

Representations of 'Home' from the Setting of 'Exile':  
Novels by Arab Migrant Writers

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## Abstract

The attempt to come to terms with the meaning of home, both literally and metaphorically, has become a major concern in literary studies. This dissertation explores the various novelistic representations of home from the point of view of Arab migrant novelists. Home, which contains various references to architectural structures, nations, states, or belonging, can no longer be thought of as a generalized or unified experience. For the migrant writer, the concept of home takes shape as a result of interaction between the past and the present, with memory playing a powerful role. It is created as a result of various forces in tension that include personal and national experiences, the context within which migration from the traditional home place occurred, ideological allegiances and identity politics. I argue through my exploration of a number of novels written by Arab writers who migrated from their home countries that the concept of home can no longer be referred to as a generalized, definite or a fixed notion.

Given the different circumstances of the movement from one country to another, even among nationals of the same country, what are the themes that will be stressed in an Arab writer's imagination and portrayal of home? Will writers stress the exclusions of exile, and define their presence away from the original country clearly as 'exile', fixating on painful nostalgia? How does memory influence the perception of home? Will those writers who have lived a long time in a new 'foreign' country emphasize the adaptations in the diaspora and the privileges of migration? Will they offer critiques of the national project, making a clear distinction between the personal home and the national project? Will such boundaries be as clearly defined for all the writers?

Those questions guide my investigation into the representation of home in the novels of Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi writers living away from their three countries of origin. This investigation takes place within the postcolonial theoretical framework of the implications of the site of migration about the revision of the centrality of the nation as a referent of identity. The analysis uncovers a variety of illustrations in the imagination of home and the portrayal of the national experience in the novels. The analysis also highlights the inextricable link between the personal experience and the political experience, whereby the ideological stance on issues of nation and nationalism cannot be easily isolated in an assessment of the cultural product at the site of migration.

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## Note on Translation and Transliteration

A few words need to be said about various aspects of the text and the conventions I have used throughout the dissertation.

Firstly, translation: except where indicated in the text itself, the translations in the dissertation are my own. Where I relied on translations that are not my own, I indicated this at the first mention of the novel. Furthermore, for the sake of clarity and consistency in analysis and representation, in the instances where I relied on the translated version of a certain novel, I also made no attempt to transliterate any of the names of authors of these novels or the names of characters and places referred to in these novels myself and thus I abided by the spelling provided in the selected and cited translated version.

Secondly, transliteration: some of the literary works written in the Arabic language that I have included here do not have an available published translation. I have also resorted to the use of secondary literature that is only available in the Arabic language. In discussing these works in English, I have used the most widespread system of transliteration, namely that of the Library of Congress in the United States.

The system is adopted as follows:

### Consonants

<i>Arabic Letter</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>Represented by</i>
hamzah . . . . .	(sounds like <i>h</i> in <i>hour</i> — a sort of catch in the voice) . . . . .	'
bā . . . . .	(same as <i>b</i> ) . . . . .	b
tā . . . . .	(the Italian dental, softer than <i>t</i> ) . . . . .	t
thā . . . . .	(between <i>th</i> in <i>thing</i> and <i>s</i> ) . . . . .	th
jīm . . . . .	(like <i>g</i> in <i>gem</i> ) . . . . .	j
hā . . . . .	(very sharp but smooth guttural aspirate) . . . . .	h
khā . . . . .	(like <i>ch</i> in the Scotch word <i>loch</i> ) . . . . .	kh
dāl . . . . .	(Italian dental, softer than <i>d</i> ) . . . . .	d
dhāl . . . . .	(sounds between <i>z</i> and <i>th</i> in <i>that</i> ) . . . . .	dh
rā . . . . .	(same as <i>r</i> ) . . . . .	r
zā . . . . .	(same as <i>z</i> ) . . . . .	z

sīn . . . . .	(same as <i>s</i> ) . . . . .	s
shīn . . . . .	(same as <i>sh</i> in <i>she</i> ) . . . . .	sh
ṣād . . . . .	(strongly articulated <i>s</i> , like <i>ss</i> in <i>hiss</i> ) . . . . .	ṣ
ḍād . . . . .	(aspirated <i>d</i> , between <i>d</i> and <i>z</i> ) . . . . .	ḍ
ṭā . . . . .	(strongly articulated palatal <i>t</i> ) . . . . .	ṭ
zā . . . . .	(strongly articulated palatal <i>z</i> ) . . . . .	z
‘ain . . . . .	(somewhat like a strong guttural <i>hamzah</i> , not a mere vowel) . . . . .	‘
ghain . . . . .	(guttural <i>g</i> , but soft) . . . . .	gh
fā . . . . .	(same as <i>f</i> ) . . . . .	f
qāf . . . . .	(strongly articulated guttural <i>k</i> ) . . . . .	q
kāf . . . . .	(same as <i>k</i> ) . . . . .	k
lām . . . . .	(same as <i>l</i> ) . . . . .	l
mīm . . . . .	(same as <i>m</i> ) . . . . .	m
nūn . . . . .	(same as <i>n</i> ) . . . . .	n
hā . . . . .	(same as <i>h</i> ) . . . . .	h
wāw . . . . .	(same as <i>w</i> ) . . . . .	w
yā . . . . .	(same as <i>y</i> ) . . . . .	y

## Vowels

The vowels are represented as follows:

Short vowels:

ˆ	fathah, as <i>u</i> in <i>tub</i> . . . . .	a
ˆ	kasrah, as <i>i</i> in <i>pin</i> . . . . .	i

Long vowels:

ˆ	long fathah, as <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> . . . . .	ā
ˆ	long kasrah, as <i>ee</i> in <i>deep</i> . . . . .	ī
ˆ	long dammah, as <i>oo</i> in <i>moot</i> . . . . .	ū
	fathah before wāw . . . . .	au
	fathah before yā . . . . .	ai

*Tanwīn* " " " is represented by *an*, *in*, *un*, respectively. The short and long vowels at the end of a word are shown as parts of the words, as *qāla* where the final *a* stands for the *fathah* on *lām*, but the *tanwīn* is shown as a separate syllable, as *Muḥammad-in*.

## Introduction

How do Arab writers who have long departed their original homelands write about ‘home’? How much does the process of relocation and the circumstances surrounding the departure from the original country affect and shape the writers’ view and representation of what home means? Do these writers who no longer live in the same country equate the concept of ‘home’ with that of the nation when they write about ‘home’? Is ‘home’ a more personal experience that could be read only in light of the personal experience of each individual writer? More importantly, could we draw any generalizations among such a group of writers who now write in a variety of languages in addition to the Arabic language, and who write in very different circumstances governed by different personal and political factors?

The attempt to come to terms with the meaning of home both literally and metaphorically has become a common concern for many of us who have been affected by the rapid rate of migration in today’s world. In this dissertation, I explore the various novelistic representations of home from the point of view of the migrant novelist. Home, which contains various references to architectural structures, nations, states or belonging, can no longer be thought of as a generalized or unified experience. For the migrant writer, home takes shape as a result of interaction between the past and the present where memory plays a strong role. It is created as a result of various forces in tension that include personal and national experiences, the context within which migration from the traditional home place occurred, ideological allegiances and identity politics. I argue through my exploration of a number of novels that home can no longer be referred to as a generalized, definite or a fixed notion.

Migration is considered one of the dominant phenomena that characterize our modern times on a global scale (Clifford, 1994 & Cohen, 1997). The Arab world took part in this growing wave of migration from different Arab countries to other countries in the West. It is currently estimated that around 20 million nationals of Arab states reside outside their country of origin (Fargues, 2011), with a “culture of migration” rapidly evolving in the Middle East and North Africa in general (Ibid). Throughout its history, the Arab world has witnessed waves of migration from and within its borders ranging in their motivations from social to economic and political in the forms of economic migration or resulting from discrimination or political persecution and large-scale conflicts. The Palestinian *Nakbah* of

1948, the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq contributed to an extremely large proportion of migration from those three Arab countries: Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. Migrants from these countries make up a large percentage of the Arab diaspora. The North African Arab countries became known as important sources of migrants to countries in Europe, while other Arab states such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories are known for their migration flows to oil-rich countries in the Gulf and to the Western states. What Philippe Fargues termed the “exit response” was a widespread phenomenon in the Arab world in the second half of the last century and it contributed effectively to the large number of Arabs now residing outside their countries of birth (2011).

Emigrants left the Arab world between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for political, economic and cultural reasons (Elad-Bouskila, 2006: 41). The literature of these emigrants came to be known as diaspora literature or “Adab al-Mahjar” (Ibid). In the 1950s, more migrants from the Arab countries moved away from the Arab world to countries in the West for similar reasons and owing to growing discontent with the limited freedom in their own home countries (Ibid 42). The Lebanese diaspora<sup>1</sup>, for example, took form during those two stages of migration. During the first wave between 1898 and 1914, 100,000 Lebanese citizens emigrated from the Lebanese state. A later stage took place during the civil war between 1975 and 1990 when 274,000 Lebanese citizens relocated to countries away from Lebanon. Movement back and forth in between those two main stages never stopped (Humphrey, 2004: 35). Today “some of Lebanon’s most influential literary figures [are known to have] lived their adult lives and produced most of their works outside their native land” (Manganaro, 1994: 374). In addition to the large Lebanese migrant population, the Palestinian *Nakbah* of 1948 and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in the two largest waves of migration from the Arab Middle East (Marfleet, 2007: 397). More than four million Iraqis were made refugees as a direct result of the invasion (Sadek, 2010: 43) and the situation in Iraq does not make return a safe option (Amos, 2010), while nearly half the Palestinian population was made refugees after 1948 (Peteet, 1995: 168). In this dissertation, I focus on novels by Arab writers from these three Arab countries<sup>2</sup>. The Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi writers included here made their decisions to live away

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<sup>1</sup> A brief background to migration from each of the three countries discussed here will be provided in the introduction of each relevant chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Although migration from the Arab North African countries constitutes a large proportion of Arab migration to the West, I have decided here to limit my scope to Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.

from Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq in the shadow of these three national experiences. This dissertation brings together some of the novels by those Arab writers who moved away from their countries of origin in different personal and national circumstances.

Given the different circumstances of the movement from one country to another, even among nationals of the same country, what are the themes that will be stressed in an Arab writer's imagination and portrayal of home? Will writers stress the exclusions of exile, and define their presence away from the original country clearly as 'exile', fixating on painful nostalgia? How does memory influence the perception of home? Will those writers who have long lived in a new 'foreign' country emphasize the adaptations in the diaspora and the privileges of migration? Will they offer critiques of the national project, making a clear distinction between the personal home and the national project? Will such boundaries be as clearly defined for all the writers? How are the imagination and portrayal of the experience of home negotiated between history, culture and ideology?

### 1. Contribution to the Field of Arabic Literary Study

Those questions guide my investigation into the representation of home in the novels of several Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi writers living away from their three countries of origin. Despite the centrality of the concept of 'home' to the experience and study of migration, little attention is actually paid to the specific ways in which people actually experience and represent home. In general, researchers into the field of Arabic literary studies have accorded a lot of attention to the study of Arabic literature that is produced away from the Arab world. The work of migrants, as well as works by Arab American and Arab British writers, garners the interest of many Arab critics. Such studies of Arab writing in 'exile' are indeed abundant, the most recent being Wail Hassan's book *Immigrant Narratives* (2012). Hassan makes the distinction clear between minority writing, immigrant writing and Anglophone Arab writing, but he focuses more clearly on Arab American and Arab British narratives (2012: xii). While Hassan's study offers a wealth of information about novels by writers of Arab origin living in both the USA and Britain, he does not engage with the representation of the concept of 'home' itself, except in his brief discussion of literature by Palestinian American writers. Even then, Hassan's discussion of the meaning of home to Palestinian American writers is confined to the reading of memoirs where the concept of home is closely tied to the loss of the Palestinian homeland (Ibid 114). Aside from Hassan's *Immigrant Narratives*, Layla Maleh's edited volume *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Literature* (2009) grappled with a large volume of literature

produced across the world by writers of Arab origins. The essays in this volume dealt with many of the concerns of this literature that is produced away from the Arab world in such novel and hybrid positions. As apparent from its title, however, the volume dealt exclusively with literature in the English language and made little reference to novels produced in similar circumstances and sites but in different languages.

Among other endeavours that engaged with Arab writers living and writing away from the Arab world is Yasir Suleiman's *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, which presented a set of essays that focused more on the representation of the nation in Arabic literature than on the representation of home per se. Zahia Smail Salhi and Ian Richard Netton's *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream* similarly explored various texts by Arab writers in the diaspora across an array of themes that did not emphasize the process or the experience of home. Ḥalīm Barakāt *Ghurbat al-Kātib al-ʿArabī* (2011) also explored more the representation of exilic life, and the links between creativity and exile without engaging with the different experiences of home as they relate to the nation. While all of these projects inevitably shed light on the writers' engagement with home, they do not offer a comprehensive analysis of what it means to experience home from the setting of migration.

This research is motivated by a desire to contribute towards filling this gap by exploring how Arab migrant writers imagine, construct and portray home in relation to the experience of exile, displacement and migration. In this goal, I identify the most with the work of the Lebanese literary critic and scholar Syrine Hout. Hout's work explores the representation of home in several novels by Lebanese writers living away from Lebanon and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four. Her eagerly awaited book *Post-war Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora*, due to be released in September 2012, is expected to address the different meanings and reformulations of home in the novels by writers of Lebanese origins who live in the West.

Moreover, this research builds on Russell King's claim that the literature of migrants helps fill in the gaps of the social science study of migration which "fails to portray nostalgia, anomie, exile, [and] restlessness" (1995: x). This approach is inspired by King's book *Writing Across Worlds* (1995), which highlighted a gap in the social science that could be filled by resorting to literature which offers access to the individual experience in depth as opposed to the quantitative aspects that mainly generalize about the migration patterns and global movement trends. Although this gap has been decreasing in recent years through the

increase in the qualitative migration studies that allows for migrants' narratives to emerge, they could not entirely replace the insights delivered through literature.

In addition to contributing to filling this gap in literature by focusing on the representation of home in novels by Arab writers living away from their countries of origin, this research is also driven by a need to engage Arabic literature with the wider discussion of migration, exile and the representation of home, which is taking place among postcolonial critics. This discussion will be introduced in greater depth in Chapter One by shedding light on the different approaches taken by literary scholars when discussing 'migrant' literature, or 'exile' literature. Moreover, the use of such labels as 'exile', 'migrant' and 'diaspora' to group works of literature together will also be discussed in the next chapter in order to set the stage for the forthcoming discussion of the novels.

## **2. Emergent Literature of the Middle East**

It is important to stress at this point that this research focuses on novels by writers who have origins in three different Arab states and their reflections on home away from Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. The novels included here on the basis of such a common experience do not equally belong to a specific body of national literature. In fact, it is one of the aims of this research to highlight this increasing complexity in labelling a corpus of literature according to national affiliation. To decide whether these novels are a part of Arabic literature or not, one has to first define Arabic literature. The definition of Arabic literature is as complicated as defining Arab identity. It invokes linguistic, cultural and historical as well as political considerations. If the Arab world is to be considered as a geographical region, could we consider Armenian and Kurdish literature to be Arabic literature? Alternatively, if we consider Arabic literature to be that which is written in the Arabic language, does that mean it does not encompass the works of Arab novelists who have chosen to entirely or partially write in different languages? What about the Francophone literature of the North African countries? What about the Anglophone literature of writers such as Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir and others? My working definition for grouping these novels selected here is based on the shared experience of distance from one of the three Arab countries – Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq – in which the origins of the writer lie. The novels are written in four different languages and they vary a great deal in settings and themes as well as in the citizenship and political standpoints of their novelists. That said, this research still aims to contribute to Arabic literary study by highlighting what Peter Clark defined as “the literature of exile, of *ghurba*, of

*ightirab*” (Clark, 2006: 183) that represent different sides of the cultural and historical experience of the Middle East and the Arab world (Ibid 184).

Thus, the attempt to label or group the novels discussed in this dissertation is complicated primarily by two main factors: language and location. These two factors in turn are influenced by the overlapping issues of migration, citizenship and political standpoints. This complexity in the process of labelling was illustrated by Elise Salem Manganaro in her attempt to introduce a collection of Lebanese works to a Western audience that reads primarily in the English language. In her desire to offer a collection that is representative of Lebanon, she found herself confronted with the difficulty of defining Lebanese literature (1994: 373-374). She states that “in a collection that attempts to link nationhood with literary output, I found myself having to ask basic questions like ‘What is Lebanon?’, ‘Who is Lebanese?’ and ‘What constitutes Lebanese literature?’” (Ibid). Answering these questions led her to a wide array of literary outputs produced all over the world, in a variety of languages, covering diverse themes and settings among a large number of writers of different citizenships and backgrounds. To determine that a novel belongs to Lebanese literature based on the novelist’s citizenship seemed implausible. The citizenship of the novelist, she argued, is not a trusted way to define the identity of the literature. She elaborated that while Lebanese men can pass on their citizenship to their children, Lebanese women cannot. Moreover, “Lebanese citizenship has often been granted on political grounds to certain national or religious groups while excluding others” (Ibid).

Manganaro’s attempt was also compounded by the presence of a large immigrant population from Lebanon that in fact numbers more than the Lebanese people inside the state of Lebanon itself. She drew attention to the fact that a large number of Lebanon’s novelists and poets have long made homes in places other than Lebanon (Ibid). But citizenship and immigration are not the only complicating factors: language also plays a major role. Many of those Lebanese writers who now live all over the world produce literature in different languages. This is quite evident in Chapter Three which offers a discussion of novels by Lebanese writers. Four out of the five novelists whose work I discuss do not write in Arabic. Rawi Hage and Nada Awar Jarrar write only in the English Language. Jad el-Hage writes in both English and Arabic, while Amin Maalouf continues to write only in French. Only Hanan al-Shaykh writes in Arabic. Of course, Lebanese writers are not the only Arab writers who write in languages other than Arabic and the phenomenon itself is not a novel one. Discussing Arab diaspora literature, Ami Elad-Bouskila explains that second generations of those Arab migrants have not only changed their countries of residence, but they have also changed the

language in which they now express themselves (Elad-Bouskila, 2006: 47). As a matter of fact, in my discussion of novels by Palestinian writers, I include two novels by two Palestinian American writers, Randa Jarrar and Susan Abulhawa, who both write in English.

This choice of language in literary expression has always gained the attention of literary critics. While migration goes a long way towards explaining the increase in the number of Arab writers who write in either Arabic or French (Clark, 2006: 183), other writers in fact see the choice of the language in which they write as a stance that is politically determined. The Algerian nationalist writer Kateb Yacine argued that by writing in French, the language of the occupation, and not Arabic, he was able to address the French directly in a language they would understand – something he wouldn't have been able to do had he written in Arabic (Salhi, 2000: 102,149). A similar approach might explain the reason Palestinian writers choose to write in Hebrew. For others, however, the choice may not necessarily be politically determined, or predicated on the audience addressed, but could simply constitute the most desired language of self-expression (Clark, 2006: 183). Yasir Suleiman noted that even a “nationally committed Arab writer can write in English or French without detracting from his identity” (Suleiman, 2006: 13). Geoffrey Nash also explained that many writers of Arab background, especially those who write in English, do not have the English language imposed on them. They embrace it out of their own free will, and in many cases this might be a result of an upper-class education that privileged the teaching of the English language (2007: 20-191).

It is also important to question whether the choice of language makes the novels by these Arab writers any less a part of Arabic literature. Inversely, do their novels belong to the literatures in whose language they write? Clark reminds us of the fact that both the Polish writer Joseph Conrad and the Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov contributed to English literature (Ibid 182). In other words, Nabokov's novels belong equally to the field of Russian literature and to the field of English literature. Similarly, I would like to argue that the novels included in this discussion, complicated by the differences in languages, settings, themes and preoccupations as well as the citizenships and backgrounds of their novelists, contribute to Arabic literature on the basis of a shared experience of origin, regardless of the language of expression used. Suleiman notes that “while all Arabic literature is Arab, not all Arab literature is Arabic” (2006: 16). Literature reflects the changing realities of nations and peoples, and in this case, this body of literature reflects the changes brought about by migration and movement from the Arab world. “Millions of Arabs have in the last thirty years migrated as never before, either within the Arab world to oil-rich states or to Britain,

mainland Europe or the Americas. Tens of thousands have gone outside the Arab world – to east and west Europe and North America – for higher education” (Clark, 2006: 183). These flows were the result of social and historical incidents that determined the presence of the writers discussed here. Their literature in turn is part and parcel of this experience regardless of language or citizenship. Steven Salaita sums it up in these words: “No literary category has hard and fast criteria; all categories are riddled with exceptions and a lack of airtight logic” (2011: 4-5). As will become apparent through the dissertation, the choices of novels are guided by location as well as theme. It is my desire to combine the socio-historical material with a critical context in order to emphasize the cultural changes overtaking the Middle East.

Towards this goal, this research will look into artistic and cultural representations that offer glimpses into experiences of migration and which provide a rewarding start point for the development of a theoretical framework that allows us to reconsider these terms: ‘home’, ‘identity’, ‘place’, ‘belonging’ and ‘memory’. Such cultural representations highlight the multidimensionality of the notion of home through the illumination of the individual experience of migration. While not all the novels I refer to here could be included under one single encompassing body of literature, together they represent a manifestation of the experience of the Middle East in the last century: one of “dramatic change, of upheaval, dislocation, exile” (Clark, 2006: 188).

### **3. A Note on Interpretation**

Since I am exploring the representation of home in the novels of several Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi writers living in exile, I take the location of the writers and their lives as a point of departure. I employ a two-way interpretive process between the literary text on the one hand and cultural and political history and the writer’s biography on the other. The analysis in each of the three cases follows the same structure. It starts with a brief background of the novelists’ lives, and the circumstances around which they relocated from the country of origin. The next step is to provide a summary of the plot of the novel being reviewed before finally moving on to a comprehensive discussion of the literary representation of the experience of home through the protagonists’ experience of it. Each section for each of the three countries ends with a conclusion that summarizes and outlines the main similarities and differences in the novelistic representations, setting the stage for the general conclusion at the end of the thesis.

I adhere to the view that any work of art is closely bound to its creator. That is not to say that the work of art has no value in the absence of its creator, but it is to say that any form

of art borrows heavily and mainly from the soul, life and mind of its maker to attain value. For this reason, I embrace Edward Said's view that "to value literature at all is fundamentally to value it as the individual work of an individual writer tangled up in circumstances taken for granted by everyone, such things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language, and friends and so on" (2001: xv). As a result, I will be reading the novels in this study and interpreting them as an exchange between the authors, their life and the text. The problem then becomes how to look at the circumstances that have shaped the author's perceptions and incorporate them into the reading of the novel with the background of the worldly situation (Ibid xv).

This relationship between the author and the text is an issue to which M. M. Bakhtin devoted a considerable degree of his analysis. In his view, to say that the text is to be read in light of the author's socio-ideological background is not to expect the novel to be an exhaustive reproduction of the author's point of view, whether political, social or otherwise. Instead Bakhtin clarifies that:

we must never confuse – as had been done up to now and is still often done – the represented world with the world outside the text (naïve realism); nor must we confuse the author-creator of a work with the author as a human being (naïve biographism); nor confuse the listener or reader of multiple and varied periods, recreating and renewing the text, with the passive listener or reader of one's own time (which leads to dogmatism in interpretation and evaluation). All such confusions are methodologically impermissible...However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction, uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them. As long as the organism lives, it resists a fusion with the environment, but if it is torn out of its environment, it dies (1981: 254).

Bakhtin believed that while we read the novels in the absence of their novelists, we continuously encounter them as the creators in the composed work. For it is the author who has given the work its structure without "directly reflecting the represented Chronotope" (Ibid 254). Bakhtin's views are consistent with Edward Said's, who argued that "each novelist articulates a consciousness of his time that he shares with the group of which historical circumstances (class, period, perspective) make him a part" (2001: 42-43). In that sense, the novel itself becomes part of history, the authors document a certain experience of their time,

not in an attempt to reflect reality as it is, but rather in an unconscious attempt at documenting their own thoughts, reflections and reactions in a fictional manner that echoes a certain crisis at a certain point in time. Bakhtin explains that “to study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real world toward which it was directed and by which it is determined” (1981: 292).

The necessary question that Bakhtin asks is: How do we sense the author’s presence in the work? He illustrates the way in which we come to situate the authors with regard to their texts – in the realm of literature. In other words, the author’s relationship to the various phenomena of literature and culture has a dialogical character, which is analogous to the interrelationships between Chronotopes within the literary work (Ibid 255): each utterance is a response to another, either previous or anticipated. We also sense the author’s presence in the text “either from the point of view of the hero participating in the represented event, or from that of an assumed author or – finally – without using any intermediary at all he can deliver the story directly from himself as the author pure and simple (in direct authorial discourse)” (Ibid). Here Bakhtin makes a distinction between the image of the author that a reader might create or imagine of the novelist and that of the real life and experience of the author. The creation of an image for the writer is an occasional occurrence for many readers. Bakhtin clarifies that only if “the image is deep and truthful, it can help the listener or reader more correctly and profoundly to understand the work of the given author” (Ibid 257). Whenever possible during my research, I attempt to provide a closer look at the life of the author and find its resonance within their text in relation to a historically and regionally relevant event in the Arab world. This approach to the reading of the novel is from the “inside out” (Shepherd, 2001: 151), an approach that makes it possible to arrive at a solid understanding of a text.

In the discussion of the selected novels, I will be drawing on the personal experience of the writers away from their countries of origin, the reasons for which they do not live in this country and a depiction of their experience of living away from it. I will explore the writers’ representations of home in light of the socio-political and historical background. In this attempt, I am in agreement with Bakhtin that “it is not private life that is subjected to and interpreted in light of social and political events, but rather the other way around – social and political events gain meaning in the novel only thanks to their connection with private life” (1981: 84). I have attempted to foreground this in the chapters that follow.

In Chapter One I set the framework for the ensuing discussion by shedding light on the parameters surrounding the study of migration and its literature, especially in a postcolonial context. I examine what it means to think of migration as a metaphor and I discuss the related terms ‘exile’ and ‘diaspora’. I also clarify my use of terminology throughout the thesis. In the second part of the same chapter, I discuss the interplay between memory and nostalgia and the reflection of that dynamic in migrants’ narratives. In chapters Two, Three and Four I discuss novels by Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi novelists respectively. In each chapter, I start by providing a brief historical account of the development of the relevant literature which helps frame the discussion of the novels themselves. Each chapter ends with a conclusion that summarizes and outlines the main similarities and differences in the novelistic representation, setting the stage for the general conclusion at the end of the thesis.

## Chapter One

### Contextualizing Migrant Literature

Starting a project on the literature of migrants places one on a confusing terrain. Words do not necessarily mean what they seem to mean. Strict definitions and abundant disclaimers are needed. Consider, for example, a word like exile and the many discussions and commentaries that have accompanied it. To use the word exile confidently is to be aware of its connotations, which include geographical distance from the original country or birth place, the elements of force implied in that distance and the insurmountable sadness suffered by the banished subject.

With these connotations in mind, I hesitate to claim that I am examining exile literature. I prefer to refer to my selected novels as belonging to the literature produced by migrants, some of whom have experienced exile<sup>3</sup>. I thus take a holistic view of the word migration to refer to a range of displacement experiences, including diaspora and exile. To take a holistic view of the word migrant, the definition must include the whole range of migrant experiences, whether exilic or diasporic, faced by immigrants, refugees, expatriates and all other travelling individuals. Following this disclaimer, I proceed to explain why I chose to engage with migrant literature in this project.

I argue in this chapter that looking into different narratives of migration helps clarify the different ways of experiencing home. I maintain that only by looking into the narratives of those who “left home” can one best understand the different ways in which home is created and experienced. Migrant writing became theorised and celebrated in the literary world, especially among postcolonial critics, as a symbolic site where the fixity of notions of identity and ideological affiliations could be progressively revised. This theorisation gave the impression that at the new destination, the migrant’s ties to all traces of national culture are eliminated, which allows for the transcendence of all centralisations of meaning. Relying on novels written by migrant novelists, I revise this perception by explaining how the concept of home has undergone a degree of complication that goes beyond the simple opposition

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<sup>3</sup> In section three, I offer a deeper analysis of the differences between the terms exile and diaspora and their two corresponding trends in migrant literature.

between exile and nation/home/origin such that one's geographical placement in the world does not necessarily entail absolute alienation. I investigate how migrant literature in general could offer multiple representations and experiences of home, and I argue that this multiplicity in the experience and representation of home problematizes the theorisation of migration.

To that end, I divide this chapter into three main sections. In the first section of this chapter, I explore what it means to refer to migration and migrancy as theoretical terms, and I shed light on the relationship between migration and postcolonial literary theory. I end with some of the criticisms that have been levelled at the overvalorisation of *migrancy*. In the second section, I argue that the representation of home from a migrant setting is a product of memory and the manner in which the past memories of home are recalled in the new setting. In addition, I adopt Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia to distinguish among migrants' different representations of home. Here, I make my argument through three interrelated points. First, I explain that migration disrupts the stability of the traditional home place and is therefore an ideal setting in which to examine the notion of home. Second, I explain that different reactions to the loss of that stability of the home could be manifested in either restorative or reflective nostalgia. Third, I argue that as a result of the dynamics of memory and nostalgia, migrant experiences and migrant narratives display multiple experiences of home, which prove that the notions of home and home country that might have been traditionally seen as interchangeable have now undergone dramatic changes. No longer is it taken for granted that the home country is the site to which the migrant permanently desires to return. In fact, many of these narratives illustrate that regardless of the different levels of attachment to the country of origin, the notion of home is not entirely dependent on place. In the third section, I provide a brief background of the two terms exile and diaspora to explain their application as two different labels used to describe migrant literature.

### 1. Migration in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theories have used migration as a metaphor for movement and dislocation. These theories allowed for migration to be understood as a site for interrogating fixity in identity. For example, in one of his essays, Salman Rushdie proposes that just as the word metaphor connotes the "migration of ideas into images", migrants are also "metaphorical beings" as they exit one culture and nation to enter another (Rushdie, 2010: 278). In

Rushdie's view, because the linguistic and social dislocation as well as the disruption of the home place that result from migration enable migrants to realise that "reality is an artefact", the migrant resists all "absolute forms of knowledge" (Ibid 280). This view maintains that a migrant who has been exposed to different cultures is only certain of the relativity of things. Similarly, Homi Bhabha argues that "metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the middle passage... across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation people" (2000: 139). Bhabha refers to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which suggests that nations are imagined collectively by a people who believe or *imagine* that they share a set of commonalities. Bhabha believes that those who do not belong to this "collective" and those who live on the margins of nations as migrants or exiles have the power to rewrite or re-imagine the nation. Bhabha argues that the migrant possesses the power to offer imaginations different from that of the nation. In that sense, both Rushdie and Bhabha introduce migration as a site of empowerment where the experience of pain or loss is diminished and where the privilege of unique insight is highlighted<sup>4</sup>.

From a purely sociological standpoint, migration simply "denotes a permanent change of residence" without necessarily involving the crossing of any state borders ('Migrant'). In that sense, it differs from the act of immigration, which refers to the "movement of people to take up permanent residence in another state" (Ibid). Migrants<sup>5</sup> thus refer to both refugees and immigrants in addition to other travellers who take permanent residence in places away from the home country (Hein, 1993: 45). In that sense, exile and diaspora are two different experiences of migration, and the terms refugee and immigrant are legal terms that refer to migrants in different circumstances.

Regardless of the sociological definition, postcolonial theory helped change the implications of the terms migration and migrancy. In postcolonial literary theory, the figure of the migrant gradually became a celebrated one, and migrancy became a metaphor that suggests alternative and triumphant interpretations of culture. Thus, Andrew Smith states that migrancy "has now become ubiquitous as a theoretical term. It specifically refers to migration *not* as an act, but as a *condition* of human life (2004: 257). The field of postcolonial studies

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<sup>4</sup> I discuss some of the criticisms of this stance below in section 1.1 titled 'The Problem with Metaphorization'.

<sup>5</sup> I will be using the word 'migrant' from this point onwards to refer to the novelists discussed here. In that sense, I only highlight the experience of travel, regardless of the reasons and the nature of this travel, which will be discussed in the appropriate sections where relevant.

generally examines migration “in terms of its epiphanies: new sights, new knowledge, a new understanding of the relativity of things” (Ibid). Place and displacement have been dominant themes in postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory; exile and the problem of finding and defining “home” have been major concerns (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 26). Smith suggests that the fascination of postcolonial scholars with migration stems from the belief that “the relationship between narrative and movement takes on a new and qualitatively different significance in the context and aftermath of colonialism” (2004: 242).

Postcolonial scholars are also strongly interested in migration because of its potential to invoke interactions among different cultures, as Smith aptly summarises in the following: “Fundamental to postcolonial criticism has been the puzzle of how aspects of life and experience in one social context are impacting on worlds that are geographically and culturally distant” (Ibid 244). For example, postcolonial theory is drawn to this issue because the movement/migration of people from previously colonised third world countries to the West will result in new cultural encounters (Ibid 243). After all, it is a field with primary interests in works that “straddle the borders between colonized and colonizing nations” (Ibid 244). For both the colonisers and the colonised, migration and the act of crossing borders are equally relevant. Smith’s argument further proposes that with the rapid increase in the movement of people among states, social change is accelerating, which, in turn, is speeding up the dissolution of boundaries between nations even in the absence of connections to the specific history of colonialism (Ibid 245). Previously inaccessible spaces have now become accessible as a result of the rapid migration and the increase in migrant narratives, which are communicated faster than ever (Ibid). Migrancy has become a symbol of the possibility of shattering the “fixed relationship between place and identity” in general (Carter, 2005: 54). Postcolonialism theorists were naturally attracted to the potential of creating alternative spaces for the articulation of new forms of identities.

For many postcolonial theorists, the “migrant writer” became the representative figure of this new site. Smith explained that those theorists believed that “by becoming mobile and by making narratives out of this mobility, people escape the control of states and national boundaries *and* the limited linear ways of understanding themselves which states promote in their citizens” (2004: 245). They proposed that these narratives were written from the perspective of the migrant, who, by physically escaping the national borders, is now unencumbered by the limitations imposed by the state and as a result “is in a position of

peculiar insight, blessed with a specific awareness of the relativity of cultural rules and forms” (Ibid 246). Edward Said explains that migrant figures possess a unique vision because of their ability to compare the present reality to that of the past:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal* (Said, 2001: 186).

Homi Bhabha, however, explains that it is more than simply this plurality of vision and argues that it is in “reading between [the] borderlines of the nation space that we can see how the concept of the ‘people’ emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative moment” (2000: 145). Bhabha speaks of the “temporality of the ‘in-between’” (Ibid 148) and of the “exilic, the marginal and the emergent” (Ibid 149). He explains that “the very condition of cultural knowledge is the *alienation*<sup>6</sup> of the subject” (Ibid 150). For Bhabha, those who live hybridised cultural lives between two nations have the power to disrupt the essentialized ideas of culture (Ibid 1). It is in, he argues, the contestation of the “origin” as a claim of supremacy of narrative that we can overcome the “emergence of the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign” (Ibid 157). He believes that in between these fixed spaces – East vs. West, politics vs. theory, first world vs. third world or nation vs. exile – we can access original insights into culture. He states the following:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on these moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (2000: 1).

Here, the migrant *represents* “a forerunner in a new type of politics in which groups no longer mobilize on the basis of the old dichotomies of opposition, but move together in and through hybridity and difference” (Smith, 2004: 249). The migrant writers came to be seen as possessing the power to challenge the entrenched ways of viewing the world and our identities, which are based on “ancestry, passport, or geography” (Ibid). In this way, migration and the figure of the migrant became a “kind of metaphor, a symbol that catches

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis mine.

many of the shared understanding and assumptions which give postcolonial studies its parameters and shape” (Ibid 250).

### 1.1 The Problem with Metaphorization

However, postcolonial theorists may have glossed over the differences between the terms exile and diaspora, which are two different descriptions of the displacement and migration experience. To metaphorize migration is to claim confidently that the site of migration allows all migrants to revise the rigidity of the nation as a referent in the construction of identity, regardless of the different ways in which migration is experienced. Regardless of the exact definitions of the terms exile and diaspora, they have both been employed as an abstract metaphor of migrancy. Carter protests the fact that “diaspora is now conceived together with a range of other concepts (hybridity, nomadism, creolization) that seek to celebrate the progressive potential of such positions, to overcome the fixed and essentialized assumptions regarding both identity and territory” (2005: 55). Similarly, in his book *At Home in the World*, Timothy Brennan notes that exile has become another term that is now “freely applied to hybridity<sup>7</sup> without recognition of what is distinctive to it” (1997: 38).

At this point, it is important to address some of the criticisms levelled at this overvalorisation of the site of migrancy within theory. Bhabha’s most dramatic claim is that migrant writers at this site have the power to rewrite the concept of the modern nation because of their presence outside the control of nation-states (2000: 37). Many critics take issue with the expectation of a uniform representation by any writer who is considered a migrant. In summary, they take issue with the claim that all migrant writers, regardless of the differences in their individual or collective backgrounds, will challenge the traditional notions of identity. Caroline Nagel explains that in reality, immigrants tend to cling to one another as a group with a similar background such that “there is little indication that culture itself is contested” (Nagel, 2001: 252) in the actual site of migration. In other words, even as they live away from the actual territory of the home country, many migrants seek to create bonds that keep alive the old traditions and beliefs. Culture itself is not contested in the new site; rather, there is evidence that the culture of the original home country is recreated at the new

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Brennan speaks of hybridity as another term related to cosmopolitanism. It is a word that has come to refer to writers of “foreignness”, which has conferred on the writers a degree of respectability for their exalted position in two worlds. Brennan’s book is a critique of this perception.

destination. As Sean Carter succinctly puts it, “The problem with much of the diaspora literature, however, is that it fails to acknowledge that diasporas can also reproduce the essentialized notions of place and identity that they are supposed to transgress” (2005: 54). In fact, many diaspora communities could be complicit in asserting the very notions of national identities that they are expected to reconstruct.

In a similar vein, Aijaz Ahmad argues that postcolonial theorists have presented an oversimplified image of the migrant. He rejects Bhabha’s privileging of certain texts based on the travelling status of their writers. He also rejects Bhabha’s argument that all migrants are capable of offering this anticipated revision of the nation-state. Both Ahmad and Smith question the unrealistic portrayal of all migrant writers as individuals whose presence away from their original home countries necessarily indicates an escape from “the control of states” (Smith, 2004: 245). Ahmad explains that because a wide variety of migrant experiences exists, we cannot speak of refugees, immigrants, political exiles and their variants as one cohesive entity (Ahmad, 2000: 86). He argues that immigration in itself holds its very own contradictions: “Many have been propelled by need, yet others were driven away by persecution; for some there really is no longer a home to return to; in many cases need and ambition have become ambiguously and inextricably linked” (Ibid). He criticises the “image of ‘theorist’ as ‘traveller’, and of literary production itself as a ruse of immigration, of travelling *lightly*” (Ibid).

Others argue that the celebration of a metaphor of migration is damaging the term itself. They highlight the existence of a gap between the celebrated migrant writer and the actual figure of the migrant, which encompasses immigrants, refugees and other displaced persons. For most of the world’s citizens, migration is a “terrifying option” (Smith, 2004: 246), with constant reminders of necessary identity documents and sufficient finances. These writers, such as Aijaz Ahmad, Michael Hanne, Andrew Smith, Graham Huggan, Peter Van Der Veer and Rudolphus Teeuwen, believe that the metaphorical migrant should not be glorified at the expense of the actual migrants. Van Der Veer criticises the proponents of this metaphorical migrancy because they “leave out of their elaborate analyses the question of how the novel and the novelist are situated vis-à-vis the constituents they supposedly write for” (Van Der Veer, 1997: 103). This unfair representation pushed Teeuwen to state forcefully that the words migrant and exile have “undergone an unhelpful metaphorical extension and that postcolonial critics such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have forged

that extension” (Teeuwen, 2004: 284). Equally frustrated with this stance is Graham Huggan, who calls Bhabha “the culprit” (2007: 132). According to Huggan, Bhabha led this postcolonial “propensity to use spatial metaphor loosely – even in some cases, interchangeably” (Ibid). Sara Ahmed explains that the problem with thinking of migration as a metaphor is that it immediately conjures up an assumption of an authentic migrant perspective set against an inauthentic one such that “the inauthentic migrant would be the one who believes in fixed entities and who refuses to transgress” (1999: 334) the boundaries of the national identity. This stance seems to be a purely theoretical one.

## 1.2 Metaphorizing Migration and the National Question

An important part of the debate about the metaphorization of migration is the preoccupation with the relevance of national identities in today’s world. Before examining the concept of home itself and how it relates to questions of national belonging, I must explore some of the reasons why postcolonial theory roots for a migrancy that revises the stability of the nation. At the heart of the metaphor is the assumption that migrancy revises the notion of the nation as a fixed cornerstone of home and identity. In general, scholars in postcolonial studies are increasingly suspicious of nationalism, which is perceived as an elitist movement that does not take into account the interests of minorities. Similarly, nationalism has also been perceived as patriarchal in nature, with no interest in gender equality (McClintock, 1995). Scholars have argued that nationalism serves only elite interests while ignoring those of the subaltern: the women and the masses (Lazarus, 2004: 188). Moreover, many postcolonial scholars share the view that nationalism traps itself within a Western framework where both the concept and the practice of the nation-state are viewed as Western inventions imposed on the colonised by the West (Chrisman, 2004: 184). This popular academic view, which started to gain strength in the 1980s, perceives the era of the nation-state to be in decline and views nationalism as a new form of colonialism (Lazarus, 2004: 183).

The violence of this era helped shape the postcolonial theorists’ view of nationalism as a source of political violence. The decade in which the field of postcolonial studies itself emerged corresponded with the global shift from the liberation anti-colonial movements to a period of communal violence under the same banner: “Such political shifts fed the tendency of postcolonial studies to regard nationalism as inherently dominatory, absolutist, essentialist, and destructive” (Chrisman, 2004: 183). These scholars tend to shun the era of the 1970s,

which witnessed the countless liberation struggles and revolutionary independence movements that supplied the world with temporary euphoria. They do not believe that those struggles to gain independence were as equal and as important as any human struggle for freedom and equality (Lazarus, 2004: 197). David Luban writes that what has emerged as a process of liberation has now become tainted with blood (1980: 393). Morley also recalls Partha Chatterjee's view that nationalism is now perceived more as a "dark elemental, unpredictable force of primordial nature threatening the orderly calm of cultural life" (cited in Morley, 2000: 239). It has indeed become fashionable in recent scholarship, as Ahmad illustrates in his book *In Theory*, to view the nation-state as an evil creation and its construction as a process that has resulted in division, bloodshed and countless civil wars (Ibid).

As a result, the postcolonial proponents who valorise this metaphor embrace a form of political liberalism in which it is no longer fashionable to express an adherence to a nationalism of any sort, even as such adherences are prevalent in migrant culture. These critics fail to distinguish between cultural and political manifestations of nationalism. Ahmad explains that postcolonial literary critics see all types of belonging as "a mere myth of origins" (2000: 129), and Smith points out that postcolonial literary theorists have tended to look suspiciously at nations and nationalism in particular as manifestations of such belonging. Timothy Brennan notes, "Also prevalent is the idea that the artist and state are incompatible – a belief that places the writer today in a position of antagonism to one of the major tenets of the decolonisation intellectual whose involvement in a new state formation was central and defining" (1997: 41). Thus, the migrant writer, who ostensibly rejects the myth of nationalism and aims to reconstruct the nation-state, emerged as an object of intense fascination among postcolonial theorists.

However, the problem with such a stance that completely demonises nations and nationalisms is that it underestimates the roles that nations and nationalisms play in the construction of home for the postcolonial "travelling" subject. Such a stance also further banishes postcolonial studies along with the migrancy metaphor to a theoretical realm that is far removed from the reality of the migrants' lived experiences. Brennan explains that there is a gap to be bridged between this position in theory, which completely sidelines the national project as irrelevant, and the reality of people's constructions of homes away from the traditional home place or country of origin. He explains:

If the primary sense of place for many former residents of colonized countries is no longer the nation, it is often a local or ethnic culture packed off into exile, jumbled together with the official cultures of the metropolis (and the cultures of other immigrants), and, where not carried on, remembered” (1997: 45).

This “jumbled together” culture created by migrants directs our attention towards the importance of attaining a view that does not totally discount the importance of nation in the construction of home away from the country of origin. There rarely exists a clear-cut separation between migrants and the nation in the manner proposed by the postcolonial metaphor. In the same vein, Rosemary Marangoly George has also argued for a separation of “nationalism at the level of elite scholarship, political rhetoric, jurisprudence and state-building from the imagining of a place as one’s home that functions on the everyday level of ordinary people as they write and live ordinary lives” (1999: 15).

My interpretation of the novels will grapple with the complexities inherent in such migrant positions and the multiplicity of identities assumed in these positions to highlight the concern with the notion of home in relation to the home country rather than the occupation with *rewriting* the nation. In an era where home leaving<sup>8</sup> is a more common occurrence, the different starting points and circumstances surrounding the process of creating homes in new places should be accounted for such that they do not blindly refer to one homogenous intellectual position.

For each migrant writer discussed, there is a different engagement with the experience of migration that makes the presence away from the country of origin a unique journey with a specific dialogue with past memories and national histories. These different dialogues produce different experiences of displacement in addition to the vision anticipated in postcolonial circles. Many migrants feel tension instead of celebration upon their arrival in new destination; they feel that they are not welcome or that they do not belong in their new environments. Their sentiments, as they express them in their narratives, do not coincide with a metaphor of migrancy. Attempts to assimilate in a new host country might even further highlight the sense of loss, especially if the migration from the original home country took place as a result of a traumatic event. The migration might serve to further alienate them from what was once considered the immediate shelter of home, family, community and other elements that are integral to the perceived sense of a stable identity.

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<sup>8</sup> Home leaving here refers to the departure from the first and original home place.

Thus, the end result of the migration process is too complex to be categorically described as a reconstruction of the nation-state. Often, the creation of a new home takes place between the pull of the traditional home place or country of origin and that of the new space. The creation process is a continuous negotiation between memory, nostalgia and identity. Additionally, while these negotiations might ultimately result in a narrative that disrupts the centrality of the nation, such disruptions are not always the main concern for the migrant writer. Migrants' experiences are rarely totalising but often contradictory, ambivalent and uncertain. To test this claim, which equates migrancy in general with destabilising (national) identity, requires us to think of what it means to be at home in one's home country in the first place and to question the role of memory in stabilising or destabilising the fixity of that home.

## 2. Migrants' Journeys and the Dynamics of Memory

By definition, migration is a journey away from home in the sense that it places the person in a setting that is previously unfamiliar, away from "the home's mundane realities" (Peters, 1990: 19). Boym mentions that home becomes an issue only if it is lost; one only feels the need to question home if it is no longer there. The first time we start to think of the meanings of home, home country and homeland is the time we "experience the first failure of homecoming" (2001: 251). Douglas Porteous actually suggests that home can only be understood from the perspective of travellers, whose temporary loss of the feeling of home pushes them to try to recreate it (1985: 387). Before migration, a subject usually takes the traditional home place for granted and does not think outside the "limits and borders of her or his experience" (Ahmed, 2000: 87). Migration also disrupts another important aspect of home, "the feeling of community" (Ibid), to whom the subject makes no attempt to translate one's self culturally or linguistically. Sara Ahmed explains that the question of "being home" is a question of the "discontinuity between past and present" (1999: 343). To a migrant, thinking of home is "an act of remembering" (Ibid).

It comes as no surprise then that the majority of the selected narratives grapple with the events that caused that very discontinuity on a collective level. The Palestinian *Nakbah* of 1948, the fifteen-year long Lebanese Civil war that started in 1975 and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 have become prominent themes in the literature of each of the three respective countries. In each of the selected novels, a writer puts forward a narrative that engages the historical incident that provoked the collective migration. These representations

and narratives were produced at different spatial and temporal distances from the event that inspired the move to the new country. At times, the narratives address both the event itself and its by-product of migration. At others, the narratives are only preoccupied with the event such that the whole novel is set in the country of origin, regardless of the presence of the novelist in a different country.

What is noteworthy is that these novels display different moods – ranging from different degrees of sentimentality to acute nostalgia – and are not only engrossed in critiques of either their respective nations or the national project in general. Described as a fixation on the loss of the home and nostalgic yearnings, the “exilic condition” does not characterise all of the selected novels. Similarly, the label of diasporic, described as an active engagement with the homing process in a new destination and an absence of nostalgia for the home country, does not apply to all of these novels either. In fact, an examination of these novels reveals that the way in which home itself is represented in the novel in relation to the notion of the home country is highly influenced by memory. The memory of home determines to a large extent the leaning of the novel towards either the exilic or diasporic end of the spectrum.

## 2.1 Remembering Home

The “dynamics of remembering and commemoration” (Gilroy, 1994: 204) determine the perception of home as portable, acquired and dynamic or fixed, stable and lost. Discussing Arab-American literature, Layla Maleh notes that “memory becomes a pretext that frames the content of the authors’ experiences, and a pretext to construct a dual or juxtaposed picture of their mental and emotional make up” (Maleh, 2009: 37)<sup>9</sup>. These narratives thus provide a fertile soil for examining the authors’ experiences and representations of the notion of home away from the home country.

Boym states that “to feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are you”; the unquestioned home is one of intimacy and familiarity, where the subject derives safety from their knowledge of the surroundings (2001: 251). These attributes render the home a comfortable dwelling; it is a site where one is most familiar with the immediate community and the immediate surroundings (Terkenli, 1995: 327) before migration places the individual in a foreign terrain. This familiarity means that the individual is in control of

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<sup>9</sup> This is especially noticeable in the case of writers with Palestinian origins because many of their narratives are driven by the desire to preserve the idea of Palestine as a national homeland.

the surroundings (Hage, 2010: 417). It ascertains the subject of the stability of both the home and the self.

If home is unavailable, people turn to the memory of it as a compensation strategy (Porter, 2001: 304). Pierre Nora suggests that active commemoration of the past takes place defensively if the environment of the memory itself is absent (1989: 12). Similarly, some migrant narratives dwell on the past for that very reason because the migrants' past is not shared collectively at the new destination. If they did not feel linked to their home country and believe that their history was at risk of being erased, such narratives would not exist. Migrants find themselves in an environment where their memories are no longer shared collectively, and the more this awareness hits them, the more effort they display in their attempts to preserve these memories (Ibid 16).

Upon arriving in a new country, all migrants engage in the process of homebuilding. The essence of home lies in the interaction between subject and space; home is the result of "recurrent, regular investment of meaning in a context with which people personalize and identify through some measure of control" (Terkenli, 1995: 325). The concept of home relies on time: the gradual investment of a subject in space changes the experience of place over time and thus renders the new place a home. Repetition is an essential element in the transformation of place into home (Ibid 326). Naturally, the unfamiliar space in which the migrant has just arrived cannot yet be experienced as home, as the two dimensions of time and familiarity are lacking. Upholding home only in memory, these migrants gravitate towards one of two forces: 1) towards familiarising the unfamiliar and thus actively engaging in creating a home in their new place; or 2) towards nostalgia (as homesickness) and thus holding on to the belief that home is fixed in the space they left behind (Ibid 329).

Salhi states that all exiles "keep an idealized image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee, and never manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. As such, they share feelings of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing" (Salhi, 2006: 3). While these elements of solitude, estrangement, loss and longing are exhibited in some of the narratives included in my selection of novels, not all narratives depict the same inclination. Salhi's statement, however, helps to highlight one main aspect of exile culture (which is only one type of migrant culture): the memory of the idealised image of home. Such representations of the past are rarely accurate reflections of reality because the memories are "always flawed, always tainted by the distortions of the exile's imagination and desire" (McClennen, 2004:

56). Exile narratives are thus consequentially marred by two dominant themes: those bemoaning the separation from the home country and those idealising that lost home of the past (Altoma, 2003: 38).

## 2.2 Nostalgia as (Home-)Sickness

This idealisation of the home country is one common reaction to the experience of migration. It is more prevalent in exilic literature than in diasporic literature<sup>10</sup>. Exilic literature presumes that there is one fixed home anchored in space to which the return would cure the pain of exile. Nostalgia is thus one dominant feature of exilic literature. The word nostalgia is derived from the Greek word *nostos*, which means to return home, and the word *algia*, which means longing (Boym, 2001: xiii). Stephen Legg defines nostalgia as “1. Sentimental yearning for a period of the past. 2. Regretful or wistful memory of an earlier time. 3. Severe homesickness” (2004: 100). A text that exudes this sort of nostalgia is best described as a text suspended between the past and the future; its fixation on the past prevents it from engaging with the future.

Nostalgia was actually perceived as a form of sickness for which doctors issued prescriptions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup> (Boym, 2001: xiv). The person afflicted with nostalgia clings to an unreal, overly idealised past. Additionally, because the object to which they cling is unreal, there is no cure for nostalgia. Physicians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century found out that even when the afflicted nostalgic patient returned home, the patient was still not cured (Ibid 12). This homesick nostalgic subject continues to cling to the memories of the past to the extent of almost “inhabiting them” (Hage, 2010: 417) at the expense of occupying the present time.

In a similar vein, when asked about the meaning of home, Mahmoud Darwish succinctly summarised the link between memory and home. Darwish stated that

home is a place where you have a memory; without memories you have no real relationship to a place. Also, it is impossible to return. Nobody crosses the same river twice. If I return, I will not find my childhood. There is no return, because history goes on. Return is just a visit to a place of memory or to the memory of the place (2002: 77).

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<sup>10</sup> A more thorough discussion of these labels is provided in section 3.

<sup>11</sup> Boym explains that the word nostalgia was coined in a medical dissertation written by a Swiss student in 1688. The word was first introduced in the field of medicine. Boym also explains that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, doctors prescribed cures for nostalgia that included opium, leeches or journeys to the Swiss Alps (2007: 7).

Darwish's description of home demonstrates that there is little hope for the nostalgic migrant to recapture the remembered home; the idealised memory of home is in the past and beyond restoration. The home that is recalled nostalgically is not a reality but a construct of memory, for that memory of the place being home "represents not a copy of an original but more precisely a version of it"<sup>12</sup> (Whitehead, 2009: 51). Darwish realises that home itself is dynamic; it is not necessarily fixed to one place. Home is not a fixed notion from which departure and return could happen on a regular basis. This idea suggests that home is much more than a mere physical dwelling. That is, for Darwish, home is not simply a geographical location; the physical presence in the remembered place does not resolve the question of home. Similarly, Boym writes that home is a state of mind that does not necessarily coincide with a specific location (2001: 251). For these individuals who continue to experience nostalgia as a form of homesickness, "the object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia" (Ibid).

The problems imposed by nostalgia are best depicted by some of the selected novels in this dissertation. In Iqbal Qazwini's novel *Zubaida's Window*, Zubaida, who is critical of the mythic and violent nature of the nation-state yet longs for the tastes, sounds, smells and familiar faces of her family in Iraq, grapples with a tormenting sense of nostalgia in her exile in Germany. Zubaida's return achieves no homecoming, and nostalgia literally causes her heart to stop. Similarly, in Jad el-Hage's novel *The Last Migration*, the main protagonist, Ashraf, is diagnosed with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). His nostalgia for the love of his life that stands as a symbol of Lebanon also brings about his physical ailments. In his essay, John Durham Peters writes that "idealization often goes with mourning" (1999: 19). This statement best describes how Ashraf remembers his dead lover – who serves as the symbol of Lebanon – in the most idealised light.

In this context, nostalgia does indeed seem like an affliction that requires a cure. The danger of nostalgia lies in its ability to confuse the actual and the imaginary and thereby create a "phantom homeland" (Boym, 2001: xvi). When conflated with homesickness, nostalgia conjures up the image of a passive migrant who lives in an imaginary past (Hage,

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<sup>12</sup> Ha Jin uses Odysseus's return to Ithaca to provide a similar example. Odysseus's return to the homeland was not a triumphant one. He realizes that twenty years of exile changed him, his memory of the homeland and the homeland itself. Odysseus's idealized memory of his homeland fails to match the reality he encounters upon return (Jin, 2008: 66).

2010: 416, 420). Nostalgia “produces subjective visions of afflicted imagination that tend to colonize the realm of politics, history, and everyday perception” (Boym, 2007: 9). This conceptualisation of nostalgia goes against the creation of new meanings out of revised identities, as implied in the migrancy metaphor.

However, some scholars have recently pointed out the positive effects of nostalgia on migrants. Ghassan Hage states that “far too often, the collapsing of all migrant yearning for home into a single ‘painful’ sentiment is guided by a ‘miserabilist’ tendency in the study of migration that wants to make migrants passive pained people at all costs” (Hage, 2010: 417). This tendency is also evident in many narratives where the characters manage to transcend their exilic state of minds and to overcome their homesickness. In contrast, Hage suggests that nostalgia can actually be empowering, and he argues that “affective” memories from a migrant’s past could be transformed into a process of homebuilding at the new destination (Ibid). Leo Spitzer has similarly argued that rather than describing homesickness, nostalgia could also have the capacity to motivate people to transcend the traumas of their past by focusing on positive memories from their past experiences (1998: 384). These thoughts are also in line with Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia:

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately. These distinctions are not absolute binaries, and one can surely make a more refined mapping of the grey areas on the outskirts of imaginary homelands (2007: 13).

Restorative nostalgia recalls the rigidity of national identity, which is passed down as an absolute truth, and embraces the restoration of origins; it “returns and rebuilds one homeland with paranoic determination” (Ibid 15). Conversely, reflective nostalgia embraces individuality; it is about stasis and flexibility (Ibid). One can draw a comparison here between the application of the terms “exilic” and “diasporic” literature and the terms “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia, as applied by Boym. The first set in the comparison concerns absolute loss, collective truths and the past, while the second set highlights adaptation, individuality and the future. Restorative nostalgia “characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths” (Boym, 2001: 41). In contrast, reflective nostalgia acknowledges the past but invests in the present (Ibid).

The selected novels feature these different types of nostalgia and the degrees of nostalgia included in between them. The novels dwell on the space between the two extremes of each set. Just as some migrant narratives depict the debilitating experience of restorative nostalgia, others challenge it (Ibid 16). Thus, these narratives illustrate that the creation of home is not contingent on a specific geographical region.

### 2.3 Distinguishing between Home and Homeland

In his discussion of the rhetoric of displacement in the work of Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, who emigrated because of persecution in his home country, Nico Israel sheds light on Adorno's experience of appropriating America as a home in the shadow of his migration experience. Israel states that a recurrent theme in Adorno's *Minima Moralia* is that of the home (Israel, 2000: 82). Throughout his autobiographical text, Adorno wonders about the nature of home, the feeling of being at home and the characteristics that make one place a home as he muses about the links between home, nationhood and nationality (Ibid).

It is noteworthy, however, that throughout the text, Adorno interchangeably employs the German words *Heim* and *Heimat*, which mean home and homeland<sup>13</sup>, respectively (Ibid). The overlap between home and homeland exists not only in Adorno's mind but also in most of ours. It is not easy to differentiate clearly between the two concepts<sup>14</sup>, which have become extremely destabilised in a modern world experiencing migration on a massive scale and rapid development of communication and information exchange among its remote parts. In *The Writer as Migrant*, Ha Jin explains that the word homeland has two main definitions: it could refer either to a person's native land or to a land where a person is present at the moment (2008: 65). In the past, it was easy to reconcile these differences because the home in homeland also referred to one's origins and past in one specific country, while today, the meaning of home in homeland has changed such that one person could have a home in

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, in the Arabic language, the terms home and homeland are both implied in the word *Watan*. According to Yasir Suleiman, Francis al-Marrash (1836-73) highlights the distinction between the two concepts *Watan* and *Umma* as follows: the former refers to the place where the person belongs, and the latter refers to the group or the nation (Suleiman, 2003: 114). More often, however, the word *Watan* is used simply to refer to the country of origin. Marilyn Booth states that the term *Watan* has been used in Arabic literature to mean home, homeland, place of birth or nation (2001). The Arabic word *Watan* is related to the act of inhabiting a certain place. It differs from the word country, which is derived from the Latin word *terra contrata*, a land with specific borders. *Watan*, however, has no geopolitical connotations; it is closer in meaning to home than to country.

<sup>14</sup> Hamid Naficy actually argues against efforts to demarcate clearly between the two concepts. For Naficy, refusing to define these concepts clearly is an oppositional strategy that prevents the words from being appropriated rigidly (1990: 2).

multiple places and thus refer to more than one country as a homeland (Ibid). Hence, Hamid Naficy writes that today “the empirical and metaphorical house, home and homeland are in crisis” (1990: 6).

These novels demonstrate some of the ways in which these concepts have been destabilised. Some individuals live in the home country and yet they do not feel at home. Other individuals have succeeded in creating homes and feeling at home many miles away from the home country. Yet another group holds on to nostalgia away from the home country as the only promise or potential of being/feeling at home. There are even those who consider themselves to have a home in a national homeland in which they neither were born nor have ever visited. Indeed, scholars in a variety of disciplines are concerned with coming to terms with home, whether in a literal or a metaphorical sense. No longer is it simply the case that one’s homeland or home is the country of origin (Jin, 2008: 65). What might have been taken for granted once as a simple identification between one’s country of origin and one’s home has now become a highly complex issue.

These varied personal experiences of home make it difficult to distinguish clearly between the home and (national) homeland or home country. These experiences also complicate the relationship between “exile” and nationalism (as a form of belonging) because the definitions of home and homeland bring into question the issue of nationalism, nationality and their links to identity. Observe, for example, the following quote by Edward Said: “Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (2001: 176). Nationalism is one expression of identity that assures the self of the presence of the home, real or imagined. Similarly, Rejai et al. note that “nationalism refers to an awareness of membership in a nation (potential or actual), together with a desire to achieve, maintain and perpetuate the identity, integrity and prosperity of that nation” (1969: 141). While Said’s definition of nationalism highlights its aspects of “cultural intimacy”<sup>15</sup>, Rejai’s definition highlights the link to the nation as a project of state building.

Looking into artistic and cultural representations that offer glimpses into migration experiences provides rewarding start points for a development of a theoretical framework that allows us to reconsider what it means to construct home away from the home country. It is limiting to read these texts, which exhibit different degrees of belonging, sentimentality and

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<sup>15</sup> The term cultural intimacy is borrowed from Boym (2001: 42).

nostalgia, strictly within the framework of the postcolonial metaphor for migration, which sets nationalism and exile as opposites (Hout, 2006: 191). A postcolonial lens leads us to examine exile and nationalism as unavoidably linked realities (Brennan, 1991: 62). In contrast, in her discussion of two novels written by Lebanese migrants, Syrine Hout proposes that

feeling at home is associated with freedom, a sense of belonging and personal dignity, wherever and whenever these may be found and enjoyed. Exile, by contrast, is a state of cognitive and emotional dissonance whether generated by war and political/sectarian division in one's own nation or induced by physical uprootedness abroad (Hout, 2006: 193).

There is also a distinction to be made between political nationalism and cultural intimacy, which is based more on “common social context, not on national or ethnic homogeneity” (Boym, 2001: 42). Restorative nostalgia thrives on political nationalism, while reflective nostalgia dwells on cultural intimacy and “does not pretend to build the mythical place called home” (Ibid 50). Although the two types of nostalgia might share common references from the same national history, they result in different narratives (Ibid 49). It is important to note again, however, that these two types of nostalgia are not absolute binaries and that migrants often experience different shades of the two types of nostalgia at different times.

Following Hout's and Boym's thoughts, I argue in my dissertation, with the support of the selected novels, against the accentuation of this dichotomy between nation as a political project and exile as an alienated condition from the nation in reading the migrant literature of the Middle East. Instead of reading a novel as either an act of advocating or an act of rejecting the nation or nationalism as a political cause or a national project – or even as an act of rewriting a nation as the postcolonial critics have claimed – I will clarify and highlight the aspects of “cultural intimacy” (Ibid 42) as the novelist's human engagement with the idea of nation as a home, people and a compilation of early memories.

I describe these novels as belonging to the genre of migrant literature. This shift responds to Carine M. Mardorossian's article “From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature”. Mardorossian states that “over the last decade or so, some postcolonial writers have reconfigured their identity by rejecting the status of exile for that of migrant” (2002: 15). She describes exile as a “condition that itself requires explanation and ideological analysis” (Ibid 16). She argues that there has been a shift away from the use of the terms exile and migrant, which did not correspond with the actual meanings of the two terms and their

implications in the literature (Ibid 17). What might seem to be an excessive preoccupation with nomenclature to some is actually explained by Mardorossian as an attempt to grapple with the assumptions implied in the term exile. She states that to refer to a certain writer as an exile is “sufficient to imply certain foundational premises about his or her work” (Ibid 16), such as being

better equipped to provide an objective view of the two worlds they are straddling by virtue of their alienation. They are ascribed the status of neutral observers, a detachment on which – according to the high modernist tradition which still dictates the discourse of exile – their literary authority is based (Ibid).

The shift from the use of exile literature to migrant literature “challenges this binary logic by emphasising movement and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages. The world inhabited by the characters is no longer conceptualised as ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Ibid). I agree with Mardorossian’s view that the migrant oscillates between the two places and, in fact, resists the view of both as separate polarised entities from the onset.

The discussed novels demonstrate that the concept of home can no longer be said to apply simply to a geographic place or site or even to a certain culture or set of practices. The concept of home is no longer stable or uniform, and stability and uniformity are no longer perceived as desirable<sup>16</sup>. In fact, the depiction of journeys “back home” in the selected literature often exposes the novelists’ suspicion of the fixity of the concept of home.

While these writers no longer live in their birth place, some narratives point towards a level of success in adopting and creating new homes at their new destinations. The ability of memory to reconcile the past and the present determines the success in adopting new homes at a time when the internet and aeroplanes help assure people of the ease of connecting with their home countries (Jin, 2008: 72). As a result, Di Stefano explains that “home is not necessarily a fixed notion... more than a physical space, home might be understood as a familiarity and regularity of activities and structures of time” (2002: 38). Homes are not found only where one is born; rather, they could be carved in different locations as long as one invests active effort in creating a new home. Amin Maalouf, for example, prefers to use the metaphor of roads, upon which human beings embark on their journeys toward new homes, rather than the metaphor of trees, which are indefinitely anchored in the same ground

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<sup>16</sup> Even in the selected novels by Palestinian writers, the concept of home is not equated with the national homeland. Susan Abulhawa’s representation in *Mornings in Jenin* actually depicts how the personal and national homes can be quite distinct.

(Maalouf, 2008: x). That is, the migrant who experiences a sense of homesickness in a place away from the geographical space traditionally designated as home will be able to ultimately render the new locale as a home through a recurrent investment of meaning in the new place. The creation of home is eventually an accumulation of all thoughts, feelings and symbols resulting from the interaction and the personalisation of the new space, regardless of whether that space was chosen voluntarily or was forcefully imposed on the subject (Terkenli, 1995: 331).

### 3. Classifications of Migrant Literature

At this point, it is important to discuss the different classifications of literature based on the method of departure from the home country. Although the selected novels are written by migrants in different circumstances, they are often discussed as exile literature or the literature of the diaspora. Such a label is misleading; the word exile has different connotations of force and suffering that is not inherent in the word diaspora. Because both diaspora and exile derive their meanings from distinct historical circumstances, applying them interchangeably ignores their specificities. At the heart of both terms are questions of how the home is experienced away from the home country. However, in a world that is witnessing rapid and dramatic changes in terms of migration and communication, these words seem to have lost contact with their original meanings such that they are used to refer to the experience of migration in general. In the last section of this chapter, I offer a brief summary of the origin and meanings of both exile and diaspora, as well as the implications embedded in labelling a literature with either term. I believe the distinction between exile and diaspora as two different migration experiences that could occur separately or concurrently helps to frame the upcoming discussion of the representation of home in the selected novels by migrants whose experiences with migration and home are themselves mutable, evolving and dynamic.

#### 3.1 Exile and the Exilic<sup>17</sup>

Etymologically, “*exile*” originates from the Latin word “*exilium*”, where the prefix “*ex*” means “out” and the root “*solum*” refers to “ground, land or soil”. The Latin word “*exilium*” is also related to the Latin verb “*salire*”, which means “to leap or spring” (McClennen, 2004:

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<sup>17</sup> Caren Kaplan explains that, although the terms cosmopolitan and diaspora are more commonly used when discussing travel and displacement, exile remains an important term in this discussion (Kaplan, 2000: 103).

14). The word implies both a painful separation and progress (2004: 14). When we think of exiled writers, Nico Israel invites us to think of authors such as Homer, Ovid, St. Augustine, Dante, Cervantes, Byron, Joyce, Brecht and Nabakov (2000: 2). These writers, Israel states, are exiles because “they have lived (and many, died) away from their homelands” (Ibid 2). Almost all of the writers whose novels I discuss in the next few chapters are exiles from this perspective as well. They have all lived away from their home countries: Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.

Other writes also agree with Israel’s definition. For example, Michael Seidel states in his book *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* that “an exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another” (Seidel, 1986: ix). His definition does not encompass the reasons and motivations that lead to the migrant’s presence in the location of exile. For Seidel, exile only requires that the person be present in a locale different from the place of origin and that the migrant reflect through a medium on the past experience. Similarly, David Morley concedes that exile involves being removed temporally and geographically from a location of habit (2000: 49). Geographical distance is the one uncontested characteristic of exile in all of these discussions.

In contrast, in his essay “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said describes exile as an “unhealable rift forced...between the self and its true home” (2001: 173). In doing so, Said inscribes exile as a situation of pain and loss. In this specific essay, Said sets the confines of the term exile to those who long to but are unable to return to their home countries<sup>18</sup>. To adopt Said’s definition of exile is to accept that there is an uncontested element of force

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<sup>18</sup> Hammid Shahidian (2000: 76), John D. Barbour (2007: 293), Nejme Khalil Habib (2008: 88) and many other writers have defined exile in the same way as Said. For them, exile is a continuous state of loss. They view the exiled person as one forever longing to return. Hammid Shahidian captures the notion in the following:

a mind torn asunder, pieces missing, pieces extra, memories convoluted. At times, the four walls of one’s host land house becomes home, at others, not even one’s legal entitlement to citizenry suffices. At times, a short poem, a collected volume of essays, an old newspaper from home in the mother tongue become home; at other not even the solid ground of the host land under your feet suffices. Exile means the painful realization that where you live *is and is not* home, and that you do not live where home is (2000: 76).

John D. Barbour describes it as a constant awareness that

one is not at home. The exile is oriented to a distant place and feels that he does not belong where he lives. Exile is also an orientation to time, a plotting of one’s life story around a pivotal event of departure and a present condition of absence from one’s native land (2007: 293).

Nejme Khalil Habib states that regardless of the reason for exile, “the dream of returning home stays alive in the mind of the exiled person. It flares or fades from person to person and from one circumstance to another” (2008: 88).

preventing the exiled individual from returning home. When I think of the writers discussed in this dissertation, this definition is inapplicable. Although all of the writers whose works I discuss grapple with exile, many of them could indeed return to their respective countries of origin if they *wanted* to. Many of them willingly chose to live away from their countries, and many have succeeded in achieving a degree of homecoming in their new destinations.

Since Said's essay, it has actually become more common to find more arguments put forward against rigidly defining the term than arguments supporting a definition that allows for the multiple experiences of exile in today's world. Michael Böss tells us to not set a definition of exile in stone in order to remain vigilant of the different ways in which exile could be employed to recall its social, cultural, psychological and historical meanings<sup>19</sup> (2005: 15). Such stances warn against limiting the experience of exile by defining it as a voluntary or involuntary journey, dominated by a loss of home or an adaptation to a life in a new setting. It is indeed enough that a person perceives one's self to be an exile, even if this perception is not permanent. Naficy states that exile "consists of multiple and variegated exiles, big and small, external and internal, fixed and voluntary" (1999: 9). Exile no longer refers simply to a permanent political expulsion from the home country or the impossibility of returning to a certain country. It has become more of a reference to cultural displacement.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the study of the culture of exile, one needs to clarify the distinctions between exiles, refugees, immigrants and expatriates. Many scholars have highlighted the differences between these categories of individuals who live away from their respective home countries. Said explains that, while force – however defined – is a major aspect of exile, some other differences exist between the aforementioned categories:

Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth century state. The word "refugee" has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas "exile" carried with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons (1984: 181).

The connotations of the terms refugee, exile and expatriate are extremely different. Refugees leave their home states and *migrate* to seek the protection of a new host state; if

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<sup>19</sup> Böss actually classifies exiles into eight different types: political, religious, cultural and social, sexual, economic, penal, inner and symbolic.

they do not cross the state border of a new host state, they are considered displaced persons (Hein, 1993: 44). Indeed, refugees have posed an international problem since the 1970s, when refugees began to form a substantial number of global migrants (Ibid 43). Although refugees and exiles share an inability to return to the home country, the “defining feature of exile is the focus on the individual figure (Israel, 2000: 2). Among refugees, there could be exiles, but not all exiles are refugees because unlike the word refugee, which “refers to a necessary territorial displacement”, exile does not constitute a legal category (McClennen, 2004: 15). Similarly, McClennen draws a distinction between the exile and the expatriate in arguing “that ‘exile’ typically refers to one who has been forced to leave one’s country, while ‘expatriate’ suggests that the separation is voluntary” (Ibid 15). Expatriates and immigrants, unlike exiles, are perceived to be more inclined to adapt and form homes in their new countries and less inclined to dwell on nostalgic memories.

The terms exilic and diasporic literature also must be differentiated from one another. To describe a novel as exilic is to suggest that the novel depicts a fixation on the past, is dominated by a sense of homesickness and features protagonists who struggle with homesickness. The word exilic here refers to more than just the site where the novel was written. The importance of the label is evident in Syrine Hout’s discussion of Lebanese writer Jad el-Hage’s novel *The Last Migration* (Hout, 2007: 288). While the novel is written away from Lebanon, Hout describes it as diasporic, not exilic. The label of diasporic literature in this context is invoked to refer to a novel by a writer in “exile” whose writings reflect preoccupation with the adaptation aspect in the new country rather than with the pain associated with the longing for the home country, as well as an active investment in the homing process in the new location (Ibid). In other words, Hout argues that, while exilic literature (recalling here Said’s definition of exile) could be identified thematically through the writers’ fixation on the past with a dominant tinge of nostalgia, diasporic literature is identified thematically through the absence of a longing for the home country and a vision that balances the past and the future. From that perspective, unlike exilic literature, diasporic literature does not suggest that the new and old locations are opposites; rather, it suggests a reconciliation and acceptance of both.

### 3.2 Diaspora and the Diasporic

Although initially related to the models of the Greek, Jewish and Armenian diasporas, the traditional definition of the term diaspora has changed over time. It is now associated with the

greater process of transnational migration and increasing cultural hybridity. Thus, the concept that principally applied to the experiences of the Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Africans is applied to more than thirty different ethnic groups today (Cohen, 1996: 507). The term encompasses “a multitude of ethnic, religious and national communities who find themselves living outside of the territory to which they are historically ‘rooted’” (Carter, 2004: 55). In this sense, the diaspora is also strongly associated with the assumptions of the migration metaphor in terms of offering revisions of fixed notions of identity.

The definitions of exile and diaspora are closely tied to one another. Compared with the concept of exile, the term diaspora is perceived to entail more choice in the process that determines migrants’ departure. Israel points out that the element of choice constitutes the most contentious issue in the recurrent debates over the use of the two terms exile and diaspora when addressing the theorisations of writing displacement (2000: 13): “That is, one must acknowledge the difference between the personal, economic, social, and political circumstances of, for example, Henry James or Ezra Pound, and, say, Richard Wright or Ngugi wa Thiongo” (Ibid). Clifford argues that the term diaspora offers a “loosely coherent adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling in displacement” (1994: 310). Israel highlights this point when addressing the linguistic difference between the two terms diaspora and exile. While exile linguistically contains both an element of force and a sense of progress, diaspora “indicates the dispersal or scattering of a body of people from their traditional home across foreign lands; yet like the agricultural sowing of seeds from which the word comes to us (from the Greek *speirein*), it also suggests an anticipation of root-taking and eventual growth” (Israel, 2000: 1).

This distinction between exile and diaspora dates back to the first diasporic experience: that of the Jews. The historical destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 568 BC highlighted the painful aspect of diaspora: the experience of displacement manifested in the banishment from the homeland, the loss of home and the sense of exile (Cohen, 1996: 508). However, this “victim tradition” (Ibid) that associated diaspora with pain and displacement is now anachronistic. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972), diaspora is now more associated with choice regarding departure because the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 allowed the Jews a choice between life away from Israel and life in their homeland (Hout, 2007: 287). In other words, those Jews who chose to stay in the Diaspora

were no longer exiles because they had been given the historical chance to return to the Jewish homeland and to relieve the pain of exile.

With regard to critical theory, this distinction between diaspora and exile over the choice of departure from the traditional home place gave diasporic literature its classification as a literature preoccupied with adaptation in the new setting. It is also tied to the idea of spiritual resistance that drove the first diasporic experience of the Jews (Israel, 2000: 2). Cohen states that “diasporas are positioned somewhere between nation-states and ‘travelling cultures’ in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state in a physical sense but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside the nation-states’ space/time zone” (Cohen, 1997: 135-6). Diaspora is exile with the homesickness lifted (Peters, 1990, 20). Israel argues that, although both exile and diaspora are two overlapping ways of describing displacement, there are subtle distinctions between them:

In terms of contemporary literary and cultural studies, at least, “exile”, perhaps most closely associated with literary modernism, tends to imply both a coherent subject or author and a more circumscribed, limited conception of place and home. Maintaining a stronger link to minority group solidarity and associated with the intersection of postcoloniality and theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism, “diaspora”, by contrast, aims to account for hybridity or performativity that troubles such notions of cultural dominance, location and identity (Ibid 3).

In this framework, to write about the predicament of displacement between exile and diaspora is to accept the claim that exile stands for “the existential stability of the individual and the nation” and that diaspora denotes “the claims put forth for a migrancy that reroutes or revises them” (Ibid). In this sense, displacement is being theorised; it no longer simply refers to the agony of being alienated in a certain place but now also refers to one form of experiencing place<sup>20</sup>. It is my aim to work within the framework of these debates. Specifically, through a discussion of home in the selected novels, I intend to explore the complexity of writing about home at a geographical distance from the country of origin at three different points in the history of the modern Arab Middle East. I suggest that subjects do not easily identify themselves in one migrant position; rather, they shift fluidly among the different experiences of migration. Along the same lines, Hammid Shahidian explains that “exiles can become immigrants, just as circumstances could make the latter exiles” (2000:

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<sup>20</sup> In that regard, Timothy Brennan has argued that “actually, ‘travel’ is the more ‘theoretical’ term, and ‘displacement’ far from being neutral, is designed precisely to force readers to remember the involuntary travel of deportation, migrations, and war” (1997: 17).

71-72). The experience of displacement pushes the migrant to carve a home in the shadow of these unstable identities of migration, where expressions of national belonging can no longer be seen in an absolute light.

## Chapter Two

### 1. The Significance of the Homeland in the Aftermath of the *Nakbah*

The inclusion of novels by Palestinian writers in this study contributes to the discussion of the metaphorization of migration by highlighting the forceful aspect of migration. For Palestinians, migration to different countries is dominated by obstacles and restrictions. Looking into novels by Palestinian writers of different generations complicates discussions of the valorized migrant writer since Palestinians in particular have a more troublesome history of migration. Since the initial expulsion of 1948, some Palestinians have moved and lived in places other than Palestine, in smaller or larger communities, in Western countries or in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab states. Others still live as internally displaced people after the loss of their original homes in their respective villages.

This history of loss and injustice contributed to the perpetuation of the Palestinian struggle to return. Although many Palestinians were actually born away from Palestine, they managed to maintain a strict sense of a Palestinian national identity and upheld the fight for the right of return to the Palestinian homeland, considering themselves as refugees or exiles. Such effects of forced migration as those apparent in the history of Palestine present us with a unique lens through which to examine the relationship between the concept of home and the question of national identity. In the discussion of the novels in this chapter, I examine how the concept of home relates to the loss of the homeland in narratives by Palestinian writers for whom the imagination of Palestine continues to play a strong role. Palestinians, whether legally recognized as refugees or voluntary migrants to different countries around the world, continue to affiliate themselves with a Palestinian identity, making it difficult to separate between political and personal preoccupations. Before delving into this discussion of the selected novels, I give a brief overview of the development of Palestinian literature in the shadow of the history of Palestinian struggle since 1948 in an attempt to explain the intersection between the political and the personal preoccupation which will set the tone for this chapter's discussion of the representation of home in novels by for four Palestinian writers.

## 1.1 The *Nakbah* of 1948

Palestinian literature is known for its preoccupation with “the treatment of place and time, of tone and attitude, and in its particular involvement with the pervasive political issue” (Jayyusi, 1992: 1). The history of this excessive concern with the pervasive political issue dates back to the events of 1948, or what came to be known in the Arab world as the *Nakbah*. 1948 marked the creation of the state of Israel and the beginning of the displacement of Palestinians. As Julianne Hammer puts it, had the *Nakbah* not occurred in 1948, Palestine would have ended up as one of the many Arab states that declared independence shortly after the world wars (2005: 10). However, 1948 became a watershed in Arab history when “between 77 and 83 percent of the Palestinians who lived in the part of Palestine that later became Israel – i.e. 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine – were turned into refugees” (Sa’di, 2002: 175). Peteet states that “estimates of 2,428,100 means that nearly half the Palestinian population of 5.2 million are refugees” (1995: 168). “About 418 villages were erased, and out of twelve Palestinian or mixed towns, a Palestinian population continued to exist in only seven” (Sa’di, 2002: 184). Although not all who have moved out of the territory of Palestine became refugees in the legal sense of the word, most Palestinians living away from Palestine labelled themselves refugees as a reminder of the temporariness of that situation, as guests in another country (Hammer, 2005: 5).

Ahmad H. Sa’di summarizes the effect of the *Nakbah* on the Palestinians in these words:

*al-Nakbah* was the moment in history when the Palestinians’s world order, which had been considered part of the “laws of nature”, was violently and dramatically altered: their legal rights as having Personae – that is, as being legal subjects – were greatly diminished or obliterated altogether. Their cultural and physical environment underwent a dramatic transformation; and their existence as a national community ceased to be taken for granted (2002: 185).

Like their physically exiled counterparts, those staying on the land of Palestine “found that their whole existence had been radically altered” (Ibid 184) as they suffered from anxiety and uncertainties and being out of touch with their loved ones who were dispersed all over the globe and in the occupied territories. For those Palestinians who remained within the land of Palestine, 1948 was swiftly followed by systematic changes that were implemented by the Zionist occupier of the Arabic names of streets and cities into Hebrew or European ones (Ibid). The growing influence of the Zionist occupier, reflected in the everyday life of the

Palestinian inhabitants, contributed towards the estrangement of the Palestinians who remained within the previous territory of Palestine and highlighted a shared sense of exile among Palestinians inside and outside the Palestinian territories. Yasir Suleiman agrees that even the Palestinians living on the land of Palestine see themselves living in a state of perpetual exile or as a “refugee nation”, a situation captured by Edward Said in the title of his autobiography *Out of Place* (Suleiman, 2006: 7). As a result, Muhammad Siddiq writes that the term “refugee” became “associated in modern Arabic sensibility with the establishment of Israel”, even if technically not all Palestinians had become refugees in 1948 as the “fate of the refugee became paradigmatic of Palestinian experience in general” (Siddiq, 1995: 87).

Siddiq also echoes the same sentiment when he introduced an excerpt from Emile Habiby’s story *Love in my Heart*, where a political prisoner and a Palestinian woman from Haifa meet in a jail cell listening to a song of yearning for the homeland:

I asked her: “what moves you in this song about return when you had never left your homeland?” She answered: “My homeland? I feel like a refugee in a foreign land. You at least dream of return and the dream sustains you. Whither shall I return?” (qtd. in Siddiq, 1995: 92)

Hammer distinguishes between four different categories of Palestinians: those in the West Bank and Gaza, in Israel, in Arab countries and in Western countries (2005: 14) separated by experiences of migration and relocation and united by embracing Palestine as a national home. However, even with those four categories, overlapping exists due to the frequent movements over the past 60-plus years (Ibid). For many of those whose existence outside of Palestine was marred by a shade of involuntariness, the idea of return to the national homeland was “often combined with political activities to achieve this goal through military or political struggle” with the aim of liberating Palestine (Ibid 15). This division of the Palestinians in 1948 caused a divide in the literature produced: “that of the writers still living on the soil of the historical land of Palestine, and that of writers living in the diaspora” (Jayyusi, 1992: 4). When it came to literature, Palestinian writers in Israel did indeed face some different issues from Palestinian writers in the diaspora; among these issues language was a primary one (Malek et al., 1999: xix). The choice of language in that case was one surrounded by political considerations and exposes the writer to the hostility of his own audience (Ibid xix).

While in the immediate aftermath of the *Nakbah*, those Palestinians who remained on the territory of Palestine itself were glorified as heroes, they were in reality marginalized and considered a diaspora in the making (Tamari, 1999: 5). In 1997, Palestinians in Israel were

estimated to be around 850,000, making up 16 percent of Israel's total population (Smooha, 1999: 9), yet they had become second-class citizens in their own land (Jayyusi, 1999: 174). Even if the gap between the Palestinians outside and Palestinians inside remained consistently wide (Malek et al., 1999: xvi), Palestinians inside Israel started to play a stronger role in asserting their rights in the 1970s and the 1980s (Ibid xvi). The peace process that started in 1993 in Oslo also played a very important role in defining this relationship between both categories, as Salim Tamari argues (Ibid 3). While earlier the relationship between both was determined by the reality of exile, "juridical aspects of identity" dominated post-Oslo (Ibid). With the Palestinians in the Galilee asserting their national identity on Land Day in 1976, followed by Israeli Bedouins in the Negev and the Intifada of 1987 (Ibid 5), Palestinians in Israel were becoming more accepted as part of the fabric of the Palestinian community.

## 1.2 The Palestinian Writer: Exile and the National Preoccupation

Despite the differences between the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Palestinians in the diaspora, exile was considered an affliction for Palestinians everywhere regardless of their geographical location. In 1979, the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra wrote:

The sense of loss in an exile is unlike any other sense of loss. It is a sense of having lost a part of an inner self, a part of an inner essence. An exile feels incomplete even though everything he could want physically were at his fingertips. He is obsessed by the thought that only a return home could do away with such a feeling, end the loss, reintegrate the inner self (1979: 83).

Writing almost 30 years after the *Nakbah* of 1948, Jabra noted that the Palestinians' sense of belonging to the soil was increasing rather than decreasing (Ibid 84); he accused Israel of miscalculating the extent to which Palestinian refugees who were forced out of their homes would give up on the idea of returning to their native lands (Ibid). Seeing his family and friends dispersed in countries all over the world, including Iraq, France, the United States, England and many other countries, Jabra wrote that the creative output of his generation became "a mixture of nostalgia and anticipation – a mixture of past and future, with very little present to speak of" (Ibid 86).

Naturally, the Palestinian people's preoccupation with their new refugee or exiled status after 1948 was reflected in the literary scene. Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani and Halim

Barakat were among the first novelists who made the Palestinian problem both a personal and literary preoccupation (Starkey, 2006: 131). Like the elderly refugee generation of Palestinians who witnessed the *Nakbah* and spoke of Palestine in terms of a divide between their life before and after the catastrophe of 1948, as they “reminisce about the ‘days of paradise’ in their villages where food was plentiful and fresh from one’s own fields” (Peteet, 1995: 180), so did the texts of these many novelists reflect longing for and nostalgia towards the land of Palestine.

Explaining the extent to which the preoccupation of the Palestinian writer with what is seemingly a political cause and a struggle for national self-determination, even more than other Arab writers, Jayyusi argues that politics

determines where and how this writer lives, and prefigures a degree of personal struggle greater than that which other Arab writers – although often dissidents and politically involved themselves – tend to experience. There are problems of identity, even problems over the simple acquisition of a passport; Palestinian writers have to spend their lives either as exiles in other people’s countries, or if they have in fact remained in their own ancestral homeland, either as second-class citizens in Israel proper or lacking any citizenship at all under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza (1992: 2).

The direct bearing of politics on the Palestinian writer’s location and standard of life has led to what comes across as excessive preoccupation with the cause of national liberation. Malek and Jacobson concurred that “it is often true for national groups engaged in political struggle that the leading writers feel compelled to devote much of their literary output to national concerns” (1999: xx). For Palestinian writers, it is the Palestinian issue which will be central to their work: “its history well known, its dangers anticipated, and its future gloomy, threatening a long period of struggle and sacrifice” (Jayyusi, 1999: 171).

As a result, artistic production in general in the years after 1948 has been predominantly characterized by “a deep sense of fragmentation that is a direct result of the *Nakbah* itself”, as well as it having become dominated by “a dialectic between rootedness and displacement” (Ankori, 2006: 47). Art in the aftermath of the *Nakbah* reflected the preoccupation with that specific trauma and its very specific repercussions of exile and the displaced refugee, while also resulting in “idealized images of the distant homeland as a paradise lost” (Ibid). In literature, the contrast in the image of the fertile land of Palestine and that of the arid one in exile has been excessively used (Ibid 50). Nostalgia in general became

a “dominant genre of Palestinian art”, joined with another two: exile and armed struggle (Ibid 52, 54).

These accounts were driven by a desire to preserve the memory of the loss of the homeland and to document it. Writing in 2011, Tahrir Hamdi introduces this genre as that of “Bearing Witness”, where the “witness writer is inevitably encapsulating her or his people’s suffering, documenting it and producing an archive that would prove necessary for a mass witnessing” (2011: 21). This genre is a chance for a writer to reclaim or rewrite an experience that has been erased (Ibid 24). Hamdi argued that the “work of the Palestinian artist is necessarily informed by the threat of complete identity erasure, a complete loss of land and history” (Ibid). Palestinian literature documented the changes that took place after the *Nakbah* by taking note of the emotional and psychological effects of the loss of the homeland, by documenting the trauma and by upholding the political and moral justice of the Palestinian cause and right of return of all Palestinian refugees (Siddiq, 1995: 87).

Attempting to define Palestine, Ibrahim Muhawi writes:

Palestine is not the West Bank, and it is not Gaza; and it is not the West Bank and Gaza combined. It is not the Palestinian Authority; and it is not Israel. It is not even historic Palestine except as a dream. Palestine exists in exile as a signifier whose signified in the dream does not match its shape or magnitude. To a large extent then, this nation exists in the dream of signification projected on it by its members because the historical process that would create a correspondence between signifier and signified seems endlessly postponed (2006: 31)

Indeed, since the *Nakbah* created this rupture in the life of Palestinians, Palestine has existed more in narrative than in any degree of reality. The *Nakbah* was thus introduced as a site of collective memory that Palestinian writers actively engaged in constructing (Sa’di, 2002: 185). This collective site of memory rose up precisely to preserve what had been lost: “there are sites of memory, because there are no longer real environments of memory” (Nora, 1989: 7). The *Nakbah* in a sense is continuously experienced in the memory and narratives of Palestinians decades after the initial loss.

Ibrahim Taha notes that after the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, the first post-*Nakbah* novel to appear was George Naguib Khalil’s *Roses and Thorns* in 1954 following six years of silence (2002: 1). Before 1967, the works of three writers all living in the diaspora – Ghassan Kanafani, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Samira Azzam – dominated the Palestinian literary scene (Jayyusi, 1992: 32), while the late 60s saw the emergence of voices

of Palestinian writers from the West Bank such as “Mahmoud Shuqair, Khalil al-Sawahiri, Rashad Abu Shawar and Yahya Yakhlif” and others from inside Israel such as “Emile Habiby, Tawfiq Fayyad, Muhammad Naffa’ and Muhammad ‘Ali Taha” (Ibid 33). It was in the early 60s period that the idea of return was given prominence in narrative: “in the first visible stirrings of broad political organization and armed struggle, through the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and in literature” (Zalman, 2006: 48). This trend continues within the literature of many Palestinian writers such as Mourid Barghouti, Ibrahim Nasrallah and others, to whom the national preoccupation is also a personal one.

As evident from the previous review, in more than 60 years since the occupation of Palestine, the declaration of the state of Israel and the displacement of millions of Palestinians, countless Palestinian writers engaged with the Palestinian question through their literature. While the differences in the backgrounds – whether in terms of political affiliation, gender or location of residence – existing between all Palestinian writers and their circumstances cannot be contained or adequately represented with such a small number of novels, I aim to focus on four novels that offered different representations of home. These novels represent a glimpse into the myriad of experiences that resulted from the initial expulsion of 1948 and persisted for decades.

The intersection between the private and the collective dimension of home adds a degree of complexity to the current discussion. Given the particular history of Palestinian migration, the study of the concept of home in novels by Palestinian writers is likely to highlight the overlap of the political issue of the national homeland and the personal search for a home. The fight for the right of return to Palestine is not only a fight for having a home in Palestine, but it is a fight against a history of injustice. In the case of Palestinians, to deny collectively the national identity of the Palestinians as a people is also to deny them the right to a national state of their own (Hammer, 2005: 23). In this sense, to be Palestinian is to always be part of an attempt to assert a narrative of identity against other counter-narratives that seek to delegitimize Palestinians’ right for a state.

In the context of this dissertation, one questions whether the celebration of the site of migration and the challenges it’s alleged to present to the nation-state undermine the Palestinians’ rightful claim to statehood. Sari Hanafi states that scholarly literature on Palestinians hesitates to use the word “diaspora” when referring to Palestinians who live away from Palestine (2003: 158). Although Palestinians live away from Palestine for various

reasons and in different circumstances, the word “diaspora” is seen as problematic (Ibid). This hesitation is derived from two specific implications of the word “diaspora”: the possibility of not returning to the Palestinian homeland and the assumption of celebrating or accepting a new diasporic identity that challenges Palestinian national identity. The application of the word “diaspora” is feared to “weaken” the Palestinian national cause (Ibid), or at least to give the impression that the cause is getting weaker. Hanafi claims that scholarly literature is more comfortable with the words “exile” and “refugees”, which entail more elements of force – they imply that the migrant’s journey was not voluntary and as such they maintain the fixity of the nation as a frame of reference and as a “national cause”, thus giving the impression that the Palestinian cause still has the support of the Palestinian people. From that perspective, it is assumed that as long as the Palestinian is still perceived to be suffering (refugee/exile), then the national cause is preserved. In reading these novels, I question this assumption as I elaborate on how the novelists attempted to create personal homes in the shadow of the collective struggle to preserve the national cause.

The overlap between the personal and the political is indeed obvious in the fiction of all the writers discussed here. However, the four novels will allow us to see different representations of home even while the historical, the political and the literary overlap in all of them. They highlight two aspects of Palestinian narrative: the history and memory of the loss of the homeland and the search for home in the diaspora. May Seikaly, who conducted field research among Palestinian Americans in Detroit, found that “most of the respondents defined their lives as a series of events and junctures correlated with the history of the Palestinian problem” (Seikaly, 1999: 34). Even in their individual memories, Palestinians have woven their national and collective history into the personal story. Similarly, I emphasize in my discussion how these writers engage with depicting the collective experience of the loss of the homeland, and how the search for the individual home takes place within this broader collective experience in relation to the permanent presence of the national project as a referent for identity and home. Divergent in tone, purpose, themes and setting, the four novels present different stories of Palestine: the facts of the Palestinian struggle, the dispersion of the Palestinian people and the tale of its refugees are highlighted in the four novels to different degrees, yet in all of them, these facts intertwine with the fictive representations of the Palestinian writers displaying how the personal home and the political struggle remain inseparable when it comes to Palestine and its literature.

## 2. Land and Return in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's (1920-1994) *al-Safīnah* (*The Ship*<sup>21</sup> 1970)

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra is a novelist, poet, short-story writer, painter, translator and critic. Adnan Haydar and Roger Allen described him in 1982 in their introduction to the translation of *The Ship* as “among the most versatile littérateurs writing in the Middle East” (1985: 3). He was born in 1920 in Bethlehem, Palestine, into a Christian Palestinian family. After the death of his father, a farmer, the family moved to Jerusalem where Jabra worked occasionally as a carpenter and a plumber to help make ends meet (Abu-Shamsieh, 1987: 3). He spent his childhood and youth in the city of Jerusalem as he studied at *al-Rashidiya* School and at the Arab college of Jerusalem. He later also worked as a teacher of English in Jerusalem. His early life in Palestine informs many of his novels' characters and settings. Jabra moved to England between 1939 and 1943 where he studied at the University of Exeter and at Cambridge University (Ibid). After the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, Jabra moved to Iraq, where he married an Iraqi woman (Balata, 2001: 215) and taught English literature at the College of Arts and Sciences at Baghdad University, later spending some time in the USA where he studied at Harvard University from 1952 to 1954 (Abu-Shamsieh, 1987: 3).

In Iraq, Jabra served as the president of the “Arts Critics Association in Iraq, a member of the Literary Critics Association, and the Union of Writers in Iraq” (Ibid 4). He received several prizes that included the Taraga Europa Prize for Culture (Rome, 1983) and the first prize of the Kuwaiti Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences in April of 1987 (Ibid 5). Among his most famous novels are *The Ship*, *In Search of Walid Masud* (1978), *A Cry in a Long Night* (1955) and his English-written novel *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960). Among Jabra's translations were Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1960) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1964) (Alwan, 1972: 223).

*The Ship* is considered his first serious contribution to the Arabic novel (Badawi, 1992: 141). Although, as Abu-Shamsieh has noted, literary critics generally do not perceive Jabra's novels to deal directly with the issue of Palestine (1987: 17), Jabra's fiction mostly

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<sup>21</sup> The quotes from the novel presented in this section are from Adnan Haydar and Roger Allen's English translation of the novel from the original Arabic as cited in the bibliography.

takes place against the background of the author's own early memories of growing up and living in Jerusalem, and in turn brings the personal and the historical contexts together as focal points in his fiction. In *The Ship*, for example, only one of the novel's characters is Palestinian and the setting of the novel takes place on a ship sailing away from the Arab world in the Mediterranean toward Europe.

The events of *The Ship* take place during one week on board the *Hercules*, as it sails through the ports of Alexandria, Beirut, Naples and other cities on the way to Europe. The characters on the ship, who mostly meet there for the first time, find, as they share their stories, that they are connected in ways of which they were previously unaware. The two central characters between whom the narration alternates are Isam al-Salman and Wadi Assaf. Isam al-Salman is an Iraqi architect who joins the trip in order to escape from his love for the beautiful Iraqi and Oxford-educated Luma, whom he had met during their studies in England. They had been unable to get married because of a feud between their families since his father killed her uncle in a conflict over a piece of land. The second main character is Wadi Assaf, a Palestinian businessman who has been working in Kuwait and has succeeded in accumulating a degree of wealth that now allows him to consider a return to his hometown in Jerusalem. His Lebanese lover Maha, who had earlier refused to join him, meets him on the ship in Naples near the end of the cruise and agrees to return with him. The other travellers on board the ship include Luma, who follows Isam with her husband Falih. Falih is an Iraqi surgeon whose pessimism and bleak outlook on life are his most distinctive features. He drinks and writes for most of the trip. The third narrator who is also on board *Hercules* is the Italian Emilia Farnesi whose sole narrated section is a report of her affair with Falih. Other characters include the Lebanese Yusuf, the Spanish Fernando, Mahmud, the Egyptian female student Effat, Shawkat, who shares the cabin with Isam, and the French Jacqueline. As the ship sails, the interaction between the characters reveals through dialogues, monologues and flashbacks the personal backgrounds of each of them, whilst also revealing the ways in which their lives are connected to one another. By the end of the novel, it becomes clear that what initially appeared as a coincidental meeting of various characters on board the ship has been a result of careful planning. Almost every character had planned to be in the company of a romantic interest. The seemingly casual interaction between the travellers is interrupted by two suicide attempts. The first attempt is that of a fellow Dutch

traveller, but that ends with other passengers rescuing him. The second attempt is that of Falih, whose death allows Luma and Isam the opportunity to be reunited.

The novel is mainly narrated by the two main characters alternately, the Palestinian Wadi Assaf and the Iraqi Isam al-Salman, with only one chapter narrated from the point of view of the Italian Emilia Farnesi. Harb notes about the two central characters that “their voices coalesce, their experiences converge, and their personalities mysteriously identify with each other. One may confidently assume, through a wilful psychological leap, that Isam Salman is Wadi Assaf’s alter ego” (Harb, 2004: 8). One Iraqi, the other Palestinian, the two characters together fortify the most prominent themes of the novel: land and return.

I argue that *The Ship* centralizes the *Nakbah* as the rupture that caused the loss of the homeland, and as a result the novel itself is a collection of the protagonists’ memories of that loss intertwined with their own personal lives. As such, nostalgia to a pre-*Nakbah* Palestine drives Jabra to present through his characters an idyllic Jerusalem that’s yearned for. However, Jabra’s nostalgia is not restorative but reflective; parallel to the recollections of the idyllic past, Jabra actively questions the capacity of nations to stir violence. In *The Ship*, Jabra highlights the duality in the perception of the nation as a site of memories of home as well as a manifestation of political ideology. As one character seeks to sail away and another seeks to return to land, Jabra presents the factors of push and pull towards the nation.

## 2.1 Jerusalem as Paradise

In an interview with Alaa Elgibali and Barbara Harlow, Jabra explained his experience writing about the memories of his childhood in his novels. He stated that the world of childhood

affirms and reaffirms the necessity of going back through the wounds of experience, through exile and homelessness, back to the primordial innocence which is a hidden spring in the life of the nation. One cannot speak of an absolute childhood, only of one’s own. The clever or lucky man is the man who can make of his childhood a mirror of the reader’s childhood and of the childhoods of all men (1981: 53).

Jabra viewed these early childhood memories of which he speaks in his autobiographical essays, interviews and novels as part and parcel of the experience of the nation; a marriage of the personal and the political. It is in this light that the representation of Jerusalem through Jabra’s character Wadi Assaf in *The Ship* should be understood. Wadi, who is “obsessed” (Jabra, 1979: 83) by the thought of Palestine and the thought of return, dwells in both

monologues and flashbacks on his early memories in Jerusalem with his friend Fayiz who died as a direct result of an attack by Israeli soldiers in 1948. He ponders:

One goes into the world and finds everywhere there are tall trees, thick forests, well-ordered gardens, but none of them is equal to one crooked branch from those ancient dust-laden trees. Nothing is equal to that red rocky land that greets your feet like a lover's kiss; and when you lie down on it, it provides you with all the comfort of a bed in Paradise. To be an exile from your own land is a curse, the most painful curse of all (*The Ship* 24).

Just before he starts another one of his inner monologues in which he narrates the story of his friendship with Fayiz, Wadi describes the idyllic setting on board the ship as the sun sets with Bach's music in the background. He wonders: "Is this what the entry into Heaven is like?" (Ibid 45). Jabra here "represents Jerusalem mainly through landscape imagery with emphasis on the Palestinian protagonists being 'made' of the same solid beautiful rocks of the landscape where the city itself is made" (Harb, 2004: 11). Wadi's pre-1948 memories peak in their idealisation right before they culminate in Fayiz's violent death, which in turn spurs the desire to resist and demand justice for the *Nakbah* of 1948. Hence, Wadi stresses:

I refuse to accept my expulsion from Jerusalem by bullets and dynamite; I refuse to accept the sight of my friend Fayiz, soaked in his own blood right in front of me; I refuse to accept the sight of tents huddled together on the hillsides as a shelter over my family's heads; I refuse to accept the idea of going from town to town looking for some paltry morsel to eat or for a roof beneath which to house my mother and father (*The Ship* 43).

Jerusalem here is more than just the site of Wadi's early childhood memories. It is also the site of the inevitable formation of his political consciousness. Moreover, as Ahmad Harb points out, Jerusalem signifies the Palestinian nation as a whole; an allusion to Jerusalem is also an allusion to "the Palestinian attachment to the 'country' in both the sense of a 'nation' and a 'land'" (Harb, 2004: 2). Although Wadi remains the sole Palestinian character in *The Ship*, his recollections and memories serve as the only source of historical contextualization. His personal story and that of Palestine become almost indistinguishable from one another as he narrates the stories of his childhood, the displacement of 1948 and the desire to return.

## 2.2 The Nation as a Site of Violence

Despite Jabra's insistence in *The Ship* on illuminating the centrality of the issue of return and reclamation of Palestine as a nation of Palestinians, he equally insists on highlighting the violent effect of what Wadi refers to in the novel as "tribalism". The feud between the families of Isam and Luma, although taking place in Iraq and not in Palestine, is a reminder

of how conflicts over land – with an allusion to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – could have fatal consequences. The killing of Luma’s uncle by Isam’s father not only keeps the lovers apart and makes it impossible for them to be reunited, but it has also led Isam to grow up in the absence of his father, an experience that has left its damaging imprint. While Wadi seeks to return to the land, Isam runs away from it. He had spent his life following his mother’s orders to save the land and rescue it by paying back the money his family had borrowed for land development. Isam and Luma – whose change of family name when in England allows for her entanglement with Isam in the first place – see in the land the capacity to stir violence. Luma says: “the land demands blood and pain. Not from any one individual, but from a whole family” (*The Ship* 145). Even such a harrowing incident as suicide on board the ship does not promise an end to the family feud. As Haydar and Allen state in their introduction: “Luma and Isam are finally together, but their problems remain, and the tribalism that separated them in the first place has not been uprooted” (1985: 5).

Salim Tamari points out that this distinction between nostalgia for the homeland and the political project of the nation where the “political and emotive are intertwined” (Tamari, 2003: 176) was as significant at the time Jabra wrote the novel as it is today. Jabra did not indulge in simplistic and sentimental nostalgic representations of Jerusalem or Palestine. Instead, Jabra’s novel, which takes place mostly away from any land, in the open sea of the Mediterranean, engages with reflective nostalgia and thus interrogates the personal dimensions of the notions of nation, land and return through the experiences of the various characters. The interactions that take place on board the ship among the characters, causing the revelation of the relationship between Luma and Isam and the suicide of Falih, determine the outcome of the trip. Moreover, Maha’s decision to join the ship in Naples and inform Wadi of her intention to join him in Jerusalem results in drawing both men closer to their lands regardless of their intentions at the beginning of the trip. The sea offers no salvation to the exiled Palestinian, who is inevitably drawn by memories to the lost land of Palestine. It is also important to take note of the historical context in which the novel was published, three years after the defeat of the Arabs in 1967. The humiliating defeat suffered by the Arabs led to an atmosphere of escapism<sup>22</sup> of which the novel is an accurate reflection.

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<sup>22</sup> The impact of the devastating loss of the 1967 war left its mark on the Arab collective consciousness in the late 60s and well into the 70s. The war resulted in divisions and fragmentation both within and among the different Arab states as they stumbled in their attempts to come to terms with the gravity of the loss. It seemed that collectively Arabs succumbed to an escape from this harsh

### 2.3 Escaping Defeat

*The Ship* reflects Jabra's views in the aftermath of a harrowing Arab defeat. From this perspective, Jabra shows strong awareness of both the increasingly pessimistic Arab setting and its social and political decadence (Said, 1987: 145). *The Ship*, Abu-Shamsieh states, "depicts Arab intellectuals as passive, impotent, and escapist" and "captures the general mood that overwhelmed modern Arab societies during the 1960s which have suffered a setback in all its domains, culminating with the Arab defeat in the 1967 war" (1987: 165). His own personal anger against both the pessimism and passivity that pervaded the Arab world is then pronounced in the words of his Palestinian protagonist Wadi who exclaims:

We spoke the truth till our throats grew hoarse, and we ended up as refugees in tents. We fancied the world community cherished the truth, and turned out to be victims of our own naiveté. We came to realise all this, both as a nation and as individuals (*The Ship* 20).

It is from this setting that the angry characters of *The Ship* escape into a world of pleasure, dancing, singing and intellectual and cultural debates that end only in suicide. At the beginning of the trip the mood of escapism is reflected in Isam's statement: "I wanted to be alone. I wanted no one to recognize me. I wanted to be just one face in a million, a wayfarer whom people pass without noticing" (Ibid 13). At the end of the trip, however, only Falih escapes through death, while Wadi, Isam and Luma find themselves catapulted back into reality as they are even closer to their homelands than when the trip started. Hence the translators, Haydar and Allen, conclude that all of Jabra's protagonists who are trying to escape the reality of their lives through dreams and illusion find that escape from the memory of loss is impossible (1985: 4).

Here the novelist captures through personal experience the mood of the historical setting in which the novel was written. From this standpoint, the oscillation between the capacity of the land to incite violence and embracing the national cause for return is a reflection of this personal and national experience in the direct aftermath of the defeat of 1967. Jabra writes:

Like Wadi Assaf in my novel *al-Safina*, the Palestinian sailed away only to ache more deeply for his return, to ache more bitterly for his grass roots. In the meantime he was enraged to see the Arab world blundering on in agony – groping for a way out of its wilderness, and getting

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reality into a world of dreams and illusions that was reflected culturally in literature, film and other cultural outlets.

lost again. Not only in a political, but more so in a psychological sense. Salvation was hard. And so slow in forthcoming (1979: 86).

Jabra's *The Ship* articulates the feelings of social and psychological alienation that pervaded the Arab world after the defeat of 1967. Unlike Hanan al-Shaykh, whose novel *The Story of Zahra* offers the two perceptions of nations as overly idealized havens as well as stifling and oppressive entities with the former cast in doubt, Jabra alternates between highlighting the justice inherent in the national cause for a return to the land of his roots and the capacity of tribalism and land disputes to maintain cyclical violence. This duality in the perception of the nation preoccupies different writers to different degrees, as will become apparent. In the next section, for example, we look at how 1948 as a central defining collective experience has been represented in a novel by a Palestinian Israeli writer who focuses mostly on how the question of narrative becomes the cornerstone of the national experience.

### 3. Finding Home in the Multiplicity of Narratives in Anton Shammas's (1950) *Arabeskot* (*Arabesques*<sup>23</sup> 1986)

*Arabesques* is a semi-autobiographical novel in which Anton Shammas both states and questions his origins and his history. The first part of the novel, titled *The Tale*, is an account of the writer's village and his family, while the second part, titled *The Teller*, is about the writer of this semi-autobiographical novel. *The Teller* and *The Tale* are both narratives by the original writer, who shares with two of his protagonists the same name of Anton Shammas. These two main sections are presented in ten parts and an epilogue that cover both *The Teller* and *The Tale* alternately with no consistency with regards to the order or space accorded to each. There is no chronological order to the events taking place in either of the two main sections but Shammas relies heavily on the dates he provides for key historical incidents, such as the *Nakbah* in 1948, the Arab rebellion in 1936 and the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, to contextualize the events that take place in the novel. He also relies on presenting key dates of the deaths of some family members: for example, he states the exact date of the death of his grandmother Alia on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1954 and the exact date of the death of his father on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1978. These dates then intertwine, with both tales providing markers for the occurrence of the incidents in *Arabesques*.

In their reading of the novel, Hannan Hever and Orin D. Gensler use the same difficulty, and almost impossibility, inherent in restating or summarizing Shammas's novel to make a case for Shammas's rejection of all forms of polarization. They argue that it is difficult to find the certainty needed to say that Shammas embraces one stand more than another, one identity at the expense of another, one narrative at the expense of another or even one truth at the expense of another, since all the narratives and the facts he actually states are then questioned or altered altogether (1987: 50-53). The narrative structure of the novel is weaved in a way that defies a neat categorization (Siddiq, 2000: 158). The novel not only rejects the categorization of its identity as Arab or Israeli, but it also rejects being categorized as postcolonial or postmodernist (Feldman, 1989: 419).

As difficult as it might be to summarize *Arabesques*, the following section attempts a brief summary that will be followed by an analysis of Shammas's imagination of home in

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<sup>23</sup> I rely in this section on the version of the novel translated into English from the original Hebrew by Vivian Eden cited in the bibliography.

*Arabesques* through his semi-fictional protagonist. The overview of the novel, with the support of the critiques provided by Muhammad Siddiq, Hever and Gensler, Avraham Balaban and Rachel Feldhay Brenner will highlight how Shammas insists on reconciling home and identity through his unique position as a Palestinian Israeli writer as well as through the rare medium of an Arab Hebrew novel.

### 3.1 The Tale and the Teller

The main setting for *The Tale* is the Arab village of Fassuta, in the Galilee. The narrative traces the history of the Shammas family from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1980s. In narrating the history of the village during this time, Shammas introduces his family members and his childhood memories and in so doing paints a picture of both his Palestinian homeland and his own personal home in relation to the homeland. His novel also tells the story and the history of the displacement of the Palestinian people. Myths and superstitious tales are given space in this narrative in which some of the characters can see the future in a slick of oil or see the fluttering of a rooster's crimson feather as a prediction of the future. In *The Tale*, the events of both 1948 and 1936 play central roles in the lives of the characters, in a way that also shapes Shammas's own destiny and future.

More central to the narrative of *The Tale*, however, is the story of Shammas's own double identity: his cousin and the other Anton Shammas around whom suspicions arise. Has the cousin who was believed to have died just after birth been in fact kidnapped and given up for adoption to a wealthy family in Lebanon, where Layla Khoury, the orphan who is taken by Shammas's father to Lebanon, meets him and thus holds the secret to his original identity? The adult Shammas tracks Layla Khoury down and finds that she is now a refugee. Shammas then meets her and confronts her with his doubts and suspicions.

*The Teller* is the journal of a writer attending the International Writing Program in Iowa in the American Midwest. Writers from all over the world take part in the program, where they spend a few months sharing ideas and discussing literature. During that time, Shammas is shadowed by the Israeli writer Bar-on whose mind is set on writing a novel about a good Arab. Bar-on's character is loosely based on the Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua, who has had a stormy relationship with Shammas himself and who, along with many other Israeli liberals, is unwilling to accept Shammas as an Israeli writer (Hever and Gensler, 1987: 58). In Shammas's mind, the satirical Bar-on muses about his good Arab, saying that he

will be an educated Arab. But not an intellectual. He does not gallop on the back of a thoroughbred mare, as was the custom at the turn of the century, nor is he a prisoner of the IDF, as was the custom at the turn of the state. Nor is he A.B. Yehoshua's adolescent lover. He speaks and writes excellent Hebrew, but within the bounds of the permissible. For there must be some areas that are out of bounds for him, so nobody will accuse me of producing the stereotype in reverse, the virtuous Arab (*Arabesques* 91).

Bar-on eventually abandons the idea of basing his Arab protagonist on the character of Anton Shammas whose identity does not fit with his simplistic novelistic aim. He resorts to Paco, the West Bank Palestinian writer who is also a participant in the International Writing Program, implying that the West Bank Palestinian's identity is much easier to grasp and understand (Siddiq, 2000: 162).

Anton Shammas, like his main protagonist in *Arabesques*, was born in the village of Fassuta in the Galilee (Hever and Gensler, 1987: 49) that was spared the forceful evacuation that has befallen many other Palestinian villages. Ibrahim Muhawi states that the identity of a Palestinian Israeli – like that of Shammas – reflects a sort of existential ambiguity where the hyphenated identity presents a negotiation that is psychological as well as geographical (Muhawi, 2006: 44). At this hyphenated site Israeli citizenship exists side by side with Palestinian subjectivity (Ibid). The specific history of the Palestinian Israeli means that while the family home might have remained the same, the family's presence in Israel now had dramatically different implications. The Arab majority became a minority within a predominantly Jewish Israeli population and suffered from the discriminatory practices of the Israeli occupier who made certain that life in Israel bore no traces of the previous Palestinian life. The site of the home as remembered through memory bears little resemblance either geopolitically or physically to the present reality.

### 3.2 Reactions to the First Palestinian Novel in Hebrew

*Arabesques* sparked a massive response from literary critics as soon as it was published and it continues to provoke criticism and analysis today. As the first novel by a Palestinian Israeli in Hebrew, it rapidly gained fame and was translated into English soon after its publication in the original Hebrew (Brenner, 1999: 99). This was Shammas's introduction to the Israeli public after the Israeli daily *Maariv* declared the novel a distinction to "Anton Shammas as well as to Hebrew Israeli literature" (Ibid 99). On the Arab side, however, the novel was received with reserved silence and shock (Siddiq, 2000: 161). The question on the mind of

the Arab critics was: How could an Arab writer use the very same language as the people who perpetuated the *Nakbah*, the displacement and murder of the Palestinians for generations, the very language that denies the Palestinian existence, to write his novel?<sup>24</sup> (Ibid 64). As Hever and Gensler note: “For an Arab author to be writing in Hebrew at all is highly unusual in the Israeli cultural landscape – a phenomenon undoubtedly connected with a blurring of the traditional boundaries of Israeli national culture” (1987: 50). Shamma’s not only blurred the boundaries of the Israeli national culture, but he also posed a dilemma for his nationalist Palestinian readers who refuse to accept his solution to resolving his identity dilemma by rejecting all forms of polarization.

It is this position that Hever and Gensler refer to as a utopian stance (Ibid 57) in its apparent detachment from the political realities of one of the most politically volatile regions in the world. If Hever and Gensler saw reconciliation and cohesion in Shamma’s oscillation between *The Teller* and *The Tale* in the absence of certainties and polarization, Balaban makes a case for a man in tension between the two languages, Arabic and Hebrew (1989: 419), which also corresponds to the obvious tension between the two identities, Arab and Israeli, that are both parts of Shamma’s own identity.

### 3.3 The Home is Israel, the Homeland is Palestine

In this context, it is important to take a closer look at the protagonist’s own perception of home. Hijab believes that “Shamma does not have a problem with home, not having lost his” (1989: 184). From this perspective, Shamma is not an actual “migrant”: he did not leave the actual home place. Shamma himself states that “the real home, even though distant,

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Clark argues that Palestinian novelists who write in Hebrew may do so out of convenience and not for any ideological reason since they are inevitably influenced by the language of schooling and the language employed in the media and in civic dealings (2006: 187). Clark thus draws some parallels between Palestinian Israeli novelists writing in Hebrew and North African novelists writing in French. Both chose to write in the language that allows them access to the authority of the imperial power by using Hebrew or French as a form of literary self-expression. Neither group may write solely in Hebrew or French, but both have been accused of committing “cultural treason” by some of their Arab counterparts who believed that they have succumbed to the power of the occupation or colonialism by abandoning their own language and cultural authenticity. One needs to recognize, however, that writing in the language of the occupation is not only an attempt to address the occupation in its own language in order to challenge it and probably undermine it, but it is, in fact, also a natural consequence of the interaction of the two languages that exist in the same space (Clark, 2006: 187).

estranging, and unwelcoming, is still Israel” (qtd. in Brenner, 1999: 98). While in the next chapters we will be dealing mostly with writers who are geographically away from the home countries in which the memory of the past diverges from the location of the present time, the complicated case of the Palestinians allows for estrangement to occur even while the writer resides in that very same place where the past memories have taken place. In fact, by blurring the lines between fiction and reality in his autobiographical novel, Shammas presented us with a good opportunity to weigh the degree to which the borders of the nation state coincide with home. The novel also depicts a considerable split between Anton Shammas the writer and *The Teller* and Anton Shammas who is himself part of *The Tale*. As *The Teller*, Shammas says upon his arrival in Iowa:

I never tried to describe my home. Because it isn't just the southern window – the *bab es-sir*, as we called it – the chill of which is still in the palms of my hands, nor the *smandra*, the cupboard where we kept the mattresses and the blankets, which towered above our heads like a threatening castle, nor the turquoise-green cat hiding behind it when she was in heat, nor the dappled light dancing on the concrete floor, nor the taste of the salty water dripping all night from the linen sack that held the yoghurt for the *labneh*, the water that our crazy neighbour Ablah would drink, the taste of which rises now from under my tongue, as the villagers say here in the American Midwest.

My sense of home begins with the spoon knocking against the rim of the pot of lentil soup and spreads like ripples in the village pond and licks at the edge of the *duwara* and limns the view from the southern window and touches my skin from within. All of the houses I've lived in since then have hardly touched me (*Arabesques* 149).

Brenner's review of another Palestinian Israeli writer highlights the novelty in Shammas's approach to the perception of the home and homeland in *Arabesques*. Brenner argues that Emile Habiby's fiction displays the motifs of sin and remorse, combines that with the representation of the homeland through the use of the metaphor of a “beloved, yet abandoned, woman”, and continues to remind himself of what Habiby sees as his “unforgivable betrayal” (Brenner, 1999: 95). Habiby – who also wrote in Hebrew – was indeed seen as a traitor by some of his Palestinian compatriots when he accepted an Israeli prize for one of his literary works (Ibid 91), an accusation that Habiby continuously tackled in his own writing. Reviewing novels by both novelists, Brenner argues that “the *raison d'être* of this act of writing is inextricable from the identity of the targeted reader, and the social function of this literature cannot be fully comprehended apart from its reception by Israeli Jewish readers”

(Ibid 89). There is a distinction then to be made between Habiby and Shammas: while Habiby might have been more concerned with resolving his sense of betrayal, or explaining his stance to readers on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Shammas seems to have already reconciled his own sense of home and homeland with his identity as a Palestinian Israeli citizen. To a large extent, *Arabesques* is the story that tells of the process of that reconciliation and resolution.

Hijab states that the main theme of *Arabesques* is the author's search for identity; this act of searching then takes the form of wandering. Shammas wanders as a writer through "literary experience" and he wanders as well through the history and the characters of his family (1989: 183-4). Brenner offers an alternative reading. In his analysis of *Arabesques*, he explains that the love affair between Anton and his Israeli lover Shlomith, to whom he writes the letters which detail his childhood memories, his admiration for his militant cousin as well as the sexual affair with a married Israeli woman, that eventually get intercepted by her husband who is an Israeli military officer, all show how the novel itself, Arab in content, Hebrew in language, "validates the reader's expectations of Arab treachery" (1999: 101-2). In this case, Brenner believes that Shammas's novel itself is intended to infiltrate Israeli consciousness to confront it with its implications in the Palestinian displacement and oppression since 1948. While Brenner sees in *Arabesques* resistance on the part of Shammas to Israel and its legacy of oppression that reflects a desire to solidify the home in his own Palestinian homeland (Brenner does not make clear whether that solidification would then take the form of a Palestinian nation state or not), Hijab argues that the tone of Shammas in *Arabesques* is passive; she claims that his view is that of "what is past is past" (1989: 85), and she concludes that

Shammas's identity problem has resulted in a missing link. He writes powerfully about the village, where his identity is secure, and fits comfortably into the world of literature, which is open to those who can write as he does, but he is shaky over the country/nation that lies between village and globe (Ibid 185).

Of course, Shammas places much emphasis on the question of the narrator's identity. This emphasis is placed, as Balaban argued, in two main ways: being exposed to characters of different allegiances and nationalities, and the continuous suggestions of different identities for the narrator (1989: 419).

### 3.4 Finding Home in the Multiplicity of Narratives

Feldman's analysis adds a different dimension to Shammas's identity which he claims has been ignored by critics. Feldman claims that the Arab Christian identity plays a powerful role in the novel and "seems to be a crucial undercurrent in the construction of identity in *Arabesques*" (Feldman, 1999: 375). He questions the centrality of 1948 in the novel and admonishes critics like Hever and Brenner who insist on highlighting only the Arab-Israeli conflict in the reading of *Arabesques* (Ibid 376). They, along with Reuven Snir, Feldman goes on, made a mistake as they never questioned the "basic premise that 1948, the watershed in the relation between Israel and the Arab or Palestinian population, is the painful centre of *Arabesques*" (Ibid). Feldman's analysis remains isolated, however, in its claim that *Arabesques* emphasizes Shammas's minority identity as a Christian Arab rather than Shammas's complicated identity as a Palestinian Israeli.

The truth is that, as most critics claimed, Shammas's complication of identities does not centralize or marginalize any narrative at the expense of another. Shammas succeeds, in fact, in leading the reader to question the validity of all narratives without offering closure. This approach will figure again in the analysis of Amin Maalouf's *The Rock of Tanios* as well as in Najm Wālī's *Šūrat Yūsuf*. All three novelists seem to agree that the story or the narrative of the nation is a constructed myth. Their narrative strategy is thus built around questioning the identity of the narrators of their novels. Wālī's narrator will merge into others and will change names at the turn of a page or in between the lines, while Maalouf's main protagonist Tanios, whose quest for the identity of his real father results in bloodshed, will find peace only when the story itself is interrupted as he travels to Cyprus. This approach does in fact redraw and redefine the nation regardless of whether this is derived from a migrant's identity or the site of migration. What needs to be highlighted here, then, is that this revision of the nation is not necessarily induced by the migrant status of the novelist. Born and raised in the same village, Shammas's view to a great degree corresponds with both migrant novelists Maalouf and Wālī. In reality, Shammas's own imposed geographical self-"exile" occurs after the writing of the novel as he relocates to the US for work as a university professor. However, these three novels painted similar pictures of the interplay between memories in actual defined spaces and questioned how far a sense of home corresponds with the nation state. Their conclusions, occasionally labelled "utopian", led their novelists to

reject the concept of the nation state in so far as it calls for embracing only one narrative, one history or one identity at the expense of all others.

#### 4. Finding Home in Wandering in Randa Jarrar's (1978) *A Map of Home* (2008)

*A Map of Home* is the first novel by the Palestinian American writer Randa Jarrar. Jarrar shares much with her central protagonist Nidali whose name literally means “my struggle”. Like Nidali, Jarrar was born in 1978 in Chicago to a Palestinian father and a mother who is half Greek and half Egyptian. Like her central protagonist, she also grew up in Kuwait until she had to move with her family during the first Gulf War. Both Jarrar and Nidali moved with their families during their early years between Kuwait and Egypt until they finally settled in the US. *A Map of Home* was published in 2008, and it was translated from the original English into six different languages. Jarrar states on her personal website that the novel “won a Hopwood Award, an Arab American Book Award, and was named one of the best novels of 2008 by the *Barnes and Noble Review*” (Jarrar, 2011). Jarrar was also celebrated as one of the 39 most gifted writers of the Arab world under the age of 40 when she was chosen to take part in *Beirut39*, which is an anthology edited by Samuel Shimon and introduced by Hanan al-Shaykh (Ibid). Jarrar has an MFA from the University of Michigan (Jarrar, 2008) and she is also a short-story writer, a novelist and a translator. She is an assistant professor of English (Jarrar, 2011) and she makes her home now with her family at Ann Arbor (Jarrar, 2008).

In her acknowledgements, Jarrar thanks Anton Shammas, among others, for his example and encouragement. Like Jarrar, Anton Shammas also made a home in the US where he moved to teach at an American university. There is very little of Shammas in Jarrar's first novel, except perhaps her occasional reference to the injustice and oppression suffered throughout the history of the Palestinian struggle. Both *Arabesques* and *A Map of Home*, however, are highly autobiographical narratives in which the protagonists share with their authors not just a birthplace but also the history of their families and their wanderings. Both novels present the personal experiences that result from the locations of each writer in a way that is closely intertwined with questions of home, identity, displacement and travel. In *A Map of Home*, even more so than in *Arabesques*, the novelist relies heavily on that personal experience and engages sometimes in an almost straightforward manner in deciphering what and where home is.

Having lived in three different countries and having to move, cut ties and build others, Nidali's and Jarrar's perception of home differs from Shammass's and his protagonist's in *Arabesques* who stayed in the same family home for the entire period of childhood and adolescence. On the question of her Palestinian identity, when she was confronted with it in an interview question, Jarrar answered:

I think the only way to define Palestinian universal identity is to say that there is no such thing. Meanwhile, I don't necessarily think of myself as Palestinian. I don't pretend to have suffered the way my relatives in Jenin have; or the way Palestinians in Gaza suffer today. I want to write a short film one day about a Palestinian-American who returns to Palestine (specifically, the West Bank) after she's inherited some land, and the fiasco that ensues with her family members. It'll be a black comedy (Danah, 2010).

Not surprisingly, then, Jarrar's novel is not a nostalgic yearning for the Palestinian homeland. She sees the homeland with the realistic eyes of an Arab woman who has broken her share of taboos. In her novel, Jarrar distinguishes between Palestine as a national homeland to which the Palestinian people have a legitimate and just right, and the ability to carve homes in the act of wandering and travelling itself. Jarrar is able to erase the boundaries of the geographically determined nation and to reject its imposition while upholding at the same time the justice of the Palestinian cause for a national homeland. This Jarrar does first through shedding light on the protagonist's relationship with her Palestinian father, and second by continuing to bring to light the details of the Palestinian daily struggle under occupation. *A Map of Home* is as much about the sense of home one forms moving from one country to another as it is about the life of an Arab woman who grows up among all these different cultures and attempts to carve her own individual identity.

The novel consists of three parts that correspond to the three main countries in which Nidali lives: Kuwait, Egypt and the United States. The story is told by Nidali who is born in the US and later moves with her parents to Kuwait. Wrongly believing she was a boy as a newborn, her father gives her the masculine name Nidal, which he later corrects by adding only the Arabic possessive suffix 'i' to change it into a female name. In Kuwait, Nidali lives with her Palestinian father – an architect who used to be a poet but now becomes unable to write and thus lives through his dreams for his daughter to be a writer and a scholar and the half-Greek half-Egyptian mother, who has a talent for playing piano. Although both writing and music once brought the couple together, now the two artistic outlets fill their lives in Kuwait with quarrels and arguments. Nidali also lives with her younger brother Gamal, who

remains a marginal character throughout most of the novel. The family moves once again from Kuwait to Egypt where they live in their summer apartment in Alexandria, after the first Gulf War started. The father Waheed loses his job along with the rest of the Palestinians who lost theirs as a result of Yasser Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein during the invasion of Kuwait. The family is forced to make new plans while the children enrol in schools in Egypt. Their last journey takes them from Alexandria to Texas in the US, where the children also enrol in new schools and become exposed to a new and different social setting. In Texas, after continuous attempts, the family becomes able to get a loan and build and own a house. Around the same time, the rebellious Nidali applies, against her father's will, to a college in Boston and leaves the family home.

#### 4.1 The Imposed Map of the Homeland

The novel is narrated by Nidali whose voice matures from infancy, through childhood and into adolescence. These stages of life take place for her in three countries in which the experiences shape her outlook on life. Her stormy relationship with her father, who occasionally beats her and who imposes his own dreams on her life, dominates much of her adolescent experience. The map of home in the title of the novel refers to the map of Palestine that Nidali draws in accordance with her father's imagination and recollections. Early on she says about her father that he "didn't really know who he was or where he belonged, having been forbidden from re-entering Palestine after the 1967 war" (*A Map of Home* 37). It is her father's obsession with the idea of Palestine as an idealized refuge and haven that Nidali resists throughout the novel. While she recognizes the legality and the justice of the cause of the Palestinian right of return and the Palestinian right to statehood, as evident from the chapter that described her family's journey to Jenin for her grandfather's funeral, Nidali refers to both Kuwait and Egypt as home, and never to Palestine. Palestine remains present mostly through her father's insistence on carving a place for it in his daughter's mind.

About her father, Nidali says: "He had an idea in his head, but that, unfortunately, was all he had" (Ibid 109). She knows that her father makes no attempt to get in touch with other Palestinian people in Kuwait or Egypt as he "didn't want to live with his own because he never felt like he belonged with them" (Ibid 59). Instead he always keeps the olive oil by his side (Ibid 178) and continues to idealize Palestine as a principle that defies practical realization. As a result, he suffers as a poet and a writer as he becomes unable to voice out his

thoughts and ideas. Afraid that he could even lose Palestine as an idea, Waheed insists that Nidali understands the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict – literally dictating history to her (Ibid 66). He also insists that she learns to draw the map of Palestine, and that she has a good education which would always be her home (Ibid 106). Nidali comes to understand that even her own name, which has been chosen by her father, does not refer to her struggle but to her father's. It is this imposition of the national homeland that Nidali rejects. It is worth noting here the main difference between Jarrar and the authors of the two previously discussed novelists: Jabra and Shammas. The younger writer Jarrar has no personal memories of Palestine, never having lived there. Unlike Jabra and Shammas, Jarrar experiences Palestine only as a collective narrative passed on from one generation to another without an actual memory of a home in Palestine. This is reflected in her ability to distinguish clearly between what is a just political cause and a personal home.

#### 4.2 Palestine is the Homeland and not the Home

However, even if Nidali does not remember Palestine as a home, migration itself becomes part of her very own personal identity (Yassin-Kassab, 2009) as a result of her mixed Palestinian, Greek and Egyptian background. When she admits that “moving was part of being Palestinian”, she realizes that home is portable and that it takes investment over a period of time, as Theano S. Terkenli argued in his article “Home as a Region” (1995: 326). She also endorses the vision of her father who carries his Palestinian homeland in his soul, and who believes that one's home can be found in one's own education, which is a principle that has been upheld by the Palestinian people across generations. As a result, even when her family has a chance to build their own home, Nidali finds herself wondering “how long that home would hold [them], how long that home would last” (*A Map of Home* 279). When she later escapes from home in preparation for joining the college to which she applied without her father's consent, she thinks of home, recalling the image of “the old apartment in Kuwait” (Ibid 283), the memory that preceded her first journey.

Ultimately, Nidali's home does not correspond to her father's memory of Palestine, his dictated history or his imposed map, but is rather one that Nidali herself makes from her own unique position as a travelling Palestinian. Her own language as she narrates her story reflects this intersection of different languages and cultures. Her literal translation of Arabic expressions such as in her use of “O'eye” (Ibid 78) and “O'heart” (Ibid 79) as well as the occasional Arabic word written in the Latin alphabet such as *Yalla* (Ibid 82), *Aiwa* (Ibid 80)

and *Kalbooz* (Ibid 79) point towards her own unique placement as a writer who has fallen between various cultures and whose written product fuses them together. Jarrar does not even attempt to provide a glossary that explains any of these expressions or words, as is done frequently in novels by writers of an ethnic background whose novels are published in the West. Jarrar, instead, depends on the strength of her own words to illuminate the intended meaning and give the words themselves the power needed to translate themselves out of context. Nidali's voice travels easily both linguistically and culturally between the different markers of her background carving out her own unique voice and her own home.

Thus, the dates that were the markers of previously discussed novels, such as 1948 and 1967, only figure in Jarrar's novel in the minimal shadow of Nidali's awareness of them. They are events that have undoubtedly left their imprint on both Nidali and Jarrar, but Jarrar highlights the personal in the shadow of the political and not the reverse. Aside from her father's imposing presence which infuses Palestine in their daily lives, Nidali does not hold Palestine as a home, but rather as a just cause. She remembers the stories that have been told to her by her Palestinian grandmother and talks in detail about the experience of being strip-searched at the Allenby Bridge on the way to Jenin. The Palestinian experience remains mostly a case of solidarity with a people wronged, and only translates itself into Nidali's own personal experience through the practical difficulties her father's Palestinian identity could occasionally pose to the family's travelling.

Although Palestine is not her home, the reality of living as a Palestinian follows her closely as she moves from one place to another. Imagining her departure from Kuwait during the Gulf War, Nidali says: "we were barefoot, like on the West Bank Bridge" (Ibid 139). Crossing over the border from Kuwait, she says:

I didn't know that there wouldn't be a fence stretched for miles and miles, or a clearly marked thick black line in the sand the way it is on a map, extended like the Gulf's horizon. Someone told me once that a straight line on a map isn't straight in reality (Ibid 147).

Watching the tourists during a flight to Egypt, she says: "I thought how nice it would be to travel just for the sake of travelling, how nice it must be to leave one country for another willingly...for fun!" (Ibid 159). When she arrives in Egypt after being in Kuwait for most of her childhood, Nidali realizes that Kuwait was the only home she has known (Ibid 166) and not Palestine, the map of which her father had her practise drawing over and over again. Home for her was the family home, the friends and the routine of the school life.

### 4.3 Erasing the Borders of the Nation

The pain of separation from loved ones, established lives and close friends is a recurrent theme in Jarrar's *A Map of Home*. Here, migration from one place to the next is anchored firmly in both the practical experiences of national boundaries and wars among the different national entities: Palestine and Israel, Iraq and Kuwait. The state presents itself at every juncture as the family decides on which passport to use – the father's Jordanian passport, the mother's Egyptian passport or Nidali's own American passport – according to the political climate that surrounds one trip or another. The restrictions imposed by a world defined mostly through the divisions between states are presented in contrast to Nidali's identity which combines three countries together. Her "thrice refugee-d" (Ibid 162) father bemoans his fate which caused him to end up exiled from Kuwait, a third home after Palestine and Egypt, with his children getting a taste of war that he had sought to shelter them from. In exasperation he confesses, when asked about the accuracy of the map of home he had made his daughter draw, that "there is no telling where home starts and where it ends" (Ibid 193). Nidali then reforms her father's map of home:

I took the map I drew to my room, flipped my pencil and brought the eraser's tip to the page. I erased the western border, the northern border. I erased the southern and eastern border. I surveyed what remained: a blank page, save for the Galilee. I stared at the whiteness of the paper's edges for a long time. The whiteness of the page blended with the whiteness of my sheets. "You are here" I thought as I looked at the page and all around me. And oddly, I felt free (Ibid).

Even though the whiteness and the removal of borders free Nidali from the confines of the imagined home in her father's mind, she does not float freely among her different homes. Every journey uproots and unsettles her previous homing experience. She knows, however, that she has "to work at feeling at home" (Ibid 207). Upon her arrival in the US, she exclaims that this was her first time in months not to miss anything (Ibid 216). Once in the US, a phase of exploration and adaptation takes place. Like Patricia Saraffian Ward, the Lebanese American author whose novel *The Bullet collection* (2003) outlined the adaptation process of a Lebanese family in the US, the last part of *A Map of Home* also documents the phases of alienation and coping that Nidali's family goes through. Unlike Ward's protagonist, though, Nidali's presence in the US empowers her to stand up to her father's beatings and his imposed dreams and aspirations. She escapes from home twice and complains to the police

when her father beats her. She applies to a college in Boston against his will and makes it clear that she will not concede to his demands.

It is not difficult to determine where Randa Jarrar falls within the postcolonial discussion of the implications of migration. By literally and figuratively redrawing the “map of home”, she did away with the implication of the overlap between the home and the country of origin or the home and the nation state. She has complied with the expectations from the migrant to destabilize the fixed identity that refers only to the nation state. She has also taken a step towards breaking ties with the family home as the novel ends with her decision to leave Texas for Boston, embracing Amin Maalouf’s view that favours the metaphor of roads and journeys over that of roots and fixed origins. Jarrar’s novel does not actively seek to document or chronicle the history of the Palestinian homeland either; she is more concerned with the personal and individual story of what growing up as a Palestinian means to Nidali, the adolescent rebellious teenage protagonist. Jarrar allows Nidali to tell the story of her own attempt to find her path to home in light of her own journey wandering around different cultures and struggling with the rigidity of her father’s perceptions and expectations.

## 5. The Collective Homeland and the Personal Home in Susan Abulhawa's (1970) *Mornings in Jenin* (2010)

Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian American novelist who now lives in the USA. She was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents who were made refugees after the Six-Day War of 1967. Like Jarrar, she also moved to the US as a teenager (Abulhawa, 2011). There, she studied biomedical science and embraced it as a profession alongside her writing. She established a charity organization called the "Right to Play" in 2001 which is dedicated to upholding the right of Palestinian children to play (Ibid). Both *Mornings in Jenin* and *A Map of Home* are the first novels by their respective novelists.

Talking about *In Search of Fatima* (2002), Ghada Karmi (1939), the renowned Palestinian woman writer, explained that she felt a need to tell the story of Palestine in a way that people can relate to and through which they can understand the plight of the Palestinians and their quest for independence (Karmi, 2009). Karmi's statement confirms John Di Stefano's observation that "for a nation to perpetuate itself within the minds of its constituents, it requires a type of ongoing narration – a narrative that provides a context within which such enactments of belonging may be positioned" (2002: 38). On her online blog, Susan Abulhawa provides an additional reason for writing. She writes that she has "always admired writers who chose storytelling as a way to tear down the barriers between peoples. It is for this reason that [she] chose to write *Mornings in Jenin*" (Abulhawa, 2011). This eight-year-long project chronicles the main events of the Palestinian saga (Ibid). As a result, Abulhawa emphasizes the common humanity of all the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The theme of the commonalities between the experiences suffered by both the Israelis and the Palestinians is a recurrent one in her novel and it reflects her belief in their power to serve as a common ground to bring the conflict to an end. To this end, she keeps her characters fictional and the historical setting real, almost factual.

The novel is divided into eight main parts and consists of 47 chapters and a prelude, thus highlighting the centrality of the date of 1948. Abulhawa starts her narration at a point that precedes the beginning of the displacement of the Palestinian people as a point of change from which the life of Palestinians has never returned to normal. The novel starts before the birth of the main character, Amal, to the family of Abulheja, who are forced out of their

village of Ein Hod. Amal is the daughter of Salma, the spirited Bedouin girl, and Hassan Abulheja, the Palestinian farmer, the son of Yehia and Basseema whose lives revolved around farming the land they inherited from their fathers and grandfathers. Abulhawa paints an extremely idyllic picture of life in Palestine in the years that preceded the displacement of 1948. The brothers Darweesh and Hasan help their parents farm the land in a friendly competition with their neighbour Abu Salem. The mother provides for the children food and fruits grown on their own land. Hasan has a strong friendship with Ari, a Jewish friend who survived Nazi violence and sought refuge with his parents in Palestine. Both the Jewish and the Palestinian families respect and love each other through their children's friendship. The central protagonist, Amal, is only born after the events of 1948, after the death of the grandmother Basseema and the kidnapping of her brother Ismael by a Jewish settler.

When Amal finds herself alone after 1967, her fate is decided upon after consultation with Abu Salem, her uncle Dawood and the UN peacekeeper Jack O'Malley. Together, they decide to uphold her father's wish by granting Amal the best education possible. She moves to Jerusalem where she joins an orphanage/school that opens the door for a scholarship opportunity in the USA. Amal goes to the US for a few years during which she studies for a master's degree, changes her name to Amy and becomes completely isolated from her Palestinian past. She later receives a phone call from her brother Yusuf in Lebanon inviting her to join his family. In Lebanon, Amal lives with Yusuf and his wife Fatima. She starts to work as a teacher at the UNRWA school and gets married to Majid, her brother's friend. This serene life is then shattered by the Israeli invasion of 1982 and the Sabra and Shatila massacres, leaving Majid, Fatima, Falasteen her daughter and her new unborn child dead. Yusuf, who is physically safe in Tunis, is later accused of bombing the American embassy in Beirut. The last few parts of the novel centre around Amal's life in the US with her daughter Sara and Majid's friends Elizabeth and Mohammed, Amal's reunion with her brother David and her return to Jenin after three decades.

Susan Abulhawa, herself born to a family of Palestinian refugees, highlights the two levels of home: one personal, and the other collective. Her novel is about Amal and her quest as a Palestinian woman to attain home in the framework of the Palestinian struggle, as much as it is about the collective Palestinian displacement. In my discussion of the portrayal of this division in the portrayal of home in Susan Abulhawa's novel, I detail how she employs the narrative framework in order to anchor her novel in a historical and geographical reality. I

also highlight how her focus on the refugee experience highlights both the personal/psychological and the political displacement of the Palestinian characters of the novel. I also shed light on the experience of Amal as an individual on a quest to find a personal home in the shadow of the Palestinian political struggle.

### 5.1 Home: the Personal and the Political in *Mornings in Jenin*

The fact that Amal was born a refugee after 1948 meant that she had to journey around different homes. She moves from Jenin after the disappearance of her father, the escape of her brother to join the resistance and the death of her mother, to join the orphanage in Jerusalem, then to the US, then to Shatila camp in Lebanon, only to return once again to the US as a result of another Israeli attack on her home. Literally and figuratively, her home is unsettled by the direct action of the Israeli aggressor. Susan Abulhawa appears to be asking: how can the personal and the political remain separate in such a setting? In a passionate text, Amal declares as a new arrival to Jerusalem after having lived most of her life in the Jenin refugee camp: “I am a daughter of the land and Jerusalem reassures me of this inalienable title, far more than the yellowed property deeds, the Ottoman land registries, the iron keys to our stolen homes, or UN resolutions and decrees of superpowers could ever do” (*Mornings in Jenin* 140). Again, Abulhawa here refers to the rightful claim to the land of Palestine that is legitimized by all the evidence she mentions, as well as to the personal feeling of being at home in Palestine. Home, Abulhawa insists, is at once personal and political. The overlap of the personal and the political continues to gain strength and to forge among the Palestinian people a collective feeling of home, as Amal sums up at the end of one chapter: “Our bond was Palestine. It was a language we dismantled to construct a home” (Ibid 165).

As a young woman, Amal stated:

Growing up in a landscape of improvised dreams and abstract national longings, everything felt temporary to me. Nothing could be counted on to endure, neither parents nor siblings nor home. Not even one’s body, vulnerable as it was to bullets. I had long since accepted that one day, I would lose everything and everyone... (Ibid 156).

Years later, as she studies in the United States, Amal would remember how her Palestinian-ness followed her around like a scar from the past (Ibid 171), even as she changes her name from Amal (hopes) to Amy and stops all communication with family and friends from the past. In her words:

I metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab-Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown. I drank alcohol and dated several men... I spun in cultural vicissitude, wandering in and out of the American ethos until I lost my way. I fell in love with Americans and even felt that love reciprocated. I lived in the present, keeping the past hidden away... But sometimes the blink of my eye was a twitch of contrition that brought me face-to-face with the past (Ibid 174).

She experiences how Palestine would rise up uninvited during her time in the US (Ibid 175) and she would resist it until her brother Yusuf's phone call reminds her that her "Arabness and Palestine's primal cries were [her] anchors to the world" (Ibid 179). Amal's experience of migration from Palestine to the US results in her realization of the role her Palestinian and Arab identities play in anchoring her existence in the world. Her reflections demonstrate how questions of migration and identity cannot be separated from one another: Amal's memory of home shifts from one that is nostalgically restorative to one that is reflective. Although, early on, she draws security from a fixed Palestinian and Arab identity, her experience throughout the rest of the novel develops into a reflective nostalgia that dominates her perception of a home that is dynamic and that is not anchored in a rigid identity or that is geographically determined. This shift from restorative to reflective nostalgia is presented in the novel to coincide with Amal's return trip on which she realizes that the home in memory (the imagined home) no longer corresponds to the home in reality.

## **5.2 Return: The Imagined Home**

Return does not guarantee the same sense of home experienced before her departure to the US. Amal exclaims as she goes back to Jerusalem that she does not understand why the dignity of people hinges upon some soil and stones (Ibid 290). She goes to Jenin and no longer feels the same sense of home (Ibid 294). On that trip, she realizes that home had always been with her (Ibid 297) in her daughter Sara in whose arms she dies after being shot by an Israeli soldier (Ibid 307). As Amal dies, the Israeli soldier mumbles that he "cannot shoot anymore" (Ibid 313). He helps Sara and Huda (Amal's childhood friend) to survive the remaining few days of curfew in Jenin. It is this gesture of humanity that ends the novel and underlines Abulhawa's theme of the power of common humanity to end the conflict. This emphasis on common humanity is a recurring theme in the novel, in a way that is almost straightforward at times. In one chapter, the reader is presented with the image of David/Ismael, the Israeli soldier, holding the wrist of his brother, who is now part of the resistance, and exclaiming that the Arab's wrist has a pulse (Ibid 99).

It is important to note at this point that although Abulhawa covers every single incident of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict starting with the *Nakbah* of 1948, passing by the *Naksah* of 1967, the Battle of *Karamah* in 1970, the *Deir Yasin* massacre, the Sabra and Shatila massacres, the invasion of Lebanon, the Palestinian Intifada and the massacre at Jenin refugee camp among other incidents, her narration ceases completely in the years that witness the failed peace process between 1993 and 2001. Neither Abulhawa nor Amal give a reason for the removal of the peace process from a novel that documents the narrative of the Palestinian struggle. It is these years, however, that precede the re-entry of David, or Ismael, into his sister's life after being absent from the narrative. The reunion with David/Ismael is a critique of the failed peace process through which she claims that the only peace possible is one that takes place through common human understanding on both sides. It is only after this reunion that Amal returns to Jenin where she meets again with her childhood friend Huda and her sons, Ari her father's friend and with David/Ismael and his son, allowing herself a final say on her views about the resolution of the conflict through a shared humanity and a common understanding.

### 5.3 1948: Refugees in Fact and Fiction

Abulhawa's emphasis, however, on seeing the common suffering and common humanity as the basis of understanding between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides is not to be confused with a call for peace that neglects the suffering on the Palestinian side. In fact, the novel itself documents the decades of the Palestinian suffering without once losing touch with reality. Abulhawa uses both fact and fiction towards this end. The chapter in which Abulhawa covers the events of 1948 becomes marked with the sense of loss of Dalia and Hasan's baby Ismael, who is kidnapped by the Israeli soldier in the midst of the panic of his mother and the rest of the people of the village. From that point onwards, loss changes Dalia and puts her in a state of pain from which she never has a chance to recover until her death. The pain and lament in Abulhawa's words are quite evident as she states:

In the sorrow of a history buried alive, the year 1948 in Palestine fell from the calendar into exile, ceasing to reckon the marching count of days, months, and years, instead becoming an infinite mist of one moment in history. The twelve months of that year rearranged themselves and swirled aimlessly in the heart of Palestine. The old folks of Ein Hod would die refugees in the camp, bequeathing to their heirs the large iron keys to their ancestral homes, the crumbling land registers issued by the Ottomans, the deeds from the British mandate, their

memories and love of the land, and the dauntless will not to leave the spirit of forty generations trapped beneath the subversion of thieves (Ibid 35).

What Susan Abulhawa provides her readers with in *Mornings in Jenin* is a timeline of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the perspective of a Palestinian refugee. Jenin is the refugee camp where Amal is born into a condition of statelessness, displacement and uncertainty that contrasts with the earlier account given of her grandparents' and her parents' life. While the earlier account is full of references to the mundane details of daily lives, adolescent love, plans for arranged marriages between cousins, friendly neighbourly competition and other day-to-day incidents that correspond to those experienced by millions around the world, the account of life in Jenin camp where Amal's birth takes place shortly after 1948 sees this serene and ideal image of life in Palestine shattered. It becomes replaced with news of impending wars, curfews, checkpoints, military restrictions and the loss of the family home.

The historical and the personal continue to go hand in hand in Abulhawa's narration, where every chapter is headed by a date that chronicles every relevant incident in the Palestinian struggle. She introduces the reader to the people of Ein Hod in her first chapter and explains their state of mind as the year 1948 approached:

Ein Hod was adjacent to three villages that formed an unconquered triangle inside the new state, so that the fate of Ein Hod's people was joined with that of some twenty thousand other Palestinians who still clung to their homes. They repulsed attacks and called for a truce, wanting only to live on their land as they always had... Attachment to God, land and family was the core of their being and that is what they defended and sought to keep (Ibid 27).

The narrative of the details of the displacement of 1948 is accorded generous space that highlights the scale of importance of this juncture. Abulhawa realizes this is a contentious issue that defines the Palestinian experience in the past, present and future. Her narrative calls upon actual news sources to give credibility to her account. She writes:

The next morning, July 24, Israel launched a massive artillery and aerial bombardment of the village. The Associated Press reported that Israeli planes and infantry had violated the Palestinian truce by the unprovoked attack, and bombs rained as Dalia ran from shelter to shelter with terror-stricken Yousef and a screaming baby Ismael (Ibid 28).

The archival source from the Associated Press that documents the historical reality of the account of the displacement takes place alongside the unfolding narrative of fiction to achieve the novelist's main aim: to give a full account of the narrative of the Palestinian struggle.

It is the loss of 1948 that turns the people into refugees. Abulhawa traces their journey of realization of their new circumstances. As they find refuge in Jenin, none of them can accept that this could become a long-term solution. Expecting return at every juncture and pinning hopes on neighbouring Arab states give Amal her name when she is born in 1955. She embodies these hopes of return to a life that preceded the *Nakbah*. However, the refugees came to realize that “they were slowly being erased from the world, from its history and from its future” (Ibid 48). After almost 20 years, the *Nakbah*, which formed the first part of Abulhawa’s novel, is followed by the *Naksah*, the setback of 1967.

Abulhawa also paints a picture of the development of life inside the refugee camp after the displacement. Palestinians went about their daily lives in the shadow of uncertainty; they attempted to duplicate their past existence by growing the same trees and the same plants they had on their lands. Abulhawa also demonstrates the practical difficulties of living without an internationally recognized state. She talks of the colour-coded identity documents, the various permits needed to travel to different areas, the passes for medical treatment and others for university passes, the “piles of pink, yellow and green slips” (Ibid 114), the experience of inspections, investigations and checkpoints that come both from being refugees and from living under occupation.

When once again Amal’s serene life in Shatila refugee camp is shattered by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Abulhawa also intervenes to document the brutal Israeli attack with the support of facts from the historical archives. Robert Fisk’s *Pity the Nation: the Abduction of Lebanon* (Ibid 219) is used to bring the image into the light of reality that shows the real magnitude of the violence of the Israeli invasion. Ronald Reagan, the American president, Philip Habib, who brokered the ceasefire, and the PLO dominate the pages that tell of the invasion, while the fictitious characters of the novel disappear from the narrative in dignified silent suffering. Later, with the occurrence of the uprising in 1987, Abulhawa resorts to Norman Finkelstein’s *The Rise and Fall of Palestine* (Ibid 249) to defend, support and uncover the myths levelled at the Palestinian uprising. An Associated Press photographer who captures the image of a dead woman is used by Abulhawa to give a picture of the suffering along with the historical fact.

Like Jarrar, Abulhawa is also aware of the sensitivities that surround the question of home in the Palestinian context. Recalling Svetlana Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia (referred to in Chapter One, section 2.2), one can see how Amal’s

nostalgia oscillates between the two. Amal's memory shifts from the restorative nostalgia that reconstructs a replica of the remembered home and remedies the homesickness with a narrative of return to roots, to the reflective nostalgia that makes possible the inhabiting of different places as homes. Her reflections at the end of the novel that dwell on the common humanity of the two sides of the conflict are clear signs of a reflective nostalgia where "the focus is not on what is perceived to be an absolute truth, but on the meditation on history and the passage of time" (Boym, 2007: 15). At the same time, Abulhawa relentlessly highlights the justice inherent in the Palestinian struggle. She makes it clear that while a personal home might not actually coincide with one that is geographically determined, only a just resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict through a revision of its history will allow for a chance to transcend national attachments.

## 6. Conclusion

The valorization of the site of migration stems from the assumption that the uncertainty that accompanies migration, and the experience of being exposed to two or more different cultures, ensures a destabilization of the formerly (supposedly) rigid view of identity and a re-creation of meaning. My intention was to examine the exaltation of that position in relation to the national tradition by focusing on the representation of home as a concept that is informed by identity, place and ideology. In this chapter, I shed light on this representation of home in the writings of Palestinian migrants whose experience of migration entails an element of force, if not immediate then historical. The accounts could be described neither as exilic nor as diasporic. These are terms used to more accurately describe the experience of life away from the country of origin and the nature of adaptation to life in the new country. While the characters of the novels do dwell between the two experiences of home, between exile and diaspora, the accounts themselves are personal stories intertwined with the history of the Palestinian struggle. The discussion demonstrated that while the concept of home is personal and is not associated with a physical location in Palestine or elsewhere, the texts sought to contribute to the memorial site of the 1948 *Nakbah* which started the initial collective experience of displacement. Novelists here assumed the task of remembering and narrating the entire collective experience to save the story of Palestine from oblivion. These, however, were not nationalist texts; each of the four novels transcended polarizations and rejected binaries, but they insisted on addressing the day-to-day struggles of the Palestinian person with occupation and its results. As long as the Palestinians' history of loss remains unrecognized, so will the commemoration of the *Nakbah* in its literature among its generations continue.

One of the results of the history of displacement and dispossession was this transnational literature that is characterized by an engagement with Palestine, its history and culture as it addresses the audience in the West. This is reflected in the novels by the two Palestinian American writers Randa Jarrar and Susan Abulhawa. With *Mornings in Jenin*, published in 2010, and *A Map of Home*, published in 2008, Abulhawa and Jarrar respectively contributed to introducing to the Arab American novel two fundamental narratives of

Palestine: the history of the loss of the Palestinian homeland and the search for home in the diaspora. Their novels which engage with Palestine are published to readers that might not be as readily sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle as an Arabic-reading audience. Their novels are written and received in two worlds – that of Palestinian literature as well as in the field of Arab American literature, a field which is witnessing rapidly growing academic interest. The field of Arab American literature, much like that of Palestinian literature, is also known to be intensely political. Critical inquiries into Arab American literature have often highlighted that one of its main distinctions is the strong preoccupation of many of its writers with political incidents that take place overseas, specifically in the Middle East (Ludescher, 2006: 95 & Salaita, 2011: 8). This is an inevitable phenomenon since the migration of many of those Arab American writers took place in most cases in the shadow of conflicts that led to their departure from their original homelands. Scholars generally agreed that the migration of Arabs to the US which started in 1885 consisted of two main waves (Suleiman, 1999). The differences between these waves were mirrored in the literature of their writers, with the defeat of the Arabs in 1967 ultimately galvanizing a strong political consciousness among Arab Americans in general (Joseph, 1999: 265). This is even more apparent in the case of Palestinian Americans for whom life in the US takes place alongside the political influence that continues to perpetuate Palestinian displacement, and in a medium which is often outright hostile to the Palestinian struggle.<sup>25</sup> The novels by the two Palestinian American writers covered the facts of the Palestinian struggle, the dispersion of the Palestinian people and the tale of its refugees. These facts intertwined strongly with the fictive representations displaying how the personal and the political remain inseparable when it comes to Palestine and its literature.

It is thus impossible to see the writers and their novels away from the political condition that determined their presence in the US or from the political circumstances that continue to surround their life there. The overlap between the personal and the political finds echoes in the lives and novels of the four writers discussed here. Abulhawa, for example, was born to Palestinian parents who were made refugees after the Six-Day War of 1967; she came to the US as a teenager and often talked in her interviews about her experience of alienation growing up as an Arab and a Palestinian. Similarly, Jarrar has a lot to say about growing up

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<sup>25</sup> The reactions that these novels occasionally provoke in the ‘West’ are interesting as a subject of study by themselves. To mention one example, Susan Abulhawa’s novel provoked an angry essay by the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy soon after its publication. Lévy believed that *Mornings in Jenin* contributes to the demonization of the Israeli state and called the novel a distressing development towards anti-Semitism.

in a Palestinian family in three different countries, none of which was Palestine. Jarrar grew up in Kuwait until she had to move with her family during the first Gulf War from Kuwait to Egypt when Palestinians were made to abandon their livelihoods in the wake of Yasser Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein. As a matter of fact, in the two novels, the personal and the political are presented concurrently, with an emphasis on one narrative more than the other in each of the two novels. Abulhawa is more preoccupied with telling a story of the nation that is informative as well as emotive to an audience that is not highly familiar with the Palestinian narrative. Jarrar is more preoccupied with an individual story of the search for home that takes place in the shadow of the history of Palestinian displacement that started in 1948 and that continues to have implications for the younger generations of Palestinians growing up in the diaspora. The story of collective displacement that is the emphasis of Susan Abulhawa's novel and the story of the individual's search for home that is the emphasis of Randa Jarrar's novel together contribute to a comprehensive narrative of the Palestinian story in the Arab American novel.

Closely tied to the preoccupation with the narrative of 1948 is the portrayal of life inside the Palestinian refugee camps. Susan Abulhawa engaged the most with the portrayal of life inside the refugee camps in Lebanon and in the occupied territories.. Her novel was preoccupied with the depiction of life in the refugee camp, the coping mechanisms, the desire to return to the land of Palestine and the just demand for a state. The novel in this way contains reminders of the masses that Edward Said wrote about in his essay "Mind of Winter": refugees armed only with ration cards (1984: 50). These practical hardships that face the migrant figure (here the refugee) also address the concerns raised by Aijaz Ahmad in his retort to Homi Bhabha about the valorization of the migrant writer (Ahmad, 2000: 86). Here the migrant is displaced and dispossessed and shares very little with the migrant writer romanticized and glorified as the proprietor of a unique power to destabilize fixed identities.

The task of narrativizing the displacement of 1948 did not start with Abulhawa's and Jarrar's novels. As I have shown in the introduction of this chapter, the commemoration of the *Nakbah* started soon after 1948. These novels are numerous and they fall within and among an unlimited set of categories of writers: gender, generation, geographical location, themes and preoccupations, language, background and political outlook. The previous analysis discussed only four novels by four writers. Jabra's novel *The Ship* and Shammas's novel *Arabesques*, which was written in Hebrew, also contributed to the commemoration of

the history of the Palestinian displacement long before the younger novelists Jarrar and Abulhawa started their writing career. However, this Palestinian Anglophone literature is far-reaching by virtue of the language in which it is written and by being introduced to a readership to which the history of Palestine is practically omitted.

Any examination or tackling of the experience or the perception of home among the four different novelists discussed here contained to a large extent an attempt to document the experience of collective history of Palestine. As argued earlier in the introduction to the chapter, the Palestinian writer finds it almost impossible to separate the personal from the political in any engagement with the presentation of home, even if the extent of separation of the two was to different degrees among the four writers. Even if, in some cases, the Palestinian writer has not lived on the land of Palestine, and has thus not actually experienced Palestine in memory, the Palestinian identity in their writing is still as powerful (Siddiq, 1995: 92). As Hammer notes, even those Palestinians who were not truly refugees in the legal sense of the word came to understand and later exemplify the condition of being one (2005: 5). As a result of this, we witnessed in the novels an engagement with home that is closely tied to the homeland of Palestine in a stronger way than in the novels discussed in the next two chapters. Home and homeland in Palestine are strongly linked not only together but with the more prominent issue of occupation and the perception of justice. None of the four writers depicted a protagonist who was so fully engaged with the individual concern that they did not feel the need to address the Palestinians' right to the land. Even Jabra's cast of alienated characters, who were presented as self-centred individuals in the aftermath of the defeat of 1967, were transported back to the land after their journey on board the ship. Without falling into the trap of presenting nation and exile as opposites, Jabra focused on the attachment to the land in general while highlighting the peculiarities and specificities of the conflict over land in Palestine. This might contribute to explaining the extent of the perceived preoccupation of the Palestinian writers with a national cause.

It is worth noting, however, that although three of the four discussed novels were very focused on presenting a certain period in the history of Palestine, and thus were focused somehow on the past; none of these novels were simply exilic accounts. The recollection of memories of the past here does not attempt to present idealized imaginings of home against the harsh reality of the present. In this sense, none of the writers were practising restorative nostalgia which assumed that a return to a fixed point in the past "attempts a transhistorical

reconstruction of the lost home” (Boym, 2007: 13). These novels do not seek to revive national history in order to promote the ideology of nationalism; rather they thrive on the collective memory that is a marker of the individual memory yet not a definite referent for it (Ibid 14). In other words, these four novelists seek the acknowledgement and the resolution of the past but not its restoration.

## Chapter Three

### 1. The Significance of the Civil War in the Lebanese Novel written in Exile

#### 1.1 Lebanese Migrant Writers

I ended the last chapter by noting that the novels by the two Palestinian American writers, Susan Abulhawa and Randa Jarrar contributed to the growing body of the Arab American novel in the USA. Their novels, which are marked by a high degree of political consciousness, present the Palestinian narrative to an English reading audience which might not be as aware of the different dimensions of the Palestinian struggle as an Arabic readership. In this chapter, I bring to light a similar phenomenon amongst Lebanese migrant writers. In five novels, I consider how Lebanese writers, who migrated from Lebanon to different locations in the West, represented the notion of home.

The fiction by Lebanese writers, who reside outside Lebanon, constitutes a growing body of literature. The first scholar to shed light on this phenomenon was Syrine Hout, an associate professor of English and Comparative Literature in the American University of Beirut. Her work focuses on novels by writers who resided no longer in Lebanon but remained, in one way or another, concerned about Lebanon by featuring its history in their literary expressions. The content and themes of these novels dealt with issues which had to do with Lebanon that, more often than not, related directly to the civil war. Some of the novels, which Hout's work has covered to date, are: Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* (1980), Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine* (2001), Toni Hanania's *Koolaid's* (1999), Patricia Sarrafian Ward's *The Bullet Collection* (2003) and many more novels written outside Lebanon. Her approach to these novels, which stresses primarily their relationship to their location of writing, is one which has started recently to gain the interest of literary scholars in relation to the Lebanese novel. Hout's continuing contribution explains that these novels, by Lebanese migrant writers, may be on their way to forming "what one may predict to become a full-fledged branch of Lebanese exilic (*mahjar*) literature" (2006: 190).

However, Syrine Hout distinguishes between two different forms of these novels in terms of the relationship they assume toward home; some could be labelled as exilic, others could be labelled diasporic. While Hout argues that after 1995, we witnessed a surge in exilic literature, even more recently we witnessed in Jad el-Hage's novel, *The Last Migration*

(Hout, 2007) the very first example of contemporary Lebanese diasporic literature. Although both exhibit issues of displacement, she explains that exilic novels feature sentimental attitudes towards the homeland with nostalgia figuring prominently in the text in a way which contrasts with the diasporic experience which valorises the adaptation in the new country (Ibid). In this context, Hout introduces el-Hage's novel as the first contemporary example of Lebanese diasporic literature and argues that it "may usher in a new brand of postwar fiction" (Ibid 288). What makes Jad el-Hage's novel different from the works of Rawi Hage, Tony Hanania, Patricia Sarrafian Ward and many other writers of postwar novels who live in the West is that *The Last Migration* stresses the adaptations of the diaspora rather than the exclusions of exile (Ibid 289)<sup>26</sup>. Hage's diasporic novel does not portray Lebanon "as a polar opposite to the (temporary) host country but as a "stopover" while travelling between cities lying to its East and West" (Ibid 292) and it "relocates home within the geography of the soul" (Ibid 294).

Hout also examines novels by Hanan al-Shaykh, a Lebanese writer who for over 20 years has made her home in the United Kingdom. In offering a reading of *Only in London* (2000), Hout explains that her purpose was to "delineate the connection between the novel as a fictional account of the Arab exilic experience and its generic "identity" as an example of contemporary literature by a Lebanese-Arab and a long time resident of England" (2008: 31). Hout maintains that there is a stark difference between the writing of al-Shaykh, a writer who had foregone Lebanon long ago as her home, and between the recent writings of the younger novelists who grapple in their fiction with issues of identity, home, belonging and nostalgia. In fact, Hout made much of al-Shaykh's own interviews in which she explains her different relationship to Lebanon. Hout quotes her saying:

Actually... I'm so happy I left. Sometimes I feel guilty when my son tells me he has no roots. But I'm really a coward. I can't take pain at all. I can't take chaos, because my imagination goes wild... I was the first one from my family and my friends and neighbourhood who left [Beirut]. I'm not nationalistic at all I think, and I was just thinking of myself and my children (qtd. in Hout, 2008: 29).

Hout's reading of both al-Shaykh's text and her life leads her to place her fiction in a separate domain than that of both the Beirut Decentrists (Ibid 31), a school designated by Miriam Cooke (1993: 187) to a group of women whom she believed had shared Beirut as their home

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<sup>26</sup> I elaborate on this discussion in section 4.

and the war as their “experience” (1988: 3), and a domain which was different also from that of the younger generation of Lebanese writers mentioned earlier.

## 1.2 Divergent Representations of Home among the Lebanese Diaspora

The different representations of home and homeland which Hout continued to point out in Lebanese novels written by Lebanese writers away from Lebanon was a reflection of the different experiences of the Lebanese diaspora. These migrant writers, who share Lebanon as a country of origin, do not have the same experience of Lebanon or the same experience of living in exile. Consequently, their representation of home and the relationship to the Lebanese homeland are different. These differences are derived from various reasons which figure far beyond the literary text, e.g. the history of Lebanese migration, the constitution of the Lebanese demography, the different individual influences on literary expression and in the language of that expression.

On the differences amongst the Lebanese diaspora, Michael Humphrey asks:

So what constitutes the Lebanese diaspora? Is there a Lebanese diaspora nostalgic for home? Do those who identify as Lebanese in the diaspora share the same imagined homeland? Is the idea of the concept of the Lebanese diaspora just too historically, culturally and politically diverse to be of much use? To what extent does diaspora continue to shape by [sic] transnational nationalist politics after the war? (2004: 34)

Humphrey explains that the formation of the Lebanese diaspora happened through two stages of mass migration. The first one took place between 1898 and 1914 with the departure of 100,000 Lebanese citizens. The second stage took place from 1975 to 1990 during the civil war; this time causing the relocation of around 274,000 Lebanese citizens. Movement back and forth between these two main stages never stopped (2004: 35). Humphrey concludes that there were various faults to be found with the attempt to homogenize the entire Lebanese diaspora explaining that:

Lebanese identities are defined primarily in relation to the states of which they are a part ...the dynamic between the old and new [migrants] tells a variety of stories – historical differences in migration patterns, sectarian identity and assimilation, changing currency of cultural capital... (Ibid 46).

Humphrey also reminds us that the wave of migration resulting from the recent civil war and the bitterness, which it left in its aftermath, consisted mainly of Christian Lebanese (Ibid 47). In that sense, he highlights the differences which existed within the Lebanese diaspora. The

bitterness, mentioned by Humphrey, constituted, according to Haugbolle, the greatest hurdle to a unified Lebanese nationalist discourse; “after all, the war entailed an ideological struggle over divergent concepts – Lebanonist, Arabist, Islamist – of the Lebanese nation” (2005: 196).

Confronted with this set of obstacles when it comes to a homogenous literature in exile or, indeed, within Lebanon itself, most of the scholarly engagement with the postwar Lebanese novel focused on the issue of the civil war and the various forms of expression in the immense number of novels which, in such a short period of time, dealt with the war. According to Carol Fadda-Conrey, who examines the exilic memories of war in Lebanese women’s writing, these stories “vary and, often, exist concomitantly with a quest to foment a form of Lebanese identity, whether a personal or collective one, regardless of the writer’s nationality” (2003: 7). She added that they corresponded, also, to the collective memory of the war in Lebanon which was itself “multiple and fragmented” (Ibid 18). These varying commentaries on the Lebanese postwar novel lend legitimacy to Fadda-Conrey’s conclusion that, although the narratives of the war defied one conclusive generalization, they all remained bound by their being a voice which broke the silence that, until recent years, spread in the wake of the civil war (Ibid).

Indeed, the number of novels written about the Lebanese civil war experience whether in Lebanon or abroad stand in stark contrast to the state’s policy of dismissal and forgetfulness which favoured approaching the postwar era as a blank slate, with as little official discussion as possible of responsibility of incrimination, vilification or victimization; waving the banner of “no victor, no vanquished” (Haugbolle, 2005: 193); and dismissing the atrocities of the war as a reflection of the interests of “others on Lebanese soil” (Sarkis, 2002: 133). In fact, Haugbolle explains that the Lebanese society was so reluctant to discuss the civil war that the first attempts to have a public debate about it did not come to life until the mid 1990s (2005: 192). This reluctance was a reflection of a set of “legal, political and sociopsychological factors” (Ibid 193). This posture towards the war seeped from the state and societal level onto Beirut’s streets from which the traces of war were predominantly absent due to the restoration projects which supported the deletion of the war episode from national history. Sarkis explained how “new buildings insipidly mimic the ones being restored, and restoration work borders on kitsch, a prevalent, albeit unconscious, form of postwar nostalgia” (2002: 133). *Solidere*, the state’s restoration project, “promised a return, a

reversion to a pre-war past..[that] flattened, homogenized and aestheticized the traces of war” (Cooke, 2002: 405).

Notwithstanding the state’s silence almost twenty years after the end of the civil war, the volume of the literature grappling directly with the war experience continues to grow and expand in its representations of war-torn Lebanon between the years 1975 and 1990 and the repercussions of the war on the Lebanese people who witnessed it. These very repercussions find one of their strongest manifestations in the Lebanese novels written away from Lebanon. In the United States of America, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and France and in many other countries the world over, a writer of Lebanese origins still seeks to represent the chaos of the fifteen year long war which caused one of the largest waves of migration in the history of the modern Middle East. These writers who chose a home away from Lebanon display a complicated relationship with Lebanon that is marred by the war and that is reflected in their literary output in multiple and different ways (Fadda-Conrey, 2003: 7).

As Manganaro pointed out, they became part of the larger wave of migration which formed the Lebanese hyphenated identities in many Western countries. These writers write in a variety of languages: in Arabic like Hanan al-Shaykh, in French like Andrée Chedid, in German such as Jusuf Naoum or in English such as Patricia Sarafian Ward, Rawi Hage and many others. In the early stages of the war, it was Lebanese based novelists like Hoda Barakat, Elias Khoury Hassan Daoud and Rashid al-Daif who were the first generation of writers to write about the experience of civil war (Sarkis, 2002: 132). These were the Lebanese writers who lived and wrote about the war as it unfolded on Lebanese soil and who as the war ended, had come to observe the silence which greeted every discussion about the war in Lebanon.

### **1.3 Writing about the Civil War**

Because the war was such a dramatic experience, literary commentators tended generally to read the novels in light of their writers’ personal experience. Most scholars upheld the effect of the writer’s own personal encounters with the civil war on the novel. For example, Hout’s and Takieddine’s engagement with the fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh distinguishes between the “identities” of fiction. They maintain that there were writers who survived the civil war and wrote in Beirut “under the bombs” (Takieddine, 1999: 90). There were other writers who moved to the West as teenagers and, as a result, represented different relationships in their fiction to home based writers whilst, of course, there are others who were born and lived in

the West as second, third or fourth generations. This engagement with the writer's personal background could find some justification in the autobiographical nature of many of these postwar novels where, in many cases, the protagonist shares more than the coincidental commonality with the writer.

Miriam Cooke and Shereen Abu al-Naga along with Evelyne Accad, Syrine Hout, Mona Amyuni Takieddine, Carol Fadda-Conrey, Samira Aghacy and Elise Salem Manganaro highlight women's fiction which rose to prominence during and in the aftermath of the civil war. In most of her writings, Miriam Cooke highlights, whether in the exilic novel or in those written by writers living in Lebanon, the distinction between men's and women's representation of the civil war. She maintains that "there is no one history, no one story about war, that has greater claim to truth but that history is made up of multiple stories, many of them her stories, which emanate from and then reconstruct events" (Cooke, 1994: 4). In addition, Aghacy introduces Hanan al-Shaykh's *I sweep the Sun off rooftops* and *The Story of Zahra* and Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter*, explaining how these writings introduced ideas of "unimaginable social and sexual freedoms" (2001: 567) and facilitated "the emergence of different sexualities that have so far remained under cover" (Ibid 567). Cooke, Aghacy, Abou El-Naga and, to some extent, Fadda-Conrey all highlighted differences between the writing of men and women that figured in the Lebanese postwar novel. According to Cooke, Lebanese men represented

the war as conventionally self evident in its waging; its constitution; its outcome; and its gendering. They were driven by commitment, and by the need to justify actions in terms of ideology. Whereas the women's writing insisted that each individual had to assume responsibility for the chaos, the men's writing pointed the finger of blame at an enemy – some -ism or other – and, thus, exonerated themselves. They rendered logical and rational a war which was waged without clear cause against a mercurially changing enemy (1993: 190).

This distinction, which Cooke made in 1993, is tested against novels written by Lebanese male writers.

In line with Cooke's thoughts, Abou El-Naga makes a distinction between both genders in their writings and considered the novels written by Lebanese women "during and in the aftermath of, the Lebanese war...[as] a form of resistance, a means of survival, and a consolidation of the memory" (2002: 88). Both Cooke and Abou El-Naga, whilst conceding the fact that the war had harrowing effects on human lives in Lebanon by tearing families apart and by individuals being affected by the prolonged subjection to violence, emphasise

that the war was empowering for women. Abou El-Naga states that gender responsibilities changed during the civil war, and cited as examples the writings of Hanan al-Shaykh, Hoda Barakat and Jean Said Makdisi. Absent from her literary analysis is a focus on these three narratives as novels written by Lebanese writers away from Lebanon (all three writers had long left Lebanon by the time Abou El-Naga wrote her article; they resided in London, Paris and the USA, respectively). Abou El-Naga focuses mainly on these writers as women who wrote primarily novels in the changing times of the civil war and who wanted their voices to be heard as a form of resistance to a previous status quo.

#### 1.4 Selection of Novels

Any listing process of the number of Lebanese novelists abroad serves as a reminder of the variety and multitude of the Lebanese experience of migration. Whilst, for example, some authors like Hanan al-Shaykh, Amin Maalouf and Hoda Barakat left Lebanon during the civil war to stay in the West where they reside currently, others like Iman Humaydan Younes left Lebanon only for some time before returning again and resuming their lives there. Still, others like Vincent Khoury-Ghata, who resided in France since 1973, left Lebanon even before the beginning of the civil war. As the war intensified, a much younger generation of Lebanese writers left as young adults, and as a result, they experienced a different relationship to Lebanon. This generation found a voice with Rawi Hage, Patricia Sarrafian Ward, Carl Gibeily and others.

Consequently, and for the purposes of the selection of the examined novels, it is important to keep in mind the central question which frames this dissertation: how do the novelists define their relationship towards home as they assume distance from it? The difference in generational perspective was the point of reference for Syrine Hout. As I pointed out in the preceding literature review, Hout chooses to focus on the generational divide in her exhaustive and continuing studies of the Anglophone Lebanese literature. She argues that these considerably young writers were the “newly displaced generation of Lebanese writers” (2005: 220) who depict what she called the “survivor memory” (2006: 190). They are “second-generation writers who grow up dominated not by the traumatic event itself but by narratives that preceded their birth” (Ibid). They portrayed the war in addition to the circumstances of expatriation or exile. Their novels were written also

with the hindsight necessary to create a critical distance from the immediacy of violence and chaos. Emerging a few years after peace had been achieved in Lebanon, these texts exhibited

a more recent consciousness, one replete with irony, parody and scathing critiques of self and nation (Ibid).

The generation – Hout argues – was the defining feature of this new postwar phenomenon which was expanding outside of Lebanon. Consequently, drawing on Hout's analysis, I selected the generational differences as one of my main criteria.

I refined my selection of the examined novels by one more factor which was the gender balance. Miriam Cooke, Lamia Rustum and others note the dramatic differences in the quantity and themes of novels written by women in the postwar era. In addition to their increasing numbers, women's representations of the civil war might have differed also from those of male writers. Cooke argues that women writers captured the chaos and nonsensical experience of the war more adequately than men who insisted on making sense of its absurdity. I considered, also, the element of chronology which differed from the generational divide pointed out by Hout. Aside from the civil war which ripped Lebanon apart between 1975 and 1990, Lebanon has also undergone societal, economic and political changes. These changes had an impact on the relationship assumed towards Lebanon and consequently found an outlet in literary expression.

## 2. Narrating the War from a Gendered Perspective in Hanan al-Shaykh's (1945) *Hikayat Zahra*<sup>27</sup> (*The Story of Zahra* 1980)

Rawi Hage, Jad el-Hage and Nada Awar Jarrar are usually grouped together as one category of Lebanese writers whose literary work is produced in English outside Lebanon. Syrine Hout placed their work together with other Anglophone and Francophone writers such as Patricia Sarrafian Ward (1969), Tony Hanania (1964), Rabih Alameddine (1959), Hani Hammoud (1963), and Alexandre Najjar (1967). In recent years, their literary output has become part of a newly emergent literature which grapples with the history of the Lebanese civil war from a position of one of its consequences: exile or expatriation. Although Hout groups these writers together, she indicates that some of their novels are exilic and others are diasporic. She maintains that this output, in these new locations outside Lebanon, was written usually by relatively young authors whose experience of the civil war was emblematic of a generation of writers who “[grew] up dominated not by the traumatic event [of the civil war] itself but by narratives that preceded their birth” (Hout, 2006: 190). Writing in 2001, Hout explained that these authors, in their mid thirties or mid forties – and whose novels were written after peace was achieved in Lebanon – differ from their predecessors in that “their preoccupation is not only with the war itself as a human tragedy but, also, with the complex relationship between life in exile and survival in the fatherland during the war years” (Hout, 2001: 285).

Hanan al-Shaykh's novels do not figure in Hout's grouping. Neither does Hout include al-Shaykh with the other Beirut Decentrists – a name which Miriam Cooke gave to a school of women writers who wrote about the war under its dismal conditions. Cooke introduces this school in heroic terms by explaining that these women “were writing of a change wrought in women, who were realizing that they had been abandoned in a dirty war. They were beginning to transform survival into resistance” (1993: 187). Hout excludes al-Shaykh from the glorified group of women writers “who shared Beirut as their home and the war as their experience”<sup>28</sup>(Cooke, 1988: 3) on the basis of al-Shaykh's personal and spatial

<sup>27</sup> The cited quotations were found in the 1986 translation of the novel cited in the bibliography.

<sup>28</sup> This school includes: Etel Adnan, Daisy al-Amir, Laila Usairan, Emily Nasrallah and others.

relationship with Lebanon. Hout points out that none of al-Shaykh's novels were written when she was in Lebanon (2008: 31).

Reading *The Story of Zahra* asserts al-Shaykh's *different* identity. Unlike the three novels, which were written in English in various locations outside of Lebanon and dealt mainly with a protagonist's engagement with a foreign country<sup>29</sup> the presence within which was a direct result of the Lebanese civil war, *The Story of Zahra* is a story of a Lebanese woman whose travels to and from Africa prior to the war and in isolation from any valorised relationship with Lebanon either as a home or homeland. Setting the location of exile in Africa is also a divergence from the other three novels' more affluent locations in the West whether in Australia, Canada or the United Kingdom. Although these three novels differ in their representations of home, *The Story of Zahra* maintains a variant image upheld both by al-Shaykh's different circumstances as a writer who was writing during the ongoing civil war and by the circumstances surrounding the travel of the novel's protagonist which were not directly related to the war.

## 2.1 Hanan al-Shaykh: Changing Reactions to the Home in the Homeland

Born in Beirut in 1945, Hanan al-Shaykh was brought up in a family emblematic of the conservative traditions of the Middle East where sex and religion were practically taboo (Larson, 1991: 14). Her writing challenges the patriarchal attitudes entrenched in Middle Eastern societies in an attempt to dismantle all religious and sexual taboos (Ibid). Al-Shaykh did not live in Lebanon during the civil war; she moved to the Arabian Gulf in 1975. She has lived in London since 1984 with her husband and her two children (Ibid). Despite her life in London, al-Shaykh's fiction remains preoccupied mostly with Lebanon and its civil war as evident in *Barīd Bayrūt (Beirut Blues)* (1992) and *The Story of Zahra* (1980). Her novels have been translated into more than twelve languages from their original Arabic and she has become one of the most highly influential female Arab novelists.

What sets al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* apart from the newly emerging Anglophone or Francophone literature is its preoccupation not with life in the new country, to which the writer migrated, but with the conditions *during* the war. This is most probably a natural response to the immediacy of the war.

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<sup>29</sup> The discussion of these novels are in sections 4,5 and 6.

Al-Shaykh's fiction (at least in relation to the discussed novel which was published only five years after the beginning of the war) displays a more immediate reaction to the war. In fact al-Shaykh states that at the time of writing *The Story of Zahra*, the Lebanese people were under the impression that the war about to end soon (al-Shaykh, 1992). She explains the differences between the representation of the relationship to Lebanon which figured in her early fiction, in *The Story of Zahra*, and the one which figured in *Beirut Blues* (1992) by saying:

When I was writing *The Story of Zahra*, Beirut was still my city, but in *Beirut Blues* the effect of war had changed the architecture of the city so drastically. So I thought I would rebuild its past on paper.

I also wanted to preserve all of these changes as well as the old Beirut because I thought it was my duty to shed this light on Beirut for my children and for the generations who come after me. When you are at a distance from your country, it is shocking to come back to it and not recognize a certain building. Perhaps, when you are living in a war-torn city on a daily basis, you are not as shocked by the destruction as is someone who has been away from Beirut for a period of time. For example, I was stunned when I couldn't recognize a certain building. So the letter to Beirut, which drew on my many memories, was more than three hundred pages at first. I think by writing that letter I was subconsciously bidding goodbye to that painful period in my life (al-Shaykh, 1992).

Al-Shaykh's words echo those of Bakhtin who believed that the novelists' work document a certain experience of their time not in an attempt to reflect reality as it is but rather in an unconscious attempt at documenting their own thoughts, reflections and reactions in a fictional manner which echoed a certain crisis at a certain point in time (2001: 42-43). One or more novelists' different experiences at different points in time and in different places result inevitably in different literary representations. Since one of al-Shaykh's works denounces the nation, as a site which connoted oppression, factionalism and violence, whilst another affirms it as a site of emotional attachment to early memories, the assumptions of a migrancy metaphor remain in doubt.

## 2.2 Zahra

As a child, Zahra grows up in a distressing environment created by an abusive violent father who beat both her and his wife because of suspicions of his wife's infidelity. She suffers from her parents' preferential treatment of her brother, Ahmad. As a consequence of her family's successful attempts to undermine her self-esteem; she develops an acne problem and believes

whole heartedly in her image as an unattractive woman. As a young woman, she becomes involved sexually with Malik, a married man for whom she felt no emotions. With two pregnancies and two abortions behind her, she becomes desperate to avoid the prospect of marriage to her brother's friend, Samir, for fear that her pre-marital affairs would become known to her family. She escapes to Africa where she stays with her uncle who left Lebanon fearing persecution by Lebanese authorities for his involvement with the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party. In Africa, she suffers from her uncle's sexual advances and decides to marry Majid who was a Lebanese expatriate searching for a better life in Africa. Despite Majid's willingness to go through with the marriage, after the initial shock from the knowledge of the loss of her virginity, Zahra remains unable to maintain a form of socially acceptable behaviour. Her attempts at conforming to what she perceived to be acceptable social behaviour ends in failure. As she became perceived by those around her as mad, she falls into long periods of complete silence which were perceived, also, as a sign of mental instability. With the marriage proving difficult to maintain despite repetitive attempts, Zahra returns to Lebanon where she gains weight and her acne problem is aggravated.

For Zahra who finds it difficult to fit in with humanity in general, whether in Lebanon or in Africa, the war and its chaos bring about temporary respite and provide her with the only sense of normalcy in her life. Her acne disappears and she starts to take part in normal social encounters. She finds comfort in the fact that no one expects normalcy to rule:

When I heard that the battles raged fiercely and every front was an inferno, I felt calm. It meant that my perimeters were fixed by these walls, that nothing which my mother hoped for me could find a place inside them. The idea of marrying again was buried deep by the thunder and lightning of the rockets (*The Story of Zahra* 107).

In the chaos of the war, Zahra encounters her most successful romantic relationship with a sniper who instilled fear in an entire neighbourhood. The relationship with the sniper ends in a pregnancy which is discovered too late to terminate and, still in fear of her parents' reactions to her second secret affair, Zahra contemplates death as her only way out. Her hopeful idea of marriage to the sniper provides the novel's bleak ending since Zahra is shot. The sniper kills both her and her unborn baby.

*The Story of Zahra* starts with a childhood memory of the female protagonist; Zahra is forced to stay silent by her mother whilst her angry father searches for her all over the house. She is asked to remain quiet lest her mother's affair becomes exposed. The novel is divided into two main parts; the first part comprising of the period before the civil war, whilst the

second part is Zahra's narrative of the unfolding events of the war. Part one brings together Zahra's childhood narrative, her move to Africa, her uncle Hashem's and her husband Majid's recollections and accounts of their exile. The novel ends with Zahra's return to Lebanon. Part two reads as Zahra's single prose narrative after her return from Africa as she watches the civil war changing her perception of both herself and Beirut. Part two thus signifies the liberating effect of war on women whose voices could now be heard more clearly and not as easily silenced or interrupted by dominant male narratives.

In its first part, *The Story of Zahra* allows for more than only the main protagonist's narration. Zahra's uncle and her husband's narrations of the meaning of *Watan* and their relationship to Lebanon, following Zahra's move to Africa, represent episodes where Zahra's voice is silenced as she figures only as a symbol of the national homeland for her uncle and, as an imagined dream of triumphant reclamation of Lebanon for her husband. Ironically, while both male accounts are filled with nostalgia, homesickness and idealization of Lebanon as a haven and a refuge, Zahra's presence in Africa was a situation brought about by her need to escape Lebanon and the threat of her family's response to her secret affairs and successive abortions. In this way, al-Shaykh presented us successfully with two simultaneous attributes of nations: as oppressive entities and as idealized havens – with the latter cast in doubt.

### 2.3 In Absence of Memories of Home

Al-Shaykh's Zahra is in a constant state of displacement throughout the novel. Whether in Lebanon with her family or in Africa, Zahra feels no sense of home. Neither routine nor habits help nurture within her a feeling of homecoming. Childhood memories serve only as a reminder of painful episodes in which she was silenced and assaulted physically for her mother's perceived sins. The security normally associated with the word home is completely absent from Zahra's narration of her own story. Her relationship to a home, whether in Lebanon or somewhere else or whether as an activity or a state of mind, is non-existent to the very end of the novel. In contrast, however, Hashem's and Majid's interrupting narratives tell a more familiar tale in terms of their relationship with Lebanon as home.

Both uncle and husband inhabit a physical and mental exile in Africa, both of them seek to establish a connection to an imagined and a remembered Lebanon from which they are separated. As Marianne Marroum elucidates, it is in these two narratives that "the topoi of exile, uprootedness and homecoming loom large" (2008: 502). Despite their respective reasons for departing Lebanon, both narratives stress equally the lament of being uprooted

and the painful alienations and loneliness imposed by exile. Hashem's presence in Africa is characterized by a focus on the past evident in his inability to develop his engagement with the party's activities and the lack of any attempt to settle down with his own family. His narrative exposes that he

is afflicted with nostalgia. He succumbs to dejection and entropy and is incapable of engaging with his present and of moving forward. He fails to envisage a tomorrow elsewhere and cannot but yearn for what he considers a lost edenic world and a prelapsarian past....he continuously dreams about repatriation (Ibid 503).

Hashem refers continuously to Lebanon as *Watan* and he imagines it as an idealized entity which can cure all his ailments of exile. He maintains his hopes for repatriation as an eventual cure. His nostalgia is restorative and not reflective. His memory insists on elevating the past to a position of glory and debases the present and the future as painful and futile.

Hashem reflects:

Memories grow stronger after one leaves one's homeland. Memories belong to the past, but one wants them to be alive in the present, as glossy as my photographs showing my nephews and nieces, among them Zahra and Ahmad in Shaghour Hamana. We stand with our hands reaching out for the cold water. I remember the taste of that water to this day (*The Story of Zahra* 50).

Unlike Ashraf the central protagonist in *The Last Migration* who attempted to revive the memories of Lebanon through the continuous cultural manifestation in the food, music and art of his Lebanese identity, Hashem freezes his past memories without renewal. His memories are fixed, idealized in glossy pictures and letters from the homeland of which, eventually, Zahra becomes his only correspondent. Similarly, in Africa, Majid continues to find ways to form ties with other Lebanese expatriates in order to affirm and fulfil his emotional ties to Lebanon. In his marriage, Majid attempted to attain "a triumphant comeback in physical absentia to his homeland" (Marroum, 2008: 509). In both cases, it is through Zahra that the two men try to remedy the afflictions of exile.

This female embodiment of the homeland is not a novel feature of Arabic literature. However, al-Shaykh's work "explores the dangers of using the female form to represent the contours of a conflicted country" (Adams, 2001: 202). The female form which represents the Lebanese nation to the two exiled male figures in *The Story of Zahra* is restless, displaced and physically deformed by acne and repetitive abortions. Her loss of virginity out of wedlock could mark her out probably as not a symbol of purity but as one of pollution. She is

neither forgiving nor sympathetic to the two Lebanese expatriates. She represented a shock to both men's fantasies and expectations. In fact, al-Shaykh ridicules the way in which the two exiled figures idolized Lebanon by presenting Hashem as a sexually abusive uncle, whilst the husband is obsessed with intact hymens – brilliantly capturing and exposing the absurdity of the Lebanese civil war.

As Mona Fayad explained, *The Story of Zahra*, presents an attempt by an Arab woman writer to offer a “counter narrative” to the dominant Arab male fiction – and, even more generally, Arab culture, which attempted to use women as metaphors for nations, and to “reclaim history and specificity” (1995: 149). Fayad explained that, in this manner, the fiction of al-Shaykh and other Arab writers such as Assia Djebar and Nawal al-Saadawi attempted to assign to the female body an active role which, in a national allegory, resisted the role of the passive metaphor (Ibid 151). Through Hashem and Majid's unfounded projection of the Lebanese homeland on Zahra, al-Shaykh illustrated “the ways in which women are ossified and abstracted in national discourses” (Adams, 2001: 203).

Then, Zahra becomes more than only a metaphor for a war-torn nation; for *The Story of Zahra* is both by Zahra and about Zahra. Told from her point of view, it offers only measured space for her uncle's and her husband's narratives. Her body is not simply the site of conflict of the warring factions of Lebanon but, also, one that experiences pleasure with one of the threatening sources. Zahra prospers whilst her fellow Lebanese are dogged by the violence of the war as al-Shaykh makes clear that the national story and the women stories are quite distinct. The miraculous loss of acne, the rapid weight loss and the pleasure filled relationship with the sniper attest to the divergence between the national and the women's narratives. In so doing, Hanan al-Shaykh highlights the oppressive nature of the national discourse which stifles the voices of women. Zahra's dismal end, as she is shot by the sniper, signifies the betrayal of the nation and its failure to preserve its only hope: Zahra's dream of settling down with the sniper and the father of her third unborn child.

#### **2.4 Rejecting the Nation**

Not only did al-Shaykh voice her resentment of the dominant narrative which assigned to the woman the metaphor of the nation but, also, she ridiculed the illogical attachments to the nation as a home and a haven. Zahra described her uncle's and her husband's idealization of Lebanon as an epidemic. Furthermore, the two characters were not created to garner much sympathy: a sexually abusive uncle and a husband whose sole purpose for marriage was

sexual gratification which fulfilled a goal of status. Observing their wretched exilic lives, Zahra asked: “Does the émigré become abnormal once he has departed his own land?” (*The Story of Zahra* 23) She responded to her uncle’s idealization of the homeland with cynicism and ridicule: “Here, in Africa, he carried in his mind a symbolic image of his homeland, believing this to be the actual homeland...His idealism was so intense. When I could take no more of it I would cry out” (Ibid 15).

Unlike Hashem and Majid, both Zahra and Hanan al-Shaykh knew that the image of the nation was not what its adherents believed it to be. For Zahra, Lebanon was never the site of stability and security. She was always a target of sexual conquest even by family members. As the character on whom both men pinned their attachment to the nation, Zahra spoke out against her own deceptive image. She thought to herself of the image upheld by her family by saying:

The image of which I had run off hundred of copies for distribution to all who had known me since childhood. Here is Zahra, the mature girl who says little, Zahra the princess, as my grandfather dubbed me; Zahra, the stay-at-home, who blushes for any or for no reason; Zahra, the hard working student – quite the reverse of her brother, Ahmad; Zahra in whose mouth butter would not melt, who has never smiled at any man, not even at her brother’s friends (Ibid 32).

She followed this statement with the real but shocking image by saying: “This is Zahra – a woman who sprawls naked day after day, on a bed in a stinking garage unable to protest at anything. Who lies on the old doctor’s table...” (Ibid 32). al-Shaykh employed this image and its reverse to highlight the nation’s deceptive nature.

In addition to Zahra’s ridicule of the two men’s perception of nation from their position in exile, their own narratives highlighted the racist/superior nature of their relationship to Lebanon. Both stressed their inability to assimilate in Africa. The uncle limited his relationships with African women to those sexual and discreet in nature for fear that such relationships would undermine his chances of a future marriage to a Lebanese woman (Ibid 81), whilst the husband’s refusal to settle down with an African woman was based on his mother’s advice that all African women were promiscuous (Ibid 69).

In *The Story of Zahra*, the nation was not only a site of displacement, imagined, deceptive and racist but it was, also, unmerciful and violent. In this regard, al-Shaykh exposed the effects of the civil war on Zahra’s surroundings. She demonstrated the nation’s dismal state through the activities of violence and looting which Zahra’s brother took part in

throughout the war, her uncle's long exile and the absence of safety and the general insecurity which pervaded her troubled text. Adams concludes that "al-Shaykh problematizes the use of woman as nation, yet offers no alternative to the totalizing discourse of reified nationalisms" (1995: 207).

However, condemning nations as oppressive and erroneously imagined entities might not be a constant feature in al-Shaykh's fiction. In her later novel *Beirut Blues*, written in "quiet and safe London" and published in 1992 (al-Shaykh, 1997), two years after the end of the civil war and twelve years after *The Story of Zahra*, al-Shaykh revisited the nation and affirmed different ties to the homeland. It could be this immediacy which drove al-Shaykh, in *The Story of Zahra*, to denounce the national project, re-writing it as an oppressive structure whilst her later projects undermined this denunciation. The concept of a safe home which offers security and peace remains totally nonexistent in *The Story of Zahra*. Its absence is highlighted mainly through its negating factors: suffering, oppression and aggression. The novels by the younger Lebanese novels were written more than ten years after the end of the civil war and, therefore, were characterized with "hindsight" (Hout 2006: 190). These novels probed the circumstances of life as migrants in the new country even as they reflected on the civil war episode.

### 3. Contesting the Supremacy of Narratives in Amin Maalouf's (1949) *Le Rocher de Tanios*<sup>30</sup> (*The Rock of Tanios* 1993)

Amin Maalouf shares the postcolonial literary theorists' well-known abhorrence of the concept of roots. His words on the first page of his recent memoir *Origins* echo their thoughts. In justifying the title of his memoirs, he states:

Someone other than I might have used the word "roots". It is not part of my vocabulary. I don't like the word, and I like even less the image it conveys. Roots burrow into the ground, twist in the mud, and thrive in darkness; they hold trees in captivity from their inception and nourish them at the price of blackmail: "Free yourself and you'll die" (Maalouf, 2008: x).

Instead, Maalouf prefers to use the metaphor of roads on which human beings, unlike trees, can use their feet to move from one place to another. In 1976, as the civil war was rapidly becoming a reality for millions of Lebanese people, Maalouf did make use of his feet leaving his home country. He went with his wife and three children to Paris where he has lived ever since. He visited Lebanon almost twenty years later in 1994, around four years after the end of the civil war (Dufour, 2008). In *The Rock of Tanios*, he draws on some autobiographical references as he constructs a narrative of an incident in Lebanon's history. Maalouf embraces the assumptions, implied in the location of migration. From his position on the margins of the Lebanese nation and his presence in Paris in "self imposed exile" (Maalouf, 2006), he contests the supremacy of the national narrative which its adherents perceive as truth and paints a highly positive picture of migration. His choice of narrative strategy allows him to draw parallels between the past and the present, whilst the intricate plot proceeds to uncover how an obsession with roots (in the form of the protagonist's preoccupation with the identity of his true father) could lead to bloody consequences reminiscent of Lebanon's recent civil war.

Born into a Catholic Arab family in Beirut, Maalouf studied economics and sociology before he joined the family tradition and became a journalist (Holt, 2005). He worked for the Beirut daily, *an-Nahar*, and travelled to various locations around the world covering stories of wars and conflicts (Neuman, 2005). His preoccupation with the circumstances surrounding

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<sup>30</sup> The quotations, cited here, were found in the 1995 translation of the novel cited in the bibliography.

the rise of conflicts, as well as witnessing the beginnings of the civil war in his native Lebanon were manifested in his writings which shed light on the human angle of such conflicts. This was a very dominant theme in *The Rock of Tanios* which, in 1993, won him the “Prix de Goncourt” (Ibid). In his writing, Maalouf does not indulge in sentiments of restorative nostalgia since he never looks at the past as a lost ideal.

In *The Rock of Tanios*, Maalouf tells the story of the people of the Lebanese village of Kfaryabda in the mid nineteenth century at the dawn of the colonial struggle over the Middle East. The story started at the rock on which Tanios, a young man, was last seen by the villagers right before he disappeared to an unknown fate, never to be seen again. The story is told to Maalouf’s readers today by a man who heard the story from his 96 year old grandfather’s cousin named Gabriel. The narrator does not tell the story until he lays his hands on “authentic documents”. He quotes from three main ones: one left by a monk who died just after the end of the First World War, and two by people who knew Tanios closely: Nader, a learned muleteer and the English Reverend Stolton in whose school Tanios was enrolled for a time.

The narrator recounts that the circumstances surrounding Tanios’ birth raised doubts about the identity of his true father. Tanios was born to Lamia and Gerios. Gerios is the major-domo for the Sheikh of Kfaryabda who was known to be a womanizer and who might have seduced Lamia and fathered her child. The doubts fuel a desire for retribution by the Sheikh’s wife. In a gesture of vengeance, the Sheikh’s wife’s family visit the village meaning to drain its resources through continuous extravagant feasts. The animosity between the two families persists and escalates into an animosity between their two villages. As Tanios grew up and faced doubts about the identity of his true father, he chooses to ally himself with the former major-domo Roukoz who had been exiled by the Sheikh after allegations of corruption. Tanios’ choice of alliance starts an unfortunate series of events which drags the whole village into a violent cycle of conflicts and, ultimately, resulted in Gerios murdering the patriarch. After the murder, Tanios was certain that Gerios is his father. However, both of them have to flee to Cyprus where they spend some time in hiding. Eventually, under false pretences, Gerios is lured back to the village and brutally murdered. Tanios returns only to the village to act as a diplomatic intermediary between the British and the Emir, and, as a result, was hailed as a hero by the villagers. Tanios was last seen on a rock where he sat thinking for a long time of the deaths which he caused whilst trying to mediate between the

different authorities in the village. As he vanishes mysteriously, the villagers attached a curse to the rock which continues to be shared across generations.

### 3.1 Justifying Migration

After recounting the way in which Tanios vanishes mysteriously, the modern day narrator is uncertain of what to believe about Tanios's fate. He cannot determine whether he returned to Cyprus or chose for himself some other fate. He suggests that it is a futile process trying to weigh up the reasons which could have encouraged Tanios's departure against those which could have made him stay. He states:

That is not the way a decision to depart is made. You don't evaluate, you don't draw up a list of advantages and disadvantages. You alternate, from one moment to the next, now this way, now that. Towards another life, towards another death. Towards glory or oblivion. Who can ever tell because of what look, what word, what sneer, a man suddenly finds himself an outsider in the midst of his own people? So that he feels the sudden urge to go far away, or disappear (*The Rock of Tanios* 272-73).

In accordance with Lebanon's situation, his identification, in 1992, with Tanios's plight, only two years after the end of the civil war, is clear. He wonders:

Following in the invisible footsteps of Tanios how many men have left the village since! For the same reasons? From the same impulse, rather, and under the same pressure? My mountains are like that. Attachment to the soul and aspiration towards departure. Place of refuge, place of passage. Land of milk and honey and of blood. Neither paradise nor hell (Ibid).

Despite the resonance with the current reality of life in Lebanon, Maalouf informed the readers, on the last page of the novel, that the novel's events were inspired loosely by a true story that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The story was that of an assassin who murdered a patriarch and who took refuge with his son in Cyprus. He is later deceived into coming back by a ruse employed by the Emir's agent. "The rest – the narrator, his village, his sources, his characters – all the rest is nothing but impure fiction" (Ibid 275). Maalouf's presentation, which offered a complex examination of conflicts, exposed their development through the interplay of love, doubt, violence, compassion, treachery, temptation, empathy, revenge, guilt and pride. Now, having convinced the reader successfully of the multidimensionality of any historical incident (inevitably recalling visions of the civil war), Maalouf ended by questioning the readers' beliefs and acceptance of this convincing version of events – which were neither purely fictional nor an uncontaminated reality.

I explore Tanios' journey, throughout the novel, from his village in Lebanon to Cyprus in exile, his return to his village and his sudden disappearance. I do so to explain the reasons for which Tanios might have chosen to live in exile. I argue that it is only in the absence of the domination of identity politics that the cycle of strife is disrupted in *The Rock of Tanios*. Only when Tanios flees to Cyprus does Maalouf's central protagonist start to enjoy newly found pleasures of bliss, silence and anonymity.

In her article, 'Les Stratégies Narratives dans *Le Rocher de Tanios* d'Amin Maalouf', Marta Schlemmerová sheds light on the narrative strategy which helped to give the impression that the events of the novel were real. She states that the narrator referred to four different sources but he interrupts his sources continuously to ensure that the truth was represented fully (2009). The narrator introduces his sources carefully and points out their structure, their style of writing and their authors' relationship to Tanios (Ibid). Additionally, the novel's situation in a historical context corresponds to real facts which contribute to the perception of the novel as a real account. It is noteworthy that Maalouf's note about the novel being but a fictional construct does not figure in the book's opening pages but at its very end.

In fact, readers of *The Rock of Tanios* are invited, by Maalouf's narrative strategy, to treat the novel (that genre which has been deemed an accomplice to the rise of the nation) not as pure fiction but as a historical reconstruction of facts. Despite trying to reach the truth behind the legend, the narrator's account of Tanios' fate is inconclusive. The villagers believe simply that he vanished since there was no evidence to suggest that either he fell off the high cliff to his death or that, simply, he left the village. By denying a definite closure on Tanios' fate, Maalouf suggests that the most plausible conclusion requires an intense examination of the sources. He invites his readers to employ their rational thinking in an attempt, as historians, to understand the reality behind the myth.

Reaching the final pages of the novel without a definite closure on Tanios' fate, the readers would have to turn back the pages to re-assess and re-examine Tanios's friendship with Nader. In doing so, they would decide on the weight given to Nader's following note:

*For all the others, thou art the absent one, but I am the friend who knows.*

*Unbeknownst to them thou hastened down the path, that the murderer, thy father, took towards the coast.*

*She waits for thee, the girl with the treasure, on her island; and her hair is still the colour of the setting sun (The Rock of Tanios 272).*

They are compelled to assess the note in relation to the facts: the account of Tanios' life in exile, his relationship with Tamar and whether or not this relationship warrants his choice of return to Cyprus. They are compelled, also, to assess the relationship between the two men and whether the fact, that Nader was the last person to see Tanios alive, offers a convincing reason to take seriously his scribbled, colourful notes in his exercise book, or, simply, to think of them as creative fiction as proposed by the narrator, at one point, when, as below, he introduced Nader's notes as "invaluable evidence" (Ibid 80), since Nader

was in the habit of noting down in an exercise-book his own personal observations and maxims, sometimes long, sometimes succinct, transparent or sibylline, generally in verse, or otherwise in fairly mannered prose.

Several of these texts begin with, "I said to Tanios" or else, "Tanios told me", without it being possible to establish whether this was a simple trick of presentation or the record of authentic conversations (Ibid 79).

Moreover, the narrator does not discount the probability that whilst, actually, the account could be true as far as Nader knew since Nader, himself, might have been misguided. Maalouf does not suggest that re-writing history or reconstructing historical facts through the different available sources could lead us to an absolute truth. Rather, he proposes that the acceptance of multiplicity of narratives facilitates co-existence.

### **3.2 The Role of Truth in Resolving/Creating Conflicts**

As a matter of fact, Maalouf's ploy reveals that, whilst the recollection of the past can hold some clues which may help to dispel the legend of Tanios' disappearance, it raises, also, suspicions about the truth behind any of the accounts which have had been narrated thus far. In that regard, Souhila Ourtirane Ramadane suggested that Maalouf's presentation of the myth, behind which the truth was difficult if not impossible to ascertain, was a testament to the futility of conflicts and an invitation for reconciliation and coexistence (2008). Indeed the novel remains full of unanswered questions despite (or perhaps due to) the narrator's attempts to provide a completely objective account of Tanios' story. The novel's fundamental premise, i.e. the Sheikh's paternity of Tanios, is not beyond question. Maalouf's text reveals that the Sheikh denied repeatedly that Tanios was his own son since the text reveals, also, the total lack of defence on Lamia's side. Juxtaposed to that denial, there are, also, facts which can lend support to the claim: the Sheikh's attempt to give the newborn child the most

distinguished name of his lineage. These are elements which leave the narrator to ponder his reaction to the scattered facts and leave him struggling to construct a believable narrative:

Could the Sheikh have lied, with his hand on the Holy Scriptures? I do not think so. On the other hand, we have no way of confirming that the Khouriya reported his words faithfully. She had promised to tell the village folk what she deemed necessary to tell them (*The Rock of Tanios* 52).

However, Tanios' belief of the truth remains the determinant of the fate of the whole village which, ultimately, leads them to a long bloody conflict. The narrator obsessed with seeking a truth remains confused as shown in the following:

Who is speaking the truth? Tanios had never had any hesitation in accepting the Sheikh's version: not for anything in the world would he have wanted to appear well-disposed towards the exile, it would have seemed like treachery! But things appeared to him in a quite different light. Was it unthinkable that the sheikh should have tried to seduce Roukoz's wife? And could he not have invented the story of embezzlement to prevent the village siding with the steward, so forcing the latter to flee? (Ibid 71)

The truth about Tanios' real father, the truth behind the corruption of Roukoz and his abuse of his position as the major-domo of the castle, the truth behind Roukoz's subtle promise of his daughter's hand in marriage to Tanios and the truth about the Emir's defeat which was used to lure Gerios into returning to the village could not be verified. These were all reasons which led to restlessness, revenge and violence and continued to lead the village into conflicts and violence of an endless cyclical nature.

Through the narrator's obsession with providing the most accurate and most substantiated historical account of the events of Kfaryabda, Maalouf makes a persuasive argument for the irrelevance of truth in the facilitation of resolving conflicts. The 96 year old Gebrayel maintains that "facts are perishable" (Ibid 261). Even with the truth, Tanios finds that he is unable to come to a decision with regards to Roukoz' fate and the *fariyya* or any of the sides of the multiple conflicts which dogged the village. Guilty of compassion, Tanios' indecision does not stop the cycle of violence since the people of the village of *Sahlain*, unsatisfied by Tanios' decision, take matters into their own hands. They kill Roukoz and four innocent prison guards from the village of Kfaryabda. When Tanios realizes that even compassion cannot prevent the cycle of violence, he chooses to leave the village.

### 3.3 Homeland versus Exile

If the narration of the incidents taking place in the village of Kfaryabda is overwhelmingly full of accounts of strife, revenge, pride and guilt which result in never ending conflicts, the account of Tanios' life in Cyprus is overwhelmingly positive. Bliss, pleasure and laughter are predominant features. The narrator announces in the opening lines of the seventh part of the novel when giving an account of the fugitives' journey that:

In Famagusta, at this time, the two fugitives were beginning their new existence in terror and remorse, but their life was also to consist of daring, pleasures and carefree days (Ibid 175).

Gerios, whose act of murder was his only way, in Tanios's eyes, to redeem his fatherhood spoke no more of the past with his son that "without any echo of his act, Gerios sometimes came to doubt its reality" (Ibid 176). After an initial period of fear of their new environment, both Tanios and his father came to enjoy their new locale. "Their walks grew daily longer, and more confident. And one morning they were emboldened to go and sit in a coffee house" (Ibid 177). "To their astonishment, they were laughing. They could not remember the last time they laughed" (Ibid 178). In contrast to the perturbed accounts of his life in Kfaryabda, Tanios enjoyed a relationship of blissful silence in Famagusta where his communication with his lover, Thamar, was done silently. "They had not spoken a single word to each other, neither of them knew which language the other spoke, but they slept as one" (Ibid 182). Then, he reflects:

Did I have to go into exile, and land without hope in this foreign town, in this hostelry, and climb the stairs to the top floor; following a stranger...did the waves of existence have to carry me so far from me to be entitled to this moment of bliss? Such intense bliss that it could be the reason for my adventure. And its culmination. And my redemption (Ibid 183).

His meetings with Thamar left him at peace in both body and mind (Ibid 189). In light of his newly found bliss in exile, his former lover, Asma, – the reason for which his father had spilled blood and led an entire village into fragmentation and violence – surprisingly, was forgotten, her importance deemed absurd. He "had thought so little about her since he left" (Ibid 183). All the pressures associated with Asma and her memories bore now "little resemblance to this supreme pleasure that he now knew" (Ibid). In exile, calmly and rationally, Tanios "saw things more clearly" (Ibid), and he realised the foolishness of his past actions. In Famagusta, he had found, "on this island, so close to his homeland and yet so distant: a haven where he could lie and wait" (Ibid 188).

Gerios, however, spends his days in Cyprus waiting to return, with no desire “to run from one port of exile to another” (Ibid 187) insisting that he would leave Famagusta only to see his wife and his country once more. Gerios’s fate which is the novel’s only incontestable historical and documented truth, was to be lured back to the village under false pretences and, on the Emir’s orders, receive a brutal death. In contrast to Gerios, Tanios remains aware of the capacity of the village to stir violence. When a return became possible, Tanios was no longer confident of his desire to go back to his life in his village (Ibid 195).

Upon his return, Tanios, probably like Maalouf himself, did not feel that he fitted in with the people of the village. He felt “as if he were in disguise” (Ibid 236), “faced with the murmurs and looks, he could not breathe, he thought only of fleeing” (Ibid 255). The manner with which the “serenity” (Ibid) was remembered in contrast to the chaos and violence of Kfaryabda, along with the continuous references of the narrator – who identified clearly with the reasons which could have led to Tanios’ departure – to Tanios’s desire to flee – could help to dispel the myth of his disappearance. As Tanios faced again the sad reality of the situation in the village and the truth of what happened to Gerios – betrayed by a fellow refugee – he started to think of “leaving, going far away, as far as possible” (Ibid 206).

*The Rock of Tanios’* historical setting set it apart from the rest of the postwar Lebanese novels that are discussed in this chapter. Maalouf does not deal directly with the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990); he “feels more comfortable in the past” (Maalouf, 2006). Nevertheless, his novel maintains a contemporary resonance which paints migration as a favourable option. This makes the attainment of a home which assures comfort and security possible and promises an exit from the cycle of civil strife which has gripped Lebanon in its recent history. Maalouf suggests that home is not where a person is born, and one that found Tanios guilty of compassion and which determined his future according to the circumstances of his birth. Rather, it is the one in which identity takes a back-seat to more humane connections. In addition to illuminating this division between home and exile, the narrative strategy, employed by Maalouf in the novel, could be seen as an invitation to draw parallels between Lebanon’s past and present national conflicts since the modern day narrator sets out to find the truth behind Tanios’ life and disappearance. Maalouf proposes that, in contesting the myth of the nation, as the supreme dictator of origins and collective identities, histories can be re-written in a manner which facilitates coexistence where no group can monopolize a hold on truth.

#### 4. Diasporic and Exilic Narratives in Jad el-Hage's (1946) *The Last Migration* (2002)

Jad el-Hage's *The Last Migration* is the first of the Anglophone novels to be discussed in this chapter. Like Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* and Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*, it is another Lebanese Anglophone novel written in the West. However, Syrine Hout maintains that there is an important distinction to be made between Jad el-Hage's *The Last Migration* and the remaining corpus of Western produced postwar Anglophone Lebanese fiction. Explaining the differences between exile and diaspora, she introduces *The Last Migration* as a prototype of Lebanese diasporic fiction [that] may usher in a new brand of postwar fiction" (Hout, 2007: 288). Hout points out that the novel's subtitle "A Novel of Diaspora and Love", amongst other factors, affirms the novel's identity as diasporic and not exilic.

She goes on to argue that *The Last Migration* is an example of diasporic fiction because, although its characters might exhibit a mental condition of exile since they maintained either critical or nostalgic unresolved feelings towards the homeland, the novel differs from its predecessors since "it offers a balanced perspective on the effects of living abroad on personal and collective identities" (Ibid). For example, Ashraf, the novel's protagonist, in stark contrast to Rawi Hage's nameless narrator in *Cockroach* is a well-integrated journalist. He "activates his longing to belong to a self-devised portable "home", and he performs affective as well as intellectual work which make possible a more meaningful future" (Ibid). In Hout's opinion, Ashraf is different from protagonists in other pieces of postwar fiction because he does not present an image of the migrating Lebanese as "alien, solitary and melancholy, out of place"<sup>31</sup>. Hout maintains that the former postwar novels "stress the exclusions of exile rather than the adaptations of diaspora" (Ibid 289). *The Last Migration* diverges from these novels since it complicates the notion of home by locating it within "the geography of [the] soul"<sup>32</sup> (Ibid 292).

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<sup>31</sup> Hout quoted McClennen's description of exiles, which she believed to fit the description of most of the protagonists in Lebanese novels written in English.

<sup>32</sup> Hout explained that she borrowed this phrase from the Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki.

Although exile and diaspora are fundamentally different concepts (Israel, 2000: 3) which, in the process of writing, carry within them different experiences of displacement at different stages, it is regarded that:

the rhetoric of displacement is less ideologically certain or fixed than Ahmad, Nixon and others often assume it to be, and more profoundly ideologically over determined, emitting (in Jameson Frankfurt's school derived terminology) both "reifying" and "utopian" political charges, with neither force ultimately having the final say (Ibid 14).

In other words, the elements of force/choice, dispersion/cohesion and melancholy/adaptation which epitomize either exile or diaspora can figure, in different degrees in the same text, a state which renders futile either label of being diasporic or exilic. I argue that *The Last Migration* exhibits both diasporic and exilic manifestations in its narrative of Ashraf's experience away from Lebanon.

Hout sees that the protagonist's focus on narrating the aspects which highlighted his adaptation and successful integration in London away from Lebanon was a reflection of the novel's diasporic outlook. However, I maintain that el-Hage's novel, the subtitle notwithstanding, expresses an exilic outlook in several other ways. Whilst I agree with Hout that el-Hage's protagonist, Ashraf, suggests an alternative to Lebanon as home, I argue, also, that his life, outside Lebanon, takes place under the past's weighty shadow. The narrative oscillates between diasporic and exilic in almost equal degrees. The exilic pull encumbers the process of "homing", and the diasporic pull is strengthened by affirming, through cultural and emotional gestures, the ties to the home country. This push and pull scenario is not exclusive to Jad el-Hage's narrative; it figures again in *Cockroach* and *Somewhere, Home*. However, I highlight this scenario here in relation to Hout's discussion of *The Last Migration* as the prototype of a Lebanese diasporic novel which may usher in a different trend in postwar fiction.

#### 4.1 A Novel of Diaspora and Love

Jad el-Hage is a poet, a novelist and a playwright who was born in 1946 in Beirut. He was 31 years old when, in 1975, the civil war erupted in Lebanon. He states in a personal email:

I did not live 10 years through the civil war in Lebanon; I left in 1978 for France, then in 1979 to England, then to Greece in 1982, then to Australia in 1985, then back to England in 1990 where I remained until 2000...But throughout the war I never stopped going back to Lebanon,

even during the worst and most dangerous periods; three or four times a year--I just couldn't let go...and finally I am the only one in my family who came back to the Land for good (el-Hage, 2011).

*The Last Migration* (2002), his first ever novel to be written in English, won the “presentation Prize at the writer’s festival in Sydney” (Hout, 2007: 287). His corpus of writing includes six collections of poetry and one selection of short stories which were both written in the Arabic language.

The Arabic alphabet, in which el-Hage wrote predominantly, makes an appearance in *The Last Migration*, his first English novel. Each of the novel’s chapters is headed by one Arabic letter. The last chapter is headed with the letter *Qaf* which is the first letter in the name of Ashraf’s native village Qana – spelt Cana throughout the novel – and corresponds coincidentally to the Arabic word which means “was”. Each chapter starts with an excerpt from what Ashraf refers to as Claire’s Little Book, a collection of thoughts and reflections written by his deceased beloved and presented to him by her daughter, Françoise, after Claire’s death. Then, the nineteen chapters are framed by a prologue, written in November 1995, and an epilogue written in November 1996. The narration comes to a halt in April 1996, as the Qana massacre takes place and as Ashraf undergoes his chemotherapy treatment for a cancer which went undiagnosed and the symptoms of which started with Claire’s death. The narration resumes, in November 1996, in an epilogue summarizing the twenty one weeks of medical treatment. In between these points, Ashraf, a forty something year old journalist of Lebanese origins tells the story of his life in London with his lifelong friend, Marwan Anna, the “Irish squatter turned commercial landlady, plumber, builder” (*The Last Migration* 10), and the other “unidentifiable aliens” (Ibid) in the cosmopolitan district of Shepherd’s Bush.

Having moved to London after living for a while in Australia, Ashraf holds his Lebanese identity, heritage and friends as his coping tools following the departure from Lebanon and the loss of the woman whom he loved more than all others. Only Ashraf’s mother remained in Qana refusing to abandon her native village, whilst Ashraf headed to Australia with his Lebanese wife and daughters after the French authorities rejected his visa. His two daughters Layla, an 18 year old History major who “remembers names and dates and battles and catastrophes like nobody does” (Ibid 32), and twelve year old Reem who wants “to sing and dance and act and be rich and famous” (Ibid), grew up “unscathed by war” (Ibid

34) – something for which Ashraf expresses his gratitude to Australia. His two daughters remain in Australia with their mother Sabina after their parents' divorce.

The story which Ashraf starts telling in November 1995, like most postwar Lebanese fiction, is intercepted with flashbacks from the past. In *The Last Migration*, they go as far back as five months, or twenty years and more. The novel's starting point is Francoise's visit five months after her mother's death in a mud avalanche in Mexico. From this starting point, Ashraf tells the readers about his first encounter with Claire during a conference in Amsterdam which was held "to promote the exchange of ideas and [to] encourage mutual translations" (Ibid 7), and their five months long relationship during which they "zigzagged between airports" (Ibid 14). It is this grief which Ashraf grapples with throughout the novel.

#### 4.2 Determining a Diasporic Narrative

Realizing that his "homeland isn't [his] home anymore" (Ibid 82), Ashraf holds on to water colour paintings from his Southern village, letters which keep him in touch with his daughters in Australia and his mother in Lebanon, Lebanese food which features excessively in the novel as he presents it proudly to his friends and family and Lebanese songs which his children prepare for him on his occasional visits to Australia. As Hout indicated, Ashraf does not merely endorse these cultural manifestations of Lebanon, but "he also invites his Western friends to partake of these delights... [Indicating that]...what signifies home is not fixed to walls but rather is an experience of sharing part of one's heritage with interested others" (2007: 290). Indeed, these are depictions of what Hout referred to as the "adaptations of the diaspora". Ashraf exemplifies, also, a diasporic identity since he appears to be well integrated in his new environment and he maintains a successful career and an active social life.

However, in this diasporic state, Ashraf's journey to find a home takes the form of a search for a woman's love (*The Last Migration* 159). This alternative home, which Ashraf finds with Claire for a short time, and, later, with Jenny is one that is idealized drastically and romanticized in a manner which is at odds "with the reality of people's lived experiences of home" (Mallet, 2004: 72). In other words, Ashraf replaces the nostalgic and romantic yearning for a home in Lebanon with an equally unrealistic idea of home embodied in the love of two women. He refers to Claire as a "safe haven" (*The Last Migration* 31), and to Jenny as a "refuge" (Ibid 135). He feels at home in Claire's apartment (Ibid 13), and in Jenny's "model home" (Ibid 115). He describes the day he met Claire as a "Monet day" (Ibid 9) on which they conversed through an "unsung melody" (Ibid 10) on a night where "the

crescent moon was chasing its tail like a silver fish” (Ibid 12) and “people smiled for the sake of smiling” (Ibid 13). Although Claire, like Jenny, refuses to share her entire life with him, keeping in place a set of restrictions which would not interfere with her needs as a creative writer, Ashraf holds an idealized memory of her and finds severe difficulty in overcoming her loss. Having lost her to death, he is unaware of any problems which might have tarnished their longer relationship. He desires to duplicate the memory of Claire and he attempts to idealize his second possible home, personified in Jenny. However, as this second relationship is uninterrupted by death and grief, the romance ends before nostalgia gets a chance. Jenny admonishes Ashraf for trying to force his ideals on her: “You cast a mould in your head and you wanted me to fit in it. The statue you made of me isn’t real. It’s only in your mind” (Ibid 174).

Ashraf’s euphoric “buzz of homing” (Ibid 109) with Jenny is short-lived and it ends to reveal a cancer which has gone undiagnosed despite frequent visits to the GP who diagnosed him first with SAD (Ibid 18) soon after Claire’s death and, later, with Vagal Syncope (Ibid 160). His insistence in idealizing a failing relationship and his failure to diagnose correctly his real ailments cost him a severe and long treatment of chemotherapy. Facing the reality of both his cancer, which demanded chemotherapy treatment, and the massacre in the Village of Qana which resulted in the murder of his extended family and neighbours, along with Marwan’s mother, Ashraf realizes the drawbacks of both excessive nostalgia and idealized memories. At this point, Ashraf’s nostalgia invokes the thought of nostalgia as a disease which needs correct diagnosis and a proper cure. His relationship to the memory of Claire, and his idealization of the idea of her as home, exhibits a feature of exiles who tend to look back at the loss of home as a lost ideal (Salhi, 2006: 3). His recollections of Claire resemble exilic recollections of idealized homelands which have been lost. McClennen argues that such recollections are

Always flawed, always tainted by the distortions of the exile’s imagination and desire. The past is only understood in light of the present and vice versa. When one has experienced an extraordinary rupture in time, both views of the past and the present bear the marks of this disjunction (2004: 56).

When Ashraf is humbled by one massacre and prolonged chemotherapy sessions, he becomes a more practical/realistic man since he decides to marry his Irish friend Anna who, all along, stood by him. At the end of the novel, Anna is pregnant with his child, and they are joined by

Ashraf's mother who came from Lebanon on her first and last migration (*The Last Migration* 184), reconciling the idealized past with the reality of the present.

Although Ashraf devises his own portable home which replaces his Lebanese village, he dwells, also, for a considerable time in the novel, on a restorative nostalgia which invokes Claire's memory as the perfect home. However, between the two major milestones, which mark the two major ruptures in Ashraf's life; one having spurred the onset of the symptoms of his illness, and the other which spurred its full-scale attack, el-Hage's narration "portrays Lebanon not as a polar opposite to the (temporary) host country but as a stopover while travelling between cities to its East and West" (Hout, 2007: 292). Ashraf emerges from the narration as an active member of the host countries, to which he travels, and engages in forming his own personal home.

### 4.3 Exilic Manifestations in el-Hage's Narrative

In his study of literature, Peter Brooks warned against the tendency of cultural studies to discard the importance of "the structure and texture of the text" (1995: 103). What is missed by discarding the structure and texture is el-Hage's excessive employment of war imagery. The text's diasporic identity appears to be eclipsed heavily throughout the novel by el-Hage's choices of imagery. It should be remembered that Ashraf, the cosmopolitan Londoner, is, also, a Lebanese immigrant who endured the war in Lebanon for a period of time, and whose mother continues to endure the harshness of the war in her southern Lebanese village. Consequently, his diasporic identity is replaced occasionally by one that is textually bound to the past in the matter of exiles.

To explain: Ashraf describes the airport where he starts a journey to holiday with his two daughters as "a furniture warehouse with catatonic passengers clutching their hand luggage" (*The Last Migration* 22). The airport terminal "looked more like a rescue centre for refugees" (Ibid), where "everyone seemed desperate, as if fleeing a country at war" (Ibid). The chaos, brought about by a slight delay of his flight, reminded Ashraf of "the confusion minutes before the end of a curfew or at the announcement of a temporary cease-fire when people shuffle and run in every direction voicing loudly the pathos of their situation" (Ibid 23). In its description of the airport, the text is littered with words like crisis, exodus, and forbidden exits. The narrator becomes fixated and obsessed with an Italian grandmother who is travelling on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday with a bouquet of flowers, given to her by her grandchildren, and which she wants cremated with her body upon her death. He thinks to himself sadly:

“there was no way that they could accommodate her roses without throwing out someone else’s belongings” (Ibid 26). Even as he arrives and meets his daughters, the imagery of aggression persists. He becomes a bird of prey (Ibid 30), encountering vultures and vehement kisses from his daughters (Ibid). His daughters’ sisterly scuffles remind him of wars and armistice agreements (Ibid 40). The imagery persists, also, when he lies down to rest for a few minutes after a date, Ashraf describes his thoughts by saying:

Images drifted through my head. Nothing precise, just shrapnel from broken visions and mushrooming tears. Atavistic tremors. Things never seem to happen to me slowly; they come like gunshots in the dark. He who pulls the trigger had severed my better half, leaving me with an amputated soul (Ibid 110).

So alive is the past in Ashraf’s subconscious that when he is attacked by two teenagers in London, his violent past resurfaces instantaneously. He states:

I created a cocktail of retribution, buying all sorts of weapons, hunting down the boys, forcing them to hand over their own jackets at gun point. It wasn’t until I heard Liz shuffling around upstairs in the early morning that I even thought of reporting the incident to the police (Ibid 133).

Such imagery betrays the label of a diasporic narration and indicates, instead, an identity marked still by the history of a traumatized violent past which Ashraf struggles to silence. This traumatic reaction, which manifests itself textually, is a reaction to constant news of the escalating conflict in southern Lebanon (Ibid 67), and to Ashraf’s exilic guilt. Writing about Iranian Exiles, Shahidian stated:

Exile erects a labyrinth of feelings; guilt shows up at every turn. Among the exile’s emotional hurdles, they must come to terms with present life proving easier than the existence they abandoned, for loved ones still endure *that* life (2000: 84).

This is definitely true in Ashraf’s case whose disease is cured and quest for homing is resolved only when his mother departs war-torn Lebanon to join him as the “past and future and present dissolve” (*The Last Migration* 184).

However, this guilt is not the only manifestation of an exilic narration in *The Last Migration*. Reflecting on life in exile, Edward Said maintained that:

Exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders (2001: 178).

He stated, also, that in “clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong” (Ibid 182). This difference, which is a set of factors that exiles insist set them apart from their new environment, is quite evident in Ashraf’s narrative in *The Last Migration*. Ashraf who sees himself as a “perfect Londoner” (*The Last Migration 2*) embraces Said’s version of the exile throughout the novel, attributing to his Lebanese heritage all that he perceives as positive, and attributes a lesser status to his surroundings (whether Western, British or otherwise). These instances, where he stresses this superiority of his Lebanese background, occur within the folds of the novel in instances which are marginal to the plot. Whilst the general themes highlight the well integrated Ashraf and his trouble-free interaction with the new community, these marginal incidents point towards an exilic narration.

One such incident occurs when Ashraf shows Claire around Shepherd Bush in London, taking her to the market where he shops for groceries. Ashraf highlights the contrast between the markets in Lebanon and London by describing the London encounter followed by his memories of the markets in Lebanon. In London he complains that:

Beyond the casual, “Can I help you? How many? Thank you,” and the occasional, “See you later”, they don’t say much, even when they’re overwhelmed by a flock of Indians, Arabs, Kurds, Jamaicans and other unidentifiable aliens like me who constantly jump the sacred queue, ignoring the Please Don’t Touch signs.....But it’s compulsive for us to smell a lemon, feel a tomato or taste a grape.... We can’t understand why we’re frowned at (*The Last Migration 76*).

This is presented in immediate contrast to the recollected memory of the festive lively market in Nourieh Souk in Beirut where:

Merchants sang the merits of their goods in comic, rhythmic melodies. It was a festival of the senses. Touching, smelling, tasting, *Ya hala*, welcome. They would give away slices of watermelon and crisp lettuce hearts sprinkled with fresh water. There was plenty harvested locally, nothing was frozen or imported. It was a celebration to listen, to buy, to touch, to taste and taste again (Ibid).

Attributing to Lebanon the virtues of sensuality, sociability and generosity, this episode goes on to highlight, also, the lack of British sense of humour in contrast to that of the unidentifiable aliens in the market.

This strategy of excluding himself from the attributes of his London environment recurs often throughout the novel. In another instance, Ashraf maintains that belly dancing,

an act of Eastern culture, which comes naturally to “girls from Tangiers to Baghdad” (Ibid 93), is extremely difficult for Londoners to copy. As he watches a girl learning to dance in the studio of Jeanette – the Assyrian Iraqi – he notes how the blundering dancer “killed herself to oblige [with the dance moves], but she just couldn’t make all that abundant flesh loosen up” (Ibid 92), and he questions if these skills could possibly “come naturally to a Westerner” (Ibid 94) who would have to absorb this “alien culture late in life” (Ibid). Ashraf insists on setting himself apart as an alien with exclusive attributes which cannot be copied or even shared by his new environment, calling to mind Said’s description of exiles.

Other instances where Ashraf sets himself apart from his new environment abound: his irritation at the image of his daughter as a “full-blown Western woman” (Ibid 31), his insistence on dressing the Western Claire in a red Jellabia (Ibid 81) and his discontent with Jenny, who did not want to take part in belly dancing (Ibid 127) are all instances that together compound to emphasise the identity of the narrative as exilic. However, as he embraces his Lebanese identity, myths and realities included equally, Ashraf never equates the concept of home with that of the Lebanese country or that of the Lebanese nation. Instead, as Hout maintains, “home is mobile, portable, circumstantial and transferable from person to person” (Hout, 2007: 291).

Ashraf, the protagonist in Jad el-Hage’s first English novel, is quite different from the protagonists who figure predominantly in postwar Anglophone Lebanese fiction. Indeed, he owes no resemblance to the melancholic suicidal Marianna in Patricia Saraffian Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* (2003). He diverges widely from Rawi Hage’s bitter and angry central characters in *De Niro’s Game* (2006) and *Cockroach*, and, unlike Jarrar’s three female protagonists in *Somewhere, Home*, still, he is not toying with ideas of hopeful return. Indeed, in telling his story, Ashraf does not knowingly present himself as a nameless immigrant, nor as a person traumatized by the effects of the civil strife from which he escaped. However, excessive preoccupation with the past marks the texture of the novel and its structure. As the protagonist pronounces his search for a love of a woman, which enables him to compensate for the loss of his southern Village Qana, the search could take place only in the shadow of the past. It is this pull towards the past which Hout chose to call exilic, in contrast to a diasporic and forward looking pull towards the present and the future. In my reading of *The Last Migration*, I chose to highlight Nico Israel’s view in relation to the literature of

displacement between exile and diaspora: “the two metaphors and experiences [are] involved in a kind of tension without resolution” (Israel, 200: 18).

## 5. Different Images of Home in Nada Awar Jarrar's (1958) *Somewhere, Home* (2004)

Terkenli and Mallet are two scholars who approached the concept of home as a complex phenomenon. Terkenli argued that the process of the formation of home required recurrent investment over time in a certain place and stated that time was essential to the formation of home (1995: 325). The incidents that happen during that time are then narrated and shared amongst descendants who perceive home as narratives of belonging which were constructed around a set of societal activities and beliefs (Di Stefano 2002: 38). Di Stefano clarified that home was not simply a physical space but, rather, home was constituted out of familiarity with certain surroundings which increased over time (Ibid). Mallet's approach was one of a reminder that the perception of home remained of a personal nature. She argued that the concept of home should take into account a wide set of factors such as history, experiences of dislocation and ties to physical locales (2004: 63).

Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* encompasses all these views of home. It introduces them in lucid prose through three stories of three Lebanese women who lived in Lebanon at various times. Unlike the dominant postwar fiction which employed the imagery of ruins (Seigneurie, 2008) or featured explicit confrontations with the brutality of the civil war (Cooke, 1982), Jarrar's preoccupation, throughout the novel, with the minutiae of the civil war remains minimal. In fact, her third protagonist, an old Lebanese lady who lives in Australia with her family, makes no mention of the civil war at all. Despite having her first protagonist state early on in the novel that she escaped to the mountains from a "Beirut that smoulders in a war against itself" (*Somewhere, Home* 4), Jarrar's silence about the war allows the reader to focus on displacement as a human and psychological condition in isolation from elements of force and violence.

Jarrar was born in 1958 and brought up in Lebanon. She lived in at least four Western countries: Australia, France, the US and the UK before she moved again to Lebanon with her husband in 1997. When the 33 day war with Israel broke out in the summer of 2006, three years after *Somewhere, Home* was published, Jarrar relocated to the mountains where she and her family sought refuge.

Her first novel brings together the journeys of three Lebanese women of different backgrounds as they attempt to reach a home. Such searches comprised those amongst literal houses, cities, selves and people. What brings the three women together is an old village house in Mount Lebanon which the three women depart, occupy or seek to inhabit. The three women share the desire to reach home; a final destination “from which there is no further to go” (Ibid 145). Home is supposed to bring about a state of satisfaction, and for that to be achieved, the women try to reconcile the past with the present. They juggle childhood memories, feelings of displacement, elements of identity, needs to escape and the desire to find love. In their different searches, they share some views on what home is. Jarrar suggests that home can be any personalized space, and home can be any location of habit.

Albeit temporarily at times, Jarrar’s three protagonists encounter peace in their separate quests but they remain haunted by a past which is cluttered with photos, letters, songs, plants, herbs and newspapers from their country of birth. From the voice of the Lebanese singer, Fairouz, to at least eight exchanged written letters between the characters, Jarrar links, by mere objects, different points of times and different spatial locations. The main theme of *Somewhere, Home* is this relationship to Lebanon as the birth place and the home country.

For a deeper examination of the portrayal of home in this novel, I start by offering a brief summary of the plots of its three parts. I argue that Jarrar’s three protagonists, Maysa, Aida and Salwa suffer displacement of different degrees as they try eventually to attain a home which offers a balance between a geographical location and personal peace and satisfaction. Jarrar’s glimpses of the different stages of home offer insights into a novelist’s mind which does not accept that the country of birth is the only place where home is found. Although Hout quotes Jarrar declaring that Lebanon was the only place in the world where she has felt at home (qtd. in Hout, 2005: 220), Jarrar’s three protagonists succeed, in varying degrees, in finding such alternative homes in both family and self-fulfilment.

### 5.1 Three Tales in *Somewhere, Home*

It is a common characteristic amongst all the three tales that 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<sup>33</sup> where the

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<sup>33</sup> Two examples that exhibit the same style of narration are Patricia Sarrafian Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* (2003) and Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* (2010).

fragmentation of narrative in time and space reflects 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.

Part one introduces Maysa who abandons Beirut during the civil war and moves to her family's old village house in Mount Lebanon. A few months pregnant with her daughter, Yasmeena, she is being cared for by the midwife, Selma, who is a second cousin once removed. In seclusion from the civil war, of which Jarrar tells us very little, Maysa records her own imagined narratives of each of the lives of her grandmother, Alia, her mother, Leila, and her aunt, Saeeda. In the corners of the ancient house, Maysa collects these traces of her family in an old worn out notebook in which she constructs a history which she can pass later on to her daughter, Yasmeena. Maysa's records of Alia, Leila and Saeeda, which, eventually, Yasmeena rejected and discarded, are locked away in a closet for seven years. Of course, these notes are her own version of events which reflect her need to nurture a sense of belonging, and cement a narrative and a record of where she was and where she is going. After a confrontation with her husband, Wadih, in which he ridicules her constructed memories, Maysa seems to be jolted back into reality; she embraces her husband and sees an image of her "house encircled in shadow" (*Somewhere, Home* 79).

Aida's tale is that of a young Lebanese woman living in Europe after leaving Lebanon, at age seventeen, with her parents and two sisters, Sara and Dina, when the civil war broke out. In Europe, Aida hears about how Amou Mohammed, the family's loyal porter/servant, was murdered, by a rifle's bullet to the head, at the hands of militias. After she learns of his death, she starts to imagine encounters with him in the park, in her apartment and in the nursery school where she works. Their encounters become a catalyst for her memories of Lebanon: her childhood and adolescence; walks with Amou Mohammed by the Corniche; a visit to the refugee camp where he lives with his family and snapshots from her past life. These memories, which occur in parallel to her current life, lead her eventually to the decision to go back to Lebanon where she meets Amou Mohammed's family again and seeks to reminisce about a man whom she considered to be a second father. When his wife resists her attempts of remembering, Aida starts focusing on breathing life into her old family home in Beirut as she evaluates her job opportunities. Later, she meets Kameel, an older Lebanese doctor who has come back from exile to stay in touch with his roots. She accompanies him on a visit to his village in Mount Lebanon where she is drawn magically to an old village house which she is inspired to turn into a nursery. As Kameel looks on her idea

scornfully, as that of an inexperienced outsider, Aida vows to take off again in search of a home somewhere else where she can reconnect with Amou Mohammed.

The final part of the novel is told by Salwa from behind her window in a nursing home overlooking a eucalyptus tree in Australia. Salwa remembers her childhood in an old village house in Mount Lebanon with her mother and her sister, Mathilde, with her father absent in Brazil, of whom news had ceased for a long time. Salwa's flashback informs us that, at the young age of fifteen, she was married to Adnan, a man who, unbeknown to her, had decided to take her and their firstborn daughter, May, away from Lebanon which he believed offered no future to their children. Their journey took them to the USA and to Australia as Adnan sought his brothers' help to start a new life. Away from Lebanon, Adnan and Salwa (now Sally) went on to have three more children; Richard, Diana and Lily. From her nursing home room, Salwa looks back on her life, after the death of her husband, and remembers the different houses and homes where she lived; her absent father; her daughter's death; father and mother; and the return visits to Beirut with her husband and children. Of her children, only May goes back to Beirut where she marries Riyadh in order to satisfy her parents, and she sends her son, Nabil, to visit his grandmother. Salwa spends her time with Nabil looking at photos from Lebanon which he brought with him. In one of the photos, Salwa is not quite sure whether she recognizes her old village house which, now, is inhabited by a different family from Beirut.

## 5.2 The Search for Home

The emphasis on the search for home as a physical structure is not to be undermined in Jarrar's novel. Throughout the novel, Jarrar uses a physical house to symbolize Lebanon. 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. Homes, as physical dwellings, figure over and over in the entire novel and Jarrar goes to lengths in providing descriptions of them. The old village house is, according to both Maysa and Aida, made up of "four pointed arches...and a red brick rooftop slanted evenly upon them" (*Somewhere, Home* 27-140). In contrast to the village house, all physical dwellings which figure in the novel, save Amou Mohammed's home in the refugee camp, seem to lack a certain something: clutter. This is how, for example, Maysa views the Beirut apartment when she goes to visit both her husband and daughter upon Yasmeena's request by saying:

The apartment is uncluttered. I see Wadih's touch in its spareness, functional pieces outlined in pace. He leads me to a dark green sofa that is pushed against the white living-room wall. There is a glass coffee table in front of it and a squat off-white lamp on the floor by its side. The windows are curtainless and there is no sign of Yasmeeena's happy clutter here (Ibid 76).

The apartment's description, coming at the point of conclusion of the first part of the novel, is that of a still and frozen image, merely functional. This bland description of the Beirut apartment is in contrast to a much warmer description of the village house. It took into account the surrounding mountains and trees (Ibid 4-5) and intertwines the description with family history and tales narrated across generations. Maysa's description of the village house is one of life; of surrounding pine trees and wild thyme and fig trees and grapevines. Her description of the inside of the house is one that requires the explanation of the family tree in its entirety. In describing the house, Maysa recalls the process of accumulation of the objects inside that belonged to different people; she takes note of the furniture and the way through which they came to the house; such as the Persian carpet and an oak dressing table that belonged to her mother and grandmother. Every object in the house is a memory; real or constructed, and fosters a sense of personal belonging to the place. The house is already one that is personalized in relation to her, with an excessive use of the possessive pronoun: "belonged to *my* mother Leila", or "*my* grandmother's oak dressing table" (Ibid 5). Such personalization remains lacking in the "uncluttered" (Ibid 76) Beirut apartment.

However, as vital as the house is in nurturing her sense of belonging, Maysa's lone presence in the house instilled within her a sense of fear, she states:

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 (Ibid 10).

Walking around its rooms, where her grandparents and uncle once lived, ate, slept and had a life, Maysa's resettling in the old family's home necessitates an imagination of its history. This history oscillates between the three poles of her grandmother, mother and aunt. She imagines and evaluates each of these women's encounters with this house. Maysa imagines that Alia cared for the house by decorating it and turning it into a home, and she thinks of how her grandmother, in an attempt to make a home of the new house as a new bride, had "placed seashells and coloured stones on window ledges, and embroidered tiny flowers wherever she could: on bed linen and tablecloths, and even on the small cloth sack used for

making yoghurt cheese” (Ibid 16). She imagines, also, her grandmother’s dissatisfaction with raising a family alone in the absence of her husband in Africa. In contrast, her aunt who journeyed between two houses with an absent husband and an absent father encounters the house as a location of dissatisfaction and unfulfilled aspirations. Despite her constant care for the garden and planting scented herbs which lure strangers to the house, Saeeda encounters only disappointments throughout her life in the house. Leila, who lived abroad and who meets her future husband in the house, and, initially, was estranged by the language barrier, instantly contrasts the weight of memories in the old village house to the weightlessness of her home in Virginia. Also, Maysa has Leila noting the forbidding stature of the house from the outside (Ibid 51), whilst, in the inside, the house shows signs of wear and tear through using words such as fading colours, slightly scuffed floors, and settled air beneath the ceilings. These are signs of a long history – totally in contrast to Leila’s home, in Virginia, which is one “without memories, without a stirring weighted past” (Ibid 52). Maysa’s imagination swings between the different experiences these three women had with the old village house. Maysa’s own eventual departure from the old house, packing so little with her and going to the apartment in Beirut, follows her desire to break free from the heavy weight of memories. Jarrar’s reconstruction of the history of the old house, at the hands of Maysa and her notebook, leads to a change in the perception of the house, and, in turn, Lebanon as an ideal home.

The second part of Jarrar’s novel stresses, also, the same heavy weight of memories which make Aida return to Lebanon in search of resolution, peace and fulfilment. In the old unoccupied village house, Aida believes that she may have achieved the aims which she came back from Europe looking for. Jarrar paints a picture of how Aida comes upon the house during an unplanned visit to Mount Lebanon by saying:

She walked, her arms swinging, her feet crushing the dirt and pebbles underneath, and became aware of the sound of crickets. The road eventually veered to the right, towards the village main street. Aida turned left onto an unpaved road that led her further up and away from the centre of the town. When she began to feel the heat, the sun beating down on her head and shoulders, she decided to find some shade to rest in. She found herself standing in the dusty courtyard of an old stone house. It had a red brick roof and four pointed arches that lined the edges of its porch. The front door, windows and shutters were painted a rich green, as was the balustrade, which was rusty in places (Ibid 140).

Aida perceives the old village house as her shelter after a tiring journey to the village. It is described as a refuge from the heat where she can rest her weary soul. The description of the house is presented, also, as a contrast to the apartment in Europe of which we know only that it is “furnished” (Ibid 101), with no mention of any investment to make it a home.

Maysa’s description of the old house though is strikingly similar to Amou Mohammed’s refugee home. Thinking of the visit to the man who “had the ability to turn hell into heaven just by being there” (Ibid 98), Aida recalls her childhood visit:

They stepped into a small courtyard where leafy plants grew out of large tins filled with dirt, the ground had been swept clean and a sudden stillness filled the air. To the right of a low dividing wall Aida noticed a sink and a toilet behind a wooden door that had been left slightly ajar. The confusion they had encountered when they first entered the camp seemed very far away...[His]room was crowded with things and people....There were large embroidered cushions on the carpeted floor and what was clearly bedding for half a dozen people piled high in one corner. A curtain separated one end of the room from the rest. Although Aida had felt a sudden shaft of light when she first entered, she realised that only one bare light bulb hung from the ceiling (Ibid 96).

It could be that Jarrar was trying to paint Aida’s character as one for whom home was a refuge from hardships and, therefore, she was fond of both the old house in the village, which she encountered after a tiring journey in the heat, as well as Amou Mohammed’s house in the refugee camp where, over the years, Palestinians escaped from neighbouring Palestine. Both houses/homes represent an attraction on the basis of the security they offer from an outside world – however ill-suited and unfitting the description might be in the case of the refugee camp. It is more likely that Jarrar is indicating the false promise of such havens. Palestinian refugee camps have some of the poorest conditions in the world, even today, some of them remain in Beirut and are constant reminders of a people betrayed, forgotten and sacrificed by surrounding neighbouring countries.

It remains that, upon finding the old village house, Aida lost interest in her apartment in Beirut and looked for a home which resembled and embodied what she remembered in her childhood. Quickly, she developed the idea of turning the house into a nursery school where she could work and educate children in the village. Her dream of fulfilment was thwarted by Kameel who reminded her of a distinction between insiders to Lebanon and outsiders. Having left during the civil war at 17 years of age, Aida was reminded that she could not lay the same claim to Lebanon as home. Eventually, Aida decided to leave Lebanon and to seek a home

somewhere else where she could find Amou Mohammed once again. In this, Jarrar presents us with a contrasting image to that of Maysa's.

Of all three women, it is Salwa who has the most memories in the old house in the village as a child born and raised in the village in Mount Lebanon. Salwa calls homes most places in which she lived; she is saddened equally when she leaves any of them and misses the people she left behind. Nearing the end of her life, in the Australian nursing home in Australia, Salwa describes Australia as a refuge by saying:

Beyond this window and the tree that stands outside it, beyond the city that surrounds us, out where sky and earth appear to meet, this country reaches out, measureless and extraordinary, a refuge in a far flung world (Ibid 196).

Although she left Lebanon against her will, she has been able to find homes in new cities which she visited with her family. What frustrates Salwa is not the illusive search for home but the constant separation from loved ones. As she rests as an old woman on her bed in the nursing home, Salwa's declaration that she feels a "sense that life has better places to go" indicates her dissatisfaction at the way her life had gone. She insists that her grandson does not stay in Australia and goes back to Lebanon to be reunited with his family, where he belongs, since she believes "mothers and children must never be made to part" (Ibid 200). It is for this reason that when Salwa comes upon the photo at the end of part three and recognizes the old house, she remains uncertain whether or not it is the same house from her childhood. As a result of Salwa's attitude towards homes, an attitude which places more weight on being surrounded by loved ones rather than presence in one place or another, Salwa sees the old house in a less alluring light than both Maysa and Aida.

### **5.3 Returns: "Nobody crosses the same river twice"**

Although the three tales, with which Jarrar presents us, are weighed down by memories and a certain idealization of the past, figuring almost equally in the three cases, Jarrar's return of the characters to these idealized places serves to shatter their idealized images. With every visit to Lebanon from abroad, Salwa notes the change of the place where she spent her childhood. Upon her first visit back to the house, Salwa states:

The village is noisier than I remember it. Sounds of car engines are persistent and there is a feeling of constant bustle that permeates the air. It's almost as if it has acquired a sense of self-importance that it never had during my childhood. Is it me or has the village changed a great deal? (Ibid 208)

Time and distance changed both Salwa and the house. The strengths of their ties and relationships were altered in. She notes during 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. “Even during my last trip when Mathilde and the children were still here... it was different then (Ibid 215).

Also, Aida went through a similar process. Haunted as she was with the past, Aida hoped her return to Beirut and her family apartment would spell home. However Aida’s attempts to transform the family house into a home were futile. Jarrar explains that upon Aida’s return from Europe:

The apartment had grown shabby, its rooms possessing a deserted air that Aida could not fill. She walked up and down the corridor a hundred times a day, slept in a different bed each night and serenaded the moon from open windows, and still could not breathe life into her former home. When it became clear that her own presence would not be enough, Aida began to imagine her sisters, young and energetic, calling her downstairs to play, or her mother sitting quietly in the room next door, certain but invisible company (Ibid 131).

In the novel, Jarrar employs acts of return to indicate the myth of the happy endings of repatriation which might have been thought to have the ability to resolve these women’s quests. In fact, instead of return, Jarrar offers, in the example of Salwa, a certain line of continuity with the past. On one occasion, Salwa ponders many years after she left Lebanon in remembering her mother singing at her wedding as a teenage bride by saying:

I hear my mother’s serenade again years later, in a small village on the eastern coast of South Australia where soft, powder-like sand reaches into the ocean and seagulls hover over giant waves. I stand at the front door of our white stone house, listening to the gramophone play the music of home. The children sleep by the warmth of the wood stove, and for once, miraculously, my ducks and chickens lie quiet in their coop. And as I listen, the sounds of this sprawling country suddenly silenced, memories of that day long ago come over me, of mother’s voice and the thumping rhythms of my own heart, and for that brief moment a certain joy is restored (Ibid 169).

Salwa reconciles her past most successfully with her present and finds the satisfaction which eludes Aida and Maysa. Her case exemplifies best the reflective nostalgia as described by Boym. The final part of Jarrar’s novel turns our attention away from the restorative nostalgia, which proposes that home is a fixed rigid notion, to alternative processes of home formation in which the past and present are merged harmoniously.

#### 5.4 Home is a Recurrent Investment in Place

Jarrar directs our attention to the idea of home as a location of habit. In Part One, Maysa finds comfort in repetition as she listens to the same music in progression in the old village house “again and again every evening until [she finds] order in anticipation and [is] strangely comforted” (Ibid 49). Jarrar’s novel is mostly a narration of daily events as they unfold and the daily habits of the characters and everyday tasks which they undertake. There is no plot that moves towards an end after specific climaxes but rather a fragmented narration of events. As she seeks satisfaction in her everyday life in the old house, Maysa asks herself: “painting a rickety shelf or mending a curtain hem. I wonder if Alia taught herself, as I have, to dwell on the details of daily life, to know in these moments her soul’s longings” (Ibid 70). It is in the mundane everyday activities that all three women, albeit momentarily in some cases, achieve a sense of home.

Like Maysa who finds comfort in familiar tasks, Aida’s life in Europe takes on a “reassuring pattern” when her life stabilizes in a certain routine: “school from the early morning until the afternoon, then a walk in the park before heading home to dinner in the kitchen of her furnished flat. She spent weekends with her sisters and her parents” (Ibid 101). However, Aida never finds such a reassuring pattern or the renewed order she was seeking in Beirut. Her plans to find a job, to learn to love Kameel or to visit Um Hisham a second time never materialize.

For Salwa, the initial rejection of departing Lebanon changes when she settles in Kingston. She explains:

I am busy, cheerful and content with the new-found stability in our existence, the certainty of my children’s love and the growing affection I have for my husband. And somewhere in the back of my mind, in that corner where joy lies hidden among memories, I am surprised at the unencumbered pleasures that fill my new life (Ibid 189).

Here, although Jarrar offers a resolution to Salwa’s quest since she succeeded the most in overcoming the debilitating nostalgia which haunted Maysa and Aida.

Jarrar’s *Somewhere; Home* differs slightly from the other novels by writers of her generation and her circumstances. This is because of her preoccupation, in this novel, in pronouncing explicitly the definition of home whereby the three protagonists seek a home both actively and consciously. Whilst Ward’s and Hage’s protagonists suffer from alienation, anger and bitterness which overshadow their consciousness of the searching act itself, Jarrar’s protagonists take part actively in the evaluation of the various mediums that could come to

serve as a home. Eventually, in family and self-fulfilment, Jarrar presents us, with some alternative visions to the imagined home.

## 6. A Critique of Immigration in Rawi Hage's (1964) *Cockroach* (2008)

In Chapter one, I introduced Aijaz Ahmad's critique of Homi Bhabha's writings which metaphorized migration and positioned nationalism and imperialism as the "twin faces of the same falsity" (2000: 69). Ahmad refused to see "nationalism [as] the dialectical opposite of imperialism" (Ibid 11), and argued against labelling nations and states as coercive entities as such. He recognized that "some nationalist practices are progressive; others are not" (Ibid). In other words, Aijaz Ahmad's main opposition to Bhabha's stance was in the equal and total demonization of both nationalism and imperialism as two opposite extremes, and resorting to the migrant experience to redraw a totally different spectrum where such positions would be presented differently from the margins. Firstly, Ahmad's critique highlighted that nationalism was originally a revolutionary force in reaction to imperialism and, secondly, that the views of the millions of migrants as international students, professional expatriates, refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants resulting from the world order could be far from unified; and, therefore, not always in line with Bhabha's expectations.

Between this view of migrants redrawing nations from their positions in the margins, unconcerned with the weight of notions of home and belonging, and Ahmad's stance of opposition to a view of nations as coercive entities, Rosemary Marangoly George joined the discussion. George argued for a separation of "nationalism at the level of elite scholarship, political rhetoric, jurisprudence and state-building from the imagining of a place as one's home that functions on the everyday level of ordinary people as they write and live ordinary lives" (1999: 15). In this context, Rawi Hage's *Cockroach's* nameless immigrant, who is "split between two planes and aware of two existences...wrapped in one sheet" (*Cockroach* 119) questions "how to exist and not to belong?" (Ibid 210) His position owes an element to each of the three arguments. As Bhabha expected, he did not vow allegiance to the nation. And as Ahmad proposed, he was not a privileged citizen enjoying the pleasures of migration. As George countered, *Cockroach's* narrator's imagination of home was related closely to a personal everyday experience. For Hage's narrator, an immigrant to Canada from a war-torn country, the starting premise is immigration; the beginning of the process to make a home in

Canada. Whilst we saw how Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* was preoccupied mainly with defining the parameters of an apolitical home, Hage's half human half cockroach immigrant demonstrates practically the politics which, in a sense, make both Lebanon and Canada incomplete homes. He focuses on the reasons for which immigrants and refugees find themselves in Canada in the first place as well as the reasons which prevent them from full integration within Canadian society thus making the creation of home difficult.

Himself an immigrant, having moved to Canada in 1992 after a brief stopover in New York, Rawi Hage shares much with the protagonists of his two novels. He was raised in Beirut during the early years of the civil war, and, like both Bassem in *DeNiro's Game*, and *Cockroach's* nameless narrator, Hage's early years, in the West, were far from smooth. He recalls to Daniel McCabe his years in New York in the early 1980s as a young man juggling lousy jobs and facing previously alien forms of racism in the American city. In 1992, he moved to Canada to study photography, worked as a cab driver and encountered the Canadian migrant scene which he wrote about in *Cockroach* with first-hand familiarity. His writing and photography remains preoccupied greatly with the themes of immigration, war and racism ('The Lands within Me', 2010).

Rawi Hage's first novel *DeNiro's Game* (2006) won him the most prestigious literary award, namely, the *IMPAC Dublin Literary Award* in June 2008 (Chong, 2008). It was a story of the young Lebanese, Bassem, who was caught in war-torn Beirut, and whose tale started with him cursing the singer, Fairouz – a historic voice and a long time symbol of Lebanon – for her melancholic songs which chased him all over the ravaged country and disturbed any attempt at finding peace. The three parts of the novel entitled Roma, Beirut and Paris, painted a picture of the young fugitive whose violent background and the sectarian divisions, which marred Lebanon, fuelled his departure to Paris where his perception of the West as a haven was struck a strong blow. In many ways, Hage's second novel *Cockroach* (2008) is a continuation of Bassem's journey away from Lebanon, except that, now, Bassem had dropped his name, and the name of his country of origin, as he joined the masses of migrants and refugees from Third World countries.

### 6.1 The Nameless Immigrant in *Cockroach*

*Cockroach* tells the story of a nameless immigrant, from a nameless war-torn country, who, as the novel starts, talks to his Canadian therapist Genevieve about his failed suicide attempt. Each of the five parts of the novel starts with a new session with Genevieve during which the

narrator reflects mainly on his childhood and youth spent in the midst of a civil war in the unidentified country. These therapy sessions, which are mostly flashbacks from the past, are the background against which the narrator's new life, in Montreal, is taking place. Through the flashbacks, we learn that the narrator was a petty thief who grew up between a violent gambling father and a constantly stressed out mother. We learn, also, that it was his life of petty crime which led to his entanglement in an ill conceived revenge murder plot against his brother-in-law which ends horrendously in the murder of his own sister, Souad, by her violent husband. It is this revenge plot that serves to join the past and the present together when the narrator attempts to redeem himself from his previous grievous mistake by avenging his Iranian lover, Shohreh, whose previous jailor/rapist, a powerful officer in the Iranian government, is frequenting now the Iranian restaurant where he secured a job.

As he recounts the story, the narrator tells us of his encounters with the different third world immigrants whom he met in Montreal. They are the Algerian "Professor", who is reluctant to embrace his newly deprived status; the homosexual, Farhoud; and the cab driver, Majeed, who escaped from the oppressive Iranian regime. There are, also, the pretentious Iranian Reza, who exploits naive Canadians through an over dramatization of his past life; the young Iranian, Sehar and her wealthy father, the Parisian Mathilde, a waitress who "chants the "Marseillaise" every chance" she gets (*Cockroach* 27), and his Pakistani, Russian and Greek neighbours. The Canadians, however, are represented in the novel by the gullible therapist, Genevieve, the pretentious Sylvie and her friends, who call themselves "la gang", the racist Maitre Pierre, the drug dealer Derrick, and Jehovah witnesses and bureaucrats and police officers.

The narrator, an immigrant and an outcast, imagines that he enters people's homes in Montreal only as a cockroach, crawling on their walls and creeping from under their doors to peer into their refrigerators and closets. Throughout the novel, the half human half cockroach imagines scenarios of the world, as we know it, coming to an end to become dominated and ruled by cockroaches, who are safe in their underground holes. In an extremely self conscious narration, reminiscent of Dostoevsky's Underground man in his *Notes from the Underground*, *Cockroach's* narrator describes the trivial and the grotesque in excessive detail by illuminating the minutiae of the lives of the vermin, which he holds as superior to human beings.

## 6.2 Mal-integration in the Host Country

*Cockroach* starts with an allusion to the narrator's recent attempt to hang himself in order to "escape the sun". This is a reference which Hage employs to indicate the narrator's need to escape from his entire existence to a cockroach's one in the underground. The novel ends with the narrator shooting his lover's rapist in a pre-planned incident which, nevertheless, ends in chaos. Between the attempted suicide and the completed murder lies the dismal story of the masses of unidentified immigrants in the Canadian city of Montreal. This is a story which Hage recounts with extreme pessimism; the only optimistic insight being that all nations are equal for they are all "are built in the image of a murder" (Ibid 82). Equally, the narrator curses his sectarian and violent past and his racism infested and deprived present, hoping that the future will be in the hands of cockroaches. From the underground of the war shelters to the underground of Montreal's alleged cosmopolitan life, the narrator is faced with obstacles in integrating himself into mainstream Canadian life.

Hage focuses on his nameless narrator with disregard to the point of origin which he attributes evenly to the entirety of the desolate third world from Iran and Lebanon to Eastern Europe, and Pakistan. Indeed, Hage makes it clear that it is neither because of the narrator's personal characteristics nor because of a history unique to his war-torn country that he faces these sets of obstacles in making a home in Canada. He represents the narrator's circle of acquaintances and neighbours as a testament to the failure of integration of those expelled by developing nations and oppressive regimes. He employs different identities which allow him to cope with life in the foreign city, taking on both the imagined despicable cockroach who unsettles the orderly life, by stealing a neatly placed pair of slippers (Ibid 84) or messing with the dial tunes in a radio. These are gestures which he referred sardonically to as "a new house order" (Ibid 149). He was, also, the "noble savage" (Ibid 183) or the "fuckable, exotic, dangerous foreigner" (Ibid 199), personas that he utilized for their appeal to Sylvie's circle of socialites who "lived in a state of permanent denial of the bad smells from sewers, infested slums, unheated apartments, single mothers on welfare, worn out clothing" (Ibid 182).

This undertaking of different personas by the exceedingly paranoid narrator is amplified as a result of the encounters with racism in Montreal which maintain his excluded status. The French speaking Maitre Pierre, another pretentious Canadian, whom the narrator meets as a dishwasher in a French restaurant, stands as a representation of the racism that hinders integration. It is when he believes that Maitre Pierre refused to promote him because

of the colour of his skin (Ibid 29) that he dispenses his cynical views on the state of Canada's demographics by saying:

The Québécois with their extremely low birth rate, think they can increase their own breed by attracting the Parisians, or at least for a while balance the number of their own kind against the herd of brownies and darkies coming from every old French colony, on the run from dictators and crumbling cities (Ibid 28).

In reaction to the perceived injustice, the encounter ends with threats to the pretentious Québécois elite; he tells the waiter: "Your days are over and your kind is numbered. No one can escape the sun on their faces and no one can barricade against the powerful, fleeting semen of the hungry and the oppressed" (Ibid 30).

However, despite the outbursts of loathing and rage against both the past, which expelled him with its sectarian violence, and the present which treats him as an outcast, the narrator – indifferent as he would like to portray himself to the different forces of nature – expresses his gratitude once he gets his pay cheque. He says:

On my days of pay, I am grateful, I am grateful for everything, and it shows. I am grateful for the good food, the warmth, the service, the forgotten ketchup that is relocated from a nearby table by a waitress's thumbs...And at the first sip of beer, the first fries, I forget and forgive humanity for its stupidity, its foulness, its pride, its avarice and greed, envy, lust, gluttony, sloth, wrath and anger. I forgive it for its contaminated spit, its bombs, all its bad dancing (Ibid 226-227).

Similarly, when he enters Genevieve's house in her absence, he imagines the pleasure that would come from having a semblance of a normal life with her, he thinks to himself:

What if I were to stay in her bed? What if she comes home and sees a considerate stranger who makes the bed and saves the other side for her to slip her toes into as she asks me if I am asleep, if I had a good day, kissing my forehead, hoping that I will wake up, take her in my arms, listen to her story about the man who was caught with a rope on a tree looking for a solid branch in the park, early on a cold day (Ibid 81).

These instances of human vulnerability do not figure often in the novel and, when they do, they are transformed regularly and rapidly into gestures of fear or contempt. In the first instance, after a brief enjoyment of his meal, he starts thinking of the "calculation of the bill, the check, the record, of the meal, its price, its nutritional value..." (Ibid 227), whilst the second instance ends with him disrupting Genevieve's routine through the theft of her slippers. Both acts stem from the narrator's status of displacement, inducing both insecurity and contempt, which represent hurdles to the attainment of the safety of homes.

### 6.3 The Global Cycle of Migration

Here, it is safe to state that, in *Cockroach*, Hage does not attempt to re-imagine Lebanon as the homeland or to recall it nostalgically. Lebanon, itself, is not the writer's concern; it remains unnamed and referred to only as the narrator's war-torn, much warmer country. If it were not for a few references, the narrator's country could have been any of the developing countries which suffered from sectarianism in the past few decades. Hage makes very few references to the mountains, the Mediterranean shores or Cedars which feature excessively in many other postwar Lebanese novels. There is none of the clutter in the forms of letters, photographs, luggage or other memorabilia which draw links to the home country that characterize a lot of migrant fiction. In fact, Hage's concern remains immigration itself: the reasons for which people the world over leave their respective countries of origin, the ways in which they adapt to new and foreign lives and the reception these new countries promise them.

Hage's main question is articulated by the narrator very early on in the novel. He says:

Where am I? And what am I doing here? How did I end up trapped in a constantly shivering carcass, walking in a frozen city with wet cotton falling on me all the time? And on top of it all, I have no one, no one...Fucking ice, one slip of the mind and you might end up immersing your feet in one of these treacherous cold pools that wait for your steps...(Ibid 9).

Through the panorama of his acquaintances, who were shunned by their respective countries after suffering torture from oppressive regimes, fundamentalism, deprivation and the various ailments that pervade the third world, the reader realises that these are neither the travellers, theorized in postcolonial discussions, nor Said's refugees who are armed with rations cards and agency numbers. These are immigrants, lost in between two spaces, who fled for hopes of better lives and better futures and were let down for a second time by the international system.

It is the words of Majeed, the Iranian cab driver, which expose the irony when he said: "we come to these countries for refuge and to find better lives, but it is these countries that made us leave our homes in the first place...they talk about democracy, but they do not want democracy. They want only dictators" (Ibid 224). True enough, Hage's plot proceeds to expose this full cycle of Western hypocrisy as the arms deal between the Canadian

government and Shohreh's rapist comes to light. This seemingly unlikely cooperation between an extremist oppressive regime and a multicultural democratic state, echoing the violent past, which the narrator fled, culminates in the novel's violent end. As his lover aims the gun at her torturer and rapist, the narrator watched the event "as if it were taking place somewhere far away" (Ibid 305). Exasperated by his past mistakes, which allowed for the death of his sister, and the unwelcoming present, he stabs the Canadian, government appointed bodyguard and kills him. Then, he proceeds to shoot the rapist twice before he walks back to the kitchen and goes down the drain to the underground joining more noble creatures.

After the publication of his novel, Hage expressed personal concern of being seen as the ungrateful immigrant (McCabe, 2008). Indeed, there are reasons to believe that the narrator is a mouthpiece for the author. Hage's narrator, the immigrant whose childhood was spent in the shadow of violence and whose youth, before his move to Canada, was spent plotting petty scams, makes confident references to classical music, Greek and German philosophers and fine art. He speaks and opines on matters of world politics and international affairs with the knowledge of a political scientist. His language, for example, as he ridicules his Algerian immigrant acquaintance, whom he nicknames the professor, is telling of an advanced educational level. He says:

The professor wants to shower me with his existentialist questions. The bastard plays Socrates every chance he gets. He has always treated the rest of us like Athenian pupils lounging on the steps of the agora, and he never answers a question. He imagines he is pseudo-socialist, Berber journalist, but he is nothing but a latent clergy man always answering a question with another question (Ibid 10).

In the absence of specific insights into the narrator's educational or social background, Hage could be seen easily as using his narrator as a puppet to voice his own views on the state of immigrants in Canada. However, as easy as it is to make this claim, it is easier for Hage to counter the claim using himself as a case in point. As mentioned earlier, Hage, himself, was raised in a war-torn country, struggled with racism and economic difficulties as an immigrant, and it was only a series of coincidences which brought about his unforeseen fortune as a winner of the most prestigious literary award for his very first novel. In itself, Hage's story provides a persuasive argument for any society to tap into the neglected wealth of talent of its newcomers who are refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, to be disregarded

and to have his potential squandered acts as one of the leading factors which drives *Cockroach*'s immigrant to desperation and alienation.

#### 6.4 The Personal Experience of Immigration

In her paper 'The Lebanese-Québécois novel as a liminal space in Canadian literature', Rita Sakr argued that, beyond the geopolitical account of migration patterns, Hage's narrator provides insights into "the more intimate and concrete level of the individual whose displacement and exilic relations are not only geopolitical, but also socio-economic, existential, psychological, human" (forthcoming). For the narrator,

the old and new spaces are simultaneously present in the narrator's consciousness, imaginatively and actually, contrapuntally orchestrating the two voices of trauma on a textual level whereby the place names in Beirut are silenced in the double act of forgetfulness and textual erasure while Montreal spaces are repeatedly named with a compulsive-obsessive insistence (Sakr, forthcoming).

In fact, the narrator mentions only the names of family members when probed. The insistence on this double erasure could not be more emphasized in *Cockroach*'s textual composition in which the word "home" is used both excessively and casually to refer to the narrator's shabby vermin infested apartment. In contrast to Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home*, Hage's narration is not as cautious with the word "home" and its implications. In an attempt to forget the traumatic past, and the role he played in it, the narrator is on a mission to cement his presence in Canada and to sever his attachments with the past. Now, he believes that there are no ideal homes; there is only the harsh reality of immigration to face. In that sense, the novel acts as a reminder of the psychological impact of displacement. In that case, having severed communication with his first environment and having failed to adjust to his new surroundings, the migrant is expressing resentment that is personal as well as collective and universal. This resentment culminates in murder and escape to the underground.

In Bakhtin's view, "language always registers not only the subjectivities of its speaker and its intended addressee but also the historical traces of the repeated and varying appropriation of words by individuals who are socially constituted" (cited in Glazener, 2001: 155). In relation to his past, Hage's highlighting of the Parisian French, the pretentious elitist French, and the heavily accented English and French, in contrast to the relatively silenced Arabic, could be seen, also, as Sakr's indicated double acts of forgetful and textual erasure. *Cockroach*'s narrative highlights the social language of each of the novel's characters,

attributing to them specific places in the social scene of Montreal. With the Parisian French, more doors are open whilst, with more heavily accented French, opportunities are difficult to come by. Language acts as a determinant of one's place and fate, and Hage's textual narrative exhibits a heightened awareness of this.

However, despite the textual erasure, which Hage employs with regards to the past, he does bring to the text a wealth inherited from Arabic poetry and a self-serving Oriental imagery. In his essay, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', Bakhtin explained that "to study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real world toward which it was directed and by which it is determined" (1981: 292). What Bakhtin proposed was a study of the novelistic hybrid; "an artistically organized system [that brings] different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving out of a living image of another language" (Ibid 361). In *Cockroach*, Hage employs his own inherited social language to highlight the narrator's present in view of his past, and, therefore, uses the imagery of Shehrezad's stories as the framework for his narrator's sessions with Genevieve. The therapist, who lives in "la-la land" (*Cockroach* 79), becomes fascinated with the narrator's stories. As he attends these government mandated sessions, he notes to himself that "the doctor, like sultans, is fond of stories" (Ibid 102). In one instance, the narrator reflects on that imagery to himself:

I wonder whether if I had happened to live back then (wearing a different outfit naturally); I could have saved any of those women. Maybe I could have been the *saqi* who slipped a few poison drops from my ring into the king's wine (Ibid 67).

It is worth noting that the word *Saqi*, which refers to the avenging murderer from the oriental story, is one of the few Arabic words in the text. As mentioned earlier, the narrator does live up to this self-appointed role as an avenging *Saqi* when he comes to his lover's aide by avenging her rape.

There is more to this emphasis on the differences in social language; Hage seems to suggest that there can be no dialogue between the two largely different entities: the heavily accented masses of migrants and refugees and their host. The narrator believes that this host is more likely to accept them as exotic foreigners in a *Thousand and One Nights* setting than as their true respective selves. In that same vein, Jesse Hutchinson argued that "*Cockroach* allows us to examine how the contemporary immigrant experience in practice reveals the flaws inherent in the ideals of Canadian multiculturalism" (2009: 1). To be accepted into the

“Canadian mosaic” entails a change of social language and an adjustment of the self to fulfil preconceived notions and upheld expectations. Then the narrator presents the host, whether personified in Sylvie and her friends or the gullible Genevieve, as mesmerized and manipulated willingly by foolish listeners.

There are two parallel lines going through *Cockroach* which together culminate in the novel’s equally pessimistic and violent end. The narrator’s traumatic past, introduced in the regular sessions with the government appointed therapist, moves parallel to his expulsion and alienation on the margins of Canadian society. This parallelism is disrupted when both past and present stories intersect with the exposure of the arms deal between the Western Canadian government and the religious fundamentalist Iranian regime; a deal that reveals to the narrator the irony of his escape from his home country. In light of this exposure, his first escape from Lebanon is deemed nonsensical. Disillusioned, he performs the only redemptive act, which he can perceive, by murdering his lover’s rapist and, therefore, avenges the loss of his own sister to an equally brutal oppressive militia. In that sense, Hage argues for the futility of displacement and paints a dull pessimistic portrait of migration. Hage seems to suggest that, if global conspiratorial oppression, sectarian divisions and material deprivation were to cease to exist, homes could be located anywhere.

## 7. Conclusion

In 1976, Trevor Noble argued that all literature and specifically the novel present us with insights into the social world “because it, more clearly than other art forms, raises issues about the relation of the fictional construct and the social context within which the process of creation and interpretation occur” (1976: 212). At the time, Noble pointed out that many of the critics, working within the Marxist tradition, focused more on the “relationship between the work and its author’s social context while too little attention is paid to the communicative aspects of the literary views as social activity” (Ibid 213). Against this trend in the 1970’s, Noble pointed out the flawed view of some scholars of the sociology of literature who expected the work of a writer or a novelist to embody and represent those of an entire group or community of people. He insisted that “while the person who can typify a group may be exceptional in the unalloyed coherence of his thinking, the exceptionally coherent individual does not necessarily typify a group” (Ibid 216).

Talking, in 2003, about Lebanese postwar novels, Ken Seigneurie’s views are in line with Noble’s. In the introduction to his book, *Crisis and Memory*, he states that “stories remain a primary means of understanding and justifying human action, so it is probably worth the trouble to try to fathom how they relate to history” (2003: 11). His book examines, through various contributors, “how people who live through contemporary Levantine history have responded to it through narrative” (Ibid). He poses the question: “Can a sense of the nation remain if literature and other cultural productions do not maintain it as an imagined community?” (Ibid 19) In attempting to answer this question, Seigneurie was faced with the multiple and diverse representations of the collected Levantine accounts. Carol Fadda-Conrey expresses the same sentiment in her article, ‘Exilic Memories of War: Lebanese Women Writers Looking Back’, in which she argues against the existence of unifying trends in terms of representation in postwar novels written by novelists who lived away from Lebanon. Conrey reasons that, after the war, the politically and socially fragmented nature of the Lebanese scene dictated the complexity of the representation of relationships to Lebanon in the presented fiction. This fragmentation manifested itself in literature in the form of “disparity in individual experiences” (Fadda-Conrey, 2003: 18).

### 7.1 Different Representations of Home amongst the Lebanese Diaspora

Notable Lebanese writers share the same view. Talking to Rita Sakr, in an interview discussing postwar Lebanese literature, Rashid al-Daif explained that the Lebanese literary masterpiece was not represented by one or more monumental work but rather by the entire collection of works (Sakr, 2007: 284). In the same spirit, Elias Khoury states that literature was not meant to serve the simple purpose of expressing or registering a writer's opinion, agenda or ideology; he insisted that "literature does not serve anything; literature serves itself" (qtd. in Seigneurie, 2003: 15). His statement could very well be stated by any of the discussed Lebanese novelists. The views were consistent neither amongst the five different writers nor, sometimes, amongst the different novels belonging to a single novelist.

Now, the question is: Are there any general conclusions about their relationships to the home country, or their visions of home, from a comparative analysis of their literary output as presented in the five novels? In the following, I offer an overview of the general themes and preoccupations of these selected novels and bring them into the postcolonial discussion about the location of migration. My aim is to allow access to a number of variant portrayals of the experience of home in order to show the role which the home country plays in determining this experience. I gave considerable attention to (but, perhaps, did not embrace completely) other analysts' concerns such as Miriam Cooke's and Syrine Hout's who saw in gender and generation respectively a defining feature of the literary output. Consequently, in order to maintain a gender and generational balance which would be consistent with Cooke's and Hout's claims, I chose to offer a close analysis of novels by two female writers and three male writers who, between them, span almost twenty years in age difference. Hanan al-Shaykh was the oldest of these writers at 66 whilst Rawi Hage was the youngest at 47 years. At 27 years of age, Maalouf was the youngest to leave Lebanon was, whilst, at 39 years, Jad el-Hage was the oldest when he left Lebanon to move to Australia 39. Al-Shaykh was the quickest to leave Lebanon after the civil war in 1975. She was followed shortly, thereafter, by Maalouf in 1976.

United by the common experience of the civil war, these five writers, like millions of their Lebanese compatriots, relocated to various new locations in the west in search of a place of refuge which was free from violence, sectarian divisions and strife. Their personal views varied. Jarrar, for example, still maintains today that, after years of living in various Western

countries, Lebanon remains the only place where she had felt at home. Others like Hanan al-Shaykh mention their own surprise that they no longer have feeling of nostalgia for Lebanon.

The writers share with one another an experience of departure from the place where they spent their early years. None of them were born in their currently chosen location of residence but the reasons, for which they left, varied between a desire to better their standards of living, the increasing violence of the civil war, despair of their Lebanese compatriots and other personal reasons. This could have been partly the reason why the selected novels revealed a multiplicity of themes and preoccupations of their novelists. Rawi Hage, Nada Awar and Jarrar and Jad el-Hage were concerned about the experience of relocation. Hage presented a pessimistic portrayal of the dismal immigrant experience in Montreal, in the shadow of the civil war experience. El-Hage gave an account of a Lebanese immigrant moving forward and building a life for himself and his daughters in the West but, yet, one who could not escape a debilitating search for a replacement for the love of the country he left behind. Their views were intercepted mildly by Jarrar's alternative visions of home as offered by the three Lebanese female protagonists revisiting the past and searching for a sense of home in their roots and the people in their past. Al-Shaykh, however, remained preoccupied mainly with a critique of the nation: al-Shaykh's account was that of a critical attack on the nation which oppressed its most vulnerable members and remained only idealized from a distance. Maalouf offered a narration of an episode of Lebanon's history which aimed to justify the choice of escaping the dreary situation in a country where identity politics threatened never ending strife.

## 7.2 Categories and Classifications in Lebanese Literature

In 1941, Kenneth Burke wrote about the phenomenon of labelling and classification in literature in a collection of essays which dealt with the sociology of literature that people tended to "name typical, recurrent situations. That is, people find a certain social relationship recurring so frequently that they must "have a word for it" (1941: 129). Comparing the social phenomenon of naming amongst different social actors in different social behaviours, Burke warned against careless naming. He advised that "one must *size things up* properly" and only when one knows accurately "how things are" (Ibid 133). He proposed that "sociological classification [should] derive its relevance from the fact that it should apply both to works of art and social situations outside of art" (Ibid 137).

The phenomenon of naming, which Burke had analysed, comes to mind when faced with the distinctions to be made between different novels according to their representation of the experience of migration. Syrine Hout singles out el-Hage's novel as diasporic which she believes depicts less painful nostalgia and longing that were noticed in other novels. In her scholarship, Hout attempts to draw a distinction between the post 1995 exile literature and that literature produced prior to that date. Her distinction claims that there exists a growing body of literature which, in its force and its content, differ from previous Lebanese literature. She argues that there is a growing number of Lebanese exiled novelists who, in their novels, portrayed the war in addition to depicting the circumstances of exile. She claims that, compared to their predecessors, the considerably younger Anglophone and Francophone writers showed perceptible differences in their literary outputs. Although it is unclear which predecessors Hout refers – whether from a position of exile or from those who had written in Lebanon, this research found no backing to the claim that age was a major distinction. Whilst Hout dedicates some of her articles to specific novelists such as Hanan al-Shaykh, Tony Hanania, Jad el-Hage and others, there had been no group of writers considerably younger or considerably older than another in a way which permits the division of the preoccupation of literary output along age lines.

Instead, the multiple themes in the Lebanese postwar novel by migrants, who relocated from Lebanon to the West, lend legitimacy to Fadda-Conrey's conclusion that the narratives defy one conclusive generalization. Following on Russell King's claim that the literature of migrants helps to fill in the gaps of the social science study of migration which "fails to portray nostalgia, anomie, exile, [and] restlessness" (King, 1995: x), an overview of the five novels by Lebanese migrants of different ages and social backgrounds serves to affirm the individual nature of these experiences.

### **7.3 Ambivalence as a Distinctive Characteristic of Migrant Literature**

Despite their various characteristics which defy one homogenous classification, there is one trend which, albeit in varying degrees, manifests itself consistently in the five novels: the ambivalent attitude toward the country of origin. In 'Geography, Literature and Migration', Paul White explained that:

A common feature of many migrants and migrant cultures is ambivalence. Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better 'then' or 'now'. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to return a 'myth of return' or to design a new

project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the ‘host’ society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. Ambivalence towards standards of behaviour: whether to cling to the old or to discard it, whether to compromise via symbolic events whilst adhering to the new on an everyday basis (White, 1995: 3-4).

It was this ambivalence in the attitude towards the home country that manifested itself in writing which, later, became the topic of Nico Israel’s book *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*. Israel points out, that despite the fundamental differences between the terms exile and diaspora, it is impossible to label or classify a novel, let alone an entire body of literature, as either exilic or diasporic. The two metaphors and experiences [are] involved in a kind of tension without resolution” (2000: 18).

This ambivalence is a defining feature of the narrator of *The Rock of Tanios*; the narrator reflects on Tanios’ thought process which could have led him to depart the village by saying:

That is not the way a decision to depart is made. You don’t evaluate, you don’t draw up a list of advantages and disadvantages. You alternate, from one moment to the next, now this way, now that. Towards another life, towards another death. Towards glory or oblivion. Who can ever tell because of what look, what word, what sneer, a man suddenly finds himself an outsider in the midst of his own people? So that he feels the sudden urge to go far away, or disappear (*The Rock of Tanios* 272-73).

Then, the narrator sums up the relationship towards the first home place in these words: “My mountains are like that. Attachment to the soul and aspiration towards departure. Place of refuge, place of passage. Land of milk and honey and of blood. Neither paradise nor hell. Purgatory” (Ibid 273). The narrator of the legend of Tanios suffers irresolute feelings toward the village where the choice of departure is seen as almost synonymous with a forced departure. Tanios departs – at least as far as the narrator believes – because the alternative is unbearable.

The ambivalence is less pronounced but incontestably present in *The Story of Zahra*, where, al-Shaykh presents her scorn for the idealization of the nation which forced Zahra to escape in search of a safe haven in juxtaposition to the idealistic romantic portrayal of Lebanon by Zahra’s uncle and husband. This refusal of the “fetishization” (Adams, 2001: 209) of the home country, which shows itself in an ambivalent narrative, is carried on in al-Shaykh’s fiction. It figures again, in a stronger manner, in *Beirut Blues* as Asmahan, the main protagonist, concerns herself in the series of letters, which she writes in the course of the

novel, in attempting to remember Lebanon as a home which is “neither rigid nor fixed” (Ibid). As Adams clarifies:

Asmahan’s contradictory, ambivalent, fragmentary, and dynamic connection with her homeland is different from any other Lebanese “nationalism” yet seen: unlike Zahra's uncle who dreams of his home, or even Asmahan's lover Jawad who “carries a beautiful picture of [his] home-land in [his] mind”, Asmahan refuses to remember or mimetically represent Lebanon (her nation-state) as transparent space (Ibid).

Ambivalence recurs, also, in Rawi Hage’s novel, *Cockroach*, in which his unnamed narrator, who had silenced the past in an endeavour to create a new life in Canada unperturbed by the painful memories of his past, finds himself depicting ambivalence towards his new host society in Montreal. He is both repulsed and attracted to its way of life. His deprived status is what prevents him from actively taking part in the city’s life since he alternates between his perception of himself as a cockroach and as a human being in searching for a way to reconcile the past and present which failed him along with his circle of migrants.

In none of the five novels is the feature of ambivalence more pronounced than in Jarrar’s *Somewhere, Home*, where the writer employs the themes of families, return and adaptation to life abroad to highlight the ambivalent attitude which brings her three different protagonists together. The weight of the past and the elusive promise of a home, in Lebanon, provide the foundation of the novel. The latter is the motive which drives the three women (who are only ever temporarily at peace) as they struggle to ease their longing and nostalgia. Despite their severe restlessness away from Lebanon, the disappointment, which Alia and Salwa face in their return visits to Lebanon as they discover that their memories of their birth places no longer remain unchanged awaiting their return, exemplifies in an extraordinary manner the ambivalent nature of migrant culture. Jarrar’s characters struggled with nostalgia and attempted to balance it with the present lives, and eventually their choices of departure resembled that of Tanios, These were bearable only in light of the alternatives but, nevertheless, not completely ideal.

#### **7.4 Migration as a Lived experience**

In relation to the discussion of the migrant metaphor in postcolonial literary circles, I highlighted in each novel’s analysis the propriety of this metaphor with regard to the implications perceived by its main advocates and critics. Andrew Smith and Aijaz Ahmad were the primary critics of the indulgence in the metaphor of migrancy. They discussed it

without references to its real life implications and positioned it rather as a promising site for alternative suggestions to the traditional notions of nation. This promotion, by literary theorists, of the migrancy metaphor could have helped to “obscure the specificities of historical experience” (Huggan, 2008: 45).

I found two opposite and extreme depictions of migration in the optimism of Amin Maalouf’s and his promotion of migration in *The Rock of Tanios* and Rawi Hage’s dreary approach to the fate of the nameless immigrant in *Cockroach*. Maalouf valorised migrancy and promoted it as an alternative to the strife caused by nations which promoted aggression and oppression. Indeed, almost literally from his position on the margins as a Lebanese migrant, he partook in a re-writing of the nation, by using various historical records which produced an alternative myth for the people of Kafryabda. His myth was one that promoted reconciliation instead of the cyclical violence and bloodshed which tore the village apart. However, Hage’s account painted a dull and pessimistic picture of migration. The experience was one in which the narrator remained unnamed amongst a mass of unidentified refugees who were forced to adopt expected behaviours in order to fit within the expectations of their host. Whilst Amin Maalouf’s narrative would coincide probably with the expectations of the postcolonial literary theorists, Rawi Hage’s insisted on questioning the assumed privileges of migration.

However, between the two extremes of the idealized migration and the dismal one, there lie the depictions of the daily preoccupations of migrants as apparent in Jarrar’s *Somewhere, Home* and el-Hage’s *The Last Migration*. The notions of families and love and the memories of these in the home country played a more important part in both el-Hage and Jarrar’s accounts of migration than they played in the other discussed novels. Marked by varying degrees of ambivalence in their relationship toward both the home country and the new host location, the two novels illustrated an attitude which attached the narrative to the lived experiences of people; a perception abandoned by literary theorists promoting migration as a metaphor. However, al-Shaykh’s *The Story of Zahra* did denounce the national project; rewriting it as an oppressive structure even if this perception was altered in al-Shaykh’s later novels. The concept of a safe home in the home country, which offered security and peace, remained totally nonexistent in *The Story of Zahra*.

Since these novels provide a personal view of the relation of the self to the past, they remain unique and personal accounts of individual writers defying homogenizations and

generalization. Indeed, if what brought the writers together was their location away from Lebanon, their literary output attested to the variant representations in their accounts of the migrants' experiences.

## Chapter Four

### 1. Home, Nation and Migration in the Iraqi Novel in the Diaspora

In contrast to the rapidly evolving study of Lebanese novels (whether Anglophone, Francophone or Arabic) by Lebanese writers residing and writing in the diaspora, novels by Iraqis living away from Iraq are yet to evoke the same focus endowed upon their Lebanese counterparts by scholars and literary critics. Among the possible reasons for this are the differences in the migration patterns or the choice of the language of expression (with Iraqis mostly writing in Arabic) between the two Arab countries. Salih Altoma argues that Iraq's former oppressive regime under Saddam Hussein and the conflicts throughout Iraq's history "combined to literally ravish the country's vibrant cultural life. Iraqi writers, artists, intellectuals and others had to endure many years of stifling isolation with restricted opportunities for interaction with the outside world" (Altoma, 2009: 308).

As a result, attempts to study Iraqi literature in the diaspora as a distinct category are slow to materialize. *Banipal's* 37<sup>th</sup> issue was the first in its attempt to bring together a list of Iraqi writers that distinguishes between those writers living inside and outside of Iraq. In fact, Altoma argues that *Banipal's* issue predominantly focused on Iraqi writers living in the West at the expense of Iraqi writers who still live in Iraq (Ibid 308).

#### 1.1 Iraq after the 2003 Anglo-American Invasion

The years after 2003 were characterized by intense instability and insecurity in Iraq. Charles Tripp describes Iraq in this period as a "troubled and increasingly insecure country in which insurgency, lawlessness and sectarian conflict claimed a growing number of Iraqi lives" (2007: 277). The death toll as a result of the Anglo-American invasion surpassed 100,000 in 2005 (Ismael, 2005: 616). With the risks and the death toll mounting high in the months and years after the Anglo-American invasion, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were finding life in Iraq increasingly unstable. It was estimated that in 2010 as many as four million Iraqis of various sects were fleeing the country in immediate fear for their lives (Sadek, 2010: 43), with many of them finding the situation still unsafe for their return today (Amos, 2010). The flight, although unprecedented in the Middle East since the Palestinian refugee crisis of 1948 (Marfleet, 2007: 397), was only one in a series of episodes which saw Iraqis seek refuge in

countries outside Iraq, as a result of the series of conflicts that devastated the state in its modern history.

As a result of its turbulent history, many Iraqi writers and artists were already acquainted with life in exile long before the Anglo-American invasion. Although the monarchy was overthrown in 1958, ending the thirty years of unpopular British influence, a series of coup d'états pre-empted any long-term stability (Ismael, 2005: 611). In 1968, Iraq was to see the Ba'ath party claiming power, only for Saddam Hussein to start his 35 years of dictatorship around 10 years later. By the end of his reign, the people of Iraq had already lived through the disastrous effects of two aggressive wars (1980 and 1990), with two neighbouring countries: Iran and Kuwait. This was closely followed by thirteen years of economic sanctions that isolated Iraq from the international community and negatively affected its population, culminating in the invasion and eventually the occupation in March 2003.

Ferial Ghazoul argues in her editorial for the *International Journal of Contemporary Iraq Studies*: 'Literature and the arts in Contemporary Iraq' that it was this history of political conflicts of Iraq in the last 30 years that resulted in the marginalization of literature and the arts in the discourse of contemporary Iraq (2009: 233). The Journal which dedicated one of its issues to a survey of Iraq's literary and cultural scene started its publication in 2007 and has since focused considerably on Iraqi literature. Its attempts to remedy the marginalization of Iraqi literature are joined by others that include those of Catherine Cobham and Fabio Caiani, who have studied and promoted the works of such renowned Iraqi authors such as Fuad al-Takarli, Mahdi Issa Sakr and others. Also writing and publishing in the English language is Ghazoul herself who attempted to shed light on the ways in which Iraqi short fiction has responded to the reality of Iraqi life (Ghazoul, 2004: 1). Other recent attempts include Shakir Mustafa's *Contemporary Iraqi Fiction: An Anthology*, that makes the point that Iraq's history of national catastrophes opened "despite their tragic consequences a wide terrain for creativity and self expression" (Mustafa, 2008: xiv). In addition, Salih Altoma's latest bibliography of Iraqi fiction in translation contributes to a growing focus on Iraq's literary productions at a time when the world was witnessing a growing interest in Iraq after the invasion. The latest comprehensive attempt to survey the portrayal of the Anglo-American invasion is Suman Gupta's in his book titled *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq invasion* (2011). The book offers a survey of the literature made available in

English by Iraqis and non Iraqis alike. It includes poetry, plays, novels and general literary fiction that depict the undertaking or the aftermath of the Anglo-American invasion.

Although this dissertation focuses on an examination of the portrayal of home in Iraqi novels post 2003, and the ways in which Iraqi novelists responded to the invasion in the last nine years, it has to be taken into consideration that these new novels are to be seen within the broad spectrum of Iraqi history. Most of the writers examined here made a home in their new chosen country before the massive flight of Iraqis in 2003, but they responded to the invasion and its aftermath as writers who identified themselves as Iraqis. The themes and preoccupations of these novels are responses and interactions with utterances that preceded them and speak to utterances that might follow. Historically, Iraqi novels varied in their response to the reality of life in Iraq throughout its tumultuous history. Iraqi novelists responded to such events as the World Wars, the Lebanese civil war, the wars of liberation in the Arab world and the various revolutions in writing. Iraqi novels have reacted to the Palestinian plight and the Arab wars against Zionism in the Middle East. The main difference in the fiction produced before and after the two Gulf Wars, however, as pointed out by Najm Kāzīm lies in the fact that these two events presented the novelists with an immediate and direct experiences (2001: 89).

## 1.2 The Iraqi Novel: Gradual Progression

Najm Kāzīm alludes at the end of his survey of the Iraqi novel (1966-1988) to three possible categories of Iraqi fiction in the period between 1980 and 2003: novels of war, exilic novels and a third category for the miscellaneous (2009: 122). That the exilic novel could form a major and distinct category in Iraqi literature is telling of both its importance as a field of study as well as its being one of the major preoccupations of Iraqi writers as witnesses of Iraq's history. Although the themes of escape, alienation, exile and return from exile were common features in Iraqi novels between 1966 and 1980, and even before the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 (Kāzīm 2001: 88), these themes persisted and expanded with the persistence of its conflicts that often resulted in the displacement of Iraqi citizens. It comes as no surprise that the theme of exile in Iraq gradually "emerged as a hallmark of postwar literature in general" (Altoma, 1972: 211) and that "the concept of exile was stretched to include the exiles within and the exiles without" (Muzaffar, 2009: 238). The migration that accompanied each of the unfortunate incidents as Iraqis fled from a country drowning in sanctions and oppression brought many writers in close touch with foreign host countries and

shed light on themes of “identity, roots and belonging” ((Mustafa, 2008: xv). For example, Mustafa indicates that almost half of the writers whose excerpts are included in the anthology are currently citizens of different countries who portray in their writing the experience of living in the diaspora (Ibid), highlighting what Susannah Tarbush refers to as the “predicament of the Iraqi writer abroad” (2010).

Some examples from Iraqi fiction that demonstrate the exilic theme include: Daisy al-Amir’s short story *The Weeper* (1980) which was an adept portrayal of the “pains of dislocation” where “the un-homely condition of living away from Iraq is dramatized by an author who spent many years away from her country” (Ghazoul, 2004: 14). Similarly, Cobham reveals how Takarli’s novel *al-Raj‘ al-Ba‘īd* published in the same year presented to the novelist a way of return to Iraq without explicitly writing about the condition of exile “unlike many other writers in his position for whom exile is the ‘basic metaphor for modernity’” (Cobham, 2002: 182). While in al-Mana’s novel: *Shufuni, Shufuni (Just Look at Me, Me, 2001)*, the writer depicts “a painful substitute for a life she longs for but cannot tolerate when she returns” and faces the restrictions of the political and social setting of Iraq (Mustafa, 2008: xviii). The more recently published novel *An Iraqi in Paris* (2005) by Samuel Shimon depicts the journey of a Jewish Iraqi into exile in Paris in a more straightforward and autobiographical manner.

However, if Iraqi novelists in exile were free from the oppressive restrictions of the Saddam Hussein regime on artistic and literary expression, the novel that was written in the diaspora still owed much in themes, style and form to the Iraqi novel in general, specifically in the novelist’s attempts to disguise political meanings. The regime “not only prohibited criticism of the state and its symbols, but ruthlessly punished those who fell short of compliance” (Ibid xvi). Tripp states that the censorship exercised by those who held power in Iraq since 1958 left self-imposed exile as the only option for many of Iraq’s artists and writers “accelerating the haemorrhage of Iraq’s artistic and cultural talent that was to impoverish the country in the decades to come” (2007: 156). However, most Iraqi intellectuals who chose to stay in Iraq continued writing even under the Ba’athist restrictions by finding “subtle ways to nurture forms of historical memory and consciousness that subverted the state’s goals” (Davis, 2005: 22). Davis alludes to the way in which “writers and artists tended to take refuge in the past to spread their message” (Ibid 17) in such a way that assists them in escaping any close censorship of the literal meaning of what could possibly be

a very political text. Davis labels this as “a discourse of hidden texts”, namely a methodology of resistance that uses the past as a vehicle for engaging in “safe” political discourses under authoritarian rule” (Ibid). Ghazoul’s study supports this hypothesis. She points out with reliance on Muhsin al-Musawi “the role of ambivalence and the uncanny in allowing writers to express themselves in an otherwise restricted ambiance” (Ghazoul, 2004: 4). In the same way, the selections of Mustafa’s anthology demonstrate how “parables that employ elements of fantasy and settings well removed from the country’s contemporary times and places have enabled Iraqi writers to communicate subversive visions by manipulating the contradictions of the Ba’athist rule” (Mustafa, 2008: xvi). Iraqi writers responded to the political changes in Iraq “not simply as detached men of letters but often as active participants in organized political movements” (Altoma, 1972: 211), which often led many to seek a life in the diaspora to avoid the wrath of the regime.

What might initially have been a strategy to avoid persecution evolved into one of the distinctive characteristics of the Modern Iraqi novel and aided in its artistic growth. This persistent trend in fiction

has veered towards the fantastic, the surrealist, the Kafkaesque, the labyrinthine, the uncanny, not out of renunciation of the real, but out of verisimilitude. Life in Iraq is depicted in juxtaposed scenes rather than plots. Continuity is privileged over causality...the confidence in a hopeful future has given way to consciousness of the absurd and monstrous (Ghazoul quoted. in Mustafa, 2010: xiv).

Moreover, Mustafa adds that “a sense of the tragic and a sense of the absurd in the past two decades have apparently liberated Iraq from traditional and predominantly social themes, as well as from an aesthetic tepid in its adherence to realism” (Ibid xv).

The four selected novels in this chapter are meant to maintain diversity in both the writers’ backgrounds as well as their portrayal of home. As a result, they maintain a balance between the writers’ gender, generation, year of departure from Iraq and the associated circumstances, as well as the country in which the writers settled. The rationale of the survey is to offer a wide array of the writers’ portrayals of their relationship to their home country, and their changing perceptions of the meanings of home and its relationship to Iraq as a home country or a national homeland in the aftermath of the invasion of 2003, as part of the context of the modern history of Iraq. At the end of the chapter, I bring the analysis of these four novels into the context of the theoretical debate about the metaphorization of migration.

## 2. Probing the Nation's Narrative in Najm Wālī's (1965) *Ṣūrat Yūsuf*<sup>34</sup> (*Yūsuf's Picture* 2004)

Najm Wālī was born in 1965 in the south of Iraq where he lived until 1980. He left Iraq right after the first Gulf War started and he lived in Hamburg, Madrid, Florence, Oxford, St. Petersburg and other cities (*Yūsuf's Picture*, 283). He published several novels and short stories in both German and Arabic that reflect the effect of Iraq's history of wars and conflicts and his preoccupation with them. His novel *War in the Amusement Quarter* espoused an antiwar position as it grappled with the gravity of the Iran-Iraq war (Khalil et al., 1995: 525). Now living in Berlin, Wālī is a renowned writer whose novels are rapidly translated into several languages. The novel *Yūsuf's Picture* is the first Iraqi novel to depict the scene in Iraq after the events of March 2003. The story is about the two brothers Yūnis and Yūsuf who fall in love with the same girl as children. Yūnis, who is angry over the special bond that develops between his brother and the girl, prepares a pie filled with nails and gives it to his unsuspecting brother who serves it to his beloved. The girl dies instantly upon eating the pie, without Wālī offering any explanation as to how this could happen in reality. Yūsuf gets blamed for the girl's death as he is the one who is seen giving her the pie, while Yūnis walks away unharmed. The girl's father who is also Yūsuf's English teacher, spends the rest of his life grieving. This simple plot is where certainty ends in Wālī's novel, for every other incident and every other character in the novel after this point changes, melts, fuses, develops, or fades into something or someone else.

Eight chapters divided along topic lines, rather than chronology, make the body of Wālī's novel. The topics start at Escape and end with Return, passing by Revenge, Death, Names, Identities and al-Khayyām Street. The novel's eight chapters are narrated by different characters that gradually converge and diverge into the same original narrator. They are also framed by an ending that is situated at the beginning of the novel, and a beginning that is situated at the end of the novel. The Ending is in turn preceded by a short introduction or what Wālī titles a 'First Entry' and it is followed by a section titled 'Recording Machine' in

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<sup>34</sup> Since there's no available English translation of this novel, all the supporting quotes I use here are my own translation from the Arabic.

which the message the narrator hears on the recording left to him by the main protagonist: “It’s time. The murderer has to pay his dues” (Ibid 15), jumpstarts the novel.

The story, as Yūsuf tells the reader directly in his ‘First Entry’, starts and ends at the same place, at his home in Baghdad, passing by Baghdad’s landmarks, streets, cinemas and bars, the Baghdad littered with military tanks and army Jeeps, violent mobs, American Marines, the militias and mirages (Ibid 11). It is, Yūsuf says, the story of travelling between and among different names and identities ever since his release from jail when he carried the name of his brother, who was later found out to be an executioner working with the Saddam Hussein regime. Yūsuf then entrusts a narrator called Hārūn Wālī to narrate his story. While Yūsuf’s account is undated, Wālī’s account is dated at the end of his novel as having been written between April 2003 and December 2004 – which is also the actual time span for Najm Wālī’s writing.

## 2.1 Writing National Identities

In *The Rock of Tanios* discussed in chapter three, section 3, Amin Maalouf ridiculed Tanios’s obsession with his identity by depicting how it brought catastrophe upon the entire village. Maalouf’s critique of identity-obsessed Lebanon sheds considerable light on the Iraqi setting in the years surrounding the Anglo-American invasion of 2003. In *Sūrat Yūsuf*, Wālī employs the theme of identity in a way that contradicts some Iraqi accounts discussed in this chapter, but that is more in line with Maalouf’s critique. Inaam Kachachi (in section 4) will present the dilemma of two opposing national identities in the post 2003 conflict. She will not engage in examining the process of formation of identity itself, but will be more preoccupied with developing a framework where the two identities might be made to coexist. Kachachi’s protagonist will long for a home that is confined within just one national space and one national identity instead of two; one literally occupying the other. In this way, Kachachi problematizes the metaphorization of migration and its assumptions of a revision of national identities.

Wālī’s novel has more than one main protagonist. The first protagonist is the actual narrator and his name is Hārūn Wālī. He is requested to write the story of Yūsuf Mānī who is the second protagonist. Both Wālī and Mānī merge and diverge at different points throughout the novel. Early on, as Wālī lies in bed listening to the recording, he states: “I did not know if that feeling of panic that took over me all of a sudden was a result of the possibility that this person sleeping there could be anyone except me” (Ibid 13). Lying down half asleep, he

states that he is wandering around as several people, he imagines himself as Yūsuf and wonders if the stories Yūsuf told him belongs to him, whether they happened to him and he invented the rest:

wandering around more than one person, inventing as I wish a previous existence for me, involving myself in it no matter what I heard on the recording and what I have not heard, so I can put myself in his place and live through all what he lived through. The more I thought about this, the more liberated I felt from what I have heard and what I have not heard yet. As if the tape recorder has moved far away, or as if I am no longer there in the house, lying across the wide bed, or as if I am not there because of someone else other than me. I am Yūsuf who is waiting for me. Or I was the one there lying on the hospital bed injured, knowing I will die and so I asked him to go to the house. It doesn't matter where I am. In the house or in no place. If he wanted to know the truth, he should only turn on the tape recorder, I asked him to stay there and asked him to let me narrate the story...this is in any case his story even if it contained stories of others. And not as I had thought that I am healing him in this way by narrating a story after story to him, even if the story is in fact his, or at the very worst, a story I think belongs to him, when in fact it doesn't belong to anyone (Ibid 17).

From the start, Wālī the narrator, asserts his own fusion with Yūsuf. In painting the picture of Yūsuf, he states that the story and the picture are as much Yūsuf's as anyone else's. In that regard, °Ulaywī wonders if the shifting identities, the intended confusion and the ease with which names and labels are borrowed are meant to depict the “legacy of the faces, names and history of fraud in Iraq” (2010). In addition, Ḥasan al-Ka°bī argues that the Iraqi writer °Alī Badr as well as Wālī undermine, in their writing, the notion of national identity as they transform incidents and people to mere mental structures that are susceptible to changes in perception and lapses or deceptions of memory and recollection (2010). al-Ka°bī states that Wālī believes that national identity is flawed in its formation, and it also induces violence: “labels that are results of identities, build a bloody history” (Ibid). As a result, Wālī's text actually depicts many characters and none at all: the narrator Wālī, Yūsuf “the innocent”, Yūnis his brother the executioner whose name Yūsuf borrows to avoid the label of a murderer, Joseph al-Kremli or Joseph K. who facilitates changes in identities through the provision of the necessary legal papers are all the same person, and ultimately not a person at all – but imagined constructs in an uncertain elusive narrative. Similarly, Sarāb (a name that literally translates to mirage) is at the same time the young child who was killed when she ate the cake, Yūsuf's wife later on, as well as his brother's Yūnis's wife; the mother of Rifqah,

Rahmah, Raʿfah and Shafaqah (names which literally translate to sympathy, mercy, clemency and pity) are all the same woman.

al-Kaʿbī argues that Sarāb “symbolizes the land in its virginal state, killed in her youth with the nail-stuffed pie” (2010). She dies, departs and is raped more than once, and thus embodies the metaphor of the impure nation that readers find out near the end of the novel might have only been part of a play on a stage. As al-Kaʿbī explains:

Yūsuf repeats the narration of Sarāb’s story as a play performed in primary school. It was then followed by consecutive and chronological narration according to varying points of view, from the front and the back. They are dreams that may have happened or not (2010).

All the characters exist in the narrator’s construct of the events in Yūsuf’s own account, which in turn is a construct of Yūsuf’s memory. They hold their significance and their representations only as constructs; and consequentially they can fuse, fade and develop into other characters preventing any certainty or truths.

Wālī’s naming of his hazy characters is also telling of his clear position on the notion of national identity. The four names of Yūnis’s daughters mentioned above, although seemingly benign, are not what they seem. The narrator explains that the girls’ names were chosen by their father the executioner who wanted to be surrounded by the screams of his victims. In this way, the names gain precedence while their holders are marginalized as mere holders of an oppressive legacy, in the same way nationals of one country identify themselves with an oppressive nation-state. But aside from the daughters’ names, every other name in the novel is, in fact, merely functional. The narrator Hārūn carries the novelist’s last name, the illusive girl who was murdered, but later becomes Yūsuf’s wife is Sarāb or Mirage. Yūsuf and Yūnis are names derived from the Quranic context as two prophets, where the Quranic Sūrah associated with each is characterized by the dominance of the story and its story telling. Hence, they are employed here to supplement the promise of the story made early in the novel: *Hikāyat al-Ḥānah* (The story of the bar), or *Hikāyat al-Madīnah* (The story of the city). While the name Joseph, which is incidentally the name used in the title of the translated version of the novel, is simply another identity of Yūsuf’s with a more foreign name.

## 2.2 The Narrative Structure overshadows the National Story

This absence of characters from Wālī’s novel naturally merges with the lack of a conventional plot to assert his point about the absence of truths and certainties and assists in ascertaining the artificiality of the nation. As a result, the novel’s strongest features are the

elements of the narrative structure that overshadow the details of the actual plot. Mahā Ḥasan notes in her review of the novel that *Sūrat Yūsuf* “does not attract you nor does it entertain you, but it provokes your masochism in following the pain” (2010). Ḥasan who describes the novel as “impossible to happen, impossible to write and difficult to read” believes that the painful text indulges in the act of recollection of the traces of the painful history of Iraq accompanied by a narration that is equally painful in its slowness, its lingering over details, and its confusion (Ibid). Wālī’s novel, in fact, has neither a conventional beginning nor end, and as a result has no climax of events and no resolution. The novel, the form that accompanied the rise of the nation, in this instance seems to be utilized by Wālī to dismantle the idea of the nation itself through the absence of a coherent narrative that triggers an emotional reaction. Yūsuf, who is unable to obtain any certainty about the events that have taken place, wonders as he searches for his brother’s dead body in the hospital’s morgue:

Everything is susceptible to spread like a contagious disease; like the air moving as these two boys push their cardboard boxes. The one narrating does the same thing; he passes a disease on to his listeners, until it becomes possible to convince you of anything; that there is a rational excuse and reason for everything specially if it’s narrated in a way that garners excitement, or accompanied by a tone of sadness, in order to gain solidarity (*Yūsuf’s Picture*, 76).

Wālī’s novel, then, is intended to acquire neither excitement nor solidarity. The plot remains secondary to the primary goal of delegitimizing the nation. As a result, Wālī’s themes are mostly marked with the elements of fear, madness and violence through the continuous reference to Iraq through its centre Baghdad and, ultimately, through the reference to Baghdad through its most violent places, for example: Abū Ghraib prison, the hospital’s morgue, the military tanks, the soldiers and masks. Madness closely accompanies violence as two patients who escaped from the mental health hospital follow Yūsuf as he wanders around Baghdad.

Wālī does not engage in the actual description of Iraq in the early aftermath of the invasion as much as he engages with the idea of dismantling the nation itself through the narrative technique. This is coupled with the insistence of the narrator, the novelist and the protagonist that they are all one and the same. Jalāl Na‘īm appears to be correct that Wālī has found a license to resort to deception in the story telling technique that he employed in the novel through the use of masks, tricks and ploys that allow him to narrate stories that are then

dismantled to tell a different tale (2006). None of the stories presented belong to any one of the characters, but are collectively shared in fragments and pieces among them.

While the absence of a conventional plot supports Ḥasan's view that the novel might be a lament over the conditions in Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion, there is more evidence in support of Ḥamzah 'Ulaywī's view that in *Ṣūrat Yūsuf*, Najm Wālī aims to dismantle the idea of the nation. The novel associates the word home only with the handbag that Yūsuf carries around with him, implying that the only refuge possible is not the nation but a journey ('Ulaywī, 2010).

### 2.3 The Recollection of the Past in an Exilic Setting

As a novel written in exile, Wālī's novel *Ṣūrat Yūsuf* is excessively preoccupied with the process of recollection and remembering the past. Such novels, in general, feature an attempt to understand the process by which the past has led to the present. Wālī's preoccupation with remembering, however, stands in contrast to these more dominant exilic texts. In fact, Wālī outright ridicules a simplistic understanding of memory:

Memory works according to its own logic in accordance with a chaotic mood most of the time. Insistence and failure, sadness and desperation, yearning and loss, bitterness and wounds. These are what drive a person to insist on remembering, remembering one image before another (*Yūsuf's Picture* 38).

This fixation on memory is then carried further throughout the rest of the novel as many passages start with the phrase: "he remembered..." then goes on to evaluate the difference between the past and the present, only to reveal that the protagonist is uncertain of the extent to which these events had actually happened (Ibid 156, 171, 205). The narrator states:

Yūsuf often asked himself: what is forgetting? They say that it's the other side of the coin of memory. But does this answer provide him with consolation? Why do we insist on remembering a certain picture and forgetting another? And who is to say that the image we choose to repeat its narration several times, insisting to narrate it on one occasion or another, that it did in fact happen to us? What makes us narrate it with such truthfulness? Why do we repeat the same story when we discover at times that we have changed it for another? That we are actually narrating a story that happened to someone else, and in this way we replace ourselves with others? Is it out of a desire for each of us to be another? Is it a hidden desire in all of humanity to be actors? Do we envy actors for changing themselves every day? (Ibid 37)

While most of the events of the novel lack certainty, there are only a few elements that are repeated with explicit insistence, urging the reader to document their importance. The first of

these elements is the young girl's description: "the young girl with green eyes, blond braids and a blue T-shirt". The full description is repeated over thirty times in the novel with an insistence that contrasts with the girl's actual name: Sarāb (Mirage). If, as al-Ka'bi argued, Sarāb symbolizes the nation, then Wālī could be affirming the importance of remembering the nation as the root of the conflict of the novel, the root of the broken relationship between Yūsuf and his brother, and the act of murder which started the sequence of identity changes and signalled the creation of a murderer. This idea is then supplemented by the repetition of Joseph's name: "Joseph al-Kremlī or Joseph K.", the man who facilitated identity theft throughout the novel. Violence and artificiality become the accompanying elements of the nation, which is in fact a Sarāb or a mirage created by storytelling.

Through the absence of a core narrative, conventional characters and a linear plot, Wālī aimed to destroy any element of certainty that might have strengthened a belief in the nation. Memories, people and places were painted as interchangeable, permeable and merging in a way that precludes their actual existence. The novel starts at a point that seeks to gather the loose ends of the 35-year long nightmare of an Iraq under the Saddam regime. As Na'im points out, it "is not just a moment of recollection or revision, but a moment of punishment which necessitates an evaluation to say the least" (2006). In Wālī's evaluation, the nation appears to be a fictitious construct in which people imprison themselves and create an environment of fear. Hence, the message on the tape recorder that cites a murderer who has to pay his dues seems to be directed at the nation itself.

The passages, quoted above, highlight Wālī's fixation on this process of construction of artificial truths through memory and recollection. Ulaywī argues that the growing number of Iraqi writers in exile, coupled with the long history of oppression in Iraq, has given rise to a generation of Iraqi writers who are very critical of the concept of the nation (2010). However, it seems that Najm Wālī stands with a small number of Iraqi writers who are outspoken critics of the nation as a concept. Although most writers discussed in this chapter are critical of the Iraqi nation, few will get rid of the concept of the nation altogether. In the next section, for example, Iqbal Qazwini writes an account of an Iraqi exiled in Germany, suspended between the belief in the nation and painful nostalgia.

### 3. Nostalgic Yearnings in Iqbal Qazwini's *Nāfidhat Zubaydah*<sup>35</sup> (*Zubaida's Window* 2006)

In this section, I turn to the first novel by Iqbal Qazwini, an Iraqi woman writer who portrayed the life of an Iraqi woman in exile. Qazwini was born in Iraq and has lived in Germany since 1978, as she was exiled by the Saddam Hussein regime for joining a delegation to the Women's International Democratic Federation in East Berlin in her twenties ('Iqbal Qazwini', 2010). *Zubaida's Window* sets the central protagonist's experience outside of Iraq, even as the protagonist remains focused solely on the only window to Iraq. This trend, already depicted more dominantly by younger Lebanese novelists in exile, shifts the focus from the experience of the invasion inside Iraq to the experience of reacting to it in the country of exile. In other words, and as Syrine Hout has previously maintained in her analysis of Lebanese novels after the civil war, this trend of literature focuses on a by-product of the events in the home country, which is exile or expatriation (2006: 190). The fragmentation of narrative that characterized most of these Lebanese novels is also present in *Zubaida's Window* where the narration of the exilic experience takes place alongside the non-linear memories recalled from the protagonist's life in Iraq in the last thirty years. Yet in a departure from these novels, *Zubaida's Window* is narrated through an omniscient narrator, creating a distance between the protagonist and their experience.

*Zubaida's Window* cannot be accurately described as contributing to immigrant literature, as Qazwini keeps the focus mostly on the protagonist's existential struggle as opposed to the practical obstacles of adaptation in a foreign country that might figure more prominently in immigrant literature. While she provides a damning critique of the nation as an oppressive violent conformist project, by embracing Bhabha's view of the nation, Qazwini does not endorse the other side of the debate, as she does not celebrate a view of a harmonious life in exile that is not weighed down by the memories of the home country. Qazwini's protagonist is unable to create a home away from Iraq. Without the support of family and torn from the security of past memories, Zubaida remains alone, and hints at being unaccepted by her new host country.

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<sup>35</sup> All quotes are from the version of the English translation of the novel cited in the bibliography.

Qazwini uses the 2003 Anglo-American invasion as the last in a series of ruptures between Zubaida and Iraq and depicts a life alienated in both the home country and in exile. “Satisfied neither by native lands nor exile” (*Zubaida’s Window* 31), Qazwini depicts Zubaida’s experience as a restless one from which redemption remains out of reach and home completely absent. In her recalled memories, Zubaida outlines the failure of the national project to provide a sense of home and the existential and practical hardships of exile that hinder the formation of a home. In this way, her text defends its nostalgia as the sole remaining survival mechanism in exile.

### 3.1 Zubaida’s Window to Iraq in Exile

Zubaida, an Iraqi woman living in Berlin, watches the news of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of her home country on a TV screen. The title of the novel is a reference to the television set which transmits nonstop images of the violence in Iraq, bringing it into her cold German apartment in a building where she lives on the same floor with a German neighbour who confuses her country Iraq with Iran. Looking through her window, Zubaida becomes transfixed to her sole connection to her home country. She occasionally turns down the sound and watches the silent blasts going off on the TV screen to the background of her own thoughts and memories. As she observes the escalating violence, Zubaida also recalls her childhood and adolescent memories growing up in Iraq. She starts to reassess her choice of departure in light of what she now considers a lonely wretched life in a cold European country.

Watching her TV, Zubaida relives her entire history of exile once again; the decision to leave, the entanglement of her brother on the war front, her deceased pilot lover, the scattered family members, the death of her grandfather, the support group in exile and her own journey of adaptation or lack thereof, alongside the process of the unification of Germany. Her memory, which is stimulated by the invasion, recalls the tumultuous Iraqi history of wars, sanctions, oppression and invasions as one uninterrupted event, as incidents overlap and merge in her head. Zubaida recalls the revolution of 1958, the fall of the monarchy, the rise of Saddam Hussein, the increasing oppression, the failure of the military and the fall of Baghdad. She also spreads her own personal memories in the form of letters, postcards, souvenirs and photos on the carpet as she tries to reconstruct and recall her past in a way that makes sense of her present.

### 3.2 Features of Exilic Literature in *Zubaida's Window*

In her review of *Zubaida's Window*, Amira Nowaira argued that the novel's narrative leads the reader into a situation she termed "compassion fatigue" which is "a feeling one experiences after viewing too many images of misery and grief" (2008). This overall sense of compassion fatigue is seen differently by Nadjé al-Ali who wrote the novel's afterword. Al-Ali termed it a " 'crisis of meaning', sometimes bordering on the surreal or even madness" (2008: 124). Both descriptions attempt to grasp the struggle of Zubaida to cope with her life in exile in the shadow of her own seemingly voluntary decision to leave, her contemplation of return, her guilt at having left Iraq and her inability to adopt Berlin as a home.

Qazwini illustrates the depth of Zubaida's existential struggle by showing how Zubaida fails to feel at home in Berlin despite repetitive attempts to create a feeling of a normal life. She leaves the "dreary, alien, lifeless" walls of her apartment and seeks companionship in the city, but walking in the city intensifies Zubaida's self-consciousness and accentuates her feelings of difference. She assumes all eyes are upon her watching her as she hangs her coat and sips her coffee. She pretends to wait for a companion to arrive lest people assume she is alone. She enters into a café and looks for the "familiar" (*Zubaida's Window* 59), but decides to sit in an "empty, secluded place" (Ibid). The café's waiter reminds her of an army general who is judging her and thinking of a way to punish her as he serves her coffee. The overheated room makes her feel "oppressed" (Ibid 60). She walks in the city searching:

for familiarity among things – among the pavement stones, and among the birds swimming in the river near her apartment. She seeks the companionship of the dispersed light on the walls of the houses but doesn't find it (Ibid).

As she waits for a train at the station Zubaida feels that her "loneliness adds to her self-consciousness, and it seems to her that all the arriving and departing travellers are staring only at her. She feels quite naked – exposed to everybody's gaze" (Ibid 76).

Self-consciousness, however, merges with her belief that the host is also unwilling to accept her. She questions: "how can people continue to exist among those who keep reminding them that they are strangers?" (Ibid 29) She recalls the fall of the walls when, as Germans celebrated, Zubaida watched from the margins and thought: "the common history that had brought them together had separated her from them.... her joy had to be marginal and

resistant to a history she was not part of” (Ibid 27). She remains sensitive to her neighbour’s confusion over her country of origin as he courteously chats with her on early mornings. In her failure to embrace Germany as a home, Zubaida lays the blame on an unaccepting host at times, and on her own failures and shortcomings at others.

As she paints a bleak picture of Zubaida’s life in Germany, Qazwini’s exilic text coincides accurately with Said’s description of the art of exile: “Composure and serenity are the last things associated with the work of exiles. Artists in exile are decidedly unpleasant, and their stubbornness insinuates itself into even their exalted works” (2001: 182). This unpleasantness that accompanies Zubaida throughout the journey, despite the privileges of her new locale, coupled with the lack of any active “redemptive act” (Nowaira, 2008) on Zubaida’s part, seems intentional by an author whose novel was published only three years after the invasion and deals with the disillusion of an entire nation. As her exile enters its third decade, Zubaida continues to live in isolation and alienation from her new surroundings. She becomes passive and continues to indulge in her pain refusing to accept that her new reality offers liberating options of travel. Although she possesses a European passport that enables her to move freely between countries in a way which she previously longed, she does not use it.

Nowaira then rightly notes:

Reading *Zubaida's Window*, the reader might feel the lack of a centre to the narrative. As one reads, one keeps expecting, or at least hoping for, a turn in events, or some reassertion of the power of the human spirit to triumph despite adversities. However, no such change occurs. (2008).

Zubaida’s attempt to actively seek a “triumph” in Germany naturally appears unlikely for a woman who still suffers from the guilt that accompanies the decision of departure. This guilt remains a powerful part of Zubaida’s psyche as she wonders over and over again if by staying she could “have helped put out the fires” (*Zubaida’s Window* 26). With these thoughts, Zubaida can only stay fixated on following the news of her brother on the war front, living more in letters and phone calls that tie her to the home country than in Berlin.

### 3.3 Alienated from the Nation

The novel’s starting point is a moment which signalled to Zubaida the downfall of Baghdad and the end to a dream she had maintained in her exile even as she refused to confront it. Ideally, Zubaida had longed for a better Iraq; the place where both her memories and her

companionships converge. As the invasion shatters this dream, Zubaida “now grieves over twin tragedies: the tragedies of her country and of her deferred dream” (Ibid 63). Her worries over the failure of the national project converge with her worries for her family and loved ones fighting and she wonders “how is a soldier to balance between his duty to defend his homeland and his desire to reject the dictator?” (Ibid 86) and in another instance she muses: “this is an inequitable battle and the soldiers, as much as they love their country, hate the dictator” (Ibid 21). Realizing her predicament in failing to cope with the national project in her home country or her new German setting, Zubaida admits that “it was a mistake to replace feelings with political slogans” (Ibid 16).

Zubaida says early on in the novel that during her life in Iraq “she never felt part of the world around her” (Ibid 10). Her decision to live in Germany was voluntary. However, as voluntary as the decision might have been, Zubaida found herself “in one half of a cold city, whose other half was encircled by electrified wire and iron helmets, planted by an iron regime in the middle of the dynamic West” (Ibid). This seemingly futile journey in exile was also experienced by Rawi Hage’s protagonist in *Cockroach*. However, while the struggle of Hage’s protagonist was more related to the difficulties of integration of an immigrant on the margins of Canadian society, here Iqbal Qazwini presents us with the mental condition of exile through an Iraqi woman whose life in Berlin as an employee in the International Women’s organization (Ibid 21) occurs with relative material ease in comparison to Hage’s unnamed immigrant.

There is another similarity to be drawn here between Hage’s protagonist, Najm Wālī’s protagonist and Zubaida: namely, their indictment of the nation. All of these protagonists condemned all nations as being equally bloody projects. Zubaida remembers both revolutions in Iraq – one from her childhood and one from her adolescence – as equally bloody affairs. She recalls the bloody murder of King Faisal II as “a shameful blot on history’s page” (Ibid 32). As a child of five or six, Zubaida witnessed the betrayal of the king by his own army, his killing, and recalls the mob dragging the body by a motorcycle. She wondered then “whether the man who disappeared into the crowd with a knife in his hand and the hem of his gown in his mouth was ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’” (Ibid 33). Thus, Qazwini made a damning critique of the nation because of its violence in the murder of a young King who held up the Quran and was prepared to surrender.

The indoctrination of its subjects, the demands of conformity, the erasure and alterations to history are all elements of the national project that alienated Zubaida and encouraged her decision to live away from Iraq. For example, she remembers how her teachers had covered up the picture of the King in her textbooks to conveniently erase episodes from the national history (Ibid 34). Witnessing the ironically named “bloodless” revolution years later, Zubaida remembers the hanging of the young people who were charged with collaboration with the enemy. Her memory doesn’t erase the images of people carelessly chatting, eating and chanting together “Long Live the Nation!” as they watched the hanged dead bodies” (Ibid 68). Forced by her school’s rules to attend this gathering, Zubaida remembers how she:

wanted to slip away without notice and without informing the school administration and the party establishment. A voice inside urged her to get out of the crowd, to move stealthily to a side street, and to go home. There, pack your bags and wait for the right chance to leave (Ibid 66).

Her judgement of the crowd is apparent:

Now as she recalls the events, she can see the whole picture more clearly: the crowds coming to witness the death scene without having had any evidence or proof; the flaunting of death in the square; the speaker who shook his hands in ecstasy and revealed on behalf of the nation, castigating the traitor and promising a similar fate to anyone tempted to betray the country (Ibid 66-67).

Equally alienated from the nation as a political project and an ideology with which she previously might have had some affinity, as well as the life she persistently sought in exile, Zubaida’s sense of loneliness is complete, justifying the pessimistic tone of the novel. Having critiqued the nation and failed to cope with her chosen exile, Qazwini’s protagonist escapes into imaginary trips on which she assesses the difficulty of return to a newly invaded and occupied Iraq.

### **3.4 The Futility of Return from Exile**

Even as she imagines an unlikely return, Zubaida takes into account the current political, religious and socioeconomic climate in Iraq, specifically, and the Middle East more generally. On her imaginary return trip, she goes to Jordan, as close to Iraq as possible, given the circumstances after the invasion. The narrator details three encounters that influence Zubaida’s decision for a stay in the Middle East. Zubaida’s encounter with the Egyptian

Masters graduate who sells tea in plastic cups in the park becomes an expressed warning of return to a life in the Middle East where her education and experience may very likely go unacknowledged. Equally menacing was the attitude of the cab driver who quizzed her over her religious identity and he warned her of the heartbreak that comes with death in exile. Finally, her encounter with the Iraqi woman whose husband disappeared in the violent chaos of Iraq presents her with the last reason not to return even on an imaginary trip to Baghdad, despite the warmth of life in the “Sunny Middle East”. She longs for a life in Jordan or Lebanon where she can still see the “Arab moon” (Ibid 91), but as her suitcase stays empty (Ibid 97), Zubaida and the readers know that there will be no active steps taken in that regard.

As a result of this imaginative yet careful overly rational assessment of return, dwelling in memories and nostalgia seem like the only cure for Zubaida’s condition. At the end of her imaginary journey, the narrator states that:

from the stories of other travellers, Zubaida knows the routes, the places for drinking tea with them in the squares and gardens, she has travelled from her balcony, and she has loved the journey. She weaves a lovely, golden shawl from these stories and wears it over her black coat. She wraps herself in the shawl, creating a refuge from cold, estranged, long nights (Ibid 96-97).

Unable to return and “living in a present that offers her absolutely nothing” (Ibid 7), Zubaida indeed admits that memory has become her only refuge (Ibid 27) even as it isolates her further from her German dwellings.

In Zubaida’s case, while the break from Iraq appears voluntary, it had inevitably resulted from an earlier sense of alienation from ideology, from the national project and from the general social setting. While her insistence on recalling the past with sadness in Germany could be seen as nostalgia, it might actually be more accurately described as grief over the loss of an ideal of conciliation between one’s home country (as a place of birth, early memories and family) and the state (as a political structure of governance determined by an ideology of nationalism). In this case, the subject is indeed helpless, and this helplessness hinders the ease of settling in and prevents her enjoying the privileges her new location has to offer. Having seen all her loved ones “vanish” in their grief, Zubaida’s heart literally refuses to cope.

The ending of the novel here is in exact contrast to that of another novel by another exiled Iraqi woman writer. At the end of °Alyā Mamdūh’s (1944) *al-Maḥbūbāt* (*The Loved Ones* 2002), the central protagonist, Suhayla, who had been lying in a coma on a hospital bed

in Paris wakes up and slowly “recovers little by little to overcome her death in life state. She opened her eyes and regains consciousness slowly but surely” (Ghazoul, 2007: 317). While Suhayla regains her consciousness as her loved ones visit her and assure her of a connection to Iraq, Zubaida’s consciousness falters as she loses those people who had once kept a connection to her home country alive, as well as her own strength of memory. Her “weak heart”, having caused her once to faint at the sight of the execution of the traitors of the state, also fails to stay alive away from the support of her family and the nurturing of a home. By the novel’s end, Zubaida “feels a new serenity” (*Zubaida’s Window* 121) in the approaching death.

4. Assessing the Viability of having Two Homes in Two Countries in Inaam Kachachi's (1952) *al-Ḥafīdah al-Amrīkīyah*<sup>36</sup> (*The American Granddaughter* 2008)

In *The American Granddaughter*, Inaam Kachachi complicates the metaphorization of migration by presenting a character whose two national allegiances come together in an actual conflict that make a reconciliation between the two affiliations problematic. The main protagonist is Zeina, who expresses her belonging to both Iraq and the USA at the onset of her journey, learns the impossibility of applying such theoretical notions to her practical experience as a returning Iraqi American citizen to the country where her extended family still lives. Zeina herself has not chosen to migrate from Iraq to the US. She was brought to the US as a child with her family. As a result, she learned to see herself as an American citizen. In telling her story, she indeed sees herself as an American citizen and she behaves as one until she comes into contact with her history through her grandmother and the rest of her family. Her “hybrid” identity tests the claim, which Bhabha put forward, for a migration that revises the fixed national identity. In the contestation of the “origin” as a claim of supremacy of narrative where one can overcome the “emergence of the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign” (Bhabha, 2000: 157). Zeina’s encounter with this process of contestation does not offer a so-called vantage view as she herself admits at times. Instead, she realises that national identity in the setting of this conflict remains the most important frame of reference. Moreover, Said’s notion of contrapuntal awareness – the awareness of two cultures and two frames of reference that exist simultaneously for a migrant – is challenged as the two affiliations are brought together in a struggle in the wake of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. In this section, after offering a brief summary of the novel’s plot, I explore how Zeina’s idealized notion of home as a double belonging to two different nations fails the test of her return to Iraq by examining the roles played by loyalty, language and history.

Kachachi was born in 1952 in Baghdad where she was a journalist in the Iraqi Press and the Iraqi radio (Khedairi, 2006). She was one of the many Iraqis who fled the country in 1979 at the onset of the Iran-Iraq war. She arrived in Paris at the age of 27 and went on to

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<sup>36</sup> All references to the text of the novel made here are to the English translation of the novel as cited in the bibliography.

obtain a PhD degree in Journalism and later became a correspondent for several newspapers. She has since published two non-fiction books; the first was *Lorna, her years with Jawad Selim* (Arabic, Dar el-Jadid, Beirut, 1998), and *Paroles d'Irakiennes* (French, Le Serpent à Plumes, Paris, 2003) which was published just before the Anglo-American invasion and in which Kachachi offered a panoramic view of Iraqi women writers' experience in a country under sanctions, as reflected in selected poems, novels and short stories (Ibid). Soon after the 2003 invasion, Kachachi made a 30-minute documentary film about Naziha Al Dulaimi, the Iraqi woman doctor who, in 1959, was the first woman to become a minister in an Arab country (Inaam Kachachi, 2006). Kachachi's encounter with fiction, and novels in general, started only around two years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, as she published her first novel *Rivulets of the Heart* in 2005. In *Rivulets of the Heart*, Kachachi provided a historical and social review of the lives of minorities to whom immigration or exile became the only refuge. *The American Granddaughter* was shortlisted for the 2008-2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction. This section focuses on tracing the journey of the novel's protagonist as she attempts to reconcile her belonging to two different countries with one another and as she struggles to come to terms with home in the shadow of a conflict between the two countries.

On the cover of the Arabic edition, the author's brief biography introduces her as an Iraqi who insists on her "Iraqiness" in spite of her stay in France for many years. Both Kachachi and her protagonist experienced this life outside of Iraq. As a child Zeina left Iraq for the United States, seeking refuge with her family in Detroit after her father was kidnapped and tortured by the Iraqi Ba'ath authorities for complaining that the news bulletin he read on TV had run a bit too long. She returns to Iraq after fifteen years as an interpreter for the American army in the belief that by this she is fulfilling her patriotic role as an American citizen who expresses gratitude for the country that embraced her as a destitute immigrant. Zeina also mentions the gain of 97,000 Dollars, which would contribute to her brother's education and her family's well being. In Iraq, she is faced with her Iraqi grandmother Rahma, who believes that Zeina's work for the American army constitutes an act of outright betrayal of her family and her country. As a result, Zeina faces her family in Iraq as a people who attempt to influence her to change her allegiances by exposing to her the reality of the American operations in Iraq.

Zeina mentions her disillusionment with the US army's mission on the first page of the novel. She reflects on her experience in Iraq individually without allusion to the readers,

her fellow Americans or the Iraqi people. She asks: “Am I colour blind? Or was my vision a perfect ten and what I see now on the screen is the wrong colours?” (*The American Granddaughter* 9) These lines at the beginning of the novel are written after the end of her experience in Baghdad, one from which she returned exhausted, disillusioned and defeated. With this stated, Zeina starts to recount her journey knowing all the while that her learnt lesson has already been stated, and what remains now is narrating her journey to the readers as well as her grandmother. The novel is narrated by two narrators. The first is Zeina and the second is the author Inaam Kachachi herself. Kachachi and Zeina are in a literary struggle, each trying to assert the dominance of their viewpoint. Zeina believes that Kachachi wants her to arrive at a simplistic patriotic conclusion that determines the triumph of her Iraqi heritage and marks her collaboration with the American army as an act of betrayal. Zeina, however, even as she admits the injustice inherent in the US-led invasion cannot fully repudiate her allegiance to the US. The novel is a depiction of the struggle between the two narrators.

#### 4.1 The History of Migration from Iraq

Kachachi does not claim that Zeina’s circumstances of immigration from Iraq to the US are exceptional; she actually places her in the wider historical framework of Iraqi migration. The readers get the first view of the Iraqi migrants in the US through the selection process for the interpreters at the CIA building, as Iraqis of different sects and ethnicities apply for the interpreting posts. They varied between old and new immigrants who came to the US in the 1960s or 1970s, or even later, as Iraqis continued to flee wars or ideological persecution, as well as women, both conservative and liberal, and former Ba’athist officials who all departed Iraq for various reasons (Ibid 26). Moreover, Zeina’s grandmother, Rahma, repetitively refers to her many children and grandchildren who are scattered across the globe between New Zealand, Syria, UAE, Canada, Jordan, Sweden, London and other countries (Ibid 63).

With this as her background, Zeina looked condescendingly upon her foster brother, Muhaymen, who believes that migration is a cause for sorrow and describes it as a crack in the self. While he sees migration as a form of captivity, Zeina looks upon it as a sign of stability, and argues that belonging to a nation does not require a physical presence in one country (Ibid 144). As such, Muhaymen’s view of immigration coincides with Said’s discussion of the condition of exile: it is sorrowful, painful and dominated by longing and nostalgia. Zeina, however, views migration as a necessary condition of modern life. For

Zeina, migration is not associated with pain and sadness. She believes that she can form a home regardless of the actual geographical place.

When Zeina visits Iraq, it is the memory of her grandmother's house that comes to her mind. She starts recounting the memory of her grandmother rocking her as an infant back and forth while singing an Iraqi lullaby. In contrast to this memory that invokes emotional ties to Iraq, Kachachi quickly shifts to Zeina's first encounter with the Iraqi people after her arrival from the US on board a military tank. On the tank, she encounters the Iraqi people who look at her in the American army uniform with hate and disgust, in that way juxtaposing her earliest memory with her present reality as an outsider. She cites this encounter as her first time of becoming aware of both her belonging to Iraq and the painful feeling that now comes with being part of the enemy's army. Briskly, however, Zeina puts forward the sum of the money of 97,000 Dollars as her motivation to join the US army as an interpreter, even as she disguises it in a cloak of American patriotism by remembering the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and thus depicting herself as one of the many Americans who associated the operation to liberate Iraq with al-Qaida's attack on the World Trade Centre (Ibid 18). By discussing the money Zeina stands to gain from taking part in the army, Kachachi prevents Zeina from convincingly using the values of patriotism and gratitude to defend her case as a citizen who joined the army out of hope for the liberation of the Iraqi people.

Zeina never introduces herself as an exiled Iraqi, rather, she sees herself as an American citizen with an Iraqi background. She does not initially long for a home she lost nor does she suffer from nostalgic feelings to an idealized past. Kachachi portrays Zeina as a young Arab American woman who belongs more to a generation of Iraqi immigrants who allegedly struck a certain balance between both identities. As a result, Zeina speaks of herself as a well-integrated immigrant to a degree that goes beyond all of the characters in any of the Lebanese novels previously discussed. There is no mention of a home in the US that is decorated with Iraqi souvenirs, nor long letters exchanged with family and friends in Iraq. Zeina speaks of a circle of Arab American friends, of her American boyfriend, Calvin, and recounts her shock at the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> as an American, with minimal reference to her Arab background. This allows Zeina to uphold her initial claim that she is a citizen of the world who freely belongs to two homes in two countries.

Thus, in the case of the Lebanese novels while most journeys were predominantly journeys about immigrants settling in new countries in the West, *The American*

*Granddaughter* is a novel of return. It is not, however, a return that was induced by longing or nostalgia, but as part of an army that she initially believed to be one of liberation and later she sees as one of occupation. The return to Iraq then exposes the difficulty of the initial premise of the smooth double belonging to two countries. Throughout the journey, Zeina encounters a series of confrontations that lead her to realise that her link to Iraq causes problems in her role as an American citizen working with the American army. Such instances of conflict abound: as she joins the army inspection operations as an interpreter, Zeina finds that her identification lies more with the Iraqis than with the American soldiers. Moreover, she communicates her anger to her fellow American soldiers who show disrespect for Shiite religious rituals. Eventually, she tries to defend herself to her grandmother and Muhaymen who explicitly and implicitly accuse her of betraying her Iraqi roots. Such intense confrontations gradually work towards magnifying the disillusionment with which Zeina both starts and concludes her narration.

As a result, Zeina's Iraqi identity is highlighted either when under attack as in the case with the American soldiers disrespecting religious rituals, or when challenged by her own Iraqi family. She reacts with resistance as her grandmother embarks on a process of rehabilitation of her American granddaughter and attempts to restore her to her Iraqi values and traditions. She treats her younger foster brother's desire to make use of her American passport with sarcasm. She enters into Arabic poetry contests when challenged by Muhaymen that leave him in awe of her skills in the Arabic language, proving to him that she has an excellent grasp of Arabic as well (Ibid 133). Kachahi makes it clear in the first few pages of the novel that Zeina's mother has always spoken Arabic with an Iraqi accent at home while English remained the language the family used on the streets, at work or when they followed the news – it was a language employed outside of the house, only to be restored again once the family was at home (Ibid 21). She surmises that she never forgot her Arabic after she left Baghdad (Ibid 22). As a result, aside from loyalty which figures as a defining element in Zeina's identity, language also plays an important role as a determinant of Zeina's belonging. Although her reaction comes in English to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as she keeps repeating with her fellow Americans the words "Oh my God" over and over again, Zeina reacts emotionally to the flirtations of a passerby in Iraq lamenting that his flirtations could never be adequately translated or have their meaning conveyed in a different language (Ibid 87). In comparison to Iraqi men, her American boyfriend, Calvin, starts to pale while the

eloquent Arabic speaking Muhaymen, her older foster brother, starts to appear attractive by virtue of his “Iraqiness” in language, behaviour and features.

#### 4.2 Resolving Belonging to Two Countries in Conflict

As she continues to struggle with the writer, Zeina insists that she is not just a returning granddaughter, although she admits this novel does not concern her as much as it concerns her grandmother (Ibid 34). She resists the writer’s attempt to convey her story as simply that of a traitor whose betrayal appears in stark contrast to her own grandmother’s saintly devotion to Iraq (Ibid 35). This attempt, Zeina maintains, robs her of having her own voice and of explaining her own story. In fact, Zeina accuses the writer herself of naivety as she does not understand that, despite her returning as an American soldier, she still retains her identity as an Iraqi (Ibid 102). Zeina admits that “writing has the power to forge” (Ibid 103) as it does not convey the full complexity of human emotions. As a result, Rahma and Zeina try to find a channel that conveys their sentiments without the interference of the writer (Ibid 103). At other times, Zeina wonders if that voice coming out of her mouth as she admonishes the American soldier for making fun of Shiite rituals is hers. She surmises that it could be her father’s or probably even the writer who is trying to imitate her tone and her accent (Ibid 120).

At times, Zeina is in control of writing, at others she gives up her position of control, as in the instance where Zeina visits her grandmother’s house in her American army uniform (Ibid 113), through which the degree of shock and rejection of Zeina’s chosen duty by her grandmother becomes apparent. Finally, Zeina admits that the computer, which was her medium of expression, has given up on her writing in reaction to the writer’s temperament, who eventually won her battle with the American granddaughter revealing her as the real loser, and in the same vein rendering the victorious writer old fashioned (Ibid 104). Both remained unable to meet on a common ground or embrace one another’s point of view. Kachachi, in turn, explains to Zeina that Rahma, Zeina’s grandmother who represents Zeina’s own history, is the one who is in control of the writing and that she is still trying to assert her Iraqi identity and her faith in resisting the American occupation (Ibid).

It is important to note that the struggle over asserting the voice in the novel between Kachachi and Zeina only serves to highlight the importance of those addressed. The

valorisation of the ‘narratee’<sup>37</sup> is quite significant in *The American Granddaughter* as both Zeina and Kachachi explain the correctness of their viewpoints to an absent audience who most probably represents the Iraqi people. Zeina tries to maintain an objective view of immigration, the Anglo-American invasion and her own belonging to Iraq, while Kachachi insists on exposing Zeina as a traitor. In this case, the novelist estimates the degree to which readers could accept a defence of Zeina, and eventually exposes Zeina as rejecting of an identity that balances her American and her Iraqi affiliations. Loyalty in this instance dictates that Zeina realizes her disillusionment with the Anglo-American operation and recognizes her actions as foolishness and naivety.

At the end of her journey, Zeina describes her experience in Iraq as a sweet but painful experience – one that bestows upon her a special status that sets her apart from “any other normal American woman” (Ibid 11). In the manner of other exiles, she similarly expresses her difference and highlights it as she returns to Detroit. Moreover, Kachachi’s novel is replete with restorative nostalgia and debilitating longing for a time that has passed, even if the central character herself refuses to admit it. Zeina concludes that there is only one home – that to which she belongs, in which she is rooted through her grandparents, her foster brothers and through history. Her account’s conclusion ends far away from the postcolonial assumptions about a metaphor of migration. From the very beginning of her journey, even as she stated her American identity, Zeina approached Iraq as a place of memories. She notices how areas have changed and how she is now perceived – in a way different than before, and on her return she recognizes her exile. Although, for example, she is fluent in both Arabic and English and makes interpreting a profession, Zeina struggles to convey the meanings of phrases that come to her mind in either language. At times she curses at her Iraqi brother in English and wishes he could understand how vulgar the meaning was, and at other times she wishes her fellow American soldiers could understand the intricacies and complexities of her Arabic words.

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<sup>37</sup> The term ‘narratee’ was employed by Ken Seigneurie in his article ‘The Importance of Being Kawabata: The Narrative in Today’s Literature of Commitment’ (2008). Seigneurie proposed that there are times when the identity of those addressed by a certain novel is as important as the identity of the novelist. This question of the imagined narratee gains its importance from the point of view of Seigneurie because it explores “the problem of language and commitment” (2008: 116): if we know who the story is meant to move, convince or repulse, the writers are coerced into appropriate communication while we as readers have the chance to judge their objective, as well as observe their choices of belonging.

## 5. Home as a Reconciliation between the Past and the Present in Muḥsin al-Ramlī's (1967) *Tamr al-Aṣābi*<sup>38</sup> (*Fingers of Dates* 2009)

Muḥsin al-Ramlī is a novelist, poet, translator and a playwright who writes both in Arabic and Spanish (Braswell, 2010). He studied at the University of Baghdad and graduated with a degree in Spanish philology in 1989 (al-Ramlī, 2005) following it with a PhD from the *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* in 2003. He worked as a journalist in Iraq, Jordan and Spain (Ibid.) and became the co-editor of the only Arabic cultural magazine in Spain called *Alwāḥ* (Braswell, 2010). Al-Ramlī's first novel, *The Scattered Crumbs*, was first published in 2000 (Ibid) and won him the *American Arkansas Prize* in 2002 (al-Jābirī, 2009). It was the first of his works made "available to the English speaking world" (Braswell, 2010). The novel traced the life of an Iraqi expatriate in Spain (where al-Ramlī himself had lived since 1995), who was in search of his cousin, in the background of the life of the cousin's immediate family in an Iraq under the Saddam regime. In comparison to some of the novels written in the aftermath of Iraq's conflicts, which are characterized by an excessive focus on the details of Iraqi history of wars as well as by an intense preoccupation with the specificities of the political context as evident from the prevalent use of dates, statistics and political actors, al-Ramlī's novels are primarily preoccupied with his characters' specificities and, secondly, with the presence of his characters in Iraq with its unique political and social situation.

Al-Ramlī's second novel, *Fingers of Dates*, is set in the years before the Iran-Iraq war started and its plot continues until the onset of the Anglo-American invasion of 2003. It is written and narrated by the main protagonist, Salīm. The story of his family started on the day that his father, Nūḥ, accompanied his sick sister from their small village in Iraq to seek medical attention in Tikrit. A sexual attack on the daughter as she is groped by a young man in a car when she's walking by her father's side encourages a violent reaction from the father who snatches the man's gun and inserts three of its bullets into the man's behind. The intervention of passers-by reveals that the young man is the nephew of the vice-president's secretary. This attack brings about a series of unfortunate events upon the entire family and

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<sup>38</sup> As an English translation of this novel was unavailable at the time of writing, I relied here on the novel in the original Arabic (cited in the bibliography). All English translations provided here are my own.

the father who is imprisoned and tortured on the orders of the vice-president. The family, which is mobilized by the grandfather to fight the government forces, ends up captured and tortured, their identity cards and last names changed and their moustaches shaved, with three men dead. When the father is eventually returned to the village, after being rendered impotent by electric shocks to his testicles, and with a handicap to his left leg, the grandfather orders the entire family to leave the village. All identity papers are thrown in the river and the family attempts to start a new life in a new village. The grandfather pledges retaliation when the number of the men in the village reaches seventy. The father, Nūḥ, also makes the promise that the last remaining bullet – that he later keeps in a keychain – will join the former three in his attacker's body.

The novel starts with the protagonist, Salīm (the son of Nūḥ) running into his conservative Muslim father in Madrid in a discotheque, which the father manages with his Spanish girlfriend, Rosa. Unravelling the bizarre twist near the very end of the novel, al-Ramlī gradually gives details and clues as the encounter between the father and son in Madrid escalates. Some of the clues include the drowning of °Alyā (who is Salīm's cousin and first love), the mention of seventeen corpses of men from the village and the stench resulting from their presence, the death of the grandfather and Salīm's puzzlement over whether the father had killed him.

The father's narration of the development of events in the village upon Salīm's departure complements Salīm's own narration and recollections. The escalation of the war with Iran spurred the government to demand that the youth of the village join the army. When the men of the village refused, the ensuing encounter resulted in the killing of seventeen of its men. The grandfather refused to bury the bodies before vengeance has been achieved and, therefore, the stench of the dead men fills the village. The stench becomes a reason for a confrontation between the father and the grandfather which ends in the death of the grandfather. Salīm hints at believing that his father is the one who killed his grandfather. On that same day, Salīm leaves the village and his narration stops. The father later reveals that upon the grandfather's death, he had made a pact with a Kurdish friend to avenge the village by pursuing the vice-president's nephew who started this tragic chapter in the family's life. His introduction to Rosa, the forty-something-year-old Spanish woman, with whom he started a relationship, brings him to Spain where his assailant now lives.

In the process of revealing the history that resulted in both the presence of the father and son in Madrid, Salīm, also tells of his life in Madrid, his Cuban neighbour, his job delivering newspapers, his colleagues, his one night encounter with the Spanish Pilar, his introduction to Fātima; the Moroccan young woman who assists his father in his discotheque and many other details that cover 10 years of Salīm's life in Spain.

### 5.1 The Host Country as a Station for Peace

Fahd Tawfīq al-Hindāl writes that al-Ramlī's dedication in the book's opening pages contains an important key necessary to the understanding of the geography of the narrative of the novel (2010). The dedication translates as follows:

*“...To Iraq: the cradle of my childhood, the cradle of civilizations  
...To Spain: My station for peace after a long road filled with wars.”*

The use of the possessive pronoun ‘my’, with both countries, affirms a personal tie to each of them equally. While Iraq is used with reference to the past, both personal and collective, Spain is the present's station at the end of the journey. But more importantly, al-Ramlī steers clear of restorative nostalgia; the word ‘station’ itself implies temporariness. This implies that the journey of finding homes is never ending, and that fact does not preclude its achievement. It is a stance that embraces neither end of the postcolonial debate on the valorisation of the location of migration. For if al-Ramlī is arguing that homes could be created wherever a journey takes a person, he insists on highlighting Aijaz Ahmad's every reservation regarding the claim that migrant identities are uninhibited by obstacles of travel in a world determined by borders between states. As a result, his novels highlight the difficulties in travel, the dangers of illegal migration and the psychological it takes to build a new life with the background of an oppressive regime, a greedy superpower and, more importantly, the shackles of tradition. In his novel, *Fingers of Dates*, therefore, “everyday life” does not stop as the protagonist solitarily reflects upon his break from the home country, but rather goes on to create a home for himself that embraces him in Madrid in a process that is illuminated by al-Ramlī through the juxtaposition of three figures representing three generations of Iraqi men, as well as through the highlighting of Salīm's own successful journey of creating a home in Madrid.

Terkenli argued that a positive investment of time in one place would ultimately turn that space into a home (1995: 325). Salīm is the illustration of that very personal investment that ends in success. Al-Ramlī's process of “home-making” thus rests on the central belief

that it is a deeply personal process of reconciling past, present and future. Salīm's recollection of the time that preceded his departure from Iraq helps him acknowledge the positive and negative incidents of his past. He sways between both restorative and reflective nostalgia as he struggles to come to terms with his new status as a migrant. Ultimately, like Jad el-Hage's protagonist in *The Last Migration*, Salīm is able to transcend the restorative nostalgia that supposed that the only home that can be attained in the one in the home country.

## 5.2 Three Generations Negotiate Home

Studying Lebanese postwar exilic novels, Syrine Hout notes that the father-son relationship constitutes a recurring feature of this category of novels, and, to a large degree, affects the definition of the protagonist's national identity. She concludes that the protagonists' "love-hate relationships with their fathers and the extent of their resulting estrangement markedly influenced their sentiments toward their war-torn nation" (2001: 293). She argues "that eventual alienation from the fatherland is proportional to estrangement from the father [figure]" (Ibid 287). The relevance extends to al-Ramlī's novel, where the father-son relationship does play an important role in the interpretation of the novel. The father does not merely serve a symbolic role, whereby the estrangement from the father constitutes an estrangement from the home country or the opposite. Rather, the role of the father here depicts a developing relationship between father and son where neither holds a solid stance that remains unmoved. It illustrates how the relationship with the home country is one of negotiation and flux based on continuous understanding and exploration. The son, Salīm, does not shun his transformed father when he meets him in Spain, but aims to understand him and to know him all over again. This process is evident throughout the novel which starts at the first encounter between father and son at the discotheque in Madrid and escalates into a passionate confrontation as each side explains their own perception of home.

While all Salīm's visitors are impressed by seeing the images from Iraq on his apartment's walls, his father's reaction shocks him. Angry and frustrated at his son, the father says:

Our real home<sup>39</sup> is the one we create for ourselves the way we want it to be, not the way in which others create for us like the dictator did. This way it becomes an unwanted home...and

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<sup>39</sup> The actual word used in the original text is *Waṭan*. As I pointed out in the first chapter in section 2.3, the word *Waṭan* invokes more the meaning of home and less the geopolitical connotations of country.

that's why we left it. Home is like love, it is a choice not an imposition (*Fingers of Dates* 149).

Salīm describes his father's anger and disbelief. His reaction was not one of mere disapproval but rather an active and spontaneous contempt and anger at his son's perceived "insanity" that spurs him to hold on to these images of Iraq (Ibid). Salīm, in turn, is extremely provoked by his father's unpleasant reaction. He does not dismiss it as unimportant but sees in it a destruction of all of his attempted ways to cope with life in Madrid. In response to his father, Salīm also accuses his father of insanity for holding on to a ridiculous pledge to seek revenge. Father and son both hold on to their viewpoints, ways of life and perceptions of home and, in the process, ridicule the other with accusations of cowardice and insanity that end only as the father slaps the son who falls to the floor.

At the end of the confrontation, Salīm thinks to himself:

I don't want a home...damn it and damn everything else. I have gained nothing from it but pain. My home is Spain. No...Not even Spain...I don't want any home...I don't need any home.....But its Iraq, its Iraq, father (Ibid 152).

This negotiation, however aggressive and passionate between both sides, is al-Ramlī's way of depicting the absence of an utter closure over the past. The father's authority – or the authority of the past – influences the present in a way that precludes an absolute resolution. As the relationship with the father develops and reaches a mature state of understanding and recognition, with the help of both Rosa and Faṭima, so does the relationship of each towards both Iraq and Spain.

The father-son relationship does play another role in al-Ramlī's novel, both between Salīm and Nūḥ, as well as between Nūḥ and the grandfather Muṭṭāq. In a key passage detrimental to the understanding of the relationship between the three, Salīm thinks:

Maybe we are originally one person multiplied in more than one body and generation but who also have many differences among them. Is it an attempt from nature for completion? And what's with this special climate in our relationship where each of us disguises an attempt to re-raise the other? Is it that we have more commonalities than differences? Are the three of us totally three independent beings? (Ibid 145)

Al-Hindāl argues that the three generations of men in the novel represent: the past, the present and the future in dialogue, conflict and negotiation with one another (2010). This representation allows us to see that, while the gap between the past and the present remains ever widening, as apparent in the distant relationship between the dominating grandfather

Muṭlaq and his son Nūḥ ,who out of fear, idealization and respect could not look his father in the eye, the gap is much more bridgeable between the present and the future, represented by the relationship between the father, Nūḥ, and the son, Salīm, which is one of understanding, forgiveness and balance. In the earlier pages of the novel, Salīm states:

I used to love my father without understanding him. I felt that there was more than one Nūḥ, characters he can conciliate between. Unlike my mother whose doubleness was of the obvious kind, which made it easy to love her....while I never even attempted to understand my cousin °Alyā....But I now realize that we have all gained nothing from my grandfather, a realization that crystallized with our real selves as much as we have taken him to be a standard which presence exerts pressure upon us – the opposite pole that obliges us to carve our special selves in the dark (*Fingers of Dates* 18).

Upon meeting his father in Madrid, Salīm sees this self that the father had carved for himself away from his grandfather’s watchful eye. Upon meeting him, Salīm describes him:

This man without a moustache, a bit of baldness over the forehead, long hair tied back in a pony tail, with two strands of red and green. Three silver loops hanging from his left ear; earrings.... is it possible that this is my father?!...Is this really my father?! (Ibid 19).

But the definitive answer to that question comes from the bullet in the keychain that reminds the father of his vendetta that brought him to Spain. The grandfather’s decision to seek revenge has become part the definitive feature for the father. In his review of the novel, Muḥammad al-Mas°ūdī notes that the dominance that the grandfather practiced over Nūḥ is a root cause of the rebellion that the son manifests in Spain; he points towards al-Ramlī’s depiction of the traditions (by which Nūḥ out of respect can’t look his father in the eye, and thus finds it difficult to identify his face) in contrast to the total denunciation of these traditions in Madrid. He drinks, he does not pray, he engages in sexual activities, etc...(2010). al-Hindāl agrees:

Despite this difference between the generation of today and that of tomorrow over the inheritance of the past and the vengeance of the present, the result of the equation remains a suppressed revolution inside the father who, even if he showed his reconciliation with him, did not forget his vendetta with the past and his sacred heritage, and his domineering images....in contrast to the way in which Salīm has decided to live in peace and quiet (2010).

al-Mas°ūdī also points towards the perfect balance that Salīm strikes between past and present that also manifests itself in the space of narrative accorded to each era. Salīm bestows his village life in Iraq and his new life in Madrid with equal narrative space (2010). In Iraq, al-Ramlī allows Salīm the space to tell the readers about his family, his sisters, their friends,

their adolescent relationships, the father's work, his dreams, his mother's habits, the developing relationship with °Alyā, the refuge in the forest, and the generally held traditions and beliefs. This is then balanced by the coverage of life in Madrid in the building occupied mainly by Spanish residents, with only one Cuban female immigrant whom he takes as a friend. Salīm tells of the details of their meetings, his neighbours' pets, his scuffles with them, as well as his friends and colleagues. Investing in both past and present equally, without an excessive preoccupation with one at the expense of the other allows Salīm to avoid the trap of loneliness and critical nostalgia that afflicted Qazwini's main protagonist in *Zubaida's Window*.

### 5.3 Active Process of Creating 'Home'

Unlike his father, Salīm heeds a sensible path between the past and present; he does not maintain a radically different personality as he moves from Iraq to Spain. Although he had not heard from his family in Iraq for over ten years, he decorates his apartment in Madrid with clippings of pictures of landmarks and scenes from Iraq that he "stuck on his walls to alleviate his homesickness" (*Fingers of Dates* 100). He filled it with Iraqi food and Arabic music. He also remained a practicing Muslim, refraining from consuming alcohol and engaging in sexual activities. As he seeks stability, order and structure in his life, Salīm is also attracted to the woman who aids him in the creation of this home, one that provides him with this balance he had been creating between his past and his present. He is attracted to Fāṭima's adherence to her faith, her appreciation of Arabic music, her gratitude and obligation towards her family members more than to her physical attributes. Salīm demonstrates this insistence on striking a balance between his Arab roots, his way of life in accordance to his history and tradition, but also in a way that does not preclude a full engagement with his new host country. This process invokes Ghassan Hage's description of migrant culture that I introduced in the first chapter on page 35. Hage argued that affective memories from a migrant's past could help ease the process of the migrant's formation of home in the new home country. Food, music, images, letters and other manifestations of cultural intimacy, such as the ones Salīm exhibits facilitate the formation of home through gradual familiarization with the new setting. As he gets to know Fāṭima, Salīm states:

I felt in her depths an unwavering self confidence and a shred of sadness that she has been able to accept and digest in a realistic manner that goes with her acceptance of asserting the

normalcy of her story...reaching a state of a satisfactory understanding...and even to change this normalcy, as she thinks about it going about her life (Ibid.104).

This description of Fāṭima that he finds attractive accurately depicts Salīm's own process of living in Spain. As a result upon meeting her, his feeling of estrangement is alleviated. He could speak to her in Arabic and he states that he finds in her a vision of the woman he had learnt to expect as he was growing up:

she is something of a sister and a mother, who accepts the role granted to her, or the one available to her in life, in a specific time and place in a framework of traditions that inspires confidence and assurance, and an acceptance of reality, as well as the sensitivity of adaptation without ever failing to consider order and improvement (Ibid 106).

His attraction to her and his eventual decision to marry her is rationalized, he knows they can learn to live with one another, there is attraction as well as understanding – there is potential for love and mutual understanding (Ibid 133). He – consciously or unconsciously – contrasts his love for Fāṭima to that for °Alyā. While Fāṭima wins a comparison of physical attributes, she does not inspire in him the same infatuation he had for °Alyā. He does not forbid himself a happy life with the latter, all her “failings” notwithstanding. In this case, al-Ramlī actually presents the two women as metaphors of the home country and the new country. While Iraq personified in °Alyā has drowned, now lost to him beyond redemption with all its history and its emotional attachments, another is still within grasp in Fāṭima, whose love for her is acquired, a gradual process of familiarization and understanding. Moreover, Fāṭima, or Spain, also embraces his past love for °Alyā, or Iraq, she exhibits no jealousy and accepts that his past will be part of their future together (Ibid 146). He recites poetry to her that had been inspired by °Alyā and she appreciates it, promising to learn to understand it.

While most novels written after 2003 depict an Iraq that is anchored in a historical reality through excessive references to historical events, the successive wars, the specific social settings, the monuments and even references to politicians and policy makers, al-Ramlī's novel offers a depiction of a very personal Iraq. Although al-Ramlī's characters live in Iraq with the reality of the escalating Iran-Iraq war, al-Ramlī's preoccupation is not with the war as a central defining event of Iraqi lives. Rather, al-Ramlī's chosen villages – the one where Salīm's family lives at first, and the one to which the family later moves, are both fictitious – used only as symbols of lives devastated by a government. What motivates al-Ramlī's characters more than any of the other protagonists are personal motivations beyond

war and occupation. Al-Ramlī seeks to highlight this personal endeavour of his characters under the regime. The same was true for his first novel, as Braswell states:

Certainly, the horrific nature of Saddam's rule is made clear in the novel. But everyone already knows of this, and if *Scattered Crumbs* did nothing more than confirm it, then it would not be much of a novel at all. Fortunately the book does more, adding significant characterological flesh to our rather skeletal understanding of the Iraqi people. *Scattered Crumbs* portrays a dictator, but its real focus is the complexities of a family suffering through his rule (2010).

This also applies to *Fingers of Dates* where the image of Iraq for both Salīm and his father, Nūḥ, is an affective one imbued with very personal histories of family, quarrels and work commitments, as opposed to the long monologues witnessed with other protagonists who longed and felt nostalgia for a country of politically defined attributes. Salīm's nostalgia is not for a vague recollection of Iraq, but concrete incidents that mean home that have taken place in Iraq. One of the most comforting memories has been the shelter in the forest that he created with his cousin and first adolescent love, °Alyā. Isolated from the eyes of family members, both °Alyā and Salīm built and made a "nest" (*Fingers of Dates* 66) of their growing love for one another in which they discovered pleasure and discussed poetry; encounters that Salīm likens to experiencing heaven.

Al-Ramlī's novel differs from the other Iraqi exilic novels discussed here in one more way: it maintains a positive outlook towards the future while not losing sight of the reality of today. The title of the novel, *Fingers of Dates*, is a reference to the pleasure that three men experience in their lovemaking: it combines one of the symbols of Iraq with the concept of pleasure for the three generations despite their differences. It is a novel, just like Salīm's description of Fāṭīma, of acceptance and improvement.

## 6. Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is set against the metaphorization of migration that was promoted by postcolonial theory. I examine the viability of studying novels by Arab migrants according to the expectations of this site. Have the Iraqi migrant writers discussed in this chapter complied with these expectations? On the first page of his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states that in their entirety, “‘in between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2000: 1). I primarily addressed the claims that the narratives of migration embrace an attitude that downplays the nation-state as a referent for an identity and elevates the idea of an identity that is free from the burden of national belonging. Through addressing the multiple ways in which writers have portrayed home after migration, I questioned whether they accurately reflected these sentiments in their fiction. My aim here was to examine this claim when addressing a contemporary conflict that brought about massive-scale migration due to the direct involvement of a foreign power, presenting us with more immediate issues of travel and migration than the colonial experience would. In this instance, the writers’ most intense preoccupation is not with revising the identity at the new site (even if this occasionally takes place) but it is with the recent conflict which has its immediate repercussions on those affiliated with the war-torn country.

It is important to note again at this point that Bhabha’s classification applies to “disenfranchised minorities” (Ibid 5) who, from their marginal perspective, are expected to reassess the centrality of the nation (Ibid). He states that “the national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture’s contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse” (Ibid 150). Bhabha’s view, then, relates to the perspective of the “migrants” from the new location and centres their narratives *vis-à-vis* that new location (mostly in the West). Aijaz Ahmad reacted by questioning the degree to which all those who live in that position of the “in-between” are, in fact, marginal or disenfranchised at a time when those most privileged are the ones who have the means to travel and leave their home countries as well as to produce a circulated literature. Privilege and marginalization do not go hand in hand, Ahmad seemed to say.

Edward Said provides another axis in this argument. He presented the case of intellectual exiles whose preoccupation with the postcolonial concern of revising national identities is diminished by their preoccupation with the causes of their displacement/relocation in the first place. Said stated that the concern with the past conflict creates a situation where migration is “a source not of acculturation and adjustment but rather of volatility and instability” (1993: 115). Hence, the narrative of adaptation to the life in the new host country takes a back-seat to the narrative of the conflict in the home country that plays a major role in the perception of their respective home country. This is a trend even more pronounced in Iraqi literature than in the Lebanese literature of the diaspora of both countries. The latter’s fiction is gradually becoming marked with more concern with the conditions of exilic (or diasporic life) than with the conditions of life in the home country; before, after or during the conflict; a trend that could be attributed to the relative (albeit still fragile) stability of Lebanon since the end of the civil war. The literature of Palestinians in the diaspora, however, reflects a balanced focus on the conditions of life in the diaspora and the conditions in Palestine itself. This could be attributed to the length of the conflict which exceeds half a century. For Palestinians, life away from Palestine, whether in the West or in the Arab world, has for a long time been a feature of Palestinian identity that is accurately reflected in a literature that grapples with both the political and personal issues.

Since its independence from colonial rule, life in Iraq has been characterized by a series of upheavals and changes in governments that left a legacy of uncertainty for generations of Iraqi people. The flight of Iraqis after 2003 was only a continuation of a trend already set in Iraq on a larger scale. The effect of repetitive conflicts and a legacy of uncertainty left its permanent imprint in the artistic and literary production of Iraqi artists and novelists, who saw themselves even in their exile “as part of a more general condition affecting the displaced national community” (Said, 1993: 115). My focus was on novels written by Iraqis of different backgrounds living in various locations outside Iraq, in the eight years since the invasion, registering the response to the changes brought about by the unsettling events. Regardless of the differences in the socio-political circumstances around which the writers themselves relocated, they all registered the imprint of an experience of migration combined with the impact of the invasion that marked their texts. The portrayal of home differed to certain degrees between these novelists; however, there existed several common themes throughout the survey. I focus here on comparing the representation of their

most common preoccupations: the focus on memory, the representation of the invasion and the perception of the nation as an alienating concept against the theoretical background discussed above.

The writers share with one another an experience of departure from the place where they spent their early years. None of them were born in their current chosen location of residence, but the reasons they left their home country varied. Most of them found migration much more preferable to a life in Iraq under looming threat of violence or in the shadow of an oppressive regime. ‘Ulaywī argues that the growing number of Iraqi writers in exile, coupled with the long history of oppression in Iraq, gave rise to a generation of Iraqi writers that is very critical of the concept of the nation (2010). Although most writers discussed in this chapter are critical of Iraq as a nation to different degrees, Iraq itself remained in the centre of the narrative of all the novels. The nation’s centrality in these novels is derived from the immediacy of the conflict and the perception of both the aggression and oppression. These are issues which, as Said argued, maintain the continued preoccupation of the authors as members of a collective national experience regardless of the ideological centrality of the nation itself.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the portrayal of alienation as a psychological condition of the individual has occurred as a trend within Iraqi literature since its early days. In this set of novels, the alienation of the individual was set against a multitude of alienating factors: the nation, the people, the self and the place of migration. Wālī, al-Ramlī, Qazwini and Kachachi, portrayed characters who were all alienated from the concept of the nation itself, even as they suffer in varying degrees from the estrangement of exile. The travelling protagonists in al-Ramlī’s and Qazwini’s novels, who abandon Iraq as a statement of condemnation of the nation which promotes violence and vengeance, seek to re-produce the comforting symbols of home in their new locations to ease their homesickness. Kachachi’s returning migrant also encounters alienation upon her return to Iraq as part of the occupying forces, while Wālī’s narrative is one of alienation from the narrated story itself, which is presented as a cornerstone of the national construct.

The extent to which a specific setting or presence within a certain country contributes towards feeling at home figured differently in each of the four novels. Some were more directly engaged with the postcolonial debates on the site of migration, while others merely touched upon such notions from a distance. Alienation was not the defining feature of the

novels and neither was exile, but both concepts appeared in relative distance from one another without a direct causal relationship. Alienation occurred both in the absence from, or presence within, Iraq. Mitigating alienation were loyalty, family and emotional relationships; forms of human attachments that give a sense of belonging to an entity even if not a physical space. Exacerbating alienation were various forms of oppression and the threat of violence; factors that prevent the attainment of security and safety of homes.

Directly related to the perception of the nation and the degree of alienation from it is the presentation and the preoccupation of memory. Although memory in all of these novels plays a central role as expected of many novels by migrant writers, they differ in the extent to which personal memory and the collective (national) memory are each highlighted. Moreover, the deployment of memory in each novel played a major role in determining the success in the adaptation process to the reality of exile, or to the newly acquired identity. Restorative and reflective nostalgia affected the protagonists differently.

All the Iraqi authors, like their Lebanese and Palestinian counterparts, showed their preoccupation with the process of memory and recollection in multiple ways. In each of the four novels, the theme of portraying the present with the background of the past, and vice versa, is a consistent one. In *Yūsuf's Picture*, recollection was an even more dominant theme that was also deployed as a powerful technique whereby the protagonist exposed memory to be a ploy of fictitious narrative. Here, Wālī's intention was to expose the fragility of memory in order to undermine the nation: one can never remember things as they happened, one can never narrate the recollected memory accurately, hence all narratives (which are merely recollections) are fictitious constructs and so is the nation. In another condemnation of politicizing memory, Qazwini portrayed memory as the sole refuge for her tormented protagonist that appears unattainable at times. In Qazwini's narrative, memory itself, or its fragility, is not questioned nor is the method of recollection; even though she attributes the characteristics of violence and oppression to the nation, Zubaida never doubts her own narration or her own recollection. She sits in her Berlin apartment as a homesick migrant who seeks to strengthen her memory even more through the arrangement of photos, letters and souvenirs. In *The American Granddaughter*, Zeina's memories of her life in Iraq are awakened by her arrival on her mission in Baghdad. Kachachi juxtaposes the personal memory and the political history to highlight the conflict of identity of her second-generation Iraqi American protagonist. The overlap of the personal and the political is highlighted to

illuminate the role the encounter plays in determining what Zeina actually remembers when she sets foot in Iraq. In al-Ramlī's novel, the most optimistic in its vision of the future, memory is reconciled. Past, present and future come together to allow the protagonist, Sālim, to adapt to his new life in Spain. It is a gradual process that comes to a close by the end of the novel, only to be questioned once again in the very last line, proving that memory is always negotiated.

Surprisingly, however, the representation of the invasion itself was not the most visible feature of the novels, although the degree of directness did differ considerably among them. In *Fingers of Dates*, references to the invasion are minimal. The political situation surrounding the invasion itself is not addressed. The focus is mostly on the protagonists' decision to migrate and engage with the formation of a new home after migration. Najm Wālī's representation of the invasion takes place in a much less explicit manner. In the early pages of the novel, Yūsuf compares today's Baghdad to what it was twenty years ago. Both times, he says, he would have escaped from the uniformed officials and their accompanying army cars: the only difference is that now he has the option to choose the direction in which he flees the scene and the freedom to defend himself (*Yūsuf's Picture* 86). Wālī does not, however, discuss the legitimacy of the invasion since his intention remains to elucidate the environment of fear created by the national narrative.

The portrayal of the invasion took a more direct form in *The American Granddaughter*, as the writer inserted the protagonist right in the centre of the direct aftermath of the invasion as an interpreter working on facilitating the mission for the American army. The protagonist struggled with issues of loyalty and belonging. However, the role of the interpreter also allowed maximum proximity to the invading forces that disrupted her identity and her sense of belonging. Despite the writers' attempt to offer a seemingly balanced portrayal of both sides, the narrative ends with a bleak vision of life in Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion. In Qazwini's exilic narrative, the invasion was far from a mere political condemnation, but more of a personal lament of the elimination of the last hope of return to a more hopeful Iraq.

In this section, I asked the question: In the shadow of the Anglo-American invasion, how far has the nation in fact been rendered obsolete at these points of "in-between" where "the ideological poverty of the nation is purportedly most visible" (Adams, 1997: 201). A few

years before the invasion of Iraq, Adams noted as she discussed the fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh that:

various attempts to erase and perhaps redraw the contours of the nation make the (admittedly unstable) construct a visible, if contradictory and liminal, presence in much current literature. Recognizing this presence need not recast the form of literary texts (as Jameson's generic classification of the allegory does), nor limit what can or cannot be discussed in individual works; rather, the recognition merely registers why the "problematic" of the nation may figure centrally in certain literatures arising from recently formed liberated nations (Ibid 202).

Adams' aim was to explain the current preoccupation of some migrant writers with discussing their national histories, even as these representations themselves condemn, redraw, revise or lament the nation. She proposed that recent political events might explain why such Arab writers continue to dwell on the history of their respective nations. Although Adams offered this explanation in her study of the fiction of a Lebanese writer living in exile, the explanation also fits the current discussion concerning Iraqi writers. Both Said and Adams highlighted the fact that recent political conflicts could play a more detrimental role in the chosen focus of the novel than any expectations of a migrant site.

## Final Conclusion

In each of the previous three conclusions, one viewpoint was emphasised in relation to the novelists' portrayal of home. In the case of Palestine, I highlighted the forceful nature of migration faced by Palestinians when it comes to examining the portrayal of home in the framework of the metaphorization of migration. The unique situation of the Palestinians led them to experience migration differently. Therefore, the conclusion to chapter one emphasised the inextricable link between the personal experience and the political experience, whereby the ideological stance on issues of nationalism and nation-state building are closely tied with issues of justice, based on the historical experience of suffering of a nation that exists mostly in the minds of its constituents without concrete international political recognition. In the subsequent case of Lebanon, however, the conclusion emphasised less the interrelationship between the personal and the political in the perception and representation of home and more the effect that the variety and multitude of personal experiences played in determining different representations of home and the experience of migration from the home country. From their positions in exile, the Lebanese novelists drew attention to their various preoccupations with issues of migration, the creation of personal homes and the (re)assessment of the national project. Finally, the conclusion at the end of the survey of the four novels by the Iraqi novelists explained the extent of the preoccupation of the Iraqi novelists more with the immediate political conflict and the critique of the nation. This conclusion explained that the immediacy of the conflict in the case of Iraq meant that the experience of migration takes a back-seat to the novelists' engagement with the cause of their displacement in the first place. These three aspects that were emphasised in each of the three cases are not absolute conclusions by any means; for they also apply in different degrees to each of the other two cases. Together they accentuate the criticisms presented against the postcolonial over-valorisation of the site of migration that expected a uniform re-drawing of the nation from these positions.

In this project the concept of 'exile' was stretched to accommodate the theoretical framework in which this thesis operated. 'Exile' was employed to indicate more than simply the change in space of the creation of the literary work. The space I chose here, was not only geographical, but it also referred to the presence outside of the margins of the nation-state;

this way justifying the inclusion of Palestinian writers who might still be present on the same territory of the desired nation state but outside it as a politically recognized entity. Lebanese and Iraqi writers, who were included here, existed in spatial exile from the nation-state regardless of their ideological affinity with it. Together these two spaces in geographical and political distance from the home country presented a fertile location for examining Bhabha's valorisation of the migrant site, the one which held a so-called promise of revising and redrawing the concept of the nation and sentiments of nationalism. The insistence on seeing the meaning of culture "in-between" fixed spaces such as East, West, North and South, as well as making clear distinctions between migrants and nationals, minorities and majorities, while it seems to overcome the binary divisions frowned upon by the postcolonial critics, is evidently complicit in asserting them. In the novels discussed, many writers maintained allegiances to their original home country while making homes in new ones. Many highlighted displacement as a painful experience while others viewed travelling as a privilege. The majority moved fluidly between these positions reminding us of the complicated way in which memory and nostalgia operate to assert the roles that cultural intimacy as an expression of cultural nationalism plays in determining the imagination of home and relationship to the home country.

Bhabha explained his point of view in his two books *Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture*. He claimed that this "in-between" space, as promised in the site of migration, held the promise of re-drawing the centre, here the nation state. He was not alone. Other Arab critics held a similar view. Mohamed Salah Omri, for example, argued that diaspora – here implying a geographical removal from the territory of the nation-state – "presents us with the process of representation and construction of identity at the complex juncture where the categories and impulses of empire, nation, gender and metropolitan location converge...." (2006: 70). He also added that, given the current situation in the Arab world, it is inevitable that any Arab writer, who exhibits an element of collective history in his work, will find himself trapped in nostalgia (Ibid 53). In effect, this claim was neither entirely substantiated nor entirely discarded. Likewise, suspicion of all forms of roots, and eyeing the nation and all forms of nationalism with aversion did not usually figure as the primary concern of the Arab writers discussed here, though many did indeed critically engage with the concept of the nation-state as a site of oppression and violence, as well as a constructed imagined space.

Reading these contemporary narratives of the Middle East, one is provoked to contextualize and analyze the accuracy and relevance of statements that seek either to undermine the centrality of nation to the questions of belonging and identity or simply take the signs of the vaguest nostalgia and longing as evidence of nationalism. While the nation-state is a political entity, one has to remember, as Lynn Meskell points out that “the political is always personal” (2002: 280); such that seeking to form a clear division between the nation as a people and the state as a political instrument and entity, while a salutary effort, undermines the painful reality of millions of displaced individuals. Through an analysis of novels that presented different portrayals of home, I demonstrated how the political and the personal converge when representing a national experience. This is amplified by the historical context in which the representation occurs. The novels that dealt with the Palestinian *Nakbah* of 1948, the Lebanese Civil war 1975-1990 and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 depicted their engagement with home without isolation from the conflicts that spurred, or enforced their separation from their geographical origin. This is not to say, however, that the representations of home in all of these novels are the same. While the engagement with the conflict figures prominently in some of the novels, and guilt and sadness are outstanding features, the re-creation of home in various ways is also a recurrent theme. What most of these novels do demonstrate is that nationalism and exile can no longer simply be seen as opposite realities where one can be embraced at the expense of the other.

One of the aspects that problematized the determination of the ideological view implied in the product of the migrant, marginal, hybrid or exilic position is inherent in the process of interpreting the literature itself. In my analysis I focused primarily on an interpretation of the themes, and I examined the choice of the settings of the novel in an attempt to determine the preoccupations of the writers: those that they chose to highlight. While the interpretation of any novel could easily be contested by a different reading, I aimed here to maintain consistency in my reviews by comparing the settings of the novels (the original country or the host country), the presentation of the experience of migration if it existed (leaning towards optimism or pessimism), the personal experience of the protagonists and their most immediate concerns and, finally, an overview of the strongest elements of the structure and texture of the text. After a brief background about the novelists, I shed light on all of the preceding aspects before linking the analysis to the theoretical debate on the centrality of the nation in these cultural products.

The aim of this project was to evaluate and assess the implications of this over-valorised location on the margins of the nation, as well as to offer a survey of the various representations of the experience of home in a small slice of migrant Arab literature. I tried to maintain a good balance in the selection of the novels, despite the abundance of literature in each of the three cases and the multiplicity of stages and complexity of the issues in some of them. In the case of Palestine, for example, I had to broaden the criteria of what constitutes migration: the inclusion of Palestinian Israelis as a minority within the same territory of their country of birth, but outside of a politically declared nation state to which they belong, provided a vantage position from which to explore the portrayal of the nation from its margins.

While I make no attempt to group the novels or novelists into limited categories, I turn now to addressing three concerns that I perceived as major issues in the past survey: the portrayal of the experience of immigration, the critique of the nation/nationalism and the assessment of the difference in the portrayal of the national experience between the two genders. These were issues raised in each of the three main chapters but I turn to them here in an attempt to draw some final parallels and connections between the three cases. I presented nostalgia as a major concern in the novels surveyed. I relied on Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia in the way that the memory of the past life in the home country is recalled and represented. I maintained that the dynamic of these recollections highly influences the experience of developing a home in the new location. I thus highlighted the role of memory and the writers' selective representation that is spurred by different personal and political experiences. The novel that best captured a sense of debilitating nostalgia was Iqbal Qazwini's *Zubaida's Window*. Qazwini's protagonist exposed a sense of grief inherent in the departure from Iraq, intensified (paradoxically) by the voluntariness of the decision to depart. However, her nostalgia was wrapped in her personal experience of immigration and relocation as a witness to the fall of Iraq to foreign invasion. Qazwini explained Zubaida's nostalgia through a critique of the national project which made impossible any reconciliation between the past memories and the hopes for the future.

### 1. Representing Migration

A novel like al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*, was not mainly preoccupied with life in "exile" or the migrant experience in the new country, but with the conditions during the conflict itself. This was a response to the immediacy of the civil war. The novelist's migrant location

affected the content of the novel in a minuscule way. Rather than being concerned with the author's presence at a distance from the home country, al-Shaykh was engaged with the national past and conflict. However, one of the novels reviewed here that has successfully captured all the different dimensions of migration was Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*. The Lebanese novelist offered a depiction of the (im)migrant experience in Montreal which traced the reasons for these immigrants' departure from their home countries as well as the struggles of life in Canada. Through his nameless immigrant, Hage did not only reflect on home and its meaning, but he also questioned the larger geopolitical framework which created immigrants and refugees to start with. *Cockroach's* narrator's imagination of home was closely related to a personal everyday experience, a point already highlighted in George's argument. For Hage's narrator, an immigrant to Canada from a war-torn country, the starting premise is immigration, the beginning of the process to make a home in Canada. While we saw how Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* was mainly preoccupied with defining the parameters of an apolitical home; Hage's half-human half-cockroach immigrant practically demonstrates the politics that make both Lebanon and Canada incomplete homes in a sense.

Other novels focused primarily on the personal experience of home: defining it and locating it. This focus was reflected in the choice of titles such as Randa Jarrar's *The Map of Home* and Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* where the female protagonists of both novels attempted to outline the boundaries of a personal home. Randa Jarrar, for example, was able to literally and figuratively redraw the borders of the nation from her position on the margins. As a wandering Palestinian, she saw a home in the act of wandering that did not coincide with the borders of any of the countries among which she wandered. Similarly, Muḥsin al-Ramlī's *Fingers of Dates* elevated the personal story of the Iraqi migrant Salīm and marginalized the national story. His protagonist journeyed from Iraq to Spain, finding a home in each, since his nostalgia was reflective. *The Rock of Tanios* showed how Maalouf grappled at once with the national conflict and the elements influencing the decision to leave the home country. Set in a distant historical era, *The Rock of Tanios* is set apart from the rest of the novels discussed here and which grappled more directly with more contemporary conflicts. Maalouf did not deal directly with the Lebanese civil war but his novel held on to a contemporary resonance through which he painted migration as a favourable option that makes the attainment of a home that promises comfort and security possible; promising an exit from the cycle of civil strife.

It is difficult to declare these positions as entirely political or ideological. Together, they point towards the several facets of the experience of migration or immigrating; it has political, economic, psychological and social implications. In fact, the positions of the novelists outlined here on the advantages and disadvantages of migration owe elements to the arguments put forward by all of the critics mentioned previously including Bhabha, Ahmad and George. These novelists did not simply write accounts in which they vowed allegiance to the nation, nor did they present one-dimensional images of privileged cosmopolitan citizens enjoying a free-floating existence in isolation from national belongings. Moreover, the so-called mythical nature of the imagined nation did not figure as the primary concern for many of the novelists. The assumption that a favourable portrayal of an experience of migration amounts to an undermining of the centrality of the nation-state would be too simplistic as it fails to take into account all the different dimensions of the migration and relocation experience which occurs in overlapping folds.

## 2. Critiques of the Nation

It is important to question, then, what Homi Bhabha's claim about the revised view of the nation from the margins entails. It is indeed quite difficult to have an absolute reading of any of the novels presented. While those novels written by the Palestinian writers do share many commonalities with accounts of migration presented by the Lebanese and Iraqi writers, they still maintain some different preoccupations. History and its telling in the Palestinian case (which could be mistaken for excessive preoccupation with the national project) are highlighted because of how closely it is linked to the personal experience. The national history, in fact, directly determines the documents the novelists possess and their place in the world. As a result, we saw how accounts like Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* did not simply address the attempts to cope with life in exile in the shadow of the past memories, nor did she entirely preoccupy herself with issues surrounding the debate of the rise or decline of the nation state, its exclusions or its inclusions and the complicity of its myths or facts. She addressed migration from the point of view of the refugees who involuntarily experienced mental and geographical exile, and highlighted both the psychological and political implications of their displacement. In this case, home was not simply reduced to Ahmed's stance as "a matter of how one feels or one might fail to feel" (2000: 89) even if this figures as one of its aspects, but it becomes part and parcel of a project that is at once profoundly personal and political. Abulhawa brought to her text the reality of the journey made by the

refugees by recalling the names of the cities, villages, streets and roads that coincide with the real and actual journey. These references were and still are part of the lives of many of those Palestinian refugees among whom was the family of the writer.

The portrayal of home in the case of the Palestinian novels was found to be strongly linked to the more prominent issue of oppression under occupation, and the perception of the right of return. Palestinian writers did not fully dissociate themselves from addressing what could be perceived as collective concern. The right of return and the national project was to an extent addressed by all four writers. This national/ideological concern was primarily a moral judgement that does not separate itself from the personal experience of the Palestinian writers. This might contribute to explaining the extent of the perceived preoccupation of the Palestinian writers with the national cause.

### **3. Gendered Accounts**

Although I hesitate to draw generalizations among all women writers included here, a strong voice was heard in many of their novels that loudly resisted previous dominant male narratives that assigned women the metaphor for the homeland. Al-Shaykh ridiculed this stance as she depicted the male illogical attachments to the nation as a homeland through over idealization that does not correspond to the reality of lived life. Al-Shaykh's *Zahra* described her uncle's and her husband's attempts to recapture Lebanon as the homeland as an epidemic. She maintained that the image of the nation is not everything its male adherents claim it is. She was able to juxtapose the various oppressive elements practiced by a nation upon its own subjects to the experience of the women in these nations. Al-Shaykh was highly aware of this complexity in the mapping of home through personal experiences to the foreground of the national experience, especially in light of the ongoing struggle against the occupation of Palestine. Her narrative avoided the representation of the national experience as one dimensional and insisted on exposing the complexities and shades without resorting to the simple binaries of home and exile or struggle and betrayal, when it came to the choices of the characters whether to leave or stay in their home countries. The novel was more about the personal experiences of characters (especially the women) rather than being about the national project glorified for its own sake. The accounts of the women writers, Hanan al-Shaykh and Randa Jarrar, showed heightened awareness of the ability of the national project to co-opt the women's experience under the claim of a just national cause.

Susan Abulhawa's historical saga that chronicled the struggle of the Palestinian people over generations stood alone (among novels by both men and women writers) in its attempt to tell a comprehensive story of a people struggling against occupation. Written in English, published in the US and directed mostly at Western readers, Abulhawa's position as a migrant led her not to redraw the nation, but to translate the struggle culturally to those on a different side of the divide. Abulhawa resorted to lending her fiction the support of facts to paint a picture of the Palestinian plight. She employed the facts to highlight the convergence of the personal and the political in Amal's experience of home as well as her sense of self in her years away from Palestine.

In addressing the claims inherent in the postcolonial discussions of the metaphorization of migration, this research allowed, through an examination of novels by Arab writers whose geographical place in the world was determined to different degrees by three political conflicts, a thorough review of the imagination of home in a small sample of modern Arabic fiction. While questioning the practicality of applying the postcolonial theoretical background to novels that are produced at a site which complicates their identity, these novels offered a panorama of the different ways in which Arab writers have narrated the experience of home. This imagination of home, as varied as it might have been among the writers included in this dissertation, also allowed for an investigation of the centrality of the nation (nation-state) to that imagination and allowed for questioning the claim that a politically declared state, or a country, automatically provides a home.

This research's most important finding was in explaining that the existence of a variety of experiences and imaginations of home that does not coincide with a collective perception or a certain experience of exile or migration, is a function of how the memory of the migrant novelist recalls the first experience of home in the home country. The distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia explained the difference between cultural nationalism and political nationalism. These literary creations disrupt attempts that suggest a tidy categorization and reject a definition that is based on the site of their production. Even as some writers dismantled the national narrative in an attempt to underestimate its existence as a refuge and others found themselves tormented with nostalgia after a voluntary departure from the home country, others wavered between different stances and some remained suspended among different positions precluding a strong ideological stance that is determined simply by a belief in nationalism.

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