

Soukaina Aouaki, Lahcen Ait Idir, Hassan II University, Morocco

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## On the Complexities of Displacement: Wars and Wounds in Nada Awar Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* (2016)

### ABSTRACT

This article studies the complexities of displacement as a product of the socio-political melancholy in Syria resulting from the so-called “Arab Spring”. It focuses on Nada Awar Jarrar’s *An Unsafe Haven* (2016), which follows the lives of various characters who are affected by the Syrian civil war in their search of refuge in Lebanon. The story taps into the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Lebanon as the first destination of the Syrian refugees. It vividly portrays the struggles of the “displaced” and the “nomadic” people seeking safety and stability in a world shattered by tensions and upheavals. Drawing on theoretical approaches to questions of displacement, memory, and trauma, this article examines the traumatic experience of dislocation as fuelled by civil conflicts and political volatilities. Furthermore, it explores the predicament of displacement and its wounds.

### KEYWORDS

displacement; memory; refugeeism; trauma; war

### 1. Introduction

The Arab novel in English, also known as the Arab Anglophone novel, has been produced by Arab diasporic writers since the early twentieth century (Gana, 2015). The emergence of this type of novel springs from the allure to respond artistically to, *inter alia*, the “unstable” Arab world (Hout, 2012). Strikingly, 9/11 is often seen as a turning point in the history of the Arab Anglophone novel: “More than half of Arab novelists writing in English today wrote their debut novels after September 11, 2001, and the number of new novelists will continue to proliferate exponentially” (Gana, 2015, p. 2). Most of the novels produced post-9/11 indicate an emergent field of Arab Anglophone literature in different contexts, including Arab-American, Arab-British, Arab-Canadian, and Arab-Australian settings. Tackling the Lebanese Anglophone novel warrants *a priori* understanding of the historical context from

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Soukaina Aouaki, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Mohammedia, Hassan II University, Casablanca, Phone: 00212523324873, Soukaina.aouaki@univh2c.ma, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7877-3030>

Lahcen Ait Idir, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Mohammedia, Hassan II University, Casablanca, lahcen.aitidir@univh2c.ma, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3680-0039>

which it emerged. Different waves of Lebanese migration to various destinations cannot go unnoticed. This fact is, to a large extent, the result of many disagreements between various sects within Lebanon and in the broader context of the region of the Middle East. In his book, *Lubnān wa Ṭāʾif (Lebanon and Taiif)*, Arīf al-Abd (2001) posits that Lebanon has always been a site of conflicts (p. 9). Yet, the protracted Civil War (1975–1990) was the most terrible conflict which led to the dispersion of around 274,000 Lebanese people (Humphrey, 2013, p. 35).

According to Syrine Hout (2012), “Wars have always acted as stimuli for writers” (p. 1). The Lebanese wars are no exception. These wars brought about a volatile growth in Lebanese literature. In fact, the post-war period in Lebanon has been, up to this day, one of genuine intellectual and artistic blossoming. Because of the vast number of novels produced about and inspired by the Lebanese war, critics have been debating what they should label as a “War novel” (Jarrar, 2004–2005). This idea is corroborated by Felix Lang (2016) who posits that “since the 1980s, Lebanese literature, and especially the novel, has, by and large, been equalled with Civil War literature. From the late 1990s to the present day, the 15-year-long Civil War remains the contextual master frame” (p. 2). In this context, the narratives of the Lebanese writers are testimonials on the experiences of the war, reflecting the physical, social, cultural, and political realities of Lebanon. In this sense, the Lebanese novels are historical accounts. The link between narrative and history comes to the fore. Given that most Lebanese diasporic writers have lived through the war, their narratives are attempts to make known the reality of the war by subverting single narratives. In narrativizing those real events through a vision of the past in contemporary literature, diasporic writing feeds on memories.

The fact of the matter is that the turmoil in the Middle East in general is central to the works of Lebanese writers. As a case in point, the literary productions of Nada Awar Jarrar, a Lebanese Anglophone writer, explore wars and wounds experienced by different communities in the Middle East such as Lebanon and Syria. Her latest novel, *An Unsafe Haven* (2016), is no exception. This novel unpacks the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Lebanon as the first destination of the Syrian border crossers. *An Unsafe Haven* delves into the infuriating experiences of its “displaced” and “deterritorialized” subjects, to borrow Gilles Deleuze’s words. These experiences are ignited mainly by social upheavals and political volatilities in the war-ravaged Syria. In this respect, this article explores the complexities of displacement and its wounds primarily in relation to the characters’ sense of identity and home. In short, this paper looks at the impact of movement on individuals, families, and places, due to the consequences of war.

## **2. The Syrian War: The Context and the Crisis**

History hurts throughout the Middle East that has been characterized by constant mayhem and instability. The so-called “Arab Spring” which broke out in 2011,

has ironically worsened the situation in a number of countries in the region, including Lebanon and Syria. In truth, the two countries stand as frequent points of departure for waves of migrants and refugees driven out of their homelands mainly because of civil wars and political uncertainties. In this vein, *An Unsafe Haven* opens with the Syrian war's context and crisis:

In the past five years, the Arab world has swelled and raged as dictators have fallen and people in their hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions of others displaced. In Syria and in Iraq, in Egypt and in Libya, and in the farther reaches of the Arab Gulf, we have looked on in horror while humanity appears to stumble over itself, and Lebanon, in the wake of all this turmoil, teeters on the brink. Living in Beirut can be deceptive; it offers a false impression of safety and permanence in the midst of all upheaval. We feel the direct consequences of the tragic events in Syria, but it is hardly by choice. (Jarrar, 2016, p. 4–5)

Sharing the same points of departure but reaching different destinations characterizes refugeeism in the Middle East, demonstrating the unavoidable choice to flee made by many civilians in the region. It does not matter where they head as long as they manage to leave. To them, “to leave” is “to remain”, hence to ward off many perils; being killed, going missing, or getting injured. Unsurprisingly, however, both the journey and the arrival of refugees are mostly unbearable and horrendous, for they are marked by pain. Experiences in the novel show how compelling it is to leave one's country in search of survival away from home. Many of these experiences have been narrated or reported in novels, journals, diaries, poems, and other cultural productions. For instance, narratives of displacement weigh upon Arab Anglophone literary productions. In fact, because of this frantic concern with “people on the move”, this writing is often labelled as war writing, displacement writing, and refugee writing.

It is of critical significance to underline that the issue of refugeeism looms large in most of Jarrar's novels, including *Somewhere*, *Home*, *Dreams of Water*, and *A Good Land*. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to argue that her writing represents genuine refugee writing. Certainly, it is within this refugee writing that *An Unsafe Haven* is inscribed. Refugeeism as a mode of life, as it were, is central to Jarrar's novel, because it explores the traumatic experiences of refugees fleeing war-torn Syria and its violent emergencies. By the end of the novel, Jarrar's protagonist, who is a Lebanese Beirut-based journalist for a British newspaper, provides the following cogitations about refugeeism:

I have wondered why we allow ourselves to believe that refugee is a right for some while remaining a privilege for others. I have questioned how exactly we have come to accept that life and abundance are accidents of birth rather than a moral responsibility, how we reconcile this clear truth with the notion that the wretchedness of fellow human beings can reasonably be kept at arm's length, can be contained like this [...]. I realize that as long as homelessness exists, I am – we all of us are – refugees. We are their fears and their frustration, their anguish, and

their undying will to survive, their optimism and their conviction that this world, somewhere, somehow, will always be their harbor. (pp. 246–247)

Importantly, *An Unsafe Haven* incarnates a “voice of anguished scream” to use Salhi and Netton’s expression (2006), in that it unearths the civilians’ homelessness, a severe form of trauma, across various physical and metaphorical borders. Jarrar deploys a number of vivid images and significant figures to spotlight refugeeism mainly through the character of Hannah, the protagonist in Jarrar’s novel. In this way, the author reflects on the state of refugees by presenting various suggestions that invite the reader to think deeply about the universal predicament of being a refugee. Indeed, this universalization of the refugee question grants Jarrar’s text a “transnational positionality” (Ball, 2022, p. 52), in that it is concerned with journeys taken by people who have moved out to different places in the world and who have developed several identities. To be specific, the “transnational positionality” of *An Unsafe Haven* is clearly evident in:

the character cast of the novel, which constellates around three intersecting relationships: between Beirut-based, dual nationality journalist Hannah, wife to Peter, a British expatriate doctor; between Anas, an exiled Syrian artist, and his German wife Brigitte, friends with Hannah and Peter; and Iraqi refugee and aid worker Maysoun, also friends with Hannah and Peter. (Ball, 2022, p. 51)

These characters vehemently undergo the burden of different forms of exile in different places. Some of them, including Hannah, experience only “internal exile”<sup>1</sup>, but many others endure exile beyond their national borders. It is true that Jarrar’s text spotlights Hannah as the character around whom the story pivots. Yet, the experiences of other characters are no less riveting than Hannah’s. Multifarious nets and knots staunchly defy borders, articulating entanglements of transnationalism and mobility. In narrating the variety of trajectories followed by the characters, Jarrar’s novel stands as a telling instance of transnational accounts, for it highlights many transnational connections which (re)configure the displaced people’s sense of selves and places<sup>2</sup>. In so doing, it makes the subject of refugees a matter of humanist appeal.

### 3. On Displacement: Forced Departures and Painful Arrivals

Embedded within the context of war and its accompanying atrocities, *An Unsafe Haven* covers, through its protagonist, various images of the corrosive effects

<sup>1</sup> In her article “Away from Home at Home: Internal Exile in Nada Awar Jarrar’s *An Unsafe Haven*”, Khaoula Chakour (2021) states that Jarrar’s protagonist develops some sort of identity crisis mainly because of undergoing “internal exile” which is “the psychological and psychic exile within one’s homeland and one’s inner psyche”. This form of exile, she adds, “is no less excruciating than the physical exile, for it engenders the same or even more uncompromising feelings of identity crisis and displacement” (p. 275).

<sup>2</sup> See Jumana Bayeh (2017, pp. 124–153).

of the conflict in Syria on the displaced. Being a journalist, Jarrar's protagonist is granted the power of "photography", in displaying people's forced departures and painful arrivals – that is, migrants' tragedy. In this respect, Jarrar states that Hannah:

recognizes the advantage photojournalists and television reporters have in covering tragedy; pictures say more than words ever could, their impact is immediate, and their portrayal of suffering and urgency unequivocal. She suspects that what she eventually writes will not manage to express what she knows is true; the unyielding pull of despair, and, despite the odds, the inexorable reality of expecting something better. (p. 56)

As a journalist, Hannah deploys an array of images and figures to represent the experiences of war victims through a "photographic referent"<sup>3</sup>. Photography, as a semiotic mode, provides the process of storytelling with a visual reality. In this sense, photographs are illustrative narratives which highlight memories and tell histories. Just as texts narrate stories, pictures provide windows into past experiences. What is at stake here is the power of photography in authenticating reality. Interestingly, Hannah's storytelling is always rife with imagery that enables readers to construct mental images about different events. Reminiscing about the Lebanese war, particularly the incidents of 1982, Hannah presents the following images:

Our family was evacuated on a ship taking Westerners out of Lebanon. My father used his connections with one of the embassies to get my mother, my brother and myself on board the ship. Throughout the journey to the Island of Cyprus, the sea surging beneath us, mother had clung to me and Sammy and cried. I was ten years old and felt a finality in that grief, a suggestion of relief that scared me. (p. 27)

Infused with images about the past, Hannah highlights the repercussions of the war, hence forced displacement, on families and individuals. In so doing, she not only represents the past but authenticates it in such a way that preserves memories and the right to remember. Also, it could be argued that Hannah's constant allusions to the Lebanese wars<sup>4</sup> spring from the need to draw comparisons between the

<sup>3</sup> In his book Roland Barthes (1981) stresses the strong relationship between photography and the real. He states: "I call 'photographic referent' not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph [...] The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (p.76 and pp. 80–81).

<sup>4</sup> Another revelatory example is stated as follows: "The civil war caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands, destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, and forced a huge chunk of its middle class to move abroad. Now, nearly twenty-five years after it ended, these losses [...] been glossed

past and the present, demonstrating how history repeats itself in dramatic ways because the neighbouring countries are in severe turmoil. It is this turmoil that has compelled millions of Syrians to leave their country for Lebanon, as their first destination, and elsewhere. Yet, their arrival is as painful as their departure. The situation in Lebanon itself is more worrying and appalling as; “there is no war going on [in Lebanon] but the sense of despair is evident. Perhaps also the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees has exposed the fragility of the situation even to those Lebanese who would ignore it” (p. 183). Because post-war Lebanon itself still struggles with its reconstruction, especially amidst the existence of political corruption and postwar insecurity, the country is not ready to receive groups of Syrian refugees.

Manifestations of painful arrivals and unhappy returns run through Jarrar’s narrative. In actuality, the entire narrative pivots around this issue, demonstrating its different dimensions. In Syria, displacement is the only mode of life in searching for new passages away from roots. During the conflict, displacement was not a choice; it was a way out to flee the disorder and the falling apart of things. Reflecting on the war, Fatima, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, describes how “the bombing was terrifying [...]. They used all kinds of weapons on my husband’s village, shot at us from aeroplanes, tanks and machine guns. We had no shelters to go to, nowhere to hide, and I knew if I didn’t get out of there, we would be killed” (p. 72). Migrants in different places opt for departure for various reasons. In the case of Syria, people were driven out of their country because of different desperate conditions brought about by fights and wars. Here, it is cogent how departure was involuntary, forced, and therefore traumatic. The passage above “undoes” the revulsions and fears of the war. “Bombings”, “tanks”, and “machine guns” all testify to the massive sources of danger. Also, the passage brings into sharper focus the malaise of dispersed families, which can be seen in the oft-shift in subject from “I” to “we”. This shift can be ascribed to the speaker’s interest in the Syrian collective experience.

It is telling how the personal and the collective merge in Jarrar’s text. One individual can be cast as the mouthpiece of collective groups, as the same trauma is often shared. Throughout the text, there are references to many experiences of displacement. This is what makes Jarrar a writer with a cause; a writer whose literature is not only intended to highlight the experience of the war but also to preserve its memory. In his work *The Writer as Migrant*, Ha Jin (2009) states that:

to preserve is the key function of literature, which, to combat historical amnesia, must be predicated on the autonomy and integrity of literary works inviolable by time [...] the writer

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over, [...] a generation of Lebanese with little awareness of their country’s past and over a million displaced Syrians struggling to survive, living without hope” (p. 191).

should be not just a chronicler but also a shaper, an alchemist, of historical experiences. The writer should enter history mainly through the avenue of his art. If he serves a cause or a group or even a country, such a service must be a self-choice and not imposed by society. (p. 30)

During the conflict in Syria, thousands of people have been killed, and many others went missing or were forced to leave. Different writers provide a discursive space for these victims in their art. The latter is “a purveyor of truth” (Jin 2009, p. 272); a way to combat historical amnesia which is often sought by states in the post-war period<sup>5</sup>. In such narratives, remembering the past is a means to learn from it and avoid history repeating itself. Approached from this perspective, Jarrar’s narrative strives to cover as many aspects of the nefarious ramifications of the war as possible. This springs from the conviction that war-related details deserve ample consideration. Within the same vein, Jarrar emphasizes how the conflict in Syria provided a fertile ground for the emergence of extremist groups which contributed to more unrest throughout the whole region, resulting in more problems for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These refugees were subject to discourse and practices of vilification, racism, discrimination, and abuse. Considering a conversation between Hannah and her husband, Peter, about the predicament of Syrians, Jarrar declares that “the infiltration of Islamic extremists from Syria and the subsequent search for them by Lebanese authorities have resulted in instances of discrimination against and abuse of the Syrian refugee population and Peter recognizes that Hannah is not wrong in being concerned” (p. 139). In this, refugees were further traumatized as they fell prey to extremist groups whose main concern was not only to discriminate against the displaced communities in refugee camps but also to recruit and instrumentalize, them in further conflicts. This state of affairs posed further security dilemmas setting the whole region on fire. In this respect, Jarrar castigates the West for their responsibility in the Middle Eastern mayhem and instability as they are “happy to see the conflict in Syria continue. It’s a convenient place for them to fight their little wars [...] it’s time the Arab world took some responsibility for the mess it finds itself in” (p. 190). This way, *An Unsafe Haven* stands as a testimonial narrative that exhibits how many (external) actors took part in the atrocities committed against civilians in Syria. In fact, the fighting was not between Syrians, but Syria was the battlefield for many external actors. In the main, the pain of displacement was interminable.

While in Lebanon, many refugees made plans to visit their country, Syria. Yet, just as the departure and arrival are excruciating, attempts to return home are also agonizing. The tragic death of Anas, the Syrian refugee artist, on his way to Damascus, crystallizes the pain of war, displacement, and exile:

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on this point, see Oren Barak, (2007) and Micheal Humphrey (2013).

Anas was killed when the car he was travelling in stopped at a Syrian army checkpoint that was hit by mortar fire. Although there were no survivors inside the vehicle and identifying the victims would not have been possible anyway, the identity cards of the driver and his passenger were eventually found behind the barricade of sandbags where an officer had been inspecting them at the time of the explosion. It was several days before Anas's family was informed. (p. 199)

It should be stated that Anas's decision to go back home is the result of the departure of Brigitte, his German wife, with her two children to Germany. Anas endures a feeling of homelessness in its physical and emotional sense as he has been displaced and left by his life partner. Seeking new emotional attachments, Anas returns to Lebanon, where he is subject to massive shelling, leading to his death. The latter brought Jarrar's narrative plot to its conclusion and revealed how cruel the turmoil in Syria was. Such a tragic end remains symbolic, as it not only stands for the death of a person. Rather, it suggests the decadence of the Middle East in particular, and the Arab world in general: "his violent death is a symbol of the betrayal of the popular revolts that brought down merciless regimes all over the Arab world" (p. 272). This powerful statement indicates Jarrar's lamentation over the situation in the Arab world because of internal conflicts and clashes, which have, of course, been caused by other external (f)actors. That said, uncertainty prevails.

This paper reveals how the socio-political melancholy in Syria and bordering countries is the product of displacement with all its consequences, displaying migrants' forced departures, painful arrivals, and unhappy returns. In the case of Middle Eastern refugees, the trauma was unbearable, particularly since they were dealt with differently from other refugees in many ways: "The real truth is that had these refugees been white and Christian, European countries would have welcomed them with open arms [...]. This is much about war and the inevitable movement of people away from it" (p. 108). It is in this way that the refugee situation was exacerbated as migrants were compelled to stay in war zones or choose dangerous routes out of their countries.

#### **4. Gendered Trauma and Insecurity: Women Refugees Despite Themselves**

Like most of her novels<sup>6</sup>, Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* is chiefly a female-centred narrative. In this, the writer speaks matter-of-factly about the state of women refugees during wartime through a feminocentric prism. Interestingly, all the

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<sup>6</sup> As a case in point, *Somewhere, Home* (2004) narrates the stories of three displaced women seeking a sense of identity and belonging within and beyond borders. In bringing attention to these [war] stories, Jarrar is keen on questioning the situation of these women who, because of the war, are left behind by their husbands and fathers to face both the trauma of the war and the predicament of patriarchal social exclusion.



female characters in the narrative endure painful (post)traumas, including those who are not displaced far from their country of origin and/or across borders. It is into this category of crossing borders that Hannah, Jarrar's protagonist, fits, insofar as she is constantly haunted by images of displaced women refugees in her country, Lebanon. In her book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth (1995) posits, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event" (p. 5). In truth, it is images of the unbearable heaviness of refugeeism Hannah repeatedly witnesses that traumatise her. However, it is also this experience that grants her narrative agency as a journalist to write about the reality of women migrants/refugees in times of turmoil and oppression. Here, Hannah, as part of her moral commitment, also provides these women with the voice to construct their own (hi)stories of trauma. As suggested earlier, women refugees' predicaments, frictions, and despair in search of safety and stability are reflected in a number of passages throughout *An Unsafe Haven*, which dedicates considerable literary space to Fatima, a Syrian refugee, to share with readers various posttraumatic feelings that she developed as a result of forced displacement and war, making Hannah worried, and even traumatized, because of the state of refugees in her country. Within the same vein, Jarrar writes:

Hannah is nervous because a group of refugees congregated at the intersection, as usual, do not seem wary enough of the cars whizzing past [...]. The refugees are like shadows, she thinks, colourless and in the same way invisible to everyone else. She has seen them here before, remembers especially a young woman with a very young boy sitting together on the median strip running down the centre of the road. When night begins to fall, Hannah has watched the young woman wrap the boy tightly in her arms, both of them sitting very still, the little boy's head on his mother's shoulder, eyes open and searching. It is a disturbing sight (pp. 60–61).

Living in transit/"peripheral spaces" creates a new status for refugees; 'new subalterns'<sup>7</sup>. Tellingly, this status is written in stories told by/about refugee women. The latter stand as "shadows", "colourless", and "invisible". These labels show how refugees transform into beings that are no longer human. In the passage above, the narrator portrays a Syrian woman refugee with a baby trapped at an intersection. It is clear that, in seeking "survival", they opt for "begging", asking for money and food. The fact that they are "at the intersection" may be construed as a reflection of the refugees' lives in general. The intersection entails "mobility", "crossing", and "instability". This state makes refugees occupy a "vicious circle", wherein uncertainty dominates the scene. What exacerbates the situation in the case of women migrants is that they are not only prey to social marginalization

<sup>7</sup> The term "new subalterns" was elaborated on by David Farrier in his book *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law* (2011) to refer to how refugees are relegated to the status of "subalterns" deploying such mechanisms as "non-citizenship", "non-belonging", and "non-affiliation". See also Gallien Claire (2018).

but also national exclusion in host countries. Equally, these countries acquire an ambivalent state; for they are feared and desired. For Claire, “national frames are feared by migrants because they mean exclusion, nationalism and xenophobia, but are also longed-for as places where protection may be sought” (Claire, 2018, p. 741). These fluctuating attitudes/realities make the condition of “the displaced” more intricate, as they are compelled to take new routes, which can sometimes be more perilous and insecure, looking for stability and recognition. This non-place/placelessness, in Augé’s view (2008), which derives from a war-driven region, further fuels women’s traumatic experiences.

What also makes “the sight disturbing” in the above passage is the presence of a baby with the woman. Because they are undocumented refugees, the relationship between the woman and the baby is subject to an ongoing discussion. In this, various speculations are brought to the surface; “she may have kept it secret and then given it to someone after its birth until she could figure out what to do. She may have been raped or had an affair. Either way, *she will be blamed for it. She thinks she’s brought shame to her family and cannot possibly take the baby as her own son*” [emphasis added] (p. 227). This case yields a gender-based discourse of rejection, discrimination, contempt, and hence subordination. Because the baby is injured in an accident, it is taken to the hospital where its identity begs more questions, and its mother’s pain becomes deeper. In fact, the baby’s accident has brought about demise and turbulence to the mother’s life, mainly because “she probably doesn’t have any papers and is here illegally [...] she is afraid of getting into trouble if she goes for help” (p. 63). Being an undocumented refugee, the mother brings about additional exposure to trauma and a lingering fear of gendered insecurity. Also, the “unwanted baby serves as the strongest motif of disempowerment, symbolizing the particular traumas that women and child refugees may endure”<sup>8</sup>, including mental and physical health consequences (Sangalang et al., 2022). Crucially, this personal trauma can be best read as an incarnation of the collective trauma of women refugees. It is a common tragedy. By the same token, speaking about one’s trauma offers soulful insights into the collective trauma of people displaced because of wars and political uncertainty in the turbulent region of the Middle East.

In visualizing women’s traumatic experiences of the war, Jarrar cleverly exposes other instances of women who are denied recognition and visibility in wartime. It is true that she spotlights the story of Fatima, the Syrian refugee, but she also includes stories of other women who faced forced displacement. A good example is that of Brigitte, the German wife of the exiled Syrian artist, Anas. Indeed, her case is no less painful and frustrating than Fatima’s as she is burdened with discontent. She is herself a refugee mother before she decides to leave for

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Syrine Hout (2019, p. 409).

Germany with her two children. Yet, she returns to Lebanon after her husband, Anas, is killed. After long exchanges with Fatima and Hannah about what had happened, Brigitte articulates her disappointment as follows:

Perhaps what I need to do, Brigitte tells herself, is to grieve without hope of comfort and without aim, with no view to the future, no expectation of resolution, to wallow in the guilt of my survival and imagine, uselessly, frenziedly, what might have been. She wants to smile at these thoughts but feels herself cave in instead, her chest and all her insides turning on themselves so that she is reduced to one, beating the centre. (p. 167)

The pain and grief experienced by Brigitte as a result of her displacement cannot go unnoticed. It seems that, added to the loss of her husband at war, she feels hopeless about the future. In Lebanon, she neither belongs nor fits. Also, her ponderings about the whys and wherefores of coming, in the first place, to Syria are disturbing, engaging in what might be termed as a “schizophrenic process” (Van der Wielen, 2018, p. 6) facing the pressing challenge of deterritorialization. She is in frequent movement like nomads who “have no points, paths, or land” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 381). She is in quest of new attachments and affiliations which pave the path for unceasing mobility across borderlines. As a nomad, her identity changes between deterritorialization and reterritorialization in Syria/Germany. The latter process is dependent upon the fulfilment of her dreams, which are always unachievable. Even when she is back in Germany, Brigitte is very concerned about her kids who feel alienated and estranged in unfamiliar Germany. For example, Marwan, Brigitte’s son, finds “Berlin unfamiliar, cold most days, with too big, tall buildings crowded up against each other and so many people [...]. He longs for the skies of home and the familiar streets sheltered below, for the smells of Damascus, for its secrets revealed only to him, for the boy he is there and the future he had been promised” (p. 145). Between the “unfamiliar” and the “familiar”, home takes on a particular significance. In fact, it is the kids’ “defamiliarization” in Germany that, *inter alia*, forces Brigitte to go back to Lebanon where, ironically, the sense of despair is evident, making matters unsettled for the refugee returnees who are in a constant search of belonging. Return is always fraught with challenges (Zetter, 2021). In general, gender trauma with its many dimensions in wartime clearly reveals how women are exposed to more vulnerability and exclusion on many levels; social, cultural, economic, and political. *An Unsafe Haven* does not only highlights this gendered otherness, but it also engages women (m)others, as subaltern voices, narrating their stories as doubly oppressed subjects, by violent emergencies and socio-cultural representations. Narration is a form of healing, or temporary remedy at least.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This article has examined war and displacement experiences as they figure in Nada Awar Jarrar’s *An Unsafe Haven*. This novel has been framed within the

context of refugee writing to explore the wounds that the displaced people endure across regional and national borders. In the course of analysis, this article brings to light various manifestations of forced displacement that Syrian refugees had to deal with. It explores the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Lebanon, a country that still struggles with reconstructing itself, healing its past “lesions”, and dealing with its present challenges. This article also discussed the question of gender trauma to make clear how women, especially refugee mothers, stood as signifiers of social and cultural Others who are excluded from the community of male “selves” thus making them objects of more discrimination, oppression, and lack of recognition. In moments of crisis, women endure more trauma. By the same token, Jarrar devotes more space to their narratives of displacement. Interestingly, because she is a displaced person herself, Jarrar is granted the agency to write acutely about refugeeism as a universal human issue.

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