment". Thus, he becomes invisible to his classmates, even to the only girl to whom he shows preference: "Julian approached Kokie one day and sat next to her, looking into her book and saying nothing. Aida watched as the little girl ignored him and continued to turn the pages of the book with the same regularity as before" (Jarrar 93). When Julian tells Aida about his departure with his family to Australia, Aida makes her decision to return to Lebanon.

Aida's complaints to Amou Mohammed's ghost, "I'm lonely here", "I feel so sad most of the time. It's as if the darkness will never leave me. I miss the light from home", and Sara's words, "I do know that you've never been happy here " prove that Aida feels that her day-to-day life in exile is a parenthetical period (Jarrar 101, 106, 108). She imagines her alternative life if she had stayed in Lebanon as a married woman to her past friend, Mark, "if it hadn't been for the war" (Ibid 104). Accordingly, her conjuration of Amou Mohammed with his question, "when are you coming home?" is a reminder of her longing to her land (Ibid 80). That is why, her decision to return is accompanied by the disappearance of Amou Mohammed's ghost.

In her last encounter with the ghost of Amou Mohammed, who acts as her subconscious, he warns her that things have changed in Lebanon after war. She has not given the warning any attention till her arrival to post-war Beirut. The unceasing movement, the deafening noise in the airport, the shabby dusty streets shocked her and filled her mind with doubts. Looking from the window of her parents' home where she grew up, she cannot find

the traces of Beirut that she used to see. She cannot find the old Beirut where she wandered with Amou Mohammed along the Corniche looking at the Raouche Rock, but she finds the marks of long years of war:

of anti-crafts rockets being fired between neighbourhoods, of people being dragged from their homes and dumped into mass graves half alive, of militias turned into protection mafias and of an absence of mercy in people's hearts. (Jarrar 105)

Unconsciously, Aida adopts a critical attitude towards everything, especially that she cannot find her past memories that defines her and cannot reach Amou Mohammed's ghost in post-war Beirut. When Aida visits Amou Mohammed's wife, the woman does not mention anything about her memories of her husband, as if telling Aida to get rid of the unattainable past and move on in her life. However, Aida keeps searching for Amou Mohammed instead. In drawing comparisons between the gone past and the unacceptable present, Aida and Maysa before her are still tracing the illusion of the past. Their nostalgic memories prevent them from following Yasmeena's steps for awareness and self-understanding.

Aida's identity crisis and being out of place still accompanies her, but this time in her country. The Lebanese regard her a stranger and an outsider who does not share them the harshness of the Civil War. Kameel, a Lebanese doctor whom she has met, tells her in one of their meetings: "people like you return, not having known the terrible years of war, and you want to teach us about life" (Jarrar 127). Aida finds herself again in the zone of alienation and identity fragmentation that she no more knows herself: "She looked into the mirror and squinted at the face that stared back. Then she leaned forward until her lips were almost touching the cold glass. 'I remember you,' she whispered. 'I remember you'" (Ibid 129). Aida leaves Lebanon that does not resemble Lebanon in her mind. Her journey does not give her the character nor the life she wishes for. She chooses the continuous search for somewhere home where she can reunite with Amou Mohammed and find inner peace: "*Tomorrow I will pack my bags and hope to run away again and find you in that place where my soul's secrets remain, somewhere from which there is no further to go, somewhere home*" (Ibid 129). In the researcher's opinion, Aida and Maysa are defeated in their journeys to be physically and psychologically in place, as their trauma lies in their incapacity to overcome the changes caused by the Civil War. As a result, each one of them lives in her own imaginative world and cannot let it go.

Commented [D1]: This quotation is in Italics as it is originally written in Italics in its original text: *Somewhere, Home* by Nada Awar Jarrar, 2004.

This dilemma continues with the protagonist of the third story, lying sick in a hospital in her exile. In her unconscious state, old Salwa goes young again remembering her past since her childhood in an old house in Mount

Lebanon to her marriage to Adnan at the age of fifteen and then her journey of displacement with him. Through looking back at her past life, the reader gets that Salwa does not have a hand in how her life moves and how it becomes. Throughout her life she has been the object of the decisions of other people: her mother, her husband and even her husband's brother Norman. She has not been entirely herself but what others want her to be.

The story of her marriage echoes Saeeda's marriage. Being the daughter of an absent father in Brazil and a full responsible mother, she has been married off quickly to a man in his forties without her will. This marriage is the beginning of a cycle of events that enlarges Salwa's sense of being out of place.

The scene of Salwa's final movement from Lebanon to the West is very shocking but expressive to the reader. Salwa has been 'kidnapped' by her husband with the full sense of the word. "Just follow me" (Jarrar 156), Adnan has deceived his wife by accompanying her and their first-born girl to Beirut, the city of her dreams for long. In front of the souqs and the majestic aura of the city, Salwa becomes sure that the day will stay forever in her mind. Ironically, it will, but only for her husband's last 'surprise' that takes the form of a huge ship to America. Jarrar is very clever in drawing this scene. The body language and the words of both Salwa and Adnan, show the unbalanced relationship between a husband and a wife in a patriarchal society:

'Where are we going, Adnan?' I ask. 'What is going on?'

I feel a rising panic as I watch people making their way up the gangway and onto the deck of the ship. Adnan pulls me to him [...] He jerks me forward and onto the gangway.

[...]

Adnan is nearly shouting. 'Do as I say and get on the ship.'
(Ibid 157)

Salwa realizes that she cannot express the fire inside her except by crying and screaming the names of her loved ones she will leave back home.

All her next three children: Lilly, Richard and Diana, were born and lived abroad; a fact that transforms them into Western more than Lebanese citizens. They ignore the language of their mother land and adapt well in their new home. On the girls' first visit to Lebanon with Salwa and Adnan, Lilly protests, "I still want to go back home. I never wanted to go on this trip anyway" (Jarrar 79). According to Lilly and Diana, Australia is their "back home". Salwa must face the reality that her children have "their loyalties, e.g., to their new country, to their friends, to a language that was 'theirs,' and

to a culture that was real to them as opposed to a culture they never experienced" (Roizblatt 518). For them, Lebanon is a fairy tale that they only know about through their parents' stories. But for the eldest daughter May, the case is different; she is keen on discovering her parents' land and eventually gets married, gives birth and lives the rest of her life in Lebanon. Jarrar presents May's son, Nabil, as the contrast of his aunts and uncle. On his visit to his grandmother in the hospital he brings Lebanon's breeze and voice through Fairouz's songs, nuts, and pictures, in one of them there is the Mount village house whose current owner, Maysa, turns out to be his father's cousin.

Although the young boy comes to Australia with the intension to stay as an escape from his father's tough temper, he feels the bitterness of being away. Salwa hopes that she will not witness her trauma of displacement and the struggle to adapt be repeated with her grandson. It has not been long that Nabil hurries to the airport to return to the place where he belongs.

In the West, Salwa becomes a character that she is not, to cope with her new community. She is not Salwa anymore but Sally. However, what has not changed is her helplessness in the presence of her husband and her husband's brother. In the 'piano' incident, Norman's order to Adnan not to buy Salwa the piano signals their fear of anything that can help Salwa form her independent identity. Salwa speaks out her pain to her grandson years after that incident, regretting: "Adnan, he never got me the piano he promised. [...]. Norman told him I might start getting new ideas and want to go out and perform in front of people. I never would have done that, you know. I just wanted the music, that's all. Not too much to ask, is it?" Reaching this age, Salwa asks herself, "What will become of me" (Jarrar 170). Her husband's plans for her life leave her fluctuating between Salwa longing for Lebanon and Sally living in exile.

If Adnan is physically present, unlike the other male characters in the novel, he is still absent if it comes to understanding and support. Adnan is a more confused person than his wife towards his land and their future, "live [...] in a country that holds no future for our children? Is that what you want Salwa?" (Jarrar 160). Their conversation is similar to a one discussed many years before Salwa's marriage between Salwa's father who believes that "maybe we'll go away one day, go and make lives for ourselves in a country where life is big, where there are better opportunities for everyone" and the mother who insists, "We can't leave. This is our village, our home. Why would we ever want to go anywhere else" (Ibid 196). The outcome is a father who turns away and a mother who is physically enrooted in the land but

psychologically out of place or vice versa. Salwa's story is a story about the history of movement in which the women are silent about their painful circumstances.

Memory authenticity and fragmentation:

Marcel Proust considers the "search for lost time" or the "remembrance of things past" as linked to fiction writing (qtd in Lavenne 4). Memory is crucial for the way the three heroines think of themselves and for the analytical focus on the interiority of the characters. They "carry all the wandering recollections, all the thoughts that have been and the people who vanished with them" (Jarrar 58). However, Candau raises an important issue by saying, memory is a "reconstruction of the past" and not only a "faithful reconstitution" (qtd in Lavenne 6). For Kalamalikis, it is a process where "the non-real takes over rational and concrete life", (72) according to Frederic Barlett, as Righi refers in her study, remembering "is not a straightforward journey" (32). "Memory", as Eric Hobsbawm clarifies, "is less stable than the events it recollects, and knowledge of what happened in the past is always subject to selective retention, innocent amnesia, and tendentious re-interpretation" (qtd in Brow 3). The researcher adopts the contemporary scholars' rejection of what is called "pure memory" that is totally faithful to the past. Daniel L. Schacter admits that memory stores pieces or fragments of the past (112). Maurice Halbwachs also clarifies that the present events can modify a person's memories of past events (57). So, it is not "pure memory", but a "plasticity of memory": the reconstruction of the past memories in the light of present events, that is of much concern.

This means that memory is not a static phenomenon, but an evolving and dynamic one. The characters' memories are not pure but interrupted by present intense events that disrupt their personalities and this makes their memories vulnerable to questions and suspicions. Saint Augustine describes memory in his *Confessions*, saying:

When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a long delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different, as much as to say 'Perhaps we are what you want to remember?' (qtd in Ricoeur 518).

Memory authenticity is, thus, open for discussion since the intrusion of imagination and hallucination is no more a taboo; a topic that is evident in

Jarrar's text, but to which many of the novel's critics have not given attention. When Maysa confesses to her cousin Selma, "But I can imagine, can't I?" (Jarrar 10) out of her ignorance of what really happened in her ancestors' past lives, proves that for Jarrar it is not a matter of what really happened in the past, but it is a matter of "creating enabling stories and self-concept, thereby recovering a sense of self and agency in the face of devastating losses" (Vickroy 8). Therefore, the notion of truth is a problematic issue in Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home*.

Maysa is writing about incidents that took place years before her birth; incidents she is not a witness of except through oral stories passed down to her by her father:

He would call me to him, 'Maysa, Maysa', and speak to me of his life in this house in fragments, in snatches of colour and longing, pausing to be the distant and more familiar figure of my childhood. But he did not know that it was his silences that intrigued me most, those moments between words that allow the imagination to wander. (Jarrar 3,4)

Marianne Hirsch defines in "The generation of postmemory"(2008) the relationship between those who grow up dominated by the memories and overwhelming experiences related to the preceding generation as 'postmemory'. The stories of the postmemory generation, in our case Maysa, are replaced by the stories of the previous generation. "[T]he 'post' in postmemory not only indicates a temporal distance or an aftermath, it also points to 'an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture'" (Hirsch 106). "Those moments between words that allow the imagination to wander" triggers the reader's wonder if Jarrar's protagonists unleash their imagination and hallucinations to change their postmemories into modified past stories or into a medium of expression they can identify with in the midst of war and displacement.

When Maysa asks herself what she knows about Alia's life and feelings towards her husband and children, the only answer she gets is, "[t]he truth is that I don't know" (Jarrar 28). Maysa fills the blank pages of the empty notebook with her own words. This does not make of the notebook the faithful stories of the women in her family, but as Wadih reveals it to Maysa, "stories you have been telling yourself because you are unable to embrace your own" (Ibid 72). For Wadih, Maysa's narratives are "inward [...] narratives of escape, to those on the outside [...] it is somewhat dangerous, out of control" (Hayek 148). In the second story, Aida has the history of weaving her imaginative world that she can identify with. In reading books to her younger sister Dina, Aida used to twist the events for her own appeals.

Later, when their mother reads the same book, Dina gets lost between the two different versions of the story, asking Aida, “how many stories are there in one book?” (Jarrar 90). Dina is not aware that for her elder sister there are as many stories as she likes just in one book. According to Aida, there is no one certain story in life. There is always a place for imagination. In exile, Aida stretches her imagination far enough to conjure Amou Mohammed in blood and flesh: “*Amou Mohammed, Amou Mohammed, [...] I have outlined the contours of your face with my own and written your story between the lines of the dreams of this vast world*” (Ibid 129). Not only does she imagine his presence, but also his reactions from comfort, worry, longing and tiresome. To the readers it becomes obvious that Amou Mohammed's ghost speaks for her subconscious. This allows the reader to dive inside Aida's worried self out of her loneliness and estrangement in exile and longing to her back home.

Commented [D2]: This quotation is in Italics as it is originally written in Italics in its original text: *Somewhere, Home* by Nada Awar Jarrar, 2004.

All of the three women are suffering from visual and audio hallucinations that intensify their psychologically disturbed conditions and consequently shake the authenticity and reliability of their memories. More than once, Maysa can see her deceased grandparents and their five children with her in the stone house around the wood-burning stove or lying one against the other in the spacious cold room for warmth. She can hear them breathing, talking and laughing as if really with her. In one occasion, she can swear that she hears her parents' voices murmuring along with her on lonely nights in the stone house, but she can't tell this to anyone. As part of the mountain people, Maysa is familiar with the concept of undying spirit; the incarnation of a spirit in the body of a miracle child "recounting their stories, the circumstances of their deaths and the families they'd once had" (Jarrar 62). By that way, the line of time is lost and division between life and death is blurred. These hallucinations are the three protagonists' way of coping with separation from the beloved ones. Death in Aida's story is a central event. Amou Mohammed's death was a bizarre and sudden occurrence that suggests the randomness of war. Not being in Lebanon when he met his end filled her with the sense of longing and guilt and intensifies her wish to see him again:

On the day she heard of Amou Mohammed's death [...] The memories came back quickly and stumbled over each other: his delight in loving, his gentleness and the lilt in his voice whenever he came to the end of a story he had been telling her [...] And all the while Aida waded through the dust of her past, she refused to see the look of astonishment on Amou Mohammed's beautiful face as the militiaman pointed the rifle to his head and pulled the trigger. (Ibid 78)

Caruth recognizes that faithfulness to the dead as a burden of the traumatized person (9). Through imagining him around all the time, she suffers living the past as present. Aida's visual hallucinations of Amou Mohammed after his death are bizarre, sudden and fragmented as well. She saw his shadow for the first time while sitting on a park bench calling her quietly and laughingly, "Do you remember me?" (Jarrar 79). He keeps appearing anywhere and at anytime to her: in the park, in the cafe, in the nursery classroom sitting among the children, on her way to home and in her flat. That distracts her from going on in her life, "leaving her with an anxiety that he might call to her in sleep or stray into her dreaming" (Ibid 106). In other words, Amou Mohammed's death creates an empty circle around her in which she keeps revolving forever searching for him.

Salwa's mentioning of her youngest daughter and asking about her as if alive, despite her death, raises suspicions about her unconscious state on her hospital bed, and thus, about the truth of "the stories in the far corners of [her] mind" (Jarrar 133). The whole story is long shots of Salwa's tale of her past life interrupted by short returns to her present life in the hospital: "like sea wave coming and then pulling back" (Ibid 62). She shifts from a childhood memory with her sister and mother to a memory as a married woman with her husband and children and also imagines conversations with her long absent father, all in a random and fragmented way that foreshadows her desire to recollect memories about her scattered family members to whom she longs. Many times she murmurs names and incidents that have vanished many years ago, causing her children's and grandson's worry about her physical and mental health. Salwa's failure to recognize her childhood village stone house that is central to her memories open the novel's end to uncertainty and ambiguity of truth with the reader fluctuating between taking the protagonists' memories for granted as "pure memories" or reconstructed memories.

From a postmodern perspective, the ambiguity and uncertainty of Maysa', Aida's and Salwa's fragmented memories indicate the inner complex reality of the Lebanese characters as well as their struggle to overcome their fragmented psyches torn between two homes and two life choices as correspondence to the collective memory of the Lebanese war which was itself fragmented. As their lives are related to extremely intense events, these memories continue to haunt and shape their identities. Walter Benn Michaels writes, "[i]t is only when the events of the past can be imagined not only to have consequences for the present but to live on in the present that they can become part of our experience and can testify who we are" (139).

Jarrar's female characters live in "durational time" and not in "chronological time". Time in the novel overlaps as if the two times exist at the same time. The characters continue to experience the past through flashbacks and internal shifts back in time and space to the extent that they cannot differentiate between the past and the present. Each of the three tales is a good application of non-coherent story:

the present occurs adjacent to the past, with no specific points of beginning and no specific points of ending. This is a trend which is present in many other Lebanese postwar novels where the fragmentation of narrative in time and space reflect a generation's attempt to grasp the absurdities of a civil war as well as the past and future of a nation affected by it. (Naguib 127,128)

Civil War writers see life as non linear, fragmented and unpredictable, so their stories are equally the same. By that way, they put their readers in the characters' disoriented positions through time shifts, memory, conscious and unconscious states. Each one of the characters fails to regain control and return to the present.

The Mount village home:

The novel presents the old village home in Mount Lebanon as a metonymy of Lebanon with its surrounding fig trees, thyme, pine trees and grapevine and the inside objects related to the family history. Hence, the text represents two levels of home: one personal and the other collective:

Each of the three tales takes us to the ancient grand village house. With its many rooms, its seductive scented herb-planted garden and its long history on Mount Lebanon, where the history of Lebanon started, it serves as a traditional embodiment of the national homeland. (Naguib 129)

Through this house, which the three women inhabit, leave or seek to live in, Jarrar entangles the three supposed separate tales.

According to Maysa, this one-storey stone cottage near the village center is the place "where everything began" (Jarrar 7). In the past it used to be the meeting place of her family members and its warmth expanded around them like sunlight in winter. For Aida, she finds herself in front of the house during her exhausting journey with Kameel from Beirut to the village. She takes from the house her shelter from the sun heat and tiresome. Aida "felt an instant sense of calm" in that dusty and deserted house and wished that Amou Mohammed can share her that moment of inner peace (Ibid 125). Salwa's childhood memories in the house are that of joy, serenity and

looking at the moon with her sister Mathilde. It is the house where she has been taken care of by her mother with no responsibility whatsoever to occupy her mind. Many years after her marriage in a small village on the eastern coast of South Australia, Salwa hears her mother's voice in the white stone village house singing to her on her wedding day. These memories restore joy in herself in a country she regards as "a refuge in a far-flung world" (Ibid 174). All of the three heroines' longing to their native home as a protection from the inner hardships and the outside world offers an insight into Jarrar's mind to reach home "*from which there is no further to go*" (Ibid 145).

During the pre-war "golden era", Maysa's mother carries her new camera on their Sunday trips from the once shining and translucent Beirut to the grandmother's. Leila freeze-dried the happy moments the house formerly had embraced: their laughter, playing, conversations and waves, and she would not leave the camera until the photo has been taken. After many years, these photos serve as Maysa's source of nostalgia to that happy past where she could be free, safe and confident; the time she could run out among the tall pine trees with the other children, and then fold away her wings to the home's terrace to the front door and finally into the calmness.

On the national level, the pictures of pre-war Lebanon taken by Studio Wahed in Downtown Beirut serves as the record of Lebanon's "golden era". Mark Westmoreland mentions in his article, "Catastrophic Subjectivity: Representing Lebanon's Undead" that in the 1960s, Studio Wahed produces images of the beautiful sites in Beirut that founded its reputation as "Paris of the Middle East". These sites were the luxurious hotels, beaches, souks, cinemas, banking districts and avenues. "Majority of the sites they represent were destroyed by armed conflicts and the Lebanese wars, thus implicating a postwar nostalgia for a bygone era" (Westmoreland 179.). As for the studio, it was destroyed by the Civil War. Its owner, Abdallah Farah, burned the negatives that he could rescue from the fire as a correspondence to the burning of the old Beirut, and he clung to his house during the war. Throughout that time, Farah used the rescued virgin film rolls to take photos of his neighborhood, but "[w]ithout Lab chemicals, Farah's photos remain undeveloped waiting for a safer day to be printed" (Ibid 180). Yet, after war Farah kept shooting the photos without printing them, instead he documented and described each photo accurately in a small notebook, "leaving an immense space for the *imagination*" (Ibid 180 Italics added). Here Abdallah Farah challenges the authority of the image and grants more agency to the reader. He calls the written documentation in the notebook, "image in the text"(Ibid 180): a similar action to Maysa's

transformation of the past photos and her secret memories of the Mount house into written documentation or recollections in her worn notebook, her "image in the text", leaving space for imagination.

However, the difference between Farah and the other female protagonists in the novel is that Farah becomes aware during and after the war that he cannot retain the past, but Jarrar's female characters cannot let the past go because they do not ever want to forget. Unlike Farah, they cannot burn the images that no more exist at the present. Escaping from the disruption of the outside world, the three women seek the long gone energy and warmth that once spread over the now timeworn house. That's why Maysa's "image in the text", unlike Farah's, is a full dedication to a faded past which makes it a heavy inheritance to her outgoing daughter, and accordingly Yasmineena cannot live with and finally rejects.

The change of time leaves its marks on the house. Its present state of emptiness and desertion resists the different image in their souls and lead to their experience of exile in their own nation. This "act of desertion and not destruction is what makes a place ruinous" (Westmoreland 190). Maysa, for example, experiences the change of the house on her return, saying:

This house, this old, dilapidated house, was once a castle, alive and spilling over with energy. My grandmother sat in a wooden-backed chair at the southern window, watching for the last of her children running home from school, and now there are shadows where she has been, shadows without sunlight, clouding my vision, filling me with fear. (Jarrar 9)

Even the surrounding of the Mount home is colored by the non-stop movement of the people, the noise and the appearance of the frenetic machines. On her first visit from Europe after many years, Salwa undergoes the same experience of shock: "The village is noisier than I remember it. Sounds of car engine are persistent and there is a feeling of constant bustle that permeates the air [...] Is it me or has the village changed a great deal?" (Ibid 184, 185). Her happiness that she is finally home is encountered by that change that becomes more persistent in her second visit: "We are facing the house and I am surprised by how insignificant and unattractive it looks. 'it's not how I remember it', I say, shaking my head" (Ibid 191). By the end of the novel Salwa fails to recognize her village home in the photo with her grandson because of its different state. In Salwa's final words in her story and the novel: "the house looked very familiar, that's all" (Ibid 202), Jarrar leaves the reader with the question where home is and thus intensifies the novel's concern with the confused sense of home during and after war.

This state of severe change overtakes whole Lebanon. Maysa, Aida and Salwa struggle to keep the mental image of Lebanon “that revelled in its own garish splendour” (Jarrar 94). Aida wants to remember Lebanon like Amou Mohammed in the photo she preserves in her exile; handsome and blissful. Yet, the last words of Amou Mohammed's ghost before his final disappearance, “I'm tired Aida” (Ibid 112), foreshadow the tiresome of Lebanon by the continuous conflicts. They are a warning to Aida as well that Lebanon that “revelled in its own garish splendour” has changed a great deal.

When Aida shows her desire to buy the old house, as “Beirut had suddenly lost its charm, seemed tired and indifferent to her passion” (Jarrar 126), it meets a sudden anger on Kameel's part, and he clarifies that he wants from accompanying her to the village to show her his work there and introduce her to the people of the present Lebanon. She cannot comprehend that Kameel blames her withdrawal, for seeking old Lebanon in the old stone house and not trying to understand what is going on in the present Lebanon. Kameel believes that her state of being a stranger to the country's hardships during war and thus its present condition and needs prevent her from claiming Lebanon as her home.

Jarrar's past-imprisoned characters are shocked by what they see in post-war Lebanon and the changes that overtake the Mount village home. However, the characters of young Yasmeena and Nabil refute these doubts. Through Yasmeena and Nabil, Jarrar presents the post-war generation who make way for newer memories. “[T]he war is over”, Yasmeena writes to her mother, “it will soon regain its former splendour” (59). Maybe Jarrar wants by displaying the depressive search of these women to reject their passivity and helplessness to find a certain home and, on the other hand, present a new confident generation that “look[s] the beast in the eye” (Haugbolle 11); that is determined to take from Lebanon their home where there is no place for crying over a far reached past.

To conclude, *Somewhere, Home's* female-centred narratives, its portrayal of home and the heroine's crucial memory authenticity put the novel in a peculiar level from the typical texts about estrangement. Although the novel prioritizes themes of intense nostalgia, amnesia, alienation and withdrawal, it is for the sake of drawing the Lebanese attention for the need of active participation, awareness and mental presence. To clarify, Jarrar wants her readers to avoid her characters' fate. Despite all the tragedies met by the women in the novel, it motivates hope for a better and promising future through changing the 'psychological' status quo. *Somewhere, Home* is

a plea not to live a life fluctuating between two times nor experience a sense of internal fragmentation, and hence it is a plea to find somewhere, home.

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