



Tales of Turmoil in Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home*

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ABSTRACT:

Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* (2003) is a fascinating account about the lives of three Lebanese women who witness devastation, plunder and escalating carnage in their country. They are driven out of their homes as a result of the civil war and subsequently witness turmoil, decadence and turbulence in their lives. Their abandonment of their city shatters their convictions about home as they undergo crisis and confront sordid repercussions amidst chaos, lawlessness and belligerence. The paper explores Jarrar's endeavours in reconstructing identities through her own discourse. The paper emanates the disillusionment that people encounter in their lives due to socio-political disruption and the way they endure the separation from their homes, families and society. The paper also explores the way Jarrar's novel emerges as a symbol of feminine resistance.

Keywords: Home, Alienation, Lebanese Civil War, Subjectivity, Affinity

Discussion:

The concept of 'Home' in academia, discourse and literature has been approached from many standpoints making it a topic of much attention, scrutiny and prominence. In the twenty-first century, the idea of home has seen many connotations and has been an issue of debate in the academia, media and philosophy. The escalation of turbulence, precarity and contention in the present times has led to the forced expulsion of innumerable people throughout the world especially in the Middle-East. Terkenli and Mallet are among the many scholars who emanated the concept of home as intricately complex and underscore contradictions in the promulgations of many critics. Terkenli puts forth that the formation of a home at a particular place necessitates investment and time. He asserts that the image of home portents, "recurrent, regular investment of meaning in a context with which people personalize and identify through some measure of control" (325). The events shared in its formation are then communicated to the descendants or inheritors who relish on the memories in narrative sharing norms and customs of their descendants. Di Stefano avers that home does not constitute some random physical space but also comprises familiarity with one's surroundings which amplifies during the passage of time. He avers, "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" (38). Mallet's formulation is based on the conviction of home as a phenomenon which is private and subjective. She proclaims that it encompasses discrete factors comprising history, affiliation to physical locales as well as dislocation from place.

Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* takes into consideration every aspect of home by accentuating in tender and delicate voices stories of three Lebanese women thriving in Lebanon at different times. Differing from the other postwar fiction that encompass details of war and rampant destruction or abhorable confrontations for large scale tragedy in the form of civil war, Jarrar's fiction minimally portrays misdeeds and more focuses on the lassitude of individuals caught in the conflict. Even her third protagonist who happens to be an old Lebanese woman makes no mention of the disastrous civil war. In the beginning, her first protagonist Maysa slightly insinuates about tragedy caused by civil war and her escape to the remote mountains from "Beirut that smoulders in a war against itself" (*Somewhere, Home*, 4). In her novel, Jarrar's kempt silence on the issue of war allows the readers to comprehend the topical issues of displacement and psychological turbulence by overlooking force and violence. Born in 1958 and brought up in Lebanon, Jarrar has lived in at least four countries such as Australia, France, the US and the UK before returning to Lebanon along with her husband in 1997. In the summers of 2006 when Lebanon's conflict with Israel intensified and resulted in thirty-three day long war she sought refuge in distant mountains to escape from the tumult, anxiety and military warfare. Her novel is an ardent expression to the odyssey of three Lebanese women who struggle to reach a home amidst annihilation, incessant carnage and destruction. Their pursuit encompasses seeking recognition and creation of socio-cultural identity. All the three women find themselves entangled in homeland searching for a place to render meaning to their otherwise distorted lives. The place where they appear arbitrarily comprises an old village house in Lebanon from where they begin their escape and later return to claim it again as their final goal "from which there is no further to go" (145).

Symbolically, Home accentuates an idea of stability, protection and identity and in the novel, the women try to reconcile the past with the present to gain meaning and understanding of their lives. They reminisce about their childhood, lament their displacement, suffer from identity crisis and long for affection, compassion and love of their loved ones. In their venture to their homeland for seeking meaning to their lives, they reflect on the subject of home. In her novel, Jarrar indicates that home comprises any personalised space and that home could include any abode or dwelling place. She evinces:

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.
(4)

The protagonists in the novels are able to seek peace, comfort and consolation during their quests but they remain haunted by their ignominious memories which are attached with objects such as letters, songs, newspapers, herbs, plants etc. from their native country. Jarrar's is too adept to incorporate and converge through objects every minor detail as she even underlines the voice of Lebanese singer, Fairouz and eight exchanged written letters between the characters intersecting at different points and spatial locations. The main idea of the novel concerns its relation to Lebanon as a birth place and the home country.

Maysa, Aida and Salwa are the three protagonists who are acrimoniously suffering from displacement, torture and disorientation as they struggle to find shelter and protection amidst the plunder their country undergoes as well as psychological contention they confront. Eager to find a shelter for reconstruction within the turmoil, they endeavour to complete their journey by attaining a geographical place and seeking personal peace and fulfillment. The author's glimpse of the home indicates that home is not only a place of one's birth but also signifies the alternatives appended to it. Besides the fact that Hout refers to Jerrar's statement where she states that Lebanon was the only place she felt at home, but her protagonists are able to find alternatives atleast temporarily. The common thread that joins the three tales is that present and the past both are blended and both randomly merge into one another. Such trends are also present in many other Lebanese postwar novels dealing with the fragmentation of narrative in time and space. It evinces their endeavours to discern the stupidity of civil war and the way the events of past and future are altered by it. The first part takes us to the character Maysa who relinquishes Beirut when the civil war engulfs the country and takes refuge in Mount Lebanon, in her ancestral house. She is pregnant with baby-girl and is being taken care of by midwife, Selma. Finding herself secluded amidst the rising tension & conflict, Maysa avers her own imagined narratives about the lives of her grandmother, Alia, her mother, Leila, and her aunt, Saeeda. Her time in her ancestral house endows her with capacity to reminisce and pen down the history of her family so that it can be passed down as an inheritance to her daughter, Yasmeena. The second story portrays Aida who relinquishes Lebanon with her parents and two sisters as the war engulfs the city. Her manservant Amin Mohammed who is like her father-figure remains in the house and is later killed by the militia. The third part comprises the odyssey of an old Lebanese woman Salwa who feels nostalgic about her past life in Lebanon and cherishes her pleasant memories.

The novel manifests their homesickness and psychological deprivation in their struggle to adopt values and customs of the foreign culture. This necessity of embracing the ethics of a new culture has serious repercussions on the self-identity of the individuals. The characters also confront the estrangement enhanced by their economic deprivation, seclusion and marginalisation which emanates due to their personal displacement and the crisis of identity. Such feelings of estrangement and segregation prompt sense of infirmity, apprehension and consternation. In an article entitled "Paradigmaticity of Postmodernism" Munir Khan proclaims, "The postmodernist discovered that the sense of alienation in the contemporary world is so intense and acute that it cannot be felt any longer, and thus the whole attitude about it got changed" (163). The displacement of the people from their native country, home and culture endangers their sense of coherency and constitution of the self. The image of home forms a significant factor in determining the identity of the characters. The absence of homeland symbolises rootlessness and fractured identity. In their book entitled *Migrant Voices in Literatures in English* Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla describe such concept in the following words:

Home is a very complex and multivalent concept. What is home for one maybe homelessness for another. For most people . . . home is where they are themselves, where they are at home and where their heart is and not where only their feet are. It is not just a building, a geographical location, a region, a religion, a nation, a cultural or spiritual or imaginative refuge. But it is a home that determines one's identity, defines or redefines one's belonging and endeavours. (8)

Jarrar postulates that some of the displaced individuals tend to overlook their depression and anxiety but others find it utterly difficult to conquer their distress and exasperation. The people who are interminably marginalised and suffer the monotony of life encounter degradation or even carnage due to the traversing changes occurring in the foreign lands. They tend to comprehend the dynamics of the changing world as menacing. It ostracises them and annihilates their subjective realities and eventually the characters are forced to seek refuge in passively active silence. Jarrar illustrates fragmentation in the identities of the characters as they pass through the adverse circumstances. She tends to discern the ways through which the characters not only experience trauma in their physical space, but also as a psychological process that delimits the self-constitution of the individuals. She delineates how the terror in the socio-political form embitters the individuals coercing them to adopt deviant methods to acquire gratification and stability. She tries to ascertain the factors of proximity related to the inner self and its connection with the outside world. Jarrar promulgates that the psyche of the individual is orchestrated by their relation and harmony with his or her homeland and when this bond or connection dissipates it leads to the disintegration of the self of an individual.

Jarrar emanates the mental distress of the characters as they confront the horrific circumstances. The novel reveals the way war becomes a cause of psychological and physical trauma. The repercussions of war become ostensible in the way it changes the prosperous lives of individuals into dispossession. The war leads to the loss of their hope and makes their lives insignificant. Maysa, Aida and Salwa try to overlook their misery and regain contentment out of their distress and ordeals. It is their effort to avoid their trauma and start their life afresh. It does not work for long as their exasperations escalate which leads to their agony and estrangement. Their struggle to evade the misery pervading their homeland symbolises their efforts to circumvent life threat. Jarrar tends to substantiate the fact that the image of homeland renders the characters a sense of integrated self. Their escape signifies not only their physical absence from their homeland, but also their rootlessness. They become expatriates and adopt an identity which is hyphenated; repeatedly struggling to create meaning out of their existence. In his article "Identity: Problem and Catch World" Dennis. H. Wrong underlines ". . . identity and identity crisis have become the semantic beacons of our time, for these 'Verbal Emblems' express our discontent with modern life and modern society and the term identity has become a value charged, almost a charismatic term, with its secure achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation" (23). Saeed reminisces about his parents and their memories.

Jerrar underlines the loss of one's identity by revealing the way absence of one's homeland takes away one's shelter and protection. The novel manifests the necessity of sharing experience of the immigrants and understanding their pain during atrocities. She reconciles the existing the socio-cultural conditions revolving Lebanon and desperate attempt of its people to seek refuge in the foreign countries. Like Jerrar, all the protagonists are also rooted in the memories of his country throughout their journey. She underlines their emotional orientation as they gradually become psychotically distressed and who are increasingly overburdened by confounding realities. They are overwhelmed by the dreadful illusions and become paranoid among the company of the other fellow people coming from different places.

In *Somewhere, Home*, Jerrar unveils the psychological crisis of Maysa, Aida and Salwa who encounter bitter displacement and agony. They are alienated from their home country and made to endure separation from their families and culture. Jerrar exhibits the presence of the communication gap that exists among the displaced who are dispossessed and marginalised in the banal world. All the characters experience otherness and emasculation of their desires. In their early lives, they zealously liked to spend their time loitering around their city where they developed passion for social interaction and joyful hobnobs. Jerrar construes the fragmentation of her protagonists' individual selves when they are forced to migrate from his country to uncertain places. In these new places, they suffer from impecunty and impoverishment, becoming vulnerable to the dilapidated conditions. Although entering the new places they save themselves from the heinous assault of the militia, but they are more bewildered by the hostility they confront aftermath as their country undergoes through unprecedented crisis. The tranquillity which they cherished once in their country is threatened by the disruption and blatant threats in the new places.

They experience social isolation which the outside world tends to embody. They affront dissolution of their selves as they fail to bridle their fate and make out any meaningful achievement. All of them suffer from excruciating circumstances due to misrule and lawlessness in their respective country. It becomes a common factor for them to identify with each other. All the three witness their dissipation and begin to recreate their identities by relating with their predicament. They tend to decipher the sense of isolation by relating to the people surrounding him.

Jameson underlines this inclination of modernism, "The modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world" (6). Jerrar in *Somewhere, Home* endeavours to highlight that the contemporary period is defined by displacement and disenchantment where the established forms of identity and meaning have become redundant. The postmodern world attests to the norms of identity which is self-effacing, fugitive and volatile. The contemporary world has changed enormously which has led to the people to shift their places and transcend the frontiers; barriers of their countries. There have been different reasons which lead the people to migrate from their land which probably constitute political upheaval or turbulence resulting from war, refugees, fear of persecution, migrants seeking better economic facilities, education and other varied reasons. The migrants who reside in a foreign country encounter identity crisis and feel jeopardised due to the hyphenated identities as underscored by Stuart Hall.

Stuart Hall considers theoretical issues regarding the concept of identity and does not come up with any single idea. Interestingly, he acknowledges the necessity to explore the notion of identification. He also highlights the convolutions of identity issues and difficulties of claiming any common origin or shared existence. He emphasises the shifting and changing nature of identity over time and assiduously focuses over the idea of deconstruction and identity politics. He rejects the conventional beliefs about identity by focusing on its changing patterns of erasure and doubleness escorted by deconstruction and instabilities of agency. He suggests that identities are constructed within the discourse with its emphasis on difference rather than sameness. In his illustrious article "Introduction: Who Needs Identity" Stuart Hall promulgates that the individuals do not have a stable or a coherent but they are, "increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to . . . the process of change and transformation" (4). Hall further states:

The endlessly performative self has been advanced in celebratory variants of postmodernism. Within the anti-essentialist critique of ethnic, racial and national conceptions of cultural identity and the 'politics of location' some adventurous theoretical conceptions have been sketched in their most grounded forms. (1)

Jerrar manifests how the political chaos disrupts the lives of millions of the people across the world. His subjective subversion becomes a political discourse as they perceive themselves a nomad bereft of any shelter and comfort. They confront disorientation and feels abandoned physically, emotionally and culturally. Such homelessness and placelessness erupts an (schizophrenic) ailment which portents the human fragility and vulnerability. It is the psychological response of the individuals to the postmodern conditions. In this condition, an individual's experience tends to become multiple, fragmented and disorienting. Such confrontation of the individual with different postmodern forces such as commerce, media and ideologies shatters his or her self. Such fragmentation and incapacitation perpetually lessens his or her control over his or her self and eventually enhances his or her susceptibility and infirmity. As insinuated by the novel, it is intensified by the dominant and imperious scientific culture of the present world. S. Lavanya also enunciates that in the postmodern world, ". . . the alienated, rootless individual withdraws from real human existence and finds solace in hallucinations and ends up as a schizophrenic" (119).

Conclusion:

Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home* is a remarkable novel in unveiling the tragedy of nation and renders an account of the tragedy of three Lebanese women through whom the author enlarges the concept of home. Maysa, Aida and Salwa overtly persevere the devastation of their country, alienation and estrangement from their families, relatives and society. They reflect on the annihilation caused by war and how it snatched away their peace, happiness and comfort. Their narratives are disjointed, fragmented and non-linear as memories play their tricks but are united by their desire, yearning and longing to orchestrate their destiny and achieve a stable identity. The three stories invariably unveil different connotations of home escorted by the memories and perspective of each protagonist. The idea of 'home' gains a fleeting, subtle and clandestine manifestation in Jarrar's narrative. Such idea establishes postmodern resonance where every meaning is unstable, pluralistic and divergent. The paper also makes conspicuous

the way memory acts as a tool in underscoring the drastic consequences and despicable repercussions of the Lebanese Civil War.

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