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# Diasporic Quagmire between Defeatism and Humanitarian Transnationalism in Nada Awar Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven*

# معضلة الشتات بين الانهزامية والانسانية–العالمية في An Unsafe Haven لندى عوار جرار

**Laboudi Hesna**

University Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 (Algeria), hesna.laboudi@umc.edu.dz

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**Abstract**

Readdressing the old–new stock issue of diaspora is closely linked to postcolonialism. Many postcolonial writers who are born and write in metropolitan chalk out the postcolonial subject from the periphery to the center and back to decenter stoic representations that govern world schemes since long. Being a Lebanese Australian, Nada Awar Jarrar weaves in her post-war narrative, *An Unsafe Haven* (2016), a polyphonic tale made up of a multitude of diasporic experiences that stretch out from East to West. This essay examines Jarrar's strategy of contrapuntal representation to define the predicament of diaspora, and evaluates Jarrar's appropriation of a transnational frame of postcolonialism through the trope of exiling Western characters into an Eastern background to make the postcolonial subject's emancipation possible and herald transnational patterns of synchronicity.
**Keywords**: diaspora; postcolonialism; emancipate; East; West.

**الملخص:**

إن إعادة التطرق الى قضية الشتات القديمة الجديدة مرتبط بشكل وثيق بما بعد الاستعمار. العديد من كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار اللذين ولدو ويمارسون الكتابة في عواصم المهجر العالمية انتقلوا بموضوع ما بعد الاستعمار من الثانوية الى المركزية ثم العكس من أجل زعزعة المعايير الراكدة والتي حكمت العالم مند أمد بعيد. باعتبارها لبنانية أسترالية الاصل، تسرد ندى عوار جرار في رواية ما بعد الحرب An Unsafe Haven 2016 حكاية متعددة الاصوات وتتكون من عدة تجارب للشتات تمتد من الشرق الى الغرب. يدقق هدا المقال اولا في استراتيجية الطباق التمثيلي لجرار وذلك من اجل تعريف معضلة الشتات وثانيا تقييم صياغة الكاتبة لإطار عابر للحدود فيما يخص موضوع ما بعد الاستعمار عن طريق مجاز تهجير شخصيات غربية ضمن خلفية شرقية بالتحديد وذلك من أجل تحرير موضوع ما بعد الاستعمار من صورته النمطية وإعلان أنماط عالمية متزامنة.
**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الشتات ، ما بعد الاستعمار، تحرير، الشرق، الغرب.

Corresponding author: Laboudi Hesna, e-mail: hesnalaboudi@hotmail.fr

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of postcolonial writers featuring diaspora in their narratives has never been new, as it manifests in the works of the first wave of postcolonial writers like Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) and *Men in the Sun* (1963), both of which depict the trajectory outcomes of leaving one's home and the mere impossibility of returning. Tayib Salih's *A Season of Migration to the North* (1966) is another prime example of a return and exile narrative with its portrayal of a protagonist driven by revenge and anger against the metropolitan. Likewise, diaspora features dominantly in the works of the second wave of postcolonial writers. Many of these writers took advantage of writing in English rather than Arabic،which enabled them to cross the linguistic barrier and gain a wider audience of readers. Adding to this, the fact that the second wave of postcolonial writers experienced diaspora themselves،which renders their stories a kind of first-hand testimony. Postcolonial writers in diaspora write from the vantage point of being the insider-outsider vis à vis home/exile. These writers gear their pens toward multidimensional perspectives to attack wrong politics inside the home of origins and the diasporic condition of uprooted populations in the host country simultaneously.

In his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Edward Said correlates the meaning of exile with negatives attributes being "an unhealable rift … a condition of terminal loss… a solitude experienced outside the group: the depravations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation" (Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, 2000, pp. 173-177). Said examines the interrelationship between exile and nationalism and contends that patriotic sentiments necessitate "belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage" (Said, 2000, p. 176) which renders exile at crossroads with any sense of nationalism since the exilic condition lacks the communal sense of homing. Reconciling opposition between exile and nationalism seems unwarranted in Said's views though he admits that the exilic condition offers a "plurality of vision" and "contrapuntalism" in its essence. Writing from and about liminal spaces like exile echoes Said's strategic method of contrapuntalism which characterizes diaspora, as being a voluntary exile most often, as he explains that "It is more rewarding-and more difficult-to think concretely and sympathetically,

contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us.' " Contrapuntalism enables surpassing differences, power rule, and self-interest for the benefit of a new world order based on mutual understanding. (Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, 2000, p. 336).

The following essay engages in pinpointing the complexities that the second wave of postcolonial writers, of which Nada Awar Jarrar is one, encounter to narrate the experience of former colonies and the handicaps that encumbered their emancipation. An assessment of diaspora that lies at the heart of Jarrar's narrative is mandatory but not from a refugee's standpoint exclusively. Rather, I argue, Jarrar opens a vista that goes beyond the traditional experience of refugees coming from the periphery to the metropolis and portrays Western characters (Peter and Brigitte) who experience diaspora while living in Arab land. This reversal of traditional dichotomies that typify the former colonizers as the host country while the colonized as zones of war and instability denotes Jarrar's departure from the politics of antagonism, which many postcolonial writers adopted after independence, toward a humanitarian transnational frame. The Western diasporic experience on an Eastern land is reminiscent of the emerging trend of postcolonial writing toward transnationality as means to depoliticize world powers and dehegemonize international relations and modes of representation. Thus, bridging channels of dialogue that had been long broken between the East and the West.

## 2. From Postcolonial Resistance to Transnational-Humanitarian Postcolonialism:

Even though postcolonialism is an effective tool and an emancipatory site to shake Eurocentric metanarratives out of their comfortable bed and canonicity, it started to loom toward its culmination in the last twenty years. The noteworthy site that postcolonialism gained, with its productive decentering ideology of Western historical narratives as well as highlighting emerging literature from the peripheries, started to wane down because of a multitude of reasons. Some of these are external including the constantly changing shifts in power dynamics and world order. Emerging countries like China, Malaysia, and Japan, for instance, are increasingly challenging former dominant powers like the United States of America, France, and Britain. Simultaneously, postcolonialism suffers

from internal schisms due to different agendas raised by thinkers and contemporary writers. While some writers still insist on the underlining dichotomy between East and West, and the oppositional relationship of the periphery to the metropolis, others call for transcending these divides. Macleod argues that postcolonialism's "tendency to become an overarching concept lacking the nuances of local contexts and an insensitivity to forms of colonialism which differ across time and space have led to a series of critiques" (2001, p. 87) which makes the postcolonial agenda in an urgent need of adaptation to the current *status quo*.

One of the key thinkers who aligns himself with the new wave of critics who go beyond the classical dichotomy of East/West, colonizer/colonized is Arif Dirlik. His essay "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" accentuates the preposition that by the end of the nineteenth century, postcolonial studies acquired a "global condition" which is hijacked by an absence of contextualization within the realm of "contemporary capitalism" (pp. 330-331). Dirlik argues that the postcolonial dilemma between resisting European imperial narratives and maintaining national heritage is another way of reinforcing dichotomies that the postcolonial strives to reject while embracing non-homogeneous politics in favor of heterogeneity. By rejecting capitalism, the division of the world into developed capitalized societies and underdeveloped non-capitalist societies becomes unwarranted. Dirlik assumes that the nationalist agenda, that postcolonialists adhere to, fades in favor of a transnational frame (pp. 333-335). To contest the polemics of changing world order and the new strategies of power control, postcolonial writers need to renew and innovate troops of resistance. Many former imperial countries are still powerful and still exercise multiple strategies of control and influence over world relations. These countries continue to exercise power in various spaces around the world as Miyoshi puts it (p. 732) puts it. In addition to former imperial powers who are still subalternizing other countries in the peripheries, the postcolonial state itself generates the neocolonial condition under a new agency. The newly independent countries immerse in a state of corruption and personal ties that result in further deterioration. Consequently, the double victimization of postcolonial countries between internal and external factors necessitates an urgent innovation of resistance strategy and means of emancipation.

While the former generation of postcolonialists built their discourse around the contours of opposition and "writing back" to the empire, the second

emerging wave of postcolonialists, including Arab Anglophone writers, is akin to develop a transnational model as a means to emancipate the peripheries from subordination and the ethos of "Othering". Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Tayib Salih are prime examples of the first stream of postcolonial writers whose fiction recount painfully the legacy of colonialism and attempts to usher emancipatory possibilities. With the blossoming of hybrid representations under the umbrella of postmodernism and cultural studies, this type of angry fiction faced serious challenges to maintain its strategies of opposition. In a world marked with plurality, the former religious, cultural, political, social, and linguistic barriers start to wane down which pushes the tenets of postcolonialism like dichotomies, opposition, and reversal to dislocate from a centralized subject matter into a marginalized one. Writers who are born in the metropolis or experienced diaspora, in particular, do reflect such anxieties about the futility of opposition as means of celebrating one's identity and patriotic feelings. Though these writers originate from former colonies, they announce their globalized visions of the totality of human experience. While doing so, denouncing forms of essentialization becomes their hallmarks. The list may include but is certainly not limited to the fiction of the Palestinian American writers Randa Jarrar, and Suzan Abulhawa, the English Sudanese Leila Aboulela, the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif, the Moroccan American Laila Lalami, the Jordanian British Fadia Faqir among other names who write dominantly in the English language. Such writers inhabit their fiction with a multitude of characters who descend from different backgrounds, speak different languages, hold different faiths, intermingle with one another, and create a dialogic space of hybridity. Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), for instance, outspeaks the struggle of two generations, an old one reminiscent of opposition and a younger generation reminiscent of a reconciled culture between dichotomies like past/present, self/other, and colonizer/colonized (Laboudi, p. 87).

Like Said himself, an Arab-American, and an Eastern-Western, Jarrar dwells on two consciousness; while one is Lebanese, the other is the metropolitan exile of living twenty years in Australia before deciding to return home to Lebanon. Many Arab Anglophone writers, including Jarrar, live in voluntary diaspora rather than being forced to exile. The malleable position of Arab Anglophone writers, as Al Maleh argues, permits them to negotiate a space outside borders as they did not turn their backs on their home, roots, culture, or traditions but rather enjoyed a pluralist space (2009, p. 5). She distinguishes three waves in the development of Arab Anglophone writing; the first stream joyfully

celebrated their ability to write with trust outside borders. These writers almost disappeared in the gleam of the West while attracting metropolitan readers who were enthusiastic to look for exotic inspiration. The second wave of the 1950s and 1970s wrote under greater influence and fascination with the Western lifestyle, education, and a language which is "very English" English. The third current stream of writers are occupied with issues of divided identity, hybridity, the in-betweenness politics of home, and metropolitan exile (2009, p. 11). Jarrar, who belongs virtually to the third stream, feels obliged to negotiate diversity while reflecting on her own diverse dislocations between Lebanon, different European cities, and Australia. (2009, p. 48). Her fiction delves into themes of belonging or lack of it, in addition to the state of homeliness (Al Maleh, 2009) points out, "The works of Nada Awar Jarrar are likewise concerned with the search for a place one can call one's own" (2009, p. 48).

Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* shares similar concerns of the second-wave Arab Anglophone postcolonial writers by criticizing internal and external misuse of power. Set in the backdrop of a violent milieu, *An Unsafe Haven* weaves the threads of a narrative that strives to be told amid a politically, socially, and emotionally charged entourage. The struggle arises between the emotional and the reasonable, home and exile, East and West, conservative and liberal, men and women among other dichotomies that hinder the Arab world's opportunity to emancipate and transcend the unsettled current *status quo* and neocolonial dilemma. Jarrar combines themes of political instability, misuse of power, and diasporic condition jointing the inside and outside home concerns equally. The textual space of the novel reads like a stage called Lebanon on which a bunch of characters from Syria, Iraq, the United States of America, and Germany take on diasporic roles. The novelist pictures Syria amid war, violence, and bloodshed that cost the lives of millions of victims as families are dispersed and cities are destroyed. Likewise, Iraq suffers from internal violence that hijacks the country's future because of political and religious dividing sects. As far as Lebanon is concerned, being the main setting, the country has been ravished for years by the Civil War whose impact is still lived after years of distress, especially with the crisis of coming refugees from Syria and Iraq. Lebanon is torn in a Civil War that lasted from 1975 to 1990 between different religious groups (Sunnis, Shias,

Druze, and Christians) whereby Jarrar pictures the Civil War as an everlasting memory whose hitherto scattered trauma is still lived in a country on the verge of explosion. Amid this turmoil, the novelist attempts to pinpoint the dynamics that the Arab region is passing through and its impact on changing politics, allies, and world interests. Jarrar draws attention to the moment when governments overlook communication with their citizens which renders the humanitarian aspect insignificant within the equation of protecting geo-strategic interests and allies.

Being the daughter of a Lebanese father and an Australian mother who lived in different Western capital cities before settling in Beirut, Jarrar belongs to this second wave of postcolonial writers who envelop the national within a transnational framework. In fact, *An Unsafe Haven* is not the narrative that turns its back to the national agenda of emancipation as it finger-points the legacy of colonialism, constant formulas of neocolonialism, and all forms of subordination and oppression. As a subject matter, the postcolonial cannot be isolated from diaspora since both of them account for the outcomes of the failed national frame of emancipation and unity, which stands for the dreams of frustrated masses. In-depth, *An Unsafe Haven* does not review the failed policies of liberation in the Arab world from within exclusively but manifests the diasporic experience of Western characters also which strengthens the novel's humanitarian transnational standpoint. Western characters, who inhabit a significant textual space of the narrative, as will be discussed below, are the means through which Jarrar subverts the hegemony of Western allies. This subversion, however, is not to express opposition but to emphasize the transnationality of human experiences like diaspora.

**3. Exiling or Hindering the National Project?**

*An Unsafe Haven* is a revelatory title of the tremendous difference between the heavenly heaven and the earthly unsafe haven which is in constant confrontation with the ravages of time, space, violence, and inequality. The revealing title of the novel enunciates that wars transform the heavenly home into an insecure haven. The evaluative project of exploring factors that could prevent people from coming back to their homelands, readdressing the old-new topical issue of return, and the possibility of emancipation necessitates recalling some flashbacks that divided the world into safe places and endangered ones. The safe

ones invite their residents to stay and build up the nation's future while the dangerous ones force their settlers to dislocate into diaspora. Former colonizers gaze at the East as a tyrannical, oppressive, and a region inhabited by terrorists, which construe the main pretext to hegemonize this region. After independence, ties between the former colonized and colonizers took a new shape under the umbrella of economic, social, and political bonds during the neocolonial period which revived the colonial oppressive period. In the MENA region, independence became an allusion due to various factors including the constant dependence of these countries on Western ones. Neocolonialism becomes the syndrome in the face of truthful independence. Being a contemporary novel, *An Unsafe Haven* records a recent turbulent period in the development of the Arab region. The choice of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon as the main locations where events take place stands for the whole Arab region which is marked by corrupt political regimes and Western continuous involvement which results in violence and encumbering of emancipation potential. Though Jarrar depicts mainly Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon in a state of unrest, these countries stand as a microcosm of the majority of third-world countries whose destruction and failed march to true independence are due to a fragile state of dependence on Western countries. The embedded accusations that Jarrar raise about Western involvement in the Arab region are in fact the main reason for the decaying state of the region. Examples vary from Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and other countries.

Iraq's invasion in 2003 was sustained by the pretext of possessing mass destruction weapons and the existence of terrorist groups mainly. Although no evidence could be traced on the existence of WMD, American military operations were entirely destructive to the nation's peace and infrastructure. The country witnessed massive destruction as well as countless loss of innocent people in addition to internal displacement, and external exiled Iraqi population. While dispersing the original population, the country suppressed its human force of labor and hope for change. The novel accounts for the Iraqi Mayssoun, for instance, who had to leave her hometown reluctantly to Beirut; a decision which is prompted by the death of her lover who was pursuing an academic career as a doctor. The killing of the young doctor to steal a sum of money is a witness to the escalating rates of criminality and despair that Iraqis endure to live decently.

With continuous violence and bombing, the lives, the present, and the future of young generations are constantly undermined and threatened. The government, however, never shows consideration for the continuously leaving population which represents the national force of labor and change. In one of Mayssoun's conversations with Jalal, who also left Iraq for New Zealand, she tells him "Jalal, even speaking in Arabic, you're sounding like a Westerner now" (Jarrar Awar, p. 60). The quote is revelatory of the loss of attachment to the original homeland and the impact of Westernized culture on citizens living in diaspora. The motifs of the refugee crisis are many and range from safety reasons to economic ones as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza argues, " The expulsion or exit from one's national space can be either voluntary or involuntary, a product of political, economic, religious, cultural, social, sexual, and legal pressures, provocations, and persecutions. It is a rupture often marked by pain and loss" (p. 11). As a case in point, Mayssoun's and Jalal's diaspora is motivated by war and insecure feelings of danger.

Talking about refugees and diaspora, one must acknowledge that starting from the colonial and the post-independent periods, it became widespread and dominantly Arab, Middle Eastern, Asian…etc phenomenon. The post-independent state generated a state of hopelessness and massive voluntary and involuntary immigration. More recently, the Arab Spring accentuated, even more, this state of hopelessness. Revolutionaries and nationalists raised slogans of breaking up ties with non-democratic regimes and rotten political systems that started in Tunisia (2010), the so-called Jasmine revolution, then spread up in Egypt, Libya, and Syria among other Arab countries that share the dream of a better future and a decent equal opportunities for citizens. As the space here is insufficient neither to assess the Arab Spring experience nor to lament how the dream of democracy and freedom turned into a valley of bloodshed and oppression, the focus will be directed toward refugees' numbers, which raised after independence and escalated with the aftermaths of the Arab spring.

The Syrian case, in particular, became and still is the cake that internal as well as external allies want to take share in it. The outcomes, one needless to account, are the millions of victims and a country that has been utterly destroyed. Introduced by Anas and his family, the Syrian case is never so different from Iraq's throughout *An Unsafe Haven*. Syria represents one of the last borderlines

of the Arab Spring's failure as the country still suffers the calamities of the civil war which is fueled all the time by Russian, American, Turkish, and other external countries that race to take a share in a divided country and protect their geo-political strategies and interests. The moment when the voice of Syrians fail to overthrow the presidency and its corrupt regime, violence, and death spread all over the country. During this political unrest and turmoil, international forces and allies seized the chance to grab the nation's hold. The Syrian case records millions of deaths and dispersed people all around the globe. Through the lenses of Anas and his family, the novel portrays the plight of Syrians between escape and commitment to one's home. Anas believes that the dream of liberation will become truth after sacrifice, chaos, and violence. Jarrar makes it clear that while Anas is in Germany pursuing his studies; his sole aim is to return to his homeland Syria. Anas' years in Germany are meant for absorbing the skills of art which he needs but it never means breaking bonds with his home country. Elaborating on the relationship between nationalism and exile, Said asks, "Do nationalism and exile have any intrinsic attributes? Are they simply two conflicting varieties of paranoia?" (2000, p. 177). For Anas, patriotism means being home and resisting which explains why he never shows hesitance or doubt when it comes to nationalism.

Anas' constant troubled relationship with his Western wife Brigitte clarifies these complex national sentiments very well. The marriage of the Syrian Anas to the German Brigitte clearly undermines the happiness and pride of Anas' Arab parents for they assume that she cannot be a good match for an Arab man rooted in his Arab culture. Anas, however, makes it clear that his country is all that matters to him, and though violence spread all over the country, he clings firmly to the national dream of liberation and the commitment to staying within the borders of Syria to defend the national cause. Patriotic people like Anas, though, are caught up between their nationalistic bonds toward their countries and jeopardizing their safety and lives ultimately. Before living the reader suspended to make a stand which choice to take between leaving one's home and staying but risking one's safety inside the country's borders, Jarrar swiftly casts out the narrative detour. The nationalists' emancipatory dream starts to transform into a nightmare the moment Anas' family becomes vulnerable to bombing.

Brigitte starts to lose faith in the country though Anas refuses her constant appeals to leave Syria. As a nationalist, Anas considers staying at home within the Syrian borders the least contribution and self-altruism he can offer in support of his country. Brigitte, however, makes the decision to leave immediately after the family apartment's attack and the children went through a traumatized experience of threat. Following the family's departure, Anas leaves to Beirut contemplating his decision to stay at home regardless of the outcomes. Just like Anas, Maysoun's mother is strongly attached to Iraq and could never settle down in a host country. Although war and bombings were constantly threatening both Anas and Maysoun's mother, they can never imagine themselves living outside their countries. Avtar Brah contends, "diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, about putting roots 'elsewhere' " (p. 179). Anas and Maysoun's mother, however, are examples of characters who could never plant their "roots 'elsewhere'.

While the national model of Anas appeals greatly to readers, his two failed attempts to return to his home country, become a puzzle to question the potential of the national cause. During his first attempt of going back to Syria, the Lebanese police, who are alarmed at the escalating number of Syrian refugees, immediately arrest him. The humiliation Anas feels and experiences at the borders of his country are sufficient to raise doubts about his firm stand with a nation about to collapse. His second attempt at visiting Syria symbolizes the ritualized last march toward death. Anas' violent death in an ambush becomes evidence of the paralyzed state of the nationalist cause and the impossibility of return after all. Srilata Ravi confirms, "since of the middle of the last century, 'return' narratives by postcolonial subjects have gradually evolved from resistant and combative texts to introspective mediations on identity and alterity" (p. 297). Hence, return, as an essential component of the postcolonial agenda, is rendered impossible if not insignificant. As the diasporic condition prevents the national model of resistance from blossoming, it encumbers all efforts of the nation's emancipation from both internal corruption and foreign interference.

Reading *An Unsafe Haven* with a focus on the Syrian plight epitomized by Anas, who symbolizes the hope of the young generations, the reader clearly

wanders how the textual space given to Syrian characters is large enough. In fact, the narrative tends to narrow down and render futile the potential of Syrians to make a change and alter the violent corrupt *status quo*. All of Anas, his family, Fatima, and her family can never participate in the rebuilding of Syria. Anas dies unexpectedly while trying to cross borders to Syria and his violent death in a bombing attack becomes a catalyst for the impossibility of return and the promised emancipation. Fatima begs in Beirut streets together with her son and then leaves for Turkey away from an unsafe country. Even the foreigner Brigitte who used to defend the Syrian country and tried to adapt to the new place, upon escalated violence, decides to leave once and for all the country with her half-Syrian children. The reader notices, that all major Syrian characters are either vulnerable or passive to contribute to the national cause of Syria. Through a series of frustration and lost causes, Jarrar examines how Arabs at large not only Syrians or Iraqis, lost confidence in the legitimacy of their governments and the dominant political regimes. Power becomes in the hands of the few while denial, poverty, and inequality are largely imposed.

Being a neighboring country to unsettled Syria, Lebanon, the main setting of the novel is directly influenced by the increasing number of Syrian refugees. Emerging devastated after a long civil war, Lebanon is neither able to host the Syrian refugees nor to afford their stay decently. The economic and social condition of Lebanon has been vividly pictured to kindly justify the government's stand towards refugees. Fatima, her son, her daughter, and her in-laws who live in a refugee camp in south Lebanon are a microcosm of millions of refugees who have been dispersed out of their own homes and countries. The mother Fatima and her son, for instance, keep begging in Beirut's streets waiting for people's charity which becomes scarce. As a host country, however, Lebanon endures unprecedented hard times of austerity measures and poverty. It is a period of turmoil dominated by the alarm of an unknown future as clarified in the narrative of many characters but especially Peter, being American and foreigner, who confesses that Beirut which he knew when he first came in becoming a foreign place with the passing of years due to the increasing visible poverty of people.

While Hannah regularly makes visits to refugee camps, she interviews them in order to write reports about their endangered lives in camps and learns of their minimal lives on subsidies. Hannah's reports on the life of refugees contain the stories she hears and the interviews she makes in various camps. These official reports about the refugees' state, which appear in sections throughout the novel, are sent to London to be published in journals. As a journalist, Hannah wonders how much the written word is sufficiently representative compared to the lively visual picture of the current state of refugees around Lebanon and the dilemma of narrating objectively and accurately stories that will be one-day history. Hannah confesses, "As I write, I admit to having been accused, by my American husband recently and by editors on a few occasions in the past, of taking the stories I cover too much to heart, of allowing my emotions to taint my supposed objectivity and making of issues meant to enlighten the general public something akin to personal. (Jarrar Awar, p. 142). Gradually, Hannah comes to acknowledge the relativity of knowledge she reports. An epiphany-like moment takes place when she meets Fatima, her relatives, and neighbors who tell her that the government forbids refugees from work and they should pay a large sum in return for a residence visa which is obtained only upon signing to never attempt finding a job. She confesses that she does not know anything about the new requirements imposed by the Lebanese government. At some point, Hannah confesses, "I realize instead 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 harbour." (Jarrar Awar, 2016, p. 142).

Hannah's meeting with Fatima and her family uncovers the fragile state of refugees and the government's unwilling attitude to deal with this crisis. Besides the government's unwillingness and limited help to provide for refugees, the narrative reveals the reluctance of international organizations like the United Nations to offer necessary aid to refugees. This attitude comes in opposition to the humanitarian slogans of the organization. Bruce Cronin argues that the United Nations is caught in a state between protecting the interests of its state members and its logo of transnational protection and humanitarian aid, the

organization finds itself caught in the dichotomy between "governmental" and "transnational functions" (p. 53). He adds that the controversy of the United Nations is prompted by its internal policies which are run largely by state members but when it comes to humanitarian programs, they are run by non-state members (p. 57). Jarrar makes it clear that the aid of the United Nations program offered to Syrian refugees is cut severely lately. Fatima's stay in Lebanon is temporary as she moves to Turkey to join her family in another camp. Lebanon for Fatima becomes like what Michel Bruneau describes "way stations, not places of settlement and integration." (p. 46). He adds, "Through dislocation, diaspora people lose their material bonds with the territory of origin, but they can still preserve their cultural or spiritual relationship through memory" (p. 48). Indeed, Fatima's constant dislocations never meant cutting bonds with Syria, a country where she used to live securely with a family and a husband who provides for her. The war, however, took away her husband and obliged her to become the sole breadwinner of the family.

**4. Humanizing the Transnational in *An Unsafe Haven***

Amid the politically unsettled setting of the novel, a bunch of characters encounter new homes and endure new experiences in the host nation. The novel offers a kaleidoscopic exilic experience that ranges from East to West. Without an exception, all of Jarrar's characters are either refugees like the Syrian Fatima and her family, the Lebanese Hannah and her family who experienced refuge in Cyprus, or characters who live in diaspora like Peter and Brigitte. This is a novel that reflects on one of the old-new global phenomena which is diaspora. It is an old phenomenon that could be found in the Jewish diaspora since old times but both the twentieth and the twenty-first-century record a remarkable growing interest in diaspora. The issue keeps persevering causing concern with the alarming number of refugees who have to leave their homes in order to seek refuge in other countries while attempting to constitute new homes.

Jarrar endeavors to give diaspora a transnational dimension stressing its malleable characteristic. *An Unsafe Haven* records the potential of diaspora not only from an unsettled region like the East but also from the West. Thomas Faist contends that in attempting to link the two concepts diaspora and transnationalism, various dissimilarities emerge including the fact that the former

is an old and politicized notion while the latter is new and less debated (pp. 10-11). Jarrar's novel, however, grants diaspora an admirable transnational dimension through highlighting Westerners' experience of diaspora. *An Unsafe Haven* offers a multi-axis space to recount the experience of diaspora not only the point of view of the subjected but also from a Western, if I may call it, diasporic experience. In fact, one notices that the threads of the multiple diasporic stories found in the novel are connected through two main characters: Brigitte from Germany and Peter from the United States of America. It is Brigitte who makes connections with the Syrian Anas before marrying and constituting a family. Likewise, it is Peter who makes connections with the Lebanese Hannah, pursues her, and marries her eventually. As such, Brigitte's as well as Peter's ultimate relocations to Syria and Lebanon respectively are the driving force of the narrative plot. With their displacement, the narrative develops to recount multiple experiences of diaspora which take place eventually in the station of Lebanon. Both Brigitte and Peter experience to borrow Avtar Brah's expression "THE HOMING OF DIASPORA, THE DIASPORIZING OF HOME" (p. 187) as they attempt to adapt to the new Arab context. The dilemma that any individual in diaspora encounters while being in the host country is intense and through stretching the diasporic experience to Western characters who decide to live in an Arab country, Jarrar makes out of diaspora truly a transnational experience that transgresses the old label which connects people from the third world to diaspora exclusively. While living in an Arab country, both Brigitte and Peter try to adapt, accommodate, and even be part of the host nation. Both characters try to learn Arabic and sacrifice some of the luxuries they used to take for granted in their home countries. Brigitte has to give up her independence and individuality while Peter sacrifices his job and full citizenship being an American who lives in Beirut. Although they are living in a voluntary diaspora, they are constantly trying to "home" this diaspora.

From a postcolonial point of view, Jarrar's transnational novel of diaspora entails the potential of reversal to destabilize modes of representations that have been fixed since long. These approaches pertain to the colonial role during the heydays of colonialism. With the colonizers' travels to the colonized territories, they put into practice different forms of subjugation whereby "the native became

the Other" in his land and the colonizer became the master as Avtar Brah explains (p. 187). This equation has been reversed skillfully throughout the pages of *An Unsafe Haven* whereby people who belong to colonial powers are treated on many occasions as "the Other". Brigitte's life in Syria, as a case in point, has been full of handicaps including her in-law family who is very disappointed about their son's marriage to a foreign woman and how society looks at her as a foreigner. Brigitte tries her best to adapt to the Arab traditions of her husband's family but she cannot endure their constant involvement in her affairs and the way she is raising her son and daughter. Brigitte could not tolerate, in particular, the fact that in Arab societies, the son is much more important than the daughter, and the two genders should not be treated equally. As all members of the family, including her husband and son, come to agree on gender differences, Brigitte becomes "the Other" in their eyes; she is the foreigner who comes to impose her Western cultural background on them. When problems intensify between the married couple, Anas becomes hesitant as he confesses to Peter, "My mother was right [. . .] I should have married someone from my own culture, someone who would have fit in better with the family. They just don't understand us, these foreigners." (Jarrar Awar, p. 75).

The same condition of estrangement characterizes the experience of the American Peter who also suffers moments of "Othering" while he lives in Beirut. As a typical Western stereotype, Peter feels less emotional and treats different matters more reasonably way as compared to his Arab companions including his wife and friends. His Arab entourage, however, never misses the opportunity to make him feel dissimilar. Peter confesses, "Does being an American mean I have to keep quiet or that I won't be accepted into this society anymore?" (Jarrar Awar, p. 66). Compared to the common traditions of the Arab society he lives in, Peter appears emotionless on different occasions; a fact he justifies with his job being a doctor but is even more certain with his native background in America. Although Peter tries to fit in a culture so different from his, with time passage, he develops feelings of estrangement whereby he starts to look at Lebanon, a country that welcomed him once, differently. Abruptly, Peter realizes that Lebanon is experiencing turmoil, and is on the verge of an explosion at any moment just like Syria and Iraq, which affects him greatly. Peter's and Brigitte's

desperate attempts at adaptation echo Edward Said's description of Conrad's exile from Poland as reflected in his works "his hopeless attempts to make satisfying contact with new surroundings" (2000, p. 179). Eventually, Brigitte leaves Syria and her dream of settling down while Peter appears exhausted to the extent that he starts to doubt the meaning of his stay in Lebanon, a miserable country suffocating with chaos and corruption.

Portraying Brigitte and Peter as "the Other" who live in an Arab land, Jarrar reverses the long-established colonial stereotype of rendering the colonized as victimized and looked upon as "the Other". Jarrar's aim behind reversing colonial roles, though, is not to reinforce the already set dichotomies separating East from West but to focalize the transnational dimension of a human experience like diaspora. *An Unsafe Haven* becomes the story of destabilizing established modes of representation and granting the diasporic dimension of the novel a transnational quality that defies cliché labels like connecting third-world populations with the experience of exile. Although voluntary, Brigitte and Peter made their choice to relocate and carry on the rest of their lives among Arab people and inside an Arab society aware of cultural, religious, and language barriers that they come across while living in this region of the world. As such, Peter's and Brigitte's stay in Arab societies epitomizes a diasporic experience from a Western perspective. Jarrar manages to break the ice on labels of dichotomies like colonizer/colonized; the self/the other; East/West…etc echoing Said's diasporic experience as reflected in his memoir *Out of Place* when he describes himself being the inward/outward, Arab/ Western, Muslim/Christian. While his identity lingers everywhere in a state of in-between-ness, he can never explain to people who he is definitely nor people can understand fully his answers (Out of Place: A Memoir, 1999, pp. 8-21) in similar terms to Peter's and Brigitte's continuous feelings of "in-between-ness". Said adds in the introduction of *Reflections on Exile*:

> I can remember, I have felt that I belonged to both worlds, without being completely of either one or the other. During my lifetime, however, the parts of the Arab world that I was most attached to either have been changed utterly by civil upheavals and war, or have simply ceased to exist. And for long periods of time I have been an outsider in the United States,

> particularly when it went war against, and was deeply opposed to, the (far from perfect) cultures and societies of the Arab world. yet when I say "exile" I do not mean something sad or deprived. On the contrary belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide enables you to understand them more easily. (2000, pp. 24-25).

Although Brigitte and Peter are individual cases that one suspects may not represent a case of diaspora, one should remember that they are representatives of larger cases and group communities, especially with the fact that the world is becoming a small village while borders continue to dismantle in terms of significance. Unexpected wars threaten people's stability and oblige them to dislocate like the latest invasion of Ukraine by the neighboring country Russia which constantly pushes Ukrainians to take refuge in neighboring European countries. Kevin Kenny argues, "diaspora is most useful when the connections assume a multipolar rather than a unilinear form." (p. 31) which makes the country of departure and the host one completely unexpected in opposition to the alleged metropolitan/periphery axis. Examining the roads that made Brigitte and Peter came to encounter Anas and Hannah and decide ultimately to relocate to Syria and Beirut is a point of interest. Anas wants to pursue a career as an artist and he wins a scholarship to study in Germany, during this time, he meets Brigitte, falls in love, and decides to marry her and move back to Syria. For the American Peter, while at home, befriends many Arab friends, and during a visit to Beirut, he meets Hannah and decides to marry her. Knowledge about these characters' meeting stories solidifies the argument that East/West relationships could never be cut and justifies the argument that the world is indeed becoming a small village and different cultures intermingle with one another frequently.

Moving backward in history, one sees that many nations that are considered today desirable places to people in diaspora, their previous population did experience diaspora in one way or another. Upon the institution of the new World, for instance, many British settlers were forced to live in the new world like prisoners and criminals; thus, they experience diaspora from their homeland England to the new world. Germany, the homeland of Brigitte, is also a particular case to consider regarding the Berlin wall crisis in 1961, which lasted for 28 years and divided the nation into East and West. People in the Western camp of

Berlin were to experience forced exile as they were forbidden to travel to East Berlin. Choosing such countries as Germany and the United States of America as countries of departure grants *An Unsafe Haven* a transnational dimension wherein Jarrar appears to be a postcolonial humanist who denounces forms of essentialization. One can say that Brigitte's and Peter's conception of the meaning of home symbolizes the novelist's alter ego. Chu Yiu Wai calls attention to the "intricate relationship between postcolonialism and globalism [. . .] Cosmopolitanism and associated notions, such as multiculturalism, can be regarded as vigorous heterogeneous discursive spaces opened up by postcolonial discourse" (pp. 148-151). Explaining such a transnational humanist vision that crosses borders, Jarrar reveals that "Brigitte maintained that a nation was not defined by its borders but by the unity and common vision of its people" (Jarrar Awar, p. 19). The novel's humanistic dimension antagonizes the failure of humanism itself for not standing to its promises. As such, *An Unsafe Haven* tells a self-diagnostic and therapeutic narrative against the discourse of hatred and superiority. Refuge for Jarrar entails "different expressions of displacement and dissonance, depending on the point at which we begin our experience of dislocation, the point at which our lives are first disrupted by the violence imposed on us by events that seem outside our control." (p. 48) a point which is further solidified by the studies of Stuart Hall who contends in his *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*

> The diaspora experience as I intend here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity.* Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (pp. 119-120).

In embracing universalism and humanism at the expense of rejecting difference, *An Unsafe Haven* tells a univocal polyphonic tale with a strong plea to understand and respect the "Other". Eastern and Western characters alike roam throughout the pages of a transnational humanistic story. Jarrar makes clear the movement from antagonism to reconciliation, from hatred to forgiveness, and above all from differences to equality and similarity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present essay elaborates on the handicaps that current postcolonial writers found themselves in between "writing back" to the former empire and transcending dichotomies to construct a humanitarian transnational frame. To work out this dilemma, Jarrar weaves multifaceted diasporic experiences in her *An Unsafe Haven* and presents a critique of both internal and external rotten policies that destroyed the potential of the Arab region to emancipate. *An Unsafe Haven* is a multi-dimensional story made up of diasporic characters whose cross-paralleled exilic stories expose the fragile internal structure of the Arab region, which is doubly victimized due to continuous external interferences in this social and political unrest and misuse of power inside the nation. Although the narrative shows timidity in pointing and attacking the external hand (Western alliances, ideologies, and interests) in the political, social, and economic deterioration that the Arab region encounters since independence, Jarrar paints her Arab story with a transnational outlook through employing Western characters who endeavor to fit into the Arab entourage. This enveloping of Western characters in an Eastern background is Jarrar's standpoint to emphasize the humanitarian dimension of the diasporic experience no matter what is the departure point or the terminal station. Through vivid descriptions of refugee's wretched life while begging in the streets and barely living on campus, the novel pleas for both the reader's sympathy and reconsideration of rotten world policies. The building up of *An Unsafe Haven*'s narrative permits to engage the reader not sentimentally but condemns the corrupt world of politics.

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