

## **A History of Remembering: Memory, Identity, and War in Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* (2004)**

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**Abstract:** Memory has a striking amount of power in Arab Anglophone diasporic writing. This is due to the inextricable relationship between memory and place. As Mahmoud Darwish astutely states, “without memories you have no real relationship to a place.”<sup>1</sup> Memory is thus important in constructing a sense of belonging and identity and in negotiating different experiences of displacement across geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders. In this sense, diasporic subjects thrive on memory, and diasporic texts are tools for collecting memories. This paper explores the role of memory in Nada Awar Jarrar's 2004 novella, *Somewhere, Home*, which ascribes a lot of value to memory. It seeks to understand the nexus between memory and identity construction by initiating a discussion of personal and collective memories. It also examines the role of war crimes and various other atrocities in the context of post-war diasporic memory. In short, it explores memory as a mode of knowledge which expresses the ferocious effects of the Lebanese Civil War in order to do justice to the war's victims.

**Key words:** Identity, memory, home, history, Lebanese

### **Introduction**

Post-Lebanese Civil War literature written by members of the Anglophone Lebanese-Australian diaspora is a growing field of scholarship which tackles the various and complex relationships between space, migration, history, memory, diaspora, exile, identity, modernity, and globalization. The impact of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) on this literature cannot be understated; it has stimulated writers within this diaspora to “respond artistically, in a variety of genres, to the destruction of lives, families, institutions and infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> Narrativising the war and its ramifications is the task of both fact-based historical interpretations and fiction alike.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this literature offers a historical archive that seeks to preserve and reflect on one of the dramatic chapters in the history of Lebanon and combat “collective amnesia.”<sup>4</sup>

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1. Joe Beinin & Rebecca Stein, *The struggle for Sovereignty: Palestine and Israel, 1993-2005* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 288.

2. Syrine Hout, *Post-war Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1.

3. Layla Al Maleh, *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009), 49-50. See also Emmanuel Alcaraz, *Les lieux de mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance algérienne*, Thèse, Paris, Université Paris XIII, 2012.

4. Samir Khalaf, “Culture, Collective Memory, and the Restoration of Civility,” in *Peace for Lebanon?* Deirdre Collings, ed., (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 237-285.

Literature about Lebanon produced in this diaspora sets out to shape and correct perceptions of the nation's history, at least in part, by bringing its members' irksome experiences of displacement, their traumatic, nostalgic and critical memories of home, and the various relationships that diasporists, as people on the move, maintain with people in both their homeland and hostland to the fore.

Nada Awar Jarrar is a Lebanese novelist whose work is intimately concerned with the above themes. She was born in 1958 in Beirut to a Lebanese father and an Australian mother. She was exiled during the Lebanese Civil War, and lived in London, Paris, Washington DC, and Sydney before returning to Lebanon in the 1990s, where she has remained since. This paper studies her 2004, Commonwealth Writer's Prize-winning novella, *Somewhere, Home*. This novella is fully inscribed within the framework of Lebanese Civil War literature, and tells the stories of three displaced women seeking a sense of identity and belonging. As a female-centered narrative, Jarrar's novella consists of three parts, each of which presents the story of a different female protagonist independently from one another. The first story is about Maysa, whose husband refuses to join her in the mountains, leaves Beirut, when the Civil War breaks out, to return to her grandparents' house in a village in Mount Lebanon where she spent her childhood. There she starts to collect the stories of other female individuals in her family. The second story is about Aida who, having spent much time in the West, returns to search for the Palestinian refugee, Amou Mohammed, who was like a father to her when she was a child. Her attachment to this Palestinian refugee is best manifest in her obsession with recollections of prewar Beirut. The last story is about Salwa, an elderly woman now, who recollects her life from her hospital bed in Australia, where she is surrounded by her children. Although the three stories are independent from one another, the unifying element in Jarrar's novella is a deserted rural house in Mount Lebanon; it is the house of either birth or childhood. Together, the three stories engage in remembering history through exploring the stories of individuals, namely females, who endured painful experiences during the wartime.

*Somewhere, Home* 'speaks to the modern condition of dislocation,'<sup>5</sup> and is laden with expressions of a need to belong to somewhere home – i.e., somewhere 'from which there is no further to go.'<sup>6</sup> The structure of the novella displays and celebrates the features of postmodern, pluralist narratives

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5. Dawn Mirapuri, "Meditations on memory and belonging: Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, home*," in Layla Al Maleh ed, *Arab voices in diaspora*, 464.

6. Nada Awar Jarrar, *Somewhere, Home* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2004), 145.

of displacement. The three stories revolve around various conceptions, meanings, elements, and manifestations of home. Home has multiple referents and meanings for each of these three women – Jumana Bayeh propounds that Jarrar's novella represents 'home as a changing and evolving category, as a concept that is not reducible to a single entity and one that can only be defined in a pluralistic manner.'<sup>7</sup> This pluralistic discourse of home emanates from the protagonists' various experiences of displacement, their sense of self and of place, and their relationships with other people. Such a discourse is consonant with the postmodern assertion that truth and reality are not fixed, and that there are many of each. Multiple perspectives arise in each narrative, and each of the protagonists constantly reproduces her sense of self. Thus, Jarrar's text resists singular, omnipresent, and omniscient voices. It also attempts to give voice to marginalised women, tell their stories, and explore the unique ways in which they construct their identities and showcase their affiliations.

In narrating home and their search for home, Jarrar's characters engage with memory and narratives about the past. Hence, this paper explores the role of memory in this novella by seeking an understanding of where Jarrar sites the nexus between memory and identity construction. In doing so, this paper will initiate a discussion of personal and collective memories and examine the role of war crimes and various other atrocities in the context of post-war diasporic memory. In short, it explores memory as a mode of knowledge which expresses the ferocious effects of the Lebanese Civil War in order to do justice to the war's victims.

### 1. Memory and Identity Construction

As stated earlier, memory is a crucial tool in identity construction. The construction of identity in diasporic texts is premised on accounts of the past. In his essay "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," Stuart Hall writes that identity

"is always a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they came from. The one way in which it is impossible to resolve the problem of identity [...] is to try looking at it, as if a good look will tell you who the people are."<sup>8</sup>

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7. Jumana Bayeh, *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora: Representations of Place and Transnational Identity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 111.

8. Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," *New Left Review*, (1995): 3. In this vein, see also Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French past* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Identity here is the product of various accounts, narratives, and stories of the past. In telling them, people seek to construct their sense of self and of belonging. In this way, processes of remembering are at the core of identity construction.

In *Somewhere, Home*, memory provides a repertoire of narratives from which the protagonists negotiate their sense of belonging and their fluid selves. Indeed, memory plays a remarkable role in the construction of the characters' identities. For instance, characters collect memories of prewar times by going back mainly to the places where they spent their childhood and youth. To reclaim personal and family history, Maysa, for instance, returns to the mountains from Beirut as the war broke out. Near the beginning of the novella, she writes:

“I have returned to the mountain to collect memories of the lives that wandered through this house as though my own depended on it. And as my heart turns further inward, I nurture a secret that in telling the stories of those who loved me I am creating my own.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, collecting memories is a mode of knowing the past – and thus of constructing identity – in *Somewhere, Home*. Maysa documents the memories she collects in a notebook, and thus engages in ‘an act of transfer’<sup>10</sup> to the coming generation. In this way, remembering is a tool for providing insights into the past, meeting the needs of the present, and establishing a vision for the future. Anh Hua argues that ‘memories do not simply document the past but move us to new ways of articulation, thus liberating us from the past as it has been known to the present and the future.’<sup>11</sup> In short, memories not only document the past but (re)create it as well – they are sites at which the past, present, and future are negotiated and reconstructed. Jarrar’s novella employs different ‘archives of memory,’<sup>12</sup> including stories, documents, and images.

As the above quote testifies, Maysa collects memories in order to retell them as stories. The effect of narration is significant here. Although this first third of the novella includes many voices and stories, each is narrated by Maysa. What is at stake here is the role of others’ stories in narrating one’s

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9. Ibid, 4

10. Marianne Hirsch & Valerie Smith. “Feminism and cultural memory: An introduction.” *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Gender and Cultural Memory Special Issue eds. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 1-19. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Autumn 2002.

11. Anh Hua, “Diaspora and cultural memory,” in *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home* Vijay Agnew, (ed.), (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 205.

12. Ibid, 9.

own. For instance, after Maysa tells her family members' stories, she stands on fertile ground to write her own narrative and construct her own identity. Here, I suggest that Jarrar is conveying how active family is in the process of narrative identity construction, because family articulates a coming together of individual and collective identities. This is reminiscent of Paul Ricoeur's idea that 'people do not remember alone, but with help from the memories of others; they take narratives given them by others for their own memories; and we compose our own memories.'<sup>13</sup> Maysa requires other people in order to construct her identity and negotiate her belonging. The memories of others both contribute to the construction of one's own history and identity and to the extension and further articulation of collective memories and collective identities.

Alexandru Cuc et al. have discussed the role of dominant narrators in the formation of collective memories. As a dominant narrator, Maysa plays a major role in laying the pathways for collective memories to emerge and spread. These collective memories are the product of shared individual memories.<sup>14</sup> Maysa presents different individual stories and experiences, and each contributes to the backbone of her story. Each of the characters in this third of the narrative – Alia, Saeeda, and Leila – have their own individual memories which are shared and brought together by Maysa, the dominant narrator, and thus forged into collective memories are born. In telling others' stories, Maysa feels sympathetic and expresses solidarity with them. In affiliating with these characters, she can be said to inhabit many identities insofar as she situates herself at the heart of others' experiences.

Maysa's narrative expresses a major diasporic theme: that personal and collective memories are intertwined. Maurice Halbwachs contends that 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.'<sup>15</sup> In short, individuals' social interactions mix collective, private, public identities, as well as the past and present, to create a collective identity that is always fluid. However, not all shared memories are collective memories: a memory 'can only be considered collective if it is widely shared and if it helps define and bind together a group.'<sup>16</sup> Jarrar's work discusses this relationship between

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13. Paul Ricoeur, "Memory, forgetfulness, and history," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* (1996): 15.

14. Alexandru Cuc, Jonathan Koppel, & William Hirst, "Silence is not golden: A case for socially shared retrieval-induced forgetting," *Psychological Science*, 18 (2007): 752.

15. *Ibid.*, 15.

16. Adam Brown, Nicole Kouri, & William Hirst, "Memory's malleability: Its role in shaping collective memory and social identity," *Frontiers in Psychology* 3, (2012):1.

personal and collective memory, by revealing each of the protagonist's self to the public, hence situating each story at the junction of personal and collective identification. But collective memories do not aim at erasing or obscuring personal memories; they merely suggest that the construction of memory, and hence of identity and of meaning, is a social and collaborative act, and that this sociality forms the basis of a collective identity.

Collective identities are also the product of a shared past. Group identity is stressed at several points in Jarrar's novella. This is especially true of her focus on women's lives during the Lebanese Civil War and across various diasporic contexts. Because she adopts this focus, she can be said to be engaging in selective memory. This selective remembering gives voice to women. Being left behind by their fathers and husbands during the war through migration, these women are socially excluded. In fact, Jarrar wields the memories of marginalised women in order to foreground and explore their harrowing experiences both within and outside Lebanon. Hence, these voices are meant to critique historical attempts to silence women, and thus the past/history develops into the loci of struggle. For Hirsh and Smith,

“What we know about the past, and thus our understanding of the present, is shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history; relative degrees of power and powerlessness, privilege and disenfranchisement, determine the spaces where witnesses and testimony may be heard or ignored.”<sup>17</sup>

As feminist writers, Hirsh and Smith stress the role of counter-memory, which is made liable through women's stories, be they oral narrative, fiction, or testimonies. Most often, the experiences of women as written by males are embedded patriarchal structures, exposing same hegemony that women go through in society. *Somewhere, Home* reminisces about the experiences of the powerless, the suppressed and forgotten women who suffer twice: they endure the trauma of the war, and they are victims of patriarchy which manifest in the figure of the father and the husband. It thus questions dominant, male-centred and state-centred narratives and seeks to offer women a space within which to tell their stories. In this vein, Jarrar's characters' quests for memories do not idealise the past, but rather destabilise hegemonic and patriarchal discourses about women's roles in diasporic histories. Thus, the various discourses of memory can be a site where marginalised and disenfranchised people are endowed with a voice to (re)write their stories of the past in the present and attain and articulate a vision of the future which includes them.

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17. Ibid, 12.

Cultural memory in Jarrar's novella is shaped at and negotiated through different sites. In constructing and negotiating their identities, each of the novella's protagonists alludes to the abandoned house on Mount Lebanon. Thus, the house is a unifying thread between the three parts of the novella – it 'acts as an archive for [...] memories.'<sup>18</sup> For instance, because the house's construction and existence are premised upon the existence and presence of family, Maysa dubs it a fertile ground for collecting memories which she can then transfer forward to future generations: 'I want to spend time on my own on the mountain to gather stories about my grandmother and her children and put them in a book to read by my own children one day.'<sup>19</sup> Thus, for Maysa, the house embodies memory and therefore embodies home and a sense of belonging. Memories endow the house with significance – by comparison, Maysa describes the house where Liela and her family settled in America as 'a home without memories, without a stirring, weighted past.'<sup>20</sup>

The house on Mount Lebanon serves as an archive of memories in the other protagonists' stories as well. Salwa's depiction of the house where she was born is fraught with images of the past. When her father decides that the family should leave home in search of education and work opportunities as well as a better life in diaspora, her mother exclaims: 'We can't leave. This is our village, our home. Why would we ever want to go anywhere else?.'<sup>21</sup> Here, Salwa's mother expresses the family's intense attachment to their home, which is an inescapable point of reference for their individual and collective identities. This is corroborated by Gaston Bachelard, who observes that 'our house is our corner of the world [...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.'<sup>22</sup> Going with May to the Mount Lebanon to visit again the abandoned rural house, Salwa's memories of this house are laden with feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty; for the house is no longer the same, and it has undergone many changes, as illustrated earlier. Standing in front the house, Salwa declares:

"We are facing the house I am surprised by the how insignificant and unattractive it looks [...] 'Even during my last trip when Mathilde and the children were still here...it was different then.' May puts her hand on my shoulder. 'Houses are like that, Mum,' she says quietly. 'They need to have people in them to stay alive.'"<sup>23</sup>

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18. Ibid, 125.

19. Ibid, 44.

20. Ibid, 49.

21. Ibid, 196.

22. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press. 1994), 4.

23. Ibid, 191.

Salwa deems the house insignificant and unattractive because it has changed from her memories. As her daughter May suggests, people are what give life to houses, and that the house was alive when the family inhabited it. May's comments suggest that the house is a space of family collective memory.

Throughout the novella, this collective memory manifests itself through different objects. Jarrar also wields letters and photographs as sources of knowledge about the past and archives of memory. Her characters use these objects to encounter, find solace in, and utilise memories to reconstruct their pasts – especially when the objects in question are related to missing or deceased loved ones. For instance, Aida's attachment to Amou Mohammed, a Palestinian refugee who is assassinated by a Lebanese militiaman, is most clearly expressed when she reads his letters after his death. In reading these letters, Aida seeks and re-creates narratives of her lost companion, who was 'like a second father to her.'<sup>24</sup> Through these letters, Aida leverages memory as a truth-telling tool to reconstruct the past and reproduce her own identity.

Photographs also evoke memory-as-identity-construction in Aida's narrative. During a visit to Amou Mohammed's wife Um Hisham, Aida says that 'just seeing you again, Um Hisham [...] brings back the memories.'<sup>25</sup> Here, the mere sight of Amou Mohammed's family sparks Aida's memories. Although Um Hisham refuses to talk about Amou Mohammed, she indirectly facilitates Aida's acts of memory and identity construction through her silence because within this silence, Aida's eyes are drawn to a photograph of the deceased. It was in fact a photograph on which both Aida and Amou Mohammed appear. Depicting the photograph, Dina and Sara, Aida's daughters, informed us that 'Amou Mohammed sat on a balcony with their mother... Found it [the photograph] among Mother's things and had it enlarged.'<sup>26</sup> Aida's preserving the photograph can be read as a demonstration of how the photograph serves as an articulation and representation of Aida's identity. The photograph binds her to the Palestinian refugee in way that testifies to the continuous development of her sense of identity: her identity thrives much on her attachment to the Palestinian refugee. This identity is always in a process of becoming, and that seeks to reconstruct the past without attempting to revive it, for the past is unattainable.

Photographs also figure in the other protagonists' narratives. When Nabil, Salwa's grandson, returns to Australia from Lebanon, he brings with

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24. *Ibid*, 116.

25. *Ibid*, 115.

26. *Ibid*, 84.

him many photographs of the family and the old house on Mount Lebanon. At this stage in the narrative, Salwa is in a nursing home in Australia and is mere moments from death. She feels solace and comfort while viewing these photographs with her grandson, because they remind her of her past, her family members, and her home. By contemplating these photos, she is able to give meaning and context to her past, her present, and her grandson's future – photographs, therefore, proffer her the grounds on which to negotiate and reconcile her identity and belonging because they offer her the opportunity to reflect on her life.

And Hua posits that 'memory can evoke identity formation, the rewriting of home and belonging, nostalgia, mourning, and a sense of lost frequently found in diaspora, exile and immigrant narratives.'<sup>27</sup> In Jarrar's novella, different sights and objects – houses, letters, photographs – spark memories and endow places with meaning. Her characters' acts of memory reconstruct the past in ways which testify to continuous and interwoven nature of past and present, which (like identity itself) are neither are fixed nor rigid but are instead constantly negotiated and in flux.<sup>28</sup> Through these memories, subaltern women in the novella can speak and unearth their attitudes and feelings. In short, memory plays a significant role in how Jarrar's characters reproduced their identities and search for somewhere home.

## 2. Memory, War Crimes, and (Re)writing History

Because Jarrar's novella wields memory as a way for her characters to reflect on and reconstruct history, it questions the veracity of mainstream or official interpretations of the Lebanese Civil War. If, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot posits, 'history is a story about power,'<sup>29</sup> then the construction, shape, and textures of historical narratives are determined by those who hold power. These people produce what Trouillot calls 'one-sided historicity.'<sup>30</sup> That means that only one hegemonic version of history is provided, excluding other narratives and versions. Patricia Sarrafian Ward's *The Bullet Collection* and Abbas El-Zein's *Leave to Remain*<sup>31</sup> and many other post-war Lebanese diasporic texts

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27. Ibid, 200.

28. For more information of the premise that memories are on the move, see Monika Palmberger and Jelena Tošić's edited book *Memories on the Move: Experiencing Mobility, Rethinking the Past* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

29. Michel-Rolph, Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 5.

30. Ibid, 4.

31. Patricia Sarrafian Ward's *The Bullet Collection* and Abbas El-Zein's *Leave to Remain* are examples of post-war Anglophone Lebanese literature writing about the protracted civil war and the traumatic experiences of displacement.

have sought to challenge this ‘one-sided historicity’ by resisting amnesiac discourses generated by official versions of history.<sup>32</sup> Jarrar’s novella is no different; *Somewhere, Home* attempts to destabilise the economy of power relations which is defined through official discourses. It seems to start from the premise that ‘Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.’<sup>33</sup> In other words, it takes as a starting point the idea that narratives of a singular History provoke the emergence of multiple histories. The striking use of memory in Jarrar’s text lays the ground for this multiplicity of histories insofar as her character’s use memory as a tool to learn about, reconstruct, and integrate the past into their lives and identities.

In rewriting the history of the Lebanese Civil War, Jarrar must confront the war crimes and other atrocities which were part of the war. Historian Haugbolle Sune argues that it is difficult to know precisely how many people were killed in the war due to the scale of these atrocities: ‘Of the 90,000 killed, close to 20,000 are individuals who were kidnapped or disappeared, and who must be assumed dead as they have not been accounted for [...] it is possible that the real number exceeds 100,000.’<sup>34</sup> Jarrar makes allusions to these atrocities throughout the novella. For instance, Maysa’s narrative describes how intense and sudden violence became a part of everyday life in Lebanon’s capital, Beirut. When Maysa decides to leave for the mountains, Beirut is ‘smoulder[ing] in a war against itself.’<sup>35</sup> Her husband comments that the fighting ‘flares up and calms down again. We manage to live during the gaps in between.’<sup>36</sup> The deep uncertainty of the war makes Aida’s family opt to leave Lebanon ‘after the first battle [clarify] for Ras Beirut ripped through their complacency.’<sup>37</sup> These images of Beirut as a site of violence against civilians help express the essential diasporic tension of the novella by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and displacement and pushing the novella’s characters to search for somewhere home.

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32. See David Rieff, “...And if there was also a duty to forget, how would we think about history then?” *International Review of the Red Cross* (2019), 101 (1): 59-67.

33. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An introduction*, volume I, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95.

34. Sune Haugbolle, “The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war.” *Online encyclopedia of mass violence* 5, (2011): 1. In this context, see also Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

35. Haugbolle, “The historiography and the memory,” 4.

36. *Ibid*, 5.

37. *Ibid*, 77.

Amou Mohammed's death in the second part of the novella reflects on the Lebanese Civil War in two main ways. First, his killing reflects on a main consequence of the war: the (sometimes permanent) separation of loved ones and families. His death confuses Aida and causes her to lose her bearings:

“on the day she heard of Amou Mohammed's death she put down the phone, donned her raincoat and rushed into a nearby park, [...] the memories came back quickly and stumbled over each other: his delight in loving, his gentleness and the lilt in his voice whenever he came to the end of a story he had been telling her.”<sup>38</sup>

After Amou Mohammed's death, Aida's world becomes mysterious, and memories are all that remain of him and what he meant to her. She seeks to heal this trauma by reconstructing her memories via visits to his family, where she finds photographs and stories of him. However much she seeks to heal, however, Aida always carries this traumatic and essentially diasporic scar from the war, which is forever a part of her identity.

Second, Amou Mohammed's death takes place in refugee camp in Lebanon. Haugbolle argues that ‘the destabilisation of the Lebanese state [...] must be primarily seen as an effect of the Palestinian question.’<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the displacement of Palestinian refugees and their lives in camps are central concerns of Aida's story. Aida herself must navigate the camps and her own, self-derived sense of refugee life and her own positionality. For instance, she resists visiting him in ‘the unknown world of refugee camps and poverty, [which] she imagined would be total squalor.’<sup>40</sup> Once in the camp, Aida ‘walked through the open gutters that ran alongside the path. Barefoot and dishevelled children wandered listlessly up and down the alleyway and tugged at Aida's sleeves of attention. The level of noise was unlike any she had ever heard.’<sup>41</sup> Jarrar's portrayals of Palestinian refugee camps reflect on the effects of displacement and layer her diasporic narrative by raising the question of how diasporic and refugee communities view one another in times of crisis. In addition, by including these camps in her novella, Jarrar defies arguments that suggest that the Lebanese conflict was solely an internal affair. In fact, other authorities have been uncomfortable with the term Civil War. These include Norman Saadi Nikro, who states that the term Civil War ‘tends not only to exclude violence in Lebanon by regional players (Israel, United

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38. Ibid, 78.

39. Ibid, 3.

40. Ibid, 85.

41. Ibid, 86.

States, Syria, the Palestinian movement), but presupposes a neat model of two discrete sides or entities engaged in violent confrontation.<sup>42</sup> It seems that Jarrar also suggests that ongoing regional issues and instability were as much to blame for the outbreak of war as Lebanon's internal power struggles and ethnic tensions.

By revealing palpably different acts of violence against Lebanese and Palestinian civilians, Jarrar's novella engenders a rich discourse of the need to remember. We might say that she is aiming to write what Haugbolle calls a 'history of remembering' (Haugbolle 2010). To write such a history is to

“map shifting contours of overlapping and contradicting narratives in the national realm. It is to observe mnemonic manipulation – invented traumas and idioms for political mobilisation – as well as memories of individual life stories. It is to listen to a wealth of stories about death and survival, hate and compassion, drama and ennui.<sup>43</sup>”

Jarrar offers such a history by providing a wealth of stories and articulating a plurality of historical accounts in order to express (in ways that official, state-forwarded accounts of the nation and its concerns cannot) how this trauma is at once heterogeneously individual and yet collective.<sup>44</sup>

In this way, we can think about Jarrar's novella as engaging in what Michael Shapiro calls literary justice to the victims of the Lebanese Civil War. In contrast to legal justice, literary justice 'keeps issues open and available for continuous reflection rather than imposing definitive judgments.'<sup>45</sup> Rather than seek absolutist narratives or accounts of the past, literary justice lays the ground for different versions of history to emerge and encourages us to reflect on their content and the relation to so-called official histories. In this way, literary justice leaves room for constant reflection on war and its accompanying atrocities and always keeps open the question of how to live and act in a world where such things are not only possible but occur with some regularity.

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42. Norman Saadi Nikro, *The Fragmenting Force of Memory: Self, Literary Style, and Civil War in Lebanon*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 10.

43. Sune Haugbolle, *War and memory in Lebanon*. Vol. 34. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

44. See Marijn C. W. Kroes and Rain Liivoja, "Eradicating war memories: Neuroscientific reality and ethical concerns," *International Review of the Red Cross* (2019), 101 (1): 69-95.

45. Michael J. Shapiro, *War Crimes, Atrocity and Justice*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 1.

Since the end of the war in 1990, the Lebanese state has sought to impose a discourse of amnesia by consigning the war to insignificance.<sup>46</sup> However, by engaging the war through her characters' memories, Jarrar gives the war the aspect of what Jacques Derrida calls 'the unforgivable and imprescriptible.'<sup>47</sup> Derrida invokes this phrase in discussing crimes against humanity. He maintains that these crimes are unpardonable because of their horrifying nature:

“The crimes committed in the name of humanity and against it, and those atrocities and horrors beyond the human measure in their radical and absolute evil cannot go with the idea of forgiveness in the sense of a political, legal, legislative or even religious consensus. These atrocities are unforgivable, irretrievable, unforgettable, irremediable, irreversible, and irrevocable. They go beyond the limits (Translation mine).<sup>48</sup>”

If crimes against humanity are unforgivable, then the perpetrators of these crimes must be called upon and judged. However, in many conflicts – and in the Lebanese Civil War, with its many foreign actors – such crimes always remain inexpiable. This is why both Derrida and Ricoeur describe such crimes as 'imprescriptible.' According to Ricoeur, 'the principle of imprescriptibility authorises the indefinite pursuit of the authors of these [...] crimes.'<sup>49</sup> Diasporic texts about the Lebanese Civil War engage in this 'indefinite pursuit' through their conviction and trust in literary justice. Such texts are not interested in reconciliation, which implies coming to terms with and possibly forgetting the past. On the contrary, they are interested in keeping such memories alive and awake – they always call the past to the present. In doing so, the past always remains a source of knowledge and a weapon with which to counter and correct official attempts to impose a discourse

46. Oren Barak, "Don't Mention the War?" The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon," *The Middle East Journal* 61 (1) (2007): 49-70.

47. Jacques Derrida, *Pardoner: l'impardonnable et l'imprescriptible*, trans. Mustapha El Arif and Abderrahime Nouredine, (Italie: publications al-mutawasit, 2018), 11.

48. "...إن الجرائم التي ارتكبت باسم الإنسان وفي حقها، تلك الفظائع والشناعات التي تتجاوز حدود الانسانية وتطال المجال ما فوق الانساني وتصل إلى حد الشر الجذري والمطلق، لا يمكنها أن تستقيم والفكرة الساذجة عن الصفح بما هو توافق سياسي أو قانوني أو تشريعي أو ديني حتى؛ إن هذه الفظائع تدخل في باب ما لا يقبل التكفير، وما لا يقبل جبر الضرر، وما لا يمكن محوه، والعضال (irremediable)، ما لا رجعة فيه (irreversible) وما لا ينسى (inoubliable)، وما لا يلغى أو ينقض (irrevocable)، إنها تتجاوز الحد النهائي والأخير،" جاك دريدا، الصفح، ما لا يقبل الصفح وما لا يتقادم، ترجمة عن الفرنسية: مصطفى العارف وعبد الرحيم نور الدين، (إيطاليا: منشورات المتوسط، 2018)، 11، تقديم المترجمين:

Jacques Derrida, *Aṣ-Ṣafḥ, mā lā yaqbal aṣ-ṣafḥ, wamā lā yataqādam*, tarjamat Mustafaa al-'Arīf wa'Abd ar-Rahīm nūr ad-dīyn, (Itāliā: manshūrāt al-mutawasit, 2018), 11.

49. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 472.

of amnesia. In short, literature such as Jarrar's novella constitutes a 'history of remembering' by offering multiple, marginalized testimonies which both overlap with and contradict state-forwarded narratives of the nation and its concerns. Such histories offer a plurality of narratives and encompass a variety of experiences. Their aim is thus corrective and counterhegemonic rather than accommodative.

### Conclusions

This paper assesses the striking presence and function of memory in Nada Awar Jarrar's novella *Somewhere, Home*. It assesses how, as an essentially diasporic novella, *Somewhere, Home* engages the interwoven roles of place, displacement, and memory in the process of identity construction, and how Jarrar's characters shape personal and collective memories and identities and (re)articulate and (re)produce their own sense of self and belonging through acts of remembrance. It also stresses that memory does not seek to revive the past, but to reconstruct and integrate the past – and that, in the context of diasporic literature; this often takes the form of opposition to existing hegemonic discourses of belonging and official history through the pursuit of literary justice.

Post-war Lebanese writing remains topical. The issues it explores are mainly the outcome of the Lebanese Civil wartime. Remembering individual and collective traumas born out of experiences of displacement within and beyond Lebanon is significant. Remembering defies attempts at amnesia, proffers lessons from history and helps drawing the backbone of any nation's better future. In many ways, this literature also offers reflections on the pain of displacement as a human experience. Psychological repercussions and cultural traumas, engendered from loss of identity and meaning, are perennial to a wide range of literature nowadays exploring the questions of refugees emerging out of political instability in different corners of the global south, namely the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>50</sup>

Recently, Lebanese diaspora literature has started to shift focus to the challenges faced by immigrants, particularly Arab Muslims, in their host societies. In today's globalizing world, the homeland seems to lose the ground for the hostland. True, memories of the homeland are mobile and different immigrants communities seek to make home away from home through different discourses and practices, including culinary practices, religious rituals, etc. In this, diasporic texts tap into the different ways in which the

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50. In this context, see Karima Lazali, *Le trauma colonial, une enquête sur les effets psychiques et politiques contemporains de l'oppression coloniale en Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018).

immigrants negotiate their identities within the mainstream societies. In this sense, questions of racism, discrimination and exclusion come to the fore. In short, research should be directed towards the delicate and thorny issue of immigrants- a transnational one- as explored by diaspora writers.

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#### تاريخ التذكُّر: الذاكرة والهوية والحرب في رواية ندى عوار جرار [منزل في مكان ما]، (2004)

**الخلاصة:** تحتل الذاكرة مكانة قوية وكبيرة في الكتابات الصادرة باللغة الإنجليزية عن أدباء الشتات المنحدرين من أصول عربية. ويعود ذلك إلى العلاقة الوثيقة القائمة بين الذاكرة والمكان، وكما يقول محمود درويش بذكاء: "ليست للمرء علاقة حقيقية بالمكان، في غياب الذكريات." وبالتالي تكتسي الذاكرة أهميتها المركزية في بناء الشعور بالانتماء والهوية وللحديث عن تجارب مختلفة لاختراق الحدود الجغرافية والثقافية واللغوية والتنقل عبر مكوناتها. وبهذا المعنى، تتناسل مواضيع الشتات في الذاكرة، لتتحول معها نصوص الشتات إلى أدوات لجمع الذكريات. وتستكشف هذه الورقة دور الذاكرة ومكانتها في رواية ندى عوار جرار الصادرة سنة 2004، بعنوان منزل في مكان ما، والتي تضفي قيمة كبيرة على أهمية الذاكرة. وتسعى صاحبة الرواية أيضاً إلى فهم العلاقة بين الذاكرة وبناء الهوية من خلال فسحها المجال أمام إمكانية مناقشة الذكريات الشخصية والجماعية. كما يبحث نص الرواية المستند في بناء السرد إلى الذكريات في الدور الذي لعبته جرائم الحرب وما إليها من الفظائع الأخرى في سياقات ذاكرة الشتات ما بعد الحرب. وباختصار، تحاول رواية مدى عوار جرار استكشاف الذاكرة كنمط من المعرفة التي تعبر عن الآثار المؤلمة المترتبة عن الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية بغية تحقيق الإنصاف لفائدة الضحايا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الهوية، الذاكرة، المنزل، التاريخ، لبنان، اللبنانيون.

**Titre: Une Histoire du souvenir: mémoire, identité et guerre dans *Somewhere, Home de Nada Awar Jarrar* (2004)**

**Résumé:** La mémoire a une puissance étonnante dans l'écriture diasporique arabe anglophone. Cela est dû à la relation inextricable entre la mémoire et le lieu. Comme Mahmoud Darwich le souligne pertinemment, "sans souvenirs, vous n'avez pas de véritable relation avec un lieu." La mémoire est donc importante pour construire un sentiment d'appartenance et d'identité et pour négocier différentes expériences de mobilité à travers les frontières géographiques, culturelles et linguistiques. En ce sens, les sujets diasporiques prospèrent grâce à la mémoire et les textes diasporiques sont des outils de collecte de souvenirs. Cet article explore le rôle de la mémoire dans le roman de Nada Awar Jarrar *Somewhere, Home*,

paru en 2004, et qui attribue beaucoup d'importance à la mémoire. Son auteur cherche à comprendre le lien entre la mémoire et la construction identitaire en initiant une discussion sur les mémoires personnelles et collectives. Elle examine également le rôle des crimes de guerre et de diverses autres atrocités dans le contexte de la mémoire diasporique d'après-guerre. En bref, elle explore la mémoire comme un mode de connaissance qui exprime les effets des atrocités de la guerre civile libanaise afin de rendre justice aux victimes de la guerre.

**Mots-clés:** identité, mémoire, maison, histoire, libanais.

**Título: Una historia para recordar: memoria, identidad y guerra en la novela *Somewhere, Home* (2004) de Nada Awar Jarrar**

Resumen: La memoria tiene un poder sorprendente en la literatura diaspórica árabe anglófona. Esto se debe a la relación inextricable entre la memoria y el lugar. Como Mahmoud Darwich afirma, astutamente, “sin recuerdos no tienes una relación real con un lugar.” Por lo tanto, la memoria es importante para construir un sentido de pertenencia e identidad y para negociar diferentes experiencias de desplazamiento a través de fronteras geográficas, culturales y lingüísticas. En este sentido, los sujetos diaspóricos prosperan en la memoria, y los textos diaspóricos son herramientas para recolectar recuerdos.

Este artículo explora el papel de la memoria en la novela de Nada Awar Jarrar, titulada *Somewhere, Home* (2004), que atribuye mucho valor a la memoria. Busca comprender el nexo entre la memoria y la construcción de la identidad iniciando una discusión sobre los recuerdos personales y colectivos. También examina el papel de los crímenes de guerra y otras atrocidades en el contexto de la memoria diaspórica de posguerra. En resumen, explora la memoria como un modo de conocimiento que expresa los feroces efectos de la Guerra Civil Libanesa para hacer justicia a las víctimas de la guerra.

**Palabras clave:** identidad, memoria, hogar, historia, libanés.