AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WRITING (LETTERS), LIQUIDS, AND LIVES REBORN IN POST-WAR ANGLOPHONE LEBANESE WOMEN'S FICTION

by
LANA MALEK ZANTOUT

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by

LANA MALEK ZANTOUT

Approved by:

Dr. Syrine C. Hout, Professor — Advisor
Department of English

Dr. David Currell, Assistant Professor — Member of Committee
Department of English

Dr. Christopher Nassar, Associate Professor — Member of Committee
Department of English

Date of thesis defense: April 19, 2016

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis examines post-war Anglophone Lebanese Women's fiction in Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water* and Zena El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You.* Through the careful analysis of the aforementioned novels, this thesis argues that writing and liquids are fluid motifs that act as a looking glass into the fractured selves of the female protagonists. The fluidity of writing, illustrated in the protagonists' written works, i.e. letters, bullet-point notes, and blogs, and the free-flowing liquids, in the form of natural fluids and drinks, spill across the pages of the novels under study, serving as the volatile medium through which these heroines attempt to understand themselves, reinvent their identities, and ultimately, experience perpetual rebirth.

The thesis opens with an introductory section which provides a brief overview of the novels' plots, emphasizing the identity struggle which is birthed by the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 War, and is exhibited through Jarrar's and El Khalil's female protagonists, Aneesa and Zena, respectively. More importantly, this section explicitly defines the theory of fluidity which is demonstrated in the motifs of writing and liquids present in both novels. Following the introductory chapter is the second chapter which offers a close reading of Aneesa's letters: written documentation of her search for self-definition. Similarly, the third chapter highlights Zena's continuous attempt at reconstructing her dissevered self through the writing of letters, bullet-point notes, and blogs. The fourth and fifth chapters study the ongoing flux of liquids in *Dreams of Water* and *Beirut, I Love You*, respectively. These liquids serve as the fluid milieu through which the protagonists seek survival via multiple rebirths. Finally, the concluding chapter provides a summary of the arguments presented in this thesis, and more importantly, makes known the limitations of this thesis and its main contribution to the field of post-war Anglophone Lebanese Women's fiction.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Set against a backdrop of war and violence, Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water* (2007) and Zena El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You* (2009) portray the lives of Aneesa and Zena, respectively, as they return to Beirut after years of living abroad. Both protagonists have experienced or will experience war in Lebanon, be it Aneesa during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) or Zena during the 33-Day-War in the summer of 2006. Notwithstanding the different time periods, generations and wars, both Jarrar's and El Khalil's novels highlight two recurring motifs: writing and liquids. Through the use of written texts, in the form of letters, notes, and blogs, and the use of liquids, natural and unnatural, in the form of drinks such as coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages, Jarrar and El Khalil map Aneesa's and Zena's character development as they struggle to define their fluctuating identity in the midst of war and post-war societies. My thesis argues that the persistent flux of writing and liquids acts as a looking glass through which readers witness the protagonists' perpetual identity crises and their attempt to define themselves vis-à-vis a shifting and rapidly-evolving world. These motifs grant readers insight into Aneesa's and Zena's desperate search for identity as they attempt to heal and define themselves in light of their understanding of the themes of war and home.

Writing and liquids, as argued in this thesis, are motifs that serve the same purpose in the works of Jarrar and El Khalil: providing a medium where Aneesa and Zena can voice their identity crises and search for self-definition. In addition to serving the same purpose, writing and liquids are both fluid in nature. The definition of fluidity

of the motifs coincides with Zygmunt Bauman's description of fluids as stated in the foreword of his book, *Liquid Modernity* (2000): "Fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it […] Fluids travel easily. They 'flow,' 'spill,' 'run out,' 'splash' […] they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still" (2).

Bauman's above definition of fluidity can especially be applied to Jarrar's and El Khalil's novels, where the war, be it the Lebanese Civil War or the 2006 War, is arguably an indication of modernity. In other words, with modernity comes the need for domination, expansion, and territorialism which in turn, heighten the fluidity of society and intensify an individual's need for self-definition. War creates a world marked by rapid change and instability, thereby enhancing society's fluidity. It is this fluid milieu that necessitates fluid identities capable of frequent transformation and adaptation. That being said, and similar to Bauman's theory of fluidity, Aneesa's and Zena's writing "flow[s]" and "spill[s]" over the chapters of both novels (2). Unable to retain its shape or a single characteristic for long periods of time, the written texts take on several forms. In the case of Aneesa's writing, her epistolary texts fail to maintain a single form, for they fluctuate from letters to diary entries and, finally, to weapons when writing under Bassam's name. In other words, the fluidity of her writing stems from the fact that epistolarity itself has become a fluid genre, overcoming the conventional obstacles concerning the transport of information from addresser to addressee. In Zena's case, fluidity is evident in the manner in which her writing fluctuates from letters to notes and blogs. As she searches for a suitable platform to voice her identity struggle, Zena fluidly experiments with several writing genres.

The fluidity of liquids, similar to the writing motif, resides in the liquids' continuous presence in the novels of Jarrar and El Khalil. In both works, the flow of liquids is persistent and, as described by Bauman, these liquids "cannot easily hold their shape," neither can they "fix space nor bind time" (2). Thus, their characteristics evolve, this rapid change evident in the liquids' transformation into the following forms: sea water, lakes, ponds, rain, in addition to many beverages like tea, coffee, and wine... Fluids, in their multiple forms, appear in both novels as a witness to the protagonists' attempt at introspection and act as the designated milieu for the understanding and reconstruction of the dissevered self.

The fluid nature of the motifs is represented through the theme of reincarnation emphasized in both novels. This theme is discussed and/or alluded to in the protagonists' written works such as Aneesa's letters to Salah. It is also highlighted as a theme in the presence of natural liquids, especially in the case of Zena's sea birth. Reincarnation, which by definition signals a new birth and the transformation of a person from one life to another, can be regarded as a form of fluidity. In other words, the theory of reincarnation, similar to Bauman's definition of fluidity in *Liquid Times* (2007), indicates a rapid and continuous process of decomposition and transformation where individuals are incapable of preserving their shape for a long period of time, and consequently, undergo constant evolution (1). In Jarrar's work, the theme of reincarnation is obviously introduced through Bassam. However, more importantly, and what will be under study, is the reincarnation that refers to Aneesa who searches for a metaphorical rebirth, a rebirth that would grant her a stable and secure identity. When Aneesa returns to her homeland, she tries to resolve her past by investigating Bassam's abduction. By trying to find closure, Aneesa attempts to experience a metaphorical

rebirth that would set her free from her past. In El Khalil's novel however, Zena experiences a spiritual reincarnation, a belief firmly held by the Druze community. Zena openly discusses her multiple rebirths which date back to 1901 and continue throughout the 33-Day-War in the summer of 2006. Hence, both protagonists experience a form of reincarnation which, in turn, further emphasizes the fluid nature of the aforementioned motifs.

The motifs used in the works of Jarrar and El Khalil are better understood via a close study of the plot of each novel and their depiction of the motifs under study. *Dreams of Water,* to begin with, depicts the life of Aneesa who attempts to find herself in the process of finding her brother. Having left Beirut in the 1980s, during the Lebanese Civil War, Aneesa moves to London in search of security and new beginnings. Throughout her years abroad, she meets Salah, another Lebanese exile who shares her nostalgia for homeland and family, and his son, Samir. Aneesa's growing relationship with Salah and Samir forces her to reevaluate her understanding of life and confront the past that has long plagued her, especially the loss of her older brother Bassam who was abducted during the war. After years in exile, Aneesa returns home in an attempt to face her haunting past and put together the fragmented pieces of her life. During one of her conversations with Samir who decides to return to Beirut to better understand himself and his homeland, Samir brings Aneesa face-to-face with a self-defining question: "If you could tell me just one thing about yourself, what would it be?" he asks (Jarrar 163). "I would say that I once lost a brother," she replies (163).

Aneesa's search for Bassam is simultaneously a quest for closure and a struggle to define herself vis-à-vis a fast-paced and rapidly-changing world. Aneesa resides in a modern society which, as argued by Bauman, is marked by "the passage

from a ‘solid’ phase to a ‘liquid’ phase” in which “individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, [and] patterns of acceptable behavior” fail “to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set” (1). One therefore, lives in a “hotbed of uncertainties” (1) where there exists an ultimate “splicing” of “individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes which are in principle infinite” (3). In other words, the only remaining constant is constant change and transformation in every aspect of human lives and human psyches.

In the midst of a fluid life, Jarrar’s use of letters and liquids are in sync with a fluctuating modern world where her main character, Aneesa, floats in a state of liquid existence that is suspended between past and present. The letters and liquids, both characteristically fluid, mimic Aneesa’s rapidly-evolving life as she moves between Beirut and London and between war and post-war periods. Similar to the persistent pouring of liquids in the novel, the fluidity of Aneesa’s letters exists in the manner in which her letters flow across the first section of the novel and as they change in nature and function. The dispersed locations of the letters also represent the fragmentation of the writer’s psyche and are an indication of an individual whose mind, as previously argued by Valery, is “no longer fed by anything but sudden changes and constant renewed stimuli” (qtd. in Bauman 1).

Through the dynamic and flexible art of letter-writing, Jarrar makes possible the depiction of Aneesa’s fragmented character via pen and paper. Epistolarity is no longer restricted to the limitations of an addresser and addressee, but rather the nature of epistolarity expands in the sense that letters may serve a purpose greater than the mere transfer of information from writer to reader. Epistolary texts, such as those written by

Aneesa, take on a psychological function. The letters addressed to Salah serve as diary entries or a written form of mental mapping which reveals Aneesa's attempt to reclaim her identity. Living in the space between London and Beirut, Aneesa's self-perception is challenged as she tries to adjust to life in Lebanon, her brother's abduction, and the new addition to her family, Ramzi, the young orphan claimed to be Bassam's reincarnation. In Aneesa's state of in-betweenness or nomadic existence, writing becomes a psychological refuge. "For a man who no longer has a homeland," as argued by Theodor Adorno, "writing becomes a place to live in" (qtd. in Stone 41). By using the epistolary genre which experiments with "elliptical narration," writers are given the opportunity to revisit their text and adopt a fluid letter-writing technique "as they remember, return, reflect, and write and rewrite their lives" (Altman qtd. in Campbell 335).

Bassam's letters, which are indeed written by Aneesa, are similar to the letters addressed to Salah and serve multiple functions, all of which grant readers insight into Aneesa's psychological state. By forging Bassam's letters, Aneesa attempts to forge an identity for herself, an identity that allows her to actively experience the war by writing about a traumatizing war event, i.e., Bassam's abduction, and by changing its outcome. Writing in Bassam's name, Aneesa is capable of ensuring her brother's well-being by keeping him alive in her letters, and is also capable of granting herself and her mother hope for Bassam's safe return. In this sense, a writer's voice, as stated by William Faulkner is more than a written documentation of human experience; "it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail" (qtd. in Seigneurie 50). Moreover, by rewriting past war events, Aneesa attempts to achieve a form of induced amnesia. In keeping her brother alive through her letters, she is deliberately striving to forget a past

traumatizing event and wipe clean from her memory the possibility of Bassam's death. Therefore, Aneesa attempts what Jean Said Makdisi has termed "dismemory" or a "deliberate, convenient forgetfulness. And this relates not merely to a particular way of situating the past, but more significantly in respect to stabilizing the present as a vantage point through and from which to disremember the past" (qtd. in Nikro 33). Hence, Aneesa's present life and her ability to find closure are dependent on forgetting Bassam's past and denying his death.

Similar to the function of Aneesa's letters, the persistent presence of liquids, both natural and unnatural, grant readers access to Aneesa's mental state in the sense that Jarrar's careful mapping of the fluidscape in the novel becomes a psychological record or a direct mapping of Aneesa's fluctuating mindscape. The use of fluids in the novel is once again an indication of a fast-paced modern liquid life characterized by renewal and revival, "a society," as argued in Bauman's *Liquid Life*, "in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines" (1).

Unnatural liquids in the form of drinks such as coffee and tea act as recurring motifs throughout the novel and are persistently present during Aneesa's confessional conversations with Salah, Samir, her mother, Waddad, and English friend, Isabel. Similar to the letters, the consumption of drinks is always accompanied by either new insights into Aneesa's psyche or the revelation of information that inevitably impacts Aneesa's character development. The vivid description of these liquids does not go unnoticed and Jarrar takes careful measures in depicting the co-dependent presence of fluids, identity, and therapy. During one of their many conversations, as "the scent of cardamom seeds [was] rising from the steaming cups," Waddad discloses new

information about Bassam and makes a decision in an effort to bring closure to herself and her daughter (Jarrar 17). "The dark, thick liquid" (16) of Arabic coffee serves as a witness to Waddad's words: "Aneesa, it's time we accepted the fact that your brother is gone. We have to get on with our lives" (18). During that same conversation, Jarrar draws an analogy between fluids and a liquid life by introducing the concept of reincarnation. Over the morning cup of coffee, Waddad claims that she has found Bassam's reincarnation in a children's orphanage in the mountains (18). In other words, Jarrar uses liquids as a means of depicting the liquid society that Aneesa lives in and how this fluidity, in turn, has affected Aneesa's character by serving as the milieu which promises the continuity of identity.

Similar to *Dreams of Water*, El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You* is centered on the life of a female protagonist who struggles with violence and war. After living in New York, Zena returns to Beirut in hopes of setting down roots in the homeland she has left behind years ago. On July 12, 2006, the Israeli army launched an attack on Lebanon, commencing what was known as the 33-Day-War or the Israel-Hezbollah War. While Lebanon is under siege, Zena attempts to survive the war through her writing which is a collection of notes, letters, and a blog concerning the war, a single entry which is part of her online blog titled *Beirut Update*.

El Khalil's novel emphasizes the presence of writing and liquids as recurring motifs that highlight Zena's struggle to heal and understand herself through her homeland. While Lebanon is ridden with bullets and bombs and as the death toll increases, Zena's writing depicts her love-hate relationship with Beirut. Her varied collection of written texts reveals fluidity in her writing as she constantly searches for different genres as a means of defining and redefining herself through her writing.

Zena, similar to Aneesa, resides in a liquid society which is continuously susceptible to change and evolution. In fact, Zena's writing itself speaks of fluids as she writes about blood, drinking, tea, water, wine, rain, and the Beirut Corniche.

The presence of fluids in El Khalil's work is one that is ongoing and is closely tied to the development of Zena's character and theme of reincarnation. Liquids, as is demonstrated in the novel, are a representation of change and the medium for Zena's reincarnation. Similar to liquids that change in form and shape, reincarnation, according to Druze belief, grants one the opportunity of multiple rebirths. In the opening chapter of the novel, the theme of reincarnation is introduced to readers and is demonstrated through Zena's rebirth. Initially born in 1901 as Hussein and having survived the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912, Zena describes her "sea birth" (El Khalil 19) as an "excruciatingly personal" experience of drowning in "dark black sea" (16). Hence, from the novel's introductory chapter, El Khalil has drawn an analogy between water and reincarnation, an analogy that reoccurs as the plot unfolds and as Zena is subjected to the experiences of war. As will later become apparent, the war itself allows Zena multiple reincarnations, while her identity is remolded and reformed. Zena herself is aware of reformation during wartime as she describes Beirut in the following lines: "She shot my heart over and over. It was always a surprise. It was always an end and a new beginning" (86). Therefore, living in the realm between endings and beginnings or between deaths and births, the presence of liquids in the novel acts as a fluidscape that maps the progression of Zena's character, her understanding of home, and ultimately, her definition of identity and self.

In *Dreams of Water* and *Beirut, I Love You*, writing and letters serve as motifs used to portray the female protagonists' search for the understanding and reconstruction

of their fluctuating selves. As Aneesa and Zena travel through pre-war and war spaces, writing and letters become the looking glass through which readers view characters' perpetual identity reformation while they attempt to understand themselves in relation to themes of war and home. Resembling the behavior of fluids which undergo rapid transformation, Aneesa experiences continuous reformation as she moves between two worlds marked by the Lebanese Civil War: the worlds before and after Bassam's abduction. Similarly, Zena's self-perception hinges on her relationship with Beirut and the events of the 33-Day-War. Both characters attempt to piece together the fragments of their lives, this struggle becoming apparent through the authors' use of written texts and liquids that flow with the same unpredictability as the fluids in their novels.

In sync with the flow of the motifs mentioned above, the structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapters two and three argue the theory of fluidity manifested in Aneesa's letters in *Dreams of Water* and Zena's writing (bullet-point notes, a letter, and a blog) in *Beirut, I Love You*, respectively. Chapters four and five explain fluidity through the flux of natural and unnatural fluids in Jarrar's and El Khalil's works, respectively. Finally, a concluding chapter serves as the closing section, briefly offering a summary of the essential arguments, the limitations of this thesis, and its main contribution to the field of post-war Anglophone Lebanese Women's Fiction.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS IN *DREAMS OF WATER*

A. Epistolary Genre

The epistolary genre has been a part of female writing since the sixteenth century. Women have since then, taken pleasure and advantage of the letter-writing genre which is complementary to their gender and regarded as an expressive platform for the female voice. Women in search of a means of self-expression have easily acquired the writing skills of the epistolary genre, adjusting their narratives to shifting world cultures and norms, quickly growing in style and technique, thereby creating letters that are "considered the best models of the genre" (Goldsmith vii). As the epistolary genre evolves to fit women's needs for self-expression, letters have ceased to be written correspondences defined by an addresser and addressee, but have rather become documentation of self-existence and a new form of autobiography. Letters have thus, surpassed the limitations of mail and acquired a greater purpose which is in line with Georges Gusdorf's definition of an autobiography as a written landscape of a speaking, existing self (Freidman 72). Furthermore, "the literary letter designates a new space within a fictional narrative, signaling a shift within the space the narrative had previously occupied" (McDowell Carley 5). Occupying a space within the larger frame of the novel, literary letters mark a new territory to be discovered and analyzed by readers (5).

With the onset of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) came a heightened need for self-documentation. Amidst a period of violence, destruction, and revolutionary change, a need arises for a writing genre capable of sufficiently mapping women's

psychological and social dislocation and relocation. In enters epistolary writing "as a subversive and freeing agent," as described by Elizabeth Campbell, and a writing outlet that would serve "as a mirror in which [women] not only seek themselves and/or another but attempt to change their lives to reflect the mirror image" (Campbell 332). It can therefore be argued that women in search of a writing outlet, turned to literary letters, a writing genre that would not only act as a platform for self-expression but also serve as a flexible genre that is in sync with women writers' fluctuating identity during a period marked by instability and change. Literary letters granted women a writing voice and "act[ed] as psychological motivators on characters in the novels" (333). In addition to providing a voice, "although never read as a (metaphorical) flesh-and-blood character, the letter brings complexity and diversity to the narrative as a (metaphorical) physical object capable of surrounding itself with a space of its own" (McDowell Carley 6). It is through this space that characters are capable of self-exploration and self-treatment. The epistolary style "with its experimenting with elliptical narration, subjectivity and multiplicity of point of view, polyphony of voices, interior monologue, superimpositions of time levels, [and] presentation of simultaneous actions" is capable of depicting literary characters' struggles in a modern world defined by change and upheaval (Campbell 335).

B. Aneesa's Letters to Salah

In Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water*, Aneesa's collection of letters, as I will argue, is the looking glass through which readers witness Aneesa's identity struggle and her search for self-understanding. Her letters, those written to Salah and the others to her family under Bassam's name, are fluid in nature, their fluidity made evident in

the manner in which they rapidly change forms and/or functions to accommodate Aneesa's shifting sense of self-perception.

After having spent years in exile, Aneesa leaves London and returns to Beirut in hopes of uncovering her brother's past. Now worlds apart, Aneesa attempts to preserve the bond that she and Salah once shared through a steady stream of correspondences in the form of two fragmented letters which exclusively appear only in the first section of the novel. None of the letters include addresses or dates and only the second letter is signed by Aneesa on page forty-one. The subsequent five sections of Jarrar's work are devoid of any correspondences, be they by Salah or others. Aneesa's first letter to Salah, starting on page sixteen, highlights leitmotifs of identity and homeland, themes which are made clear as Aneesa juxtaposes her years in London with her new life back home. Aneesa starts the letter by describing herself in her former London life as living "in the throes of aloneness, almost content with its settled rhythms, yet feeling the desolation that inevitably comes with it" (Jarrar 16). Her contradictory state of "aloneness" and "content" is further discussed as she continues to narrate the memories of her London life: "I told you there were times when I liked it in this city with its pockets of green, and the loneliness and peace it brought me. Trouble seems such a long way" (21). Compared to her paradoxical life in exile, Aneesa describes "the ease with which [she has] slipped back into being" back home: "Lebanon is like a second skin that does not leave me even as I wish it away. It is the here and now of everything I feel and do" (16). It is therefore apparent through Aneesa's writing that exile births a life of contradictions. While homeland is "a second skin," exile offers a paradoxical state of being that challenges one's identity and changes his/her nature. Aneesa, aware of her transformation, makes the following statement: "I could not

believe at first how distant I had become in my years in London, how cool compared to the heated passions that I found here" (28). Similarly, Aneesa believes that her transformation is made visible to her Lebanese neighbors and acquaintances whose curious looks seemed to bore into her until Aneesa felt that she could "burn under their gazes. Who are you now? [T]hey seemed to be saying to [her]. What do you make of us after all this time?" (28). Similarly, Aneesa's return to her homeland, despite the ease and comfort of having once again slipped into her "second skin," poses challenges to her identity, for she is not the same person who left Lebanon many years ago nor was she her former Lebanese self during her years abroad (Jarrar 16). It is arguable that in London and Beirut, Aneesa occupies grey spaces or is better described as a state of in-betweenness where she fails to belong to either place. While in London, Aneesa lived with the habit of looking back. She would look back into her past, her brother's abduction, and her Lebanese self and homeland. The "pockets of green" that Aneesa writes about is in reference to the English landscape that she has grown to love and depend on (21). While in exile, London's green parks became a constant presence in her life, a presence that posed a striking contrast to Beirut's concrete jungle and landscape of debris and shrapnel throughout the civil war. Having escaped Beirut's war zone, Aneesa tries to find refuge in London's green parks only to be faced with a conflicting state of "loneliness" and "peace" (21). Despite its tranquil beauty, London was not home. Therefore, still in search for home and unwilling to live a life of repetitively looking over her shoulder, Aneesa returns to Beirut. Her relocation however, has caused a relapse and Aneesa finds herself once again, falling into the habit of looking back, this time reflecting on her European life with Salah, her reminiscence depicted in the following lines of her letter: "I wish I could run upstairs, ring the bell

and find you there. We could make tea biscuits, I think, to remind ourselves of our once-Western lives" (16). Aneesa's identity is a fluid concept that fills the grey areas i.e. in-between spaces in both her English and Lebanese lives.

In *Dreams of Water,* similar to her previous novel titled *Somewhere, Home* (2003), Jarrar draws readers into a post-war world marked by "displacement" and "belonging," common themes among exiles who have fled their country in times of war (Mirapuri 464). Aneesa, not unlike Jarrar's female protagonist in *Somewhere, Home,* yearns for the comfort of belonging in the post-Lebanese Civil War period. Upon describing *Somewhere, Home* in the 2004 Vintage edition of Jarrar's novel, the Irish writer, Brian Keenan makes the following statement: "In an age of dislocation *Somewhere, Home* lights up the lost road to ourselves and the home place of the heart" (qtd. in Mirapuri 464). The same description applies to *Dreams of Water* which portrays Aneesa's quest to find herself and ultimately, find the home she once lost during the war. Aneesa's identity hangs in the balance as she repetitively attempts an "exploration of the myriad associations we all attach to the concept of belonging" (Flockhart qtd. in Mirapuri 464). She does not belong in exile, though, as she has admitted to Salah in her letters, it is the place where "trouble seems such a long way away" (Jarrar 21). Upon her return, she attempts to belong to her homeland, however her Lebanon, despite being "the here and now of everything [she] feel[s] and do[es]," is also the very land that has robbed her of her brother and thus, has jeopardized her feeling of security (16). A better understanding of Aneesa's situation is made possible by examining Edward Said's essay titled "The Mind of Winter." In his essay, Said discusses exile and belonging, both of which are inextricably related to the theme of identity. The following argument made by Said captures the struggles of migration

forced on Aneesa by the Lebanese Civil War: "The fact of migration is extraordinarily impressive to me: that movement from the precision and concreteness of one form of life transformed or transmuted into another […] And then of course the whole problematic of exile and immigration enters into it, the people who simply don't belong in any culture" (qtd. in Maleh 11). The question therefore, poses itself: Where does Aneesa belong? Can one belong to a homeland after years of exile? This is where the significance behind Aneesa's epistolary writing comes in.

As an attempt to answer the above questions, Aneesa's letters to Salah serve their purpose of introspection by helping Aneesa reach an understanding of who she is in the post-exile phase of her life. Both "subjective" and "emotional," the epistolary style "reaches out as it looks inward, opening up and presenting a consciousness to a specific sympathetic listener," in this case, Salah (Campbell 336). Thus, in the letter's function of introspection, lies Aneesa's medium of self-searching. Moreover, and as described by Campbell, "the letter has been, for women especially, a metaphor for the self as well as for the addressee. Women send themselves in letters, feel the presence of the addressee in letters they both write and receive" (336). That being said, Aneesa uses her letters as a platform for discussing her struggles as an exile. The letters are Aneesa. Her pent-up confusion and disorientation caused by years of exilic existence find an outlet in her letters. As argued by Janet Gurkin Altman, the epistolary text is "obsessed with its oral mode" where the writer is driven by a need to vent and express thoughts and emotions on paper (qtd. in Campbell 337). "The oral mode" in Aneesa's letters reveals a type of "frantic writing," an obsession with creating "written discourse out of oral discourse" (337). Hence, Aneesa's writing, which mimics oral speech, is free-flowing and creates a "stream of consciousness effect" similar to the effect created

through the writing of diaries and/or journals (337). Therefore, the function of Aneesa's letters surpasses epistolarity as it acquires the properties of a diary, a therapeutic discourse which attempts to aid the writer in disclosing secrets, expressing troubling thoughts, and ultimately, attempting introspection through self-searching via writing. Aneesa's letters also become objects of possession (McDowell Carley 9). In A.S Byatt's post-modern novel titled *Possession* (1990), the characters' letters are treated "as objects of pursuit," and as alluded to in the title, "the novel offers an investigation into the concepts of possession and materialism central to the twentieth century and posits letters as objects to be possessed and pursued" (9). Similarly, Aneesa's letters are objects of possession. However, contrary to Byatt's definition of possession, I argue that the concept of possession in relation to Aneesa's letters carries a double entendre. The first meaning comes from Byatt's definition: letters as objects of possession that Aneesa, having full writing authority, can control and manipulate to bring about the desired effect, i.e. self-searching. Unlike Bassam's disappearance which she has no control over, her letters are tangible and susceptible to manipulation. In addition to the concrete papers of the letter or the stationary set, "language itself becomes a material object […] and gains materiality in its interaction with other words" (18). The latter meaning of possession concerns Aneesa being possessed by the letters, in the sense that the letters become an obsession. Writing to Salah is an addiction for Aneesa who is desperate to find herself through the act of writing letters. The language that fills her letters secures Aneesa's existence in the world, for language has the ability to "mark our existence in the world" and "enact our material being" (Iwanicki qtd. in McDowell Carley 24).

Aneesa's geographical relocation from homeland to exile then back home again results in a psychological relocation that is depicted in her writing. In other words, the fragmented structure of her letters represents a physical relocation of pen on paper and is symbolic of Aneesa's displacement or fractured identity. Aneesa's internal struggles imposed on her by the return to her homeland are reflected in her fragmented letters to Salah. In juxtaposing her European life against her Lebanese life, Aneesa is incapable of discussing her nomadic existence in a single coherent letter. She discusses her struggles of being an exile in the following fragmented letters: throughout the entire letter on page sixteen, in the closing paragraph of the letter on page twenty-one, and finally, throughout the letter falling on pages twenty-seven and twenty-eight. The mobility of Aneesa's wandering pen is representative of her mobile identity that has become the norm in a modern era of relocations and rapid change. "In this age of mass migration, refugee crises, and global mobility, it could be argued that the experience of displacement, relocation, migration, and diaspora is no longer the exception but the rule" (Mirapuri 464). Thus, with global mobility comes a mobile identity that cannot, try as it may, be confined or fixed to a single location. As Said's argument stipulates in "The Mind of Winter," the movement from homeland to exile is a complete transformation that exceeds geography; it is a transmutation of the self as it travels from a world marked by "concreteness" to one of vague and unfamiliar existence (Said qtd. in Maleh 11). It is a morphing of the self from one form to another where the new self has shed some of its previous properties in its transformation process. In exile, people "simply don't belong in any culture," neither the culture of the homeland they have left behind nor the foreign culture of the exilic land (11). In his essay, "Reflections on Exile," Said further expands on the struggle of living in exile by defining exile as "the

unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (137). The "rift" created by exile between a person and his homeland is one that produces multiple rifts or fissures in the self where the person in exile suffers "the loss of something left behind forever" (137). "Exile is a discontinuous state of being" where "exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past […] Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives" (140-141). The "rift" and "discontinuous state of being" that Said discusses in his description of the exile can also be used to describe Aneesa's epistolary writing. Her letters about exile and identity are written in fragments, separated by pages which act as rifts and are symbolic of the psychological rift in the writer's psyche. The letters, presented in a "discontinuous" manner, mirror Aneesa's own state of discontinuity. Her fragmented writing style is therefore, expressive of the fragmentation of the self resulting from exile. Each fragment of her letter is an attempt at locating herself, as if her letters echo the questions posed on her by the curious glances of the citizens of her homeland. "Who are you now?" they seem to be asking (Jarrar 28).

"Much of an exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule," states Said (144). What Said describes is once again a statement that captures Aneesa's struggles as she attempts to compensate for the greatest loss she has suffered: Bassam's abduction. By resorting to exile, she is not only escaping the civil war in Lebanon but is simultaneously, and some may argue, more importantly, trying to create a new life in order to compensate for her former lost life. This new life however, is marked by constant fluidity and is in direct sync with the character of the exile who is on the move and "always out of place" (Said 143). It is

therefore not unusual that the exile's choice of occupation is one that allows her flexibility. This flexibility granted to Aneesa by her profession is two-fold: firstly, the flexibility in her chosen profession which allows her to travel and escape the war, and secondly, the flexibility that exists in carrying out her profession or in the act of translation itself. In the former case, one poses the following question: Was Aneesa deliberate in her choice of profession, using her work as a means of escape? Having lived through the war and the abduction of her brother, it is arguable that Aneesa relies on her profession in order to achieve a form of fluid lifestyle where she can "drift[] into a kind of living" (Jarrar 20). Her profession keeps her on the move, escaping from one moment to the next. It is her promise of a constant stream of new beginnings, never remaining in a single place long enough to expose herself to harm or danger. The latter aspect of fluidity, i.e., the act of translation, is an indication of Aneesa's obsession with writing. She translates discourse from one language to another just as she translates her pain and confusion on paper. She translates people's words into transcripts just as she translates her life into writing. Aneesa reveals her writing addiction when she describes her evening routines in London in the following lines: "She moves around the flat in cloth slippers, preparing dinner and taking note of every step she takes. Aneesa, you are washing your hands now, she muses; after that you'll chop the carrots. Now you can switch the stove off and now it's time to do the dishes" (102). In other words, writing is an addiction that allows her to keep track of her life. If she can document the events of her life and her every move, then Aneesa exists. She has a voice. Similarly, in *War's Other Voices* (1996), miriam cooke discusses writers' addiction to writing. Writers who have experienced the war, explains cooke, resort to writing to shed the horror of the war. "For the horror to be purged it seems that it has to be conveyed explicitly without

recourse to the imagination" (41). Hence, there is a need for actual documentation through writing, the marking of ink on paper in order to transfer thoughts from the realm of the imagination to the concrete and tangible realm of paper in the form of written documents, letters, novels, and the like. "The act of writing," cooke continues, became for some an addiction, a haven which was sought to shake off the disgust and the loathing" (41). Aneesa's need for writing is similar to the works of writers that cooke discusses. Aneesa, having had to swallow the traumatic disappearance of her brother, finds the purging of such an experience possible through writing. She therefore, writes to cleanse her mind and achieve a state of mental clarity. Her writing, be it letters, transcripts, or mental writing, creates a home for the exile or a versatile homeland that is constantly present in her life. It is a home that she can depend on, during both times of war and peace. This home can't disappear like Bassam after his abduction nor is it susceptible to destruction and violation due to war. Her profession, engrossed in the act of translating and writing, preserves her homeland of words – and her self from extinction.

An exile's occupation, argues Said in "Reflections on Exile," "requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill. The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (144). Aneesa's career as an Arabic translator allows her the mobility described by Said. In London, she has created a quasi-fictitious life for herself, one that is unlike the harsh realities of war in her homeland. In a sense, Aneesa's identity, fluid as it is, undergoes repetitive transformations as she remolds herself, in the process, distancing herself "from all connections and commitments," "liv[ing] as if everything around [her] were temporary and perhaps trivial" (146). In agreement with Said's theory on home

and exile is Adorno, who in his autobiography, written in exile and titled *Minima Moralia*, argues the following: "Everything that one says or thinks, as well as every object one possesses, is ultimately a mere commodity" to the person living in exile (qtd. in Said 147). It is a shifting and fast-paced world where "language is jargon," "objects are for sale," and nothing is long-lasting (147). Consequently, and as stated by Adorno, the only home made known to the person in exile is his writing (147). It is arguable that Aneesa, even after returning to Lebanon, still resides in a state of exile, for "it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (Adorno qtd. in Said 147).

Aneesa's return to Lebanon raises many questions concerning identity and home. What is meant by "return" and how does its definition affect the identity of the returning exile? In *After the Last Sky,* Said poses the following question about *awdah*; "All of us speak of *awdah*, 'return,' but do we mean that literally, or do we mean 'we must restore ourselves to ourselves?'" (qtd. in Maleh 45). In Aneesa's case, her return to the homeland is not for the reason of finding her brother, but rather finding herself and returning to the self she has left behind during the civil war. It is an attempt to "restore" her dissevered self fractured by exile (qtd. in Maleh 45). Aneesa resembles Jarrar who, having left her homeland during the Lebanese Civil War, has "decided to return and reclaim her Lebanese identity" (Maleh 48). Both Jarrar and her character, Aneesa, try to remove the indelible marks left by war on their fractured selves. However, their efforts are to no avail because war, as argued by Jarrar in Hout's "Memory, Home, and Exile in Contemporary Anglophone Lebanese Fiction," "installs itself in the depth of one's being and fuses itself to one's skin. And right at the moment when you think you have forgotten it, it remembers you" (qtd. in Hout 220, translation by Hout). "My life," continues Jarrar, "like that of many Lebanese of my generation,

can be neatly divided into two parts: before and after the civil war […] Before was childhood and permanence; after has been exile and return" (qtd. in Hout 220). Aneesa, as per Jarrar's previous description, lives a double life divided by the civil war that has jeopardized Aneesa's identity by permanently robbing her of her brother and familial security. Consequently, Aneesa's identity remains displaced as she traverses the boundaries of exile and homeland. What Aneesa possesses is the unpredictable identity of a traveler. Travelling, as described by Trinh T. Minh-ha, "perpetuates a discontinuous state of being" (qtd. in Hout 36). "The departure, the cross-over, the fall, the wandering, the discovery, the return, [and] the transformation" are the contributing factors behind Aneesa's fluid identity (Minh-ha qtd. in Hout 36).

In addition to writing about her identity in homeland and exile, Aneesa, occupied by the thought of reincarnation and rebirth, fills her letters to Salah with stories of Ramzi, introducing him in detail on pages thirty-seven till forty, forty-eight till fifty, fifty-three till fifty-five, fifty-eight till fifty-nine, and sixty-two till sixty-three. I have subjected to study the location of only certain letters, those which prove to be of importance to Aneesa's identity search through Ramzi. The fragmented letter on pages thirty-seven to thirty-eight appears in the novel after Aneesa reports to have woken up from a dream. As the narrator states, "she wakes to dreaming, images, faint and gleaming, trailing before her, the colours of her childhood […] nascent yellows of hope. And she closes her eyes once again, attempting to recapture the clarity of this sudden awareness, of the long journey into the self she sees herself again and again in the company of those she has loved" (Jarrar 36). The narrator's words reveal Aneesa's psychological state prior to writing her letter on pages thirty-seven to thirty-eight. Aneesa's dreams depict her longing for her hopeful childhood: years of innocence,

Bassam, and war-free times. Her letter to Salah is an "attempt to recapture the clarity of [her] sudden awareness, of the long journey into the self" (36). Her dreams which are filled with the people she loves, remind her of Bassam. It is only during her waking hours "that the ghosts of daylight return" and she finds herself being haunted by Bassam's absence. Therefore, with Bassam's disappearance lingering in her mind, she immediately turns to writing to Salah and thus, the fragmented letter appears on pages thirty-seven to thirty-eight for the readers to see. The short section following Aneesa's letter, found on pages thirty-eight till thirty-nine, is a flashback to Salah's birthday in London. The following final lines describing the birthday are perhaps what give this section its importance: "The bus lurches forward. Then they both look straight ahead, through the window and towards their approaching destination" (39). The forward movement of the bus is symbolic of the movement of Aneesa's life, her desire for her own life to move forward towards a new future and a new destination, rather than remaining in the past where the war and Bassam act as obstacles to her forward movement. Following Aneesa's flashback is another letter to Salah located on pages thirty-nine to forty-one, the latter page finally concluding the first of the two letters written to Salah. Even as she writes the final lines of her letter, the subject of Ramzi lingers on before she draws her letter to a close with: "Yours, Aneesa" (41). The next time Aneesa writes about Ramzi is in the letter on pages forty-eight till fifty. The placement of this letter is of importance because it appears immediately after Aneesa's flashback to the night spent at the bar with Bassam and his friend, Chris. It is during her conversation with Chris, a newspaper reporter, that she first hears of Bassam's involvement in the war. "He's helping me with a piece I'm writing about the war for the newspaper I work for," says Chris (48). Upon noticing Aneesa's confusion, Chris

adds: “Hasn’t your brother told you what he’s been up to lately?” (48). It therefore, becomes apparent to readers that the flashback represents Aneesa’s search for answers concerning Bassam’s mysterious behavior. Her letter to Salah on the aforementioned pages serves as an attempt at finding an explanation for Bassam’s behavior through Ramzi.

Aneesa’s letters to Salah draw readers’ attention to Aneesa’s metaphorical rebirth which is depicted through Bassam’s reincarnation. A close study of the content of such letters is necessary. On pages thirty-seven till thirty-eight, in another fragment of the first letter that she has commenced writing on page sixteen, Aneesa introduces Ramzi, the eight-year-old orphan who is Bassam’s reincarnation. “How can I see,” writes Aneesa, “in the birth of an eight-year-old boy, the soul of a man killed at that very moment, moving from one body to another, *skin to new skin*, time suspended in that movement, transmigration, layers of memory embedded in a young heart and love transported too, as if by magic, burning, passionate and never-ending?” (Jarrar 38, italics mine). Aneesa’s choice of the above words to describe Ramzi pose an important question concerning her relationship with Ramzi and Lebanon. Her use of the phrase “skin to new skin” (38) to explain the process of reincarnation is reminiscent of her previous description of her country in her letter to Salah located on page sixteen: “Lebanon is like a second skin that does not leave me even as I wish it away.” In the repetitive use of the word “skin”, Aneesa draws a parallel from Bassam, through Ramzi, and Lebanon. It can be argued that her brother, just like her country, is fused to her body and acts as a second skin. Therefore, in using the phrase “skin to new skin” in her description of Ramzi, Aneesa reveals an inadvertent and desperate need to believe in the process of reincarnation and consequently, believe that her brother remains a part of her

like a second skin that cannot be willed away (38). Moreover, human skin, which by nature undergoes constant renewal in the process of cellular turnover, resembles the phenomenon of reincarnation that is marked by renewal and evolution. Thus, Aneesa relies on the process of regeneration which is present in her brother and her Lebanon. It is through regeneration, as I argue, that Aneesa is granted a second chance at her relationship with Bassam, a second chance at preserving her sense of self. Furthermore, and after the aforementioned description of Ramzi, Aneesa concludes her letter by expressing her astonishment at the ease with which her mother, Waddad, has embraced the notion of reincarnation and the comfort Waddad takes in convincing herself of Bassam's rebirth, "of the starry meeting of [the] souls" (40). She is surprised by Waddad's belief in reincarnation and "the magnitude of her [mother's] grief," projecting on her mother, her own overwhelming grief of losing Bassam (41). I argue that Aneesa, though skeptic and seemingly unaccepting of the Druze belief in reincarnation, repeatedly writes about Ramzi as an alternative means of searching for her own rebirth.

"Our elders here tell us that in the forward movement of our souls is certain salvation, limitless opportunities to stand nearer to the true nature of our selves and to a forgiving god," Aneesa writes to Salah (63). These lines written by Aneesa in her letter state the definition of reincarnation and more importantly, capture what Aneesa herself is trying desperately to achieve: an opportunity to redeem the identity that she has lost during the war and find herself. Similar to Aneesa's definition of reincarnation, Malcolm Bull describes reincarnation as "the continuity of identity and the accumulation of memories from one incarnation to the next," resulting in the "multiplying [of] the identities within a single body" (Bull qtd. in Stocks 85). Aneesa's

search for her own reincarnation not only reveals her need to be reborn, but is once again, an indication of Aneesa's multiple selves and her perpetual quest to relocate her identity. Furthermore, in her description of Ramzi as "a sorry child adrift in loneliness and misguided hope," she is inadvertently narrating her own struggles as she drifts into a fluid state of living, faltering between past and present. The "forward movement" stated in the above definition of reincarnation echoes Christopher Tilley's definition of a "globalized" identity, stated in his essay, "Identity, Place, Landscape, and Heritage:" "Identities must of necessity be improvised and changing, rather than fixed and rule-bound" (17). In the midst of a rapidly-fluctuating and modern world, identities undergo constant change and evolution in order to remain in sync with the demands of globalization. In this sense, Tilley's "improvised and changing" identity can be regarded as a metaphorical form of reincarnation where an individual experiences symbolic rebirths (17). Tilley's definition of a "global identity" resembles the process of reincarnation in the sense that "global identity construction is abstracted, mediated, generalized and involves multiple points and reference," similar to the reincarnated soul that travels across time and space (18).

The process of reincarnation and "global identity" alike involve multiple points of reference and are not fixed or anchored to a single location (18). In Aneesa's case, living in a modern, post-civil war world demands the flexibility of a global identity or a metaphorical reincarnation that is only achieved through the acceptance of Ramzi as Bassam's reincarnation. If the development of Aneesa's identity is impeded by Bassam's death, then I argue that his rebirth through Ramzi is Aneesa's opportunity to restore her identity. In other words, Bassam's second chance at life is simultaneously Aneesa's rebirth. Similarly, Bassam's reincarnation closes the door to Aneesa's past,

thereby allowing her to move forward. She no longer has to live her life looking back into the past that poses a hindrance to her identity development. The past is dead and Aneesa is reborn into a life with new possibilities. Reincarnation, defined by regeneration and fluidity, allows Aneesa to swiftly move through life. As argued by Tilley, "globalization […] diasporas and large-scale movements and displacements of peoples, tourism and travel […] and a collapsing sense of space and time" have resulted in fast-paced societies where the means for survival depends on the flexibility of the individual and the ease with which he can experience self-construction, displacement, and relocation (8). Having lived in exile and then returned to the homeland, Aneesa is familiar with the demands of globalization as she fluidly traverses through the time and space marked by the Lebanese Civil War and the abduction of her brother.

In addition to highlighting the leitmotifs of exile and reincarnation, Aneesa's letters to Salah reveal her desperate need to restore her identity which is dependent on resolving the past, thus achieving closure. Only upon reaching closure can Aneesa begin the phase of healing which is defined by her ability to relocate her identity and define herself separately from Bassam.

Aneesa, to no avail, is in a constant state of trying to achieve the above processes of closure and healing. Failing to move forward and thus, residing in the past, she defines herself in light of previous life events, so much so that the novel comes to a close with Aneesa's defining words: "The past is with me all the time […] sometimes I think I am nothing else but who and what has come before me" (Jarrar 233). The novel therefore ends with Aneesa's ongoing self-searching and her futile attempt to forget the past. In her letters to Salah, it becomes apparent to readers that Aneesa's past is illustrated through Bassam's abduction, a personal and traumatic topic Aneesa revisits

throughout the many pages of her letters. Aneesa mentions Bassam's abduction in the first few pages of the novel, and more importantly, discusses the aftermath of his disappearance in her first letter to Salah. Bassam's abduction has not only tinged her life with "unrelenting sadness," as she describes, but is rather a milestone in her life and the reason for her exile (21). "When I told you the story of my brother's abduction, you asked if that was why I had left in the first place. I nodded," Aneesa admits to Salah. In another letter, Aneesa writes about a critical moment in her family's life: the day Waddad tells Ramzi the story of Bassam's abduction. This letter particularly stands out from the other letters discussing Bassam's abduction because it reveals Waddad's long-awaited closure concerning her son's disappearance. Having found the answers she desperately needed to hear from Ramzi, Waddad can put the past to rest and start the process of healing, knowing that her son, now Ramzi, is safe and alive. Aneesa's writing portrays the conversation she imagined has happened between Ramzi and Waddad. Absent during Waddad and Ramzi's conversation, she either translates the account told by Waddad into her own words or takes the liberty of writing the account from her imagination. If Aneesa writes from imagination however, her letters are simultaneously marked by fiction and reality. The possibility that the account is partly fictitious reveals desperation on Aneesa's part to believe her mother's experience with Ramzi, to believe in the process of reincarnation and Bassam's new life. In either case, whether the account is translated or imagined, Aneesa reveals a persistent dependency on writing. Writing is in everything that she does, be it her choice profession or her letters. In her letter to Salah, Aneesa writes the account between Waddad and Ramzi in the following lines:

> [Waddad] I keep thinking, though …I keep wondering why, when Bassam saw them and realized what was happening, why he didn't escape through the bedroom window. It would have been so easy to slip down to the neighbours and run […]
> [Ramzi] I suppose Bassam was concerned about you, he finally says, his voice rising as he speaks. Waddad suddenly understands what he is trying to say. Worried they might hurt me? [S]he asks the little boy in the seat beside her. That's why you didn't try to escape, isn't it? (Jarrar 49-50)

Ramzi's answer has provided Waddad with the closure she has painfully awaited since Bassam's disappearance during the civil war. In Waddad's eyes, her reincarnated son has come back to life to explain his behavior and put past demons to rest. It can be argued that Aneesa's careful narration of the turning point in Waddad's life is Aneesa's attempt at vicariously achieving closure through her mother. If Waddad is capable of reaching closure via the comfort of Ramzi's words, then Aneesa has the same hope of healing by accepting Ramzi's words and believing in his reincarnation.

Ramzi's presence has the potential of undoing the damage done by Bassam's absence and may help relieve Aneesa from the persistent sense of being haunted by her brother's abduction. Aneesa's identity formation is hindered by the haunting state she has resided in since her brother's abduction during the war. It is therefore crucial to her psychological wellbeing that Aneesa overcomes "the haunting" (Gordon qtd. in Cutter 5). In her introductory essay titled "The Haunting and the Haunted," Martha J. Cutter adopts Avery F. Gordon's definition of haunting or being haunted who inadvertently describes Aneesa's psychological state in the period following Bassam's abduction:

> Haunting… alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future… [S]pecters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent or symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole

essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention (5).

Gordon's definition captures the essence of Aneesa's psychological state and her reaction to her brother's abduction, for Aneesa, due to being haunted, is suspended in time. Her past always finds its way into her present and will coincide with her future; being haunted has "alter[ed] the experience of being in time" (Gordon qtd. in Cutter 5). Gordon's definition of a ghost defines Bassam's lingering presence. Bassam's abduction has become a ghost because "the trouble [it] represent[s] and symptomize[s] is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon qtd. in Cutter 5). Bassam's presence is almost tangible and is the reason she has fled her country to live in exile. Similarly, Aneesa's revealing conversation with Samir reaffirms the effect of Bassam's abduction on his sister's self-perception: "If you could tell me just one thing about yourself, what would it be?" Samir asks Aneesa (Jarrar 163). "I would say that I once lost a brother," she replies (163). In other words, if Aneesa defines herself in terms of her brother's abduction, then Bassam's presence, like that of a lingering ghost, is not "repressed or blocked from view" but rather "demands its due, [Aneesa's] attention (Gordon qtd. in Cutter 5). However, in accepting Ramzi as Bassam's reincarnation, ghosts cease to exist and self-understanding is made possible for Aneesa. With Ramzi, Aneesa can remain in the present and learn to separate the past from her current life. If her re-born brother is alive and well, Aneesa may commence the healing process and relocate her fractured identity. Hence, once again, in carefully illustrating Waddad's acceptance of Ramzi and Waddad's subsequent experience of closure, Aneesa is capable of following suit. In writing these letters to Salah, Aneesa has created a powerful body of literature that is able to "depict ruptures in [her]

understanding of the past and present" (Cutter 11) and more importantly, as Gordon states it, is capable of depicting an understanding of what is "gaping, detouring, and haunting" (qtd. in Cutter 11). In addition to filling-in the missing gaps in one's life, in this case, the gap created by Bassam's abduction, writing helps the writer reach new revelations and apprehensions that may have previously been invisible or unrecognizable (Cutter 11).

C. Bassam's Letters

Similar to the letters to Salah, Aneesa's letters to her family, which as I argue are written by Aneesa herself in Bassam's name, serve multiple purposes, all of which aim at reinforcing Aneesa's post-war identity and helping her reach a therapeutic state. Firstly, the written proof that states Aneesa as the writer behind Bassam's two letters exists on pages sixty, sixty-one, and eighty-five. Bassam's first letter on page sixty is located in between two short paragraphs written by Jarrar's narrator, both of which indicate the real identity of the writer behind the letters. The narrator writes the following evidence: "Later that day, sitting in the armchair in the living room with one leg bent underneath her, Aneesa takes a writing pad and pen and begins to write" (60). Immediately following these revealing lines, Bassam's full letter is displayed on page sixty. Succeeding the letter, is the following paragraph written by the narrator: "Aneesa lifts the pen off the page and rereads what she has written. The letter is shorter than the previous ones she has written and does not really sound like Bassam. She wipes a tear from her cheek, folds the paper and places it inside a white envelope. Then she puts on her cloak and goes out" (61). Therefore, in both sections on pages sixty and sixty-one, the narrator details Aneesa's pre- and post-writing processes, making known to readers

that Aneesa has not only written the letter on page sixty but has also written others in Bassam's name. Similarly, the evidence on page eighty-five is another indication of the writer behind the letters. Concluding the page is the following sentence stated by the narrator at the time of Bassam's abduction: "He wishes he had some way of telling Waddad and Aneesa that he is all right, that one day soon he will come back to see them" (85). In other words, Bassam has not had any contact with his family since his abduction. It is hence, Aneesa who has been writing Bassam's letters, reassuring her mother of Bassam's safety and well-being.

Aneesa's letters in Bassam's name play an important role in reestablishing her identity. In the fluctuating, modern post-war world depicted by Jarrar, Aneesa searches for an identity capable of weathering the rapidly-evolving society birthed by the Lebanese Civil War. During a period of change and transformation, Aneesa's means of survival depends on the ease and pace with which she fluidly shifts from one identity to another. In other words, in order to come to an understanding of herself and the world around her, Aneesa must experiment with multiple selves. Moreover, what Aneesa tries to accomplish by forging the letters is overcoming the trauma induced by Bassam's abduction. Having lost Bassam during the war, with his exact whereabouts unknown, Aneesa survives the Lebanese Civil War only to suffer from psychological trauma characterized by "a division in the survivor," a fracture of the self (Stocks 74). "Psychological trauma," by definition, "results from an extremely disturbing event, an experience which fractures the apparently coherent self, forcing a division in identity which healing ultimately seeks to overcome" (74). Stocks' definition of trauma describes Aneesa's psychological state, her divided identity the result of Bassam's abduction and the absence he has abruptly left behind. In writing the letters from

Bassam, Aneesa is trying to recover from traumatic experience by exploring and experimenting with multiple identities through writing. Be it the aftermath of residing in Jarrar's rapidly-changing society or the experience of trauma, Aneesa is incapable of possessing a singular, unified self and therefore, entertains the potential of multiple selves, or at the very least, another self through her writing. The psychological case of a dissevered self, as seen in Aneesa, is argued by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok in their book titled *The Shell and the Kernel*; their definition of self-construction "redraws the boundaries of the self" and "explore[s] the possibility that identity is not unified and singular" (78). What is illustrated in Bassam's letters is Aneesa's ability to push the fluid boundaries of the self and relocate herself in a strong position of authority capable of changing her brother's fate.

In addition to exploring multiple selves, Aneesa's forgery reveals her need to fill-in the psychological void caused by Bassam's disappearance by applying Abraham and Torok's theory of "introjection:" a healthy means of dealing with loss by replacing the source of loss or filling the void with words (78). It is "an autopoetic process in which loss is taken in, transformed, and translated into the emergence of something new" (Schwab 109). Therefore, through introjection, language, as argued by Abraham and Torok, serves as the tool used to fill the existing lack or absence by figuratively speaking, lending shape to the void (qtd. in Stocks 78). The lost object, initially the state of lack created by the absence of the mother's breast, is therefore, replaced with language (Stocks 78). Hence, words are the means by which to "fill the vacated oral void" (Stocks 78). In Aneesa's situation, the lost object is Bassam and the letters are the alternative to his absence, for introjection "allows the gradual acceptance of loss and the expansion of the ego" (79). Writing is the medium which is used to help Aneesa

heal and find therapy through words. The letters occupy Bassam's void twice: the first with the literal act of filling paper with words and the latter with Aneesa's choice of words in Bassam's letters. For example, in the first letter that Aneesa has written on Bassam's behalf, Aneesa repetitively uses "I" as a personal pronoun to replace Bassam's void. In the nine sentences making up the letter, Aneesa has written the word "I" ten times: "I cannot imagine how difficult it has been […] I am sorry […] I have begun negotiating with my captors [..] I cannot say much more […] I love you both very much" (Jarrar 24-25). As Aneesa reads the letter aloud to her mother, her words linger in the air, filling the silence and the absence Bassam has left behind.

In taking to pen and paper, Aneesa's writing of Bassam's letters has granted her access into the war zone. By writing in her brother's name, she is taking an active role in the civil war; she is writing about war experiences. Through her letters, she has created a body of literature that "can come through to stand as if on its own, with an intrinsic and permanent importance, so [she] can see the rest of [her] living through it" (Williams qtd. in Takieddine Amyuni 18). Similarly, Edward Said argues that: "texts are worldly, to some degree/ they are events, and even when they/ appear to deny it, they are nevertheless/ a part of the social world, human life,/ and of course the historical moments in/ which they are located and interpreted" (qtd. in Takieddine Amyuni 4). Therefore, taking into account Williams' and Said's definitions of a text or body of literature, one can see how Aneesa's letters are more than correspondences. Epistolarity has acquired a new function, that is, it has made Aneesa privy to an alternative world where she has control over the outcome of war events. The act of writing culminates in self-performativity where the self is transformed from the abstract realm of the psyche to the concrete realm of pen and paper (Smith 108). This transformed self is capable of

rewriting Bassam's life; it is no longer alienated from male experiences of war. Aneesa's letters become a war story of its own, and as argued by cooke in *Women and the War Story* (1996), each war story is an individual narrative of war, for "there is no one history, no one story about war, that has greater claim to truth" but rather a multitude of "herstories" that are a part of a greater collage of experiences (4). Aneesa's letters are a form of documentation. "Writing," to quote cooke again, "is the recording of experience; it is also the assignation of meaning to an event that once interpreted becomes part of a process that may be transformative" (3). Moreover, as discussed in *War's Other Voices*, cooke argues that female narratives, as opposed to male war stories, speak of "responsibility" and "duties," encouraging every individual to carry the responsibility of ending the war (qtd. in cooke 16). Contrary to male discourse that focuses on the protagonists' rights to defend territory and land, female war stories hold each citizen accountable for bringing about peace. By writing on Bassam's behalf, Aneesa follows through with cooke's definition of female war narratives, for Aneesa has taken responsibility for her brother's life and safety; she writes him into existence and consequently, brings about the long-awaited inner-peace that she craves.

The writing of Bassam's letters, in addition to ensuring Bassam's safety, gives Aneesa the authority to change the past and practice the act of "dismemory" of past civil war events, a forced forgetfulness of the pain inflicted by war experiences (Nikro 1). In *The Fragmenting Force of Memory* (2012), Saadi Nikro discusses measures taken by the state to create post-war amnesia. In the wake of the Lebanese Civil War lie "ghost-like traces of a manufactured forgetting" (1). With the period following the war, came a tangible lack or avoidance of inquiries into the past war, its history, and outcome, as

well as a deliberate absence of "state supported museums, memorials or commemorative practices that could be studied as contested sites of memorialization" (1). Similarly, there was a profound absence of war narratives that could document the war and bring its past events into the light of remembrance. In writing Bassam's letters, Aneesa situates herself in a critical situation where she is simultaneously advocating induced amnesia and challenging the lack of war narratives. In other words, by changing Bassam's fate, she is attempting to wipe from her memory any trace of Bassam's potential death. However, her letters also serve as war narratives that resist the dismemory of the civil war and the state-sponsored code of silence by writing about war events through Bassam's abduction. The therapeutic approach taken by Aneesa depends on the denial of her brother's death. By changing his fate, she keeps him alive. If Bassam is alive and well, then Aneesa avoids the pain of mourning a loss. The letters are thus, a defense mechanism used to narrate "stories in order to defer death" (Schwab 95).

When Aneesa writes, she defies and redefines the boundaries of epistolarity. In the letters written in Bassam's name rests the act of story-telling that serves as the therapeutic means of dealing with Bassam's absence. By fabricating stories and writing her brother into existence, Aneesa gives herself a voice that counteracts the silence that befell her on the day of Bassam's abduction where her voice could not be heard. "Telling a tale enables each of us to know ourselves as someone who has a voice which is worth listening to, someone who can be heard and understood" (Gersie and King, qtd. in Knoetze 461). Story-telling also allows the narrator to alter and change the unfortunate events of his/her life. In this case, Aneesa avoids Bassam's death and her fabricated stories help her construct a character capable of changing her brother's fate.

In *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990), Michael White and David Epston define the act of story-telling as narratives used to give meaning to life events, helping the narrator reconstruct his/her identity as s/he attempts to reach an understanding of himself or herself (Knoetze 461). Bassam's letters are a case in point, for Aneesa's writing acts as a platform through which Aneesa attempts to make sense out of her brother's abduction. When Bassam disappears without a trace, Aneesa is plunged into a state of darkness. There are no reports from the police or anyone who has seen Bassam or his abductors. Bassam's voice is unheard and his body is never found or identified. At a loss for tangible and reliable facts concerning her brother, Aneesa constructs an alternative reality where the safe return of her brother is forthcoming. Aneesa's story-telling allows the construction of two alternative identities: one is her own and the other Bassam's. Aneesa adopts the identity of a war hero when she writes off the possibility of Bassam's death. In Bassam's case, his identity is transformed at the hands of his sister who transforms him from a war victim into a survivor. Hence, what one detects in Aneesa's writing is a "therapeutic letter" (Knoetze 462): "The essence of a therapeutic letter is to highlight unique outcomes and amplify alternative life stories and narratives, to encourage the shaping of new and preferred identities" (Knoetze 462). The alternative life created by Aneesa reveals her desperate need to humanize the war and preserve the remains of her pre-war life. If Bassam is alive, then the war loses part of its inhumanity, even in the slightest degree. Her letters thus, "humanize the non-humanity of the war in ways that international media, academic thinkers in study centers and ideologists are not capable of" (Nelson qtd. in El Hamamsi 167). In this sense, Aneesa's story-telling becomes the means through which she survives the war and attempts to heal.

In the collection of letters written by Aneesa, Jarrar illustrates a symbiotic relationship between epistolarity and identity. Jarrar exploits the art of letter-writing, pushing the limits of the epistolary genre and making use of its flexible nature to demonstrate the fluidity of Aneesa's identity. As previously argued, Aneesa's self-search is actualized through the Salah and Bassam letters. In the former case, her letters are never met with a response from Salah, or so Jarrar has led readers to believe. If there happened to be mutual correspondence between Aneesa and Salah, Salah's letters are not disclosed for readers' eyes, for the main focus behind Aneesa's letters is self-discovery through writing. In this sense, her letters can be regarded as diary entries. Her letters, often written in fragments, are scattered throughout the first chapter of the novel, their structure resembling diary entries located in a journal. As previously stated, similar to the psychological function of the diary and its use in self-mapping, Aneesa "use[s] the letter as a subversive and freeing agent and also as a mirror," not only as a means for self-searching but also, as the medium through which she attempts to change the reflection she sees in the mirror (Campbell 332). This reflection fluctuates constantly and is in sync with modern circumstances of abrupt and rapid change. It is "a world characterized by a nonsynchronous and multitemporal development: a world animated by plural subject positions that are simultaneous but not synchronic," argues Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan in *Diasporic Mediations between Home and Location* (1996) (120). Similarly, Frank Furedi, in his book titled *Therapy Culture*, discusses the conditions of a modern culture where "social fragmentation and fluidity, individuation and change constantly throw up questions like 'Who am I?' and where do I belong?' In […] a world where everything appears as fluid and ephemeral, the belief that there is a stable innate self offers a degree of comfort to otherwise anxious individuals" (qtd. in

Jolly 51). The world in which Aneesa resides is marked by such conditions described by Radhakrishnan and Furedi. In these unpredictable circumstances, it is the epistolary genre, with its multiple functions and fluid boundaries, which is capable of mapping out the development of the modern self. Through writing, Aneesa experiments with epistolarity as she tries to trace her identity that hinges between past and present, and traverses the space between Beirut and London, between pre- and post-civil war periods. Similar to the letters written to Salah, the letters written in Bassam's name illustrate Aneesa's ability to dabble with fate, to forge an identity that is not only capable of weathering the civil war but is also a new self endowed with a voice and the power of changing the outcome of her brother's abduction. In writing Bassam's letters, Aneesa takes part in Furedi's Therapy Culture which recognizes each individual as an autonomous being capable of reaching a state of self-discovery by probing the dynamics of the self (Furedi 106). Advocates of the Therapy Culture, explains Furedi, firmly base their psychological approach on the following premise: "The idea that individuals are at least potentially, in charge of their own fate lies at the very heart of therapeutic philosophy" (Smail qtd. in Ferudi 106). Bassam's letters hence represent a therapeutic form of writing used to examine the inner-workings of the self. It is a platform for Aneesa to push the boundaries of the self that resides in a state of construction and reconstruction, as she aims at discovering her identity. The letters in *Dreams of Water* therefore, illustrate Jarrar's ability to fluidly experiment with the epistolary genre, using Aneesa's letter collection to depict a post-war world set against a backdrop of unpredictability and instability.

CHAPTER III

ZENA'S WRITING IN *BEIRUT, I LOVE YOU*

A. Pilgrimage of the Modern Individual

In the light of a fast-paced life marked by turn-over and transformation, modernity is regarded as a pilgrimage, where the pilgrim is constantly on the move, in search of his or her identity. "Pilgrimage is what one does of necessity, to avoid being lost," states Bauman in "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity" (21). The individual walks through life as the pilgrim walks through the desert, his footprints in the sand serving as the metaphor for his identity search or the road he wishes to leave behind (23). However, what the wandering individual finds out is that the desert, though an easy medium for marking footsteps in the sand, "does not hold features well. The easier it is to emboss a footprint, the easier it is to efface it. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places" (23). The desert that Bauman describes is representative of modern life where the conditions of a modern society are always changing and evolving, thus obliging the individual to redefine himself or herself and reconstruct the borders of his or her identity. Unable to permanently leave a fixed mark on the sands of society, one is repeatedly on the go, trying to imprint and re-imprint footsteps in a modern, quicksand society. This individual therefore, is susceptible to evolution and can experience multiple rebirths in his or her attempt to end uncertainty. With each attempt, the wandering individual searches for a new method of self-depiction in order to stay afloat a fluid world.

The above conditions of a modern life are a direct description of the society portrayed in Zena El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You* which is depicted during the Lebanese

2006 war. Birthed by nations' desire for control, power, and territorialism, wars are created and in turn, act as the driving force behind instability and change. As a result, in a world of rapid fluctuation, comes the theory fluidity, made evident in El Khalil's work. In other words, her novel paints a portrait of a Lebanese society torn apart by destruction and devastation, focusing on the female protagonist, Zena, who struggles to identify herself vis-à-vis the war. Similar to the pilgrim who resides in a quicksand society, Zena struggles to survive in a world of instability, striving to locate her identity which, like the sands of the desert, is a concept that slips through her fingers. The 33-Day-War, also known as the Israeli-Hizballah War, broke out on the evening of July 12, 2006 "in response to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hizballah militants on the southern Lebanese border for the purpose of exchanging the soldiers for prisoners in Israeli jails" (Khawaja, Assaf, and Yamout 489). Though short-lived, the war was arguably the most destructive "interstate war" witnessed in Lebanon, wreaking havoc on the lives of civilians as well as the country's main power supplies, water sources, and infrastructure (488). The death toll exceeded a thousand casualties, thousands were reported injured, and approximately one third of Lebanon's population was displaced (488).

In the case of El Khalil's protagonist, it is a psychological displacement rather than a physical displacement that results in Zena's attempt to redefine her identity during times of instability and turmoil. I argue that Zena's self-search is portrayed via the phenomenon of reincarnation which is depicted through her collection of writing produced during the war. Throughout El Khalil's novel, Zena experiences multiple births, both literal and metaphorical, as she struggles to identify herself by defining Beirut and her relationship to her country. The latter reincarnation exists in Zena's

writing which changes from one form to another as she experiments with multiple writing genres: letters, blogs, and bullet-point texts. With each genre, Zena is reborn. It is therefore arguable that Zena's experimentation with different forms of writing is her attempt to locate herself and redefine her identity, thereby striving to heal herself from the trauma of war. Through the careful analysis of Zena's diverse writing, this chapter attempts to illustrate Zena's fluctuating identity with its persistent reconstruction and rebirth, ultimately achieved via the process of writing therapy.

An understanding of the fluid nature of Zena's writing is made possible through the study of Zygmunt Bauman's theories concerning the fluidity of time in a modern world of rapid evolution and change. As argued by him in *Liquid Times* (2007), modernity is marked by "the passage from a 'solid' to a 'liquid' phase […] that is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long" (1). Modern society is also characterized by the "splicing of […] individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes" (3). Thus, the society that Bauman describes is one in which both individual behavior and all societal forms are unstable and constantly fluctuating, breaking any form of routine or fixed pattern. Moreover, during modern times, "conformity" is substituted with "flexibility," otherwise defined as a willingness to change and evolve, and resulting in a complete abandonment of previously-established patters and preconceived notions (4). The conditions of this liquid society arguably serve as a premise for a world in which its inhabitants undergo reincarnation. The liquid state of the society, the "splicing of […] individual lives," and the total abandonment of patterns and routines all result in a society of transformation and evolution which is arguably defined as reincarnation (3).

Influenced by her liquid society, Zena's writing adopts the same fluid characteristics. Her writing is in sync with modern society and her fluctuating writing styles reflect the fast-paced society she inhabits. Moreover, the fluidity of Zena's writing fails to hold its form for long periods of time but must rather evolve and undergo a series of rebirths. In other words, Zena refuses to conform to a single genre and exhibits an open readiness to transform as she tries to locate herself amidst a shifting world of uncertainty.

In a life defined by uncertainty, the purpose behind Zena's writing becomes clear: Zena writes in order to map-out her identity on pen and paper. Through the act of writing, similar to Aneesa in *Dreams of Water,* she is capable of creating tangible proof of her existence. She marks her presence in the world like she marks paper with ink. Zena therefore, takes responsibility upon herself in locating her identity, for "the world demands to the individual a constant and increasingly controversial search for identity and tracking of parameters for standardizing in order to obtain the "role" of individuals, because, today, the identity is a *task*" (Palese 1, italics mine). Therefore, the possession of an identity is not a given; it is a chore that demands persistent effort and dedication. The individual, "a momentary unity of the passing swarm and driven by the fleeting current," frequently negotiates his identity which is, in and of itself, a fleeting concept subjected to change (3). Zena thus, writes to make known her experiences, her pain and suffering. Her writing is a translation of mental mapping on paper; it is the filling of intellectual or mental spaces through the use of letters, notes, and blogs. More importantly, writing gives Zena full authority and control over the map she is drawing. She draws herself on Lebanon's map. She traces the borders of the country she loves and hates. She illustrates a Lebanon that searches for peace in the midst of war, plants flowers in minefields, and experiences living in the throes of death. It is a Beirut that

"still had her glorious sunrises that exploded over the mountains," even as bombs exploded in the background, a Beirut that maintained "her splendid sunsets that plunged into her sea," while people plunged into their collective, massive deaths (El Khalil 79). Zena's writing is simultaneously a remapping of Lebanon and herself. Through her unconventional mapping, Zena challenges the preconceived concept of territory and attempts to create a space of her own that would better help her understand herself through the understanding of her country. This space therefore, comes to represent what Trinh Minh-ha terms "territorialized knowledge" and is defined in the following lines:

> [it] secures for the speaker a position of mastery: I am in the midst of a knowing, acquiring, deploying world – I appropriate, own and demarcate my sovereign territory as I advance – while the "other" remains in the sphere of acquisition. Truth is the instrument of a mastery which I exert over areas of the unknown as I gather them within the fold of the known (qtd. in Blunt and Rose 15).

In other words, as Zena advances in self-knowledge and acquisition, she grows closer to marking the territory of her own self and defining her identity. Once again, Zena's self-perception depends on the understanding of her country. The various forms of writing created during the war are evidence of the probing and exploration of the self.

B. Bullet-Point Notes

The first piece of Zena's writing that readers come across in El Khalil's novel is located on pages eighty till eighty-three. The location of the selection is somewhat spontaneous, yet also seems to be inspired by the Beirut described on pages seventy-eight and seventy-nine: "Beirut is total and absolute freedom. It is imagination uncensored. What you will to happen can happen […] There were no strict laws at the

time. People had just come out of decades of civil war and all they wanted to do was party" (E Khalil 78). These few lines capture the message behind Zena's text which is written in the free-style form of bullet points. Similar to Beirut with its "imagination uncensored," Zena liberally writes about her experiences in Beirut, creating a list "in no particular order," of all the things she loves about Beirut (80). The list which is titled "Being in love with Beirut," is expansive and varied, including all of life's pleasures in Beirut, spanning from the simple experiences of sitting by the fire, spending time with family, kissing, and enjoying 80s music and a good laugh to more important experiences that revolve around liquids and the concept of fluidity (82). As I argue, what is mostly of relevance on Zena's list is the number of experiences that involve various forms of fluids. Sixteen of the points listed on pages eighty till eighty-three are about Zena's experiences with fluids which I have divided into natural liquids and unnatural liquids in different forms of drinks.

In the case of natural liquids, Zena's experiences with water involve the Mediterranean Sea in Sour or Batroun, the Corniche, walking barefoot in water in the south of Lebanon, Beirut's first rainfall of the season, and watering her garden flowers at night. What Zena experiences reveals her dependency on water, how many of her life's greatest pleasures take place in fluids. Zena's close proximity to water reflects the nature of her character and the fluidity of her identity. Mimicking the properties of water, Zena refuses to be contained in a single or closed space. It can be argued that the turbulent and insecure life conditions created by the war have forced upon Zena the adoption of a fluid identity that is better equipped to survive the war. During war, the rules of the life game are pushed to the extreme; "life is fast and leaves no time to pause and think and draw elaborate designs […] the rules of the game keep changing long

before the game is finished," explains Bauman in "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity" (25). During these extreme situations, it is therefore possible that Zena surrounds herself with a liquid environment capable of enduring and surviving instable living conditions. Her list of favorite things in Beirut reveals her dependency on liquids which become her life-line for surviving the war. Moreover, all these liquid experiences are short-lived, reflecting a fragmented concept of time which, in turn, mirrors Zena's fragmented identity. On her list, Zena writes the following activities: being on the Corniche, watching the color that first peaks over the mountains as the sun rises," "rain, the first rainfall in Beirut," and "my garden, Um Tarek's advice for my flowers, watering it at night" (El Khalil 81-82). What is clear from Zena's list is that these activities are short episodes or brief moments of time. In other words, time, similar to Zena herself, is merely a fleeting concept; time is "a collection of ponds and pools" (Bauman 25). When each experience is brief and susceptible to change, there is no dependency on a single experience and one can therefore, live multiple experiences where he/she is born time and time again. This individual does not stagger; when one experience has served its purpose, it is time to move to the next experience in a long series of experiences. This movement can be described as short trips, transporting the individual from one experience to the other. Consequently, the individual is not subjected to pain and suffering. "The shorter the trip, the greater the chance of completing it; do not get emotionally attached to the people you meet at the stopover […] do not commit yourself too strongly to people, places, causes – you cannot know how long they will last or how long you will count them worthy of your commitment" (25). Hence, Zena relies on her liquid experiences to transfer her through a series of short experiences while avoiding the pain that results from commitment and stability.

In addition to giving Zena mobility and flexibility, water acts as the medium for her reincarnation. Zena describes the following experience on her list: "swimming, swimming in our sea, in Sour, in Batroun, swimming at night, holding my breath under water for as long as I can" (El Khalil 81). I argue that Zena's experience of swimming at night is reminiscent of her reincarnation as a boy named Hussein, after the historical sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. When Zena swims in the Mediterranean, it is symbolic of her "sea birth" (19). She holds her "breath under water for as long as [she] can," in remembrance of the time she "lay at the bottom of the sea for almost five-and-a-half years" (18). In other words, Zena's life pleasures revolve around water because this fluid medium serves as the milieu of her sea birth. The sea is also an environment that allows Zena, then known as Hussein, to float through life. Similar to the pilgrims in the modern desert, she performs an underwater pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is described as follows: "I wandered in the darkness all by myself […] I walked for years to no avail. My legs grew thin and my heart, weary. I grew blisters the size of continents. I walked and walked until I forgot why I was walking" (18-19). Therefore, Zena swims in the Mediterranean to remind herself of her reincarnation. She treads the sea, knowing that she is capable of multiple rebirths, that she is on a constant pilgrimage to locate her identity. She swims in an attempt to reach spiritual and mental clarity by washing away the pain. The underwater experience is healing because it wipes away the pain by allowing Zena to begin again and again until she has reached a point where the pain does not exist because it has not yet taken place in Zena's new life.

Zena's long list of things she loves also includes drinking fluids, mostly in the form of various alcoholic beverages, as well as coffee and tea. It is arguable that fluids, once again, serve as the only constant presence in Zena's life. The fluidity of drinks not

only reminds Zena of her own flexible identity, but rather reminds Zena of the rules of the life game: the player takes part in a series of short experiences and rapidly moves on to the next destination. In other words, when Zena drinks, she toasts the short-lived experiences that she describes on her list: "dancing at Walimet Warde restaurant to traditional live Arabic music, drinking lots of arak, watching the clear liquid turn white when I add water to it," "drinking vodka sec, anywhere," and "wine, alone, with a lover, on the beach, on my roof, on the Corniche" (80-81). All of these drinking experiences can take place regardless of time or location thereby, not requiring any commitment from the player. Furthermore, the consumption of drinks is an experience of reincarnation, as stated by Zena: "the morning after binge drinking, feeling like I've been reborn, like I've been given another chance to live" (82). With each drink, she is reincarnated and given a new opportunity to locate and relocate her identity. As a result, Zena can start anew; she has a clean slate of unlimited possibilities.

C. Letter to Firas

Following Zena's list which comes to an end on page eighty-three is Zena's letter to Firas, the only letter written by Zena in the novel. Zena's four-page-letter which falls on pages eighty-three till eighty-six is one in which there is no date, no mailing or sending address, and finally, no closing signature. Though the letter is addressed to Firas, Zena's ex-lover, the letter can also be addressed to Beirut. The letter's location proves quite interesting, for it falls in-between the pages listing Zena's favorite things and chapter ten where Zena discusses the post-Lebanese Civil War period in the opening section of the chapter. It therefore comes as no surprise that Zena's letter mainly revolves around her relationship with Beirut. Zena's epistolary

writing illustrates the analogy drawn between Zena's relationship with men, including Firas, and her relationship with her beloved Beirut. Driving to Firas' house, Zena begins drawing parallels between Lebanon and Firas: "Driving to your house, I see the reflection of tragic red lights on the wet wet streets. It looked like blood. Your blood. The blood of Qana" (El Khalil 83). On the next page, Firas becomes symbolic of all Beiruti men. In her relationship with men, like her relationship with Beirut, she plays the role of Mother Teresa, and "find[s herself] consoling weak and frantic men" (84). In other words, Zena is trying to save Beirut during its weakest moments; she is attempting to save Beirut through the power of her love. When Zena describes Lebanese men and the pressure they are subjected to, what she is discussing is Lebanon's fragile state during the war. Beirut will always need Zena and she will never cease to be there for her county by presenting herself to its men in need. The following words written to Firas further illustrate the analogy between men and Beirut: "I never thought I could live it without you. I never thought I could find Beirut again after you left me. But I did. Because as long as there are men that need to be loved, Beirut will open her arms to me and present me with her next victim […] I always loved each and every one of you. Because you all brought me Beirut" (86). Hence, by pursuing her relationships with Beiruti men, she is growing closer to her country. It can be contested that all her relationships are merely an attempt to understand her country, to reach a state of enlightenment about Lebanon. By understanding Lebanon, she will finally reach an understanding of herself. Her identity depends on unraveling the identity of Lebanon. What is Lebanon during wartime? What is Lebanon in the wake of all the wars that it has survived? What can be said about a country that has experienced a civil war, the Qana massacres of 1996 and 2006, and finally, the 33-Day-War? How can one

describe a Lebanon with its "addiction for the next bomb," "undiscovered mass graves," and "ghosts in the tunnels[?]" (86). What can be said about "the thousands, 17,000 people to be exact, who are still declared missing?" (86). Hence, Zena's attempt to identify the missing and the dead is simultaneously an attempt to battle her own ghosts and uncover her identity.

In addition to illustrating her attempt at self-discovery through understanding her country, Zena's letter portrays the fluid nature of her identity. Just as she tries to define herself through her country, Zena attempts to locate her identity through the continuous presence of liquids in her life. Similar to her previous writing, i.e., her list of bullet points, Zena's letter highlights the persistent presence of liquids in her life. While writing to Firas, all four pages of the letter include a reference to fluids which mark Zena's life. On the first page of the letter, Zena draws an analogy between the rain-soaked streets of Beirut and the blood of Lebanon. The reflection of the red traffic lights on the wet roads is symbolic of Firas' blood. It is also "the blood of Qana. Where Jesus turned water into wine" (83). Fluids, in this case rain, are capable of multiple transformations. On the rainy streets of Beirut, Zena sees the blood of Lebanon, the history of her country, and the massacres it has witnessed. Through Zena's eyes, rain is transformed into blood, water, and finally wine. Fluids therefore, represent the perpetual changes of Zena's country, and ultimately, the changes of Zena's identity. Zena, who defines and depicts herself via her country, undergoes transformations that are in sync with her fast-paced society. Moreover, Zena expresses the need to surround herself with fluids. Fluids ensure Zena's continuity and rebirth. In other words, when Zena drinks wine, she "would live forever, like the stencils of martyred militiamen on tattered Beirut walls […] Like the sea, the endless blue […]

Like bitter coffee, [she] swore never to write about. Like war…that will never end" (85). Zena's drinking is analogous to the continuity of the self. Similar to the endless Mediterranean Sea, the countless cups of coffee, and the ongoing war, Zena's fluid identity "would live forever" (85). Upon writing to Firas, Zena illustrates the importance of drinking in the following statement: "We drank wine […] We drank more wine and vowed that we would always stay pure […] That we would walk the tightrope and never fall. That neither war, nor bombs, nor unfriendly neighbors would ever break our spirit […] That every moment would give birth to a new one. That life could be what we wanted it to be" (85). Hence, it is the act of drinking, i.e., the constant presence of fluids, that creates a borderless identity, a life of infinite possibilities. With drinking, there is no breach, neither in spirit nor in the endless stream of events in life. In the closing section of her letter, Zena reiterates the importance of fluids in her description of Beirut: "It was always an end and a new beginning. The morning after a bottle of vodka. A rebirth" (86).

It is apparent from the above excerpts taken from Zena's letter that her writing is closely tied to fluids. Zena's writing revolves around the careful description of liquids that have become an essential presence in her life. In other words, liquids and letters come together to help her achieve a therapeutic state of awareness and self-understanding manifested through the following: firstly, the ability to define her identity and resolve conflicts of the self, and secondly, the potential of Zena's self-purification and rebirth. Her letter to Firas is a dual form of therapy, the first form of therapy existing in the general act of letter-writing and the latter in the specific act of writing about liquids that have occupied Zena's life. In the first case, that is, the case of letter-writing, Zena's letter to Firas is arguably an unsent letter, thus acting as a letter to the

self. The letter that appears on pages eighty-three till eighty-six is without a postal or mailing address and Firas' full name is never revealed. In other words, Zena's letter is potentially written to herself, as she attempts to resolve her inner conflicts and struggles for self-definition, by resolving her issues with the men in her life and Beirut. If she can understand her relationship with Beiruti men, one of them being Firas, and her country, then she grows closer to achieving an understanding of her own self. By writing, Zena expresses the state of a perturbed self, "a self which needs to become conscious of its internal conflicts to bring them into relationship and eventual harmony" (Jolly 48). The unsent letter hence, acts as a manifestation of the self on paper and "involves techniques of expressing, sometimes personifying, a hurt or emotion, thus facilitating a sense of agency in the self" (48-49). Her writing is also an attempt to remove "emotional blockages," making possible the subsequent change and evolution of the self (49). Consequently, letters may be regarded as "a natural therapeutic tool in so easily harnessing internal as well as external relationships […] This is especially striking in the case of letters that will not, should not, be sent, or at least, not sent to the addressee" (49). Therefore, Zena once again, writes about external and tangible or concrete relationships illustrated through her relationship with Firas and Beirut, as a means of resolving her inner and seemingly intangible relationship with herself. "The letter is being used to perform internal dialogue" (49). It brings to the surface what will otherwise remain buried deep within the self. The letter transforms internal self-dialogue into external discussion made tangible on paper, and transports the writer from the inner realm of the self to reality. The writer, holding the pages of the letter containing his/her inner-most thoughts, is capable of reading, analyzing, and resolving conflicts of the self. As argued by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the letter creates "a

stronger claim to reference – it points more directly to a world that has some solidity and resistance" (qtd. in McDowell Carley 25). The referenced "solidity and resistance" are characteristics used in the description of a world that, unlike the inner realm of the psyche, is solidly or more firmly grounded in reality. It is therefore arguable that Zena's letter, written by her and intended for her eyes only, is the protagonist's attempt to bring into harmony her conflicting relationship with herself through defining the boundaries of her relationship with the men in her life and her country.

The latter form of therapy attempted by Zena, i.e. purification and rebirth, is depicted through Zena's repetitive writing about fluids that have marked her life and her existence. Zena writes about fluids, believing in their ability to create a therapeutic effect. If she can express said beliefs on pen and paper, then maybe these beliefs have the potential of becoming a reality. For example, Zena writes about her consumption of alcoholic beverages, believing that by drinking wine or vodka, she "would always stay pure" (El Khalil 85). If Zena manifests her beliefs in letters, perhaps her beliefs about fluids are transformed from the conceptual realm into the realm of reality where drinks serve as a liquid medium for purification and rebirth. In a single 4-page-letter, Zena repeatedly discusses liquids, as if convincing herself of their therapeutic properties. Liquids have thus become Zena's means for unlimited potential, of clean slates and fresh starts. With liquids, be it rain, sea, water, or wine, every moment is a new beginning and each beginning is "a rebirth" (86). More importantly, therapy through identity-reconstruction is attempted through Zena's desire to mimic the behavior of fluids by adopting a fluid identity. Influenced by her ever-changing society, Zena experiences multiple rebirths as she searches for a means of locating her identity. Similar to the lucid properties of fluids repetitively described by Zena and their ability

to transform into rain, water, blood, and wine, Zena attempts to achieve an identity capable of transformation. Consequently, when Zena writes about fluids, she exhibits a desire to mimic fluid-like characteristics, granting her identity the potential of continuous regeneration and rebirth.

D. War Blog

Having ended her letter to Firas on page eighty-six, it being the only epistolary text she has written, Zena turns to blogging where only a single blog entry appears on pages 144-145. It is important to note that Zena's blog entry is a part of El Khalil's online blog titled *Beirut Update*. A number of her blog entries, namely, "Beirut Will Never Die," "After the Ceasefire," and "It's Raining Bombs; Only Two Hours of Electricity," to name a few, are also posted on *The Electronic Intifada*, an online non-profit and pro-Palestinian publication covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In El Khalil's novel, the blog entry appears under the following title and date: "2006 summer war: Zena's Blog/ August 13, 2006 2:41 AM" (144). Therefore, readers are aware of the identity of the blogger and the time in which the blog was written. Furthermore, the location of the blog in the novel proves essential in understanding the motive behind writing. Zena's blog is nestled in-between the selection on pages 143-144, where Zena discusses the abrupt end of the 2006 War, and the selection located on pages 145-147, describing the post-war period, especially the death of her best friend, Maya. The selection prior to the blog, to begin with, depicts Zena's psychological state upon receiving news of the ceasefire. Having experienced the trauma of war for the period of thirty-three consecutive days, how does one resume his/her former pre-war life? Zena wonders: "How does it end? How does it just end? Is war like a machine? Do you just

switch it off?" (143). On the following page, Zena's questions remain unanswered and she appears to be experiencing an identity crisis which is made evident through a steady stream of questions: "What happens the day after ceasefire? What do you do? Where do you go? […] Will you work again? […] Will you find a new purpose to your life? One that means something? One that is worth living for?" (144). Similar to the pre-blog selection, the selection following Zena's blog emphasizes the dire need to write and find therapy through words. When Zena turns to the writing of her blog, it is as if she can foresee Maya's upcoming death, for she concludes her blog with the following sentence: "life is so so precious" (145). Hence, in predicting the occurrence of inopportune life events and realizing the fragility of life, Zena's need for therapy through writing is heightened and her reliance on the written word is elevated.

In search of a means of finding herself and defining her life and identity in the conflicting post-war period, Zena turns to writing and her blog subsequently appears after the questions she poses at the beginning of page 144. The blog may be regarded as Zena's attempt at answering the questions that threaten her self-definition. Where does she stand in the post-war zone? Who has she become and what will become of her? "On the eve of ceasefire, I have mixed emotions," Zena writes in the first line of her blog. From the opening line of the blog therefore, Zena makes clear to readers the purpose for her writing. Writing stems from the need to define herself and understand her new life situations. Similarly, Zena tries to define her identity through the forward movement of life, this endeavor made evident in her following statement: "It's not just about rebuilding lives, country, and morale. But it's also about moving forward positively on all sides" (144). Zena's identity hinges upon her ability to move forward in life and evolve positively. According to her definition, a forward movement depends

upon the complete and total elimination of hatred from human lives. "War instills hatred in people. We as human beings… have to make sure that we don't fall into the vicious cycle of hate […] I don't believe that we are born to hate. I believe that it is conditioned through things like fear, violence, oppression and misunderstanding," Zena argues (144). If one succeeds at living without hate, his/her forward movement and evolution are possible.

Based on the evidence that is found in the above experts taken from Zena's blog entry, it becomes apparent to readers that Zena's means of self-definition is firmly grounded in Bauman's theory of a liquid world discussed in his book, *Liquid Life* (2005). While describing the unpredictability of life, Zena makes a statement, arguing that life "is like the never ending possibilities of youth" (144). Zena therefore, inadvertently argues Bauman's theory of life's forward movement where liquidity "is a succession of new beginnings" (Bauman 2). Having experienced the war, Zena's survival in the post-war society depends on her ability to respond quickly to unpredictable, shifting life conditions (1). "Conditions of action and strategies designed to respond to them age quickly and become obsolete" (1). Zena's identity hence, depends on its free-flow into the present and future. There is no looking back, for past experiences or "past tests cannot take account of the rapid and mostly unpredicted (perhaps unpredictable) changes in circumstances" (1). Moreover, in the final paragraph of her blog, Zena discusses the unpredictability of life. "If there is one thing I have learned this past month, it is that life is so precious. In one second, your whole life can change. One day I was taking artwork down from a gallery about to send the paintings to their respective owners… The next morning, our airport was bombed and we were at war. Just like that. Life is so so precious," Zena explains (El Khalil 145). If

Zena were to attempt self-definition, her success would depend on the ability to adapt to sudden changes in a liquid life of unpredictability. "In short, liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty. The most acute and stubborn worries that haunt such a life are the *fears* of being caught napping, of failing to catch up with fast-moving events" (Bauman 2, italics mine). This fear is discussed by Zena in the blog as a hindrance to her self-evolution. Fear is one of the factors that lead to hatred, and hatred in turn, acts as an obstacle to evolution or forward movement. In other words, if Zena were to be "moving forward positively on all sides," fear must be eradicated (El Khalil 144).

After the above analysis of the themes of identity and self-definition, one turns to the motive behind the writing of Zena's blog: therapy achieved on various levels. Therapy is first potentially achieved when Zena's blog serves as a lifeline. Using an online blog as a means of self-expression, Zena creates a form of digital documentation to survive her current situation. Her blog, which started during the war and proceeds through the post-war period, as seen in El Khalil's novel on pages 144-145, is Zena's platform for survival achieved through self-expression. If Zena can write about her war experiences and identity crisis, then she grows closer to understanding herself. If she makes known her struggles to the cyber world, her struggles do not go unnoticed, but are rather acknowledged by online followers or readers who may in response, offer their advice and comments. In this sense, the writer is never alone. With a push of a button, the writer is connected through cyberspace to a throng of followers, to countless online readers searching for companionship and/or, similar to Zena, for self-valediction. In a shifting world of inconsistencies, the blog acts as an element of constancy that survives the seemingly endless changes of a modern society. Moreover, the blog traces Zena's

evolving life. It is an online diary that keeps record of Zena's experiences, documenting her mental and emotional states.

Zena's blog ensures her presence throughout the war. She may not have carried weaponry and joined the armed forces in their battle against the Israeli army, but she has taken to writing as an attempt to bring about peace and end the hatred that has spread like an epidemic across Lebanon. Through her blog, Zena wards off helplessness by taking action, that is, writing action, striving to ensure her connection and devotion to her country. Zena, who defines herself through her country, writes about her homeland in an attempt to allow Lebanon to rise from the ashes of war. By writing, she has formed a bond with her country and her people: fellow Lebanese citizens that have suffered the same war, the same water shortages and electricity cuts, the same fear at the rising death toll. Zena's reaction to the 2006 War is similar to Mona Takieddine Amyuni's Post-Lebanese Civil War experience described in the following lines: "The healing process took its natural course and I, as well, took up my pen. Writing soothed me, linked me back to reality and to my people" (qtd. in Rustum Shehadeh 89).

Zena, resembling Amyuni, relies on writing which links her to the struggles of her people. She finds therapy in her online blog which expresses the Lebanese communal experience and her personal war experience alike. Through her words, she brings to the surface the suffering that has accumulated throughout the war. If this suffering is acknowledged, then the healing process may commence. Therefore, Zena promotes the notion of healing through remembrance, through resisting amnesia. When Zena writes, her narrative attempts to bridge the gap between past and present; her blog challenges Saadi Nikro's concept of "memory as a site in which the tension between

past and present cannot be overcome or definitively recovered" (Nikro 19). Zena writes to remember and remind others of the past, lest the past be repeated, lest the hatred discussed in El Khalil's novel fester once again. Moreover, the frequent writing of blogs, its nature raw and immediate, serves as a digital reservoir of memories more accurate than the memories written in post-war narratives. Unlike post-war narratives written after a considerable lapse of time, Zena's war blog houses memories of experiences, events, and emotions that are still fresh and unfiltered by time and consequent forgetfulness.

Zena's memories, expressed through the immediate act of writing, defy Nikro's concept of "the fragmenting force of memory" (Nikro 5). Zena's blog is a direct challenge of the following argument made by Nikro, concerning the validity of memories: "The fragmenting force of memory does not only work to re-collect past experiences, but situates them in a way that the present itself is dislocated and prised open, employing memory to articulate a departure from dismemory" (6). In Zena's blog however, there is no great effort for recollection, for the events and experiences which reside in the recent past are easier to retrieve than memories of the distant past. In this sense, Zena's memories are different than several post-war writers such as Jean Said Makdisi, who in her attempt to document her recollections of war experiences, states the following: "Here in this sea of despair and waste and sadness that is Beirut, events call upon moments that flash out of my past and interpret the present […] Impelled by my own private agony as I flail against the overwhelming and pitiless force of things around me, I am brought up short sometimes by the reflection and sometimes by the reality. I cannot always tell which" (qtd. in Nikro 31). What Makdisi clearly expresses in her statement is the confusion she experiences when faced with recollections: Are

they accurate and objective reflections of reality or merely the subjective and personal reflections of her own private experiences? Furthermore, Makdisi's use of the word "force" in the above description of the struggles of recollection is reminiscent of Nikro's argument of "the fragmenting force of memory" (Nikro 6). Both Nikro and Makdisi speak of the force that one's memory is subjected to upon attempting to recollect the past, trying to distinguish the real from the reflective, or the realistic from the fabricated. Hence, what Zena tries to achieve through her online blog, is a more reliable narrative account of the war. She writes the war she experiences in all its recent happenings. Zena, for instance, can accurately recall the Israeli bombs that hailed on the suburbs of Beirut. In one of her blog entries which was written during the 2006 War, posted on August 11, 2006 and titled "It's Raining Bombs; Only Two Hours of Electricity," Zena writes about raw events and experiences. She can count the number of bombs that fell on her beloved Beirut. "Last night, I counted at least 12 explosions. It was a difficult night. They just wouldn't stop," Zena writes in her blog (electronicintifada.net). "Today has been difficult getting online," she continues. "Electricity is less and less. We are down to about two hours a day. Because there is a fuel and diesel shortage, it has become difficult to keep the generators going" (electronicintifada). Hence, Zena's unfiltered blog, mainly written about the 2006 War and during the war, is unlike Makdisi's Beirut Fragments, a memoir about the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) which was first published in the year of 1990. Thus, Makdisi's war novel lacks the immediacy that online blogging offers to the writer and the reading audience, where both parties vividly remember the ongoing war events.

In the post-war blog that appears in El Khalil's novel, readers witness a writer who is trying to find therapy through re-evaluating her life and herself. Her blog

therefore, becomes a means of mental "housecleaning," where writers resort to writing in order to clear their minds of unwanted thoughts and take inventory of the thoughts they desire to express or document (Hunt 186). Therapeutic writing exists to help the writer overcome the burdens of an overloaded mind:

> The problem is to clear out most of what is in [the mind], to fill huge plastic bags with the confused jumble of things that have accreted there over the days, months, years of being alive and taking things in through the eyes and ears and heart. The goal is to make a space where a few ideas and images and feelings may be so arranged that a reader will want to linger awhile among them" (Malcolm, qtd. in Hunt 186).

In this sense, Zena's blog is a home and her words are a shelter that she can live in. When the aftermath of war threatens the security of her country, writing becomes the homeland she can depend on. Moreover, her blog is a therapeutic platform that attempts to heal the writer by providing clarity of mind, by providing inventory for thoughts and emotions. Through clarity, the writer betters herself by removing the obstacles that act as a hindrance to her self-knowledge or self-awareness.

Via online blogging, Zena practices narrative therapy as she attempts to locate herself and find her standing vis-à-vis the shifting war and post-war phases of her life. The analysis and interpretation of her experiences act as "the essence of narrative approach to therapy," where "experiences are collapsed into narrative structures or stories to give a frame of reference for understanding and making experiences understandable" (Etchison and Kleist 61). In other words, Zena weaves her experiences into her narratives, trying to reach an understanding of life. In the large web of narratives, Zena depicts herself across a series of life events, tracing the evolution of her identity. Similarly, what narrative therapy allows is the empowerment of the writer

who, in writing his/her life stories, is simultaneously attempting to rewrite the circumstances of life. According to *Adelaide*, the Dulwich Centre founded by Michael White, in narrative therapy, the narrative aims at "assisting [writers] to challenge the ways of life that they find subjugating" and focuses on "encouraging persons to re-author their own lives according to alternative and preferred stories of identity, and according to preferred ways of life" (qtd. in Besley 127). Hence, Zena's blog serves as a therapeutic platform where she can rewrite herself and transform the role she plays in the 2006 War. By writing about the war, she is actively striving to bring about peace in her country and its people, and ultimately, her own inner peace. Her narratives call for love through the abolishment of hatred. If Zena succeeds in making a change in Lebanon, then she has succeeded in defying "the ways of life that [she] find[s] subjugating" (127). Moreover, narrative therapy grants her the opportunity of molding and altering the contours of her identity into an identity capable of surviving and withstanding her evolving life situations. Therapy through the written word, offers Zena flexibility in the shaping of her identity which she can manipulate via the process of narrative writing. Thus, discourse "affects how we frame our notions of the 'self' and 'identity'" (Besley 126). Furthermore, as A.C. Besley states about White's theory of narrative therapy, "both the language and how it is used are important […] It can condition how we think, feel, and act and can be used purposefully as a therapeutic tool" (128).

Narrative therapy achieved through blogging, in addition to helping the writer define the contours of the self, aims at reassuring the writer of his/her existence through engagement in a type of "personal writing" which reveals the writer to himself/herself

(Gere 210). The blogger with a reading audience practices what Barbara Myerhoff labels "cultural performance" which she defines as follows:

> Cultural performances are opportunities for appearing, an indispensable ingredient of being itself, for unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our own existence. Cultural performances are reflective in the sense of showing ourselves to ourselves […] We are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness (qtd. in Gere 210).

According to Myerhoff's argument, Zena, by writing her blog, finds therapy through cultural performance which not only allows her to reach a state of self-awareness and self-consciousness, but also ensures her existence simply by existing in her readers' eyes. By blogging, she battles doubts of self-existence and solidifies her position as a writing and existing being throughout war and post-war phases. Furthermore, Zena's blog entries, documented with exact dates, are regarded as a "literate mode [that] enables the recording of linear time and can be checked for accuracy. It maps experience onto the temporal dimension and becomes an important mechanism for producing meaning in people's lives" (Besley 129). Along the timeline created by the online blogs, Zena is once again reinforcing her existence, the dates serving as electronic evidence of her existing self.

El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You* showcases the writing of a female protagonist in search of a medium for self-definition. Zena's writing, in the various forms of a bullet-point list, letter, and online blog entry, illustrates her reliance on the act of writing as a means of defining her fluctuating sense of self and attempting introspection. Zena's fluid experimentation with diverse writing genres is a reflection of the fluid nature of her self-depiction. In fact, Zena's combined writing selections can be regarded as a woman's war diary that documents personal war experiences during times of upheaval

and destruction. As long as Zena writes, she protects herself from the destruction of the self, from losing herself amidst the rubble and debris in the wake of the 2006 War. To confront identity crises and challenges, Zena resorts to diary writing, "using personal writing to rehearse and construct an effective ethos for turbulent times" (Harrison 243). Moreover, personal writing has helped Zena, like many women war writers, adopt a new and improved role that can strongly withstand the challenges of survival in the war zone (243-244). In this sense, the war diary becomes a form of "self-rhetorics," this form "indicating personal, symbolic construction, revision, and maintenance of selfhood" (245). Hence, the self is under constant reconstruction as Zena negotiates her multiple definitions of identity through writing. "A focus on identity reconstruction does not, however, assume that identities can be stabilized or fixed" (246). In fact, Zena, recognizing the fluidity of her shifting sense of self, relies on multiple forms of writing, therefore, repeatedly experiments with writing genres capable of reflecting her constant self-evolution amidst her liquid milieus.

CHAPTER IV

FLUIDS IN *DREAMS OF WATER*

A. Fluids and Modernity

"When she lifts herself off the bed, her body shadowing the dim light, she lets out a sigh and shakes her head. Her dreams, gathering all her fears together in one great *deluge* until there seems to be no means of overcoming them, were once again of water, the images behind her eyes thick and overwhelming, her pulse quickening and then stopping in the base of her throat," says Aneesa in the first chapter of *Dreams of Water* (23, italics mine). As indicated in these lines and in the title of Jarrar's novel, Aneesa's life, her waking and sleeping hours, is "one great deluge," an endless stream of water that carries Aneesa across the rapidly-transforming moments of her existence (23). Life begins and culminates in fluids. Living in transit between past and present, between war and post-war phases of her life, Aneesa, as argued in this chapter, attempts to experience identity formation and therapy through the endless flux of fluids in her life. It is these fluids in their natural state, in the form of water and rain, and unnatural state, in the form of drinks, that reflect Aneesa's perpetual quest for identity formation.

In an increasingly globalized world and the collapse of previously-set universal boundaries, defining the seemingly borderless human self becomes a frequent struggle. Modernity, i.e., life marked by insecurity birthed by wars, territorialism, and destruction, is best characterized by its fluidity. Hence, the modern life is in constant motion and the restless individual leads a lifestyle of rapid transformation, travel, and mobility. Similarly, in the modern society depicted by Jarrar, resembling the society illustrated in El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You,* individuals reside in a transitory world, a

liquid milieu through which individuals survive by experiencing an endless string of rebirths.

B. Natural Fluids

With identity as a self-made project comes responsibility, the task of resolving identity struggles on a day-to-day basis. In Aneesa's case, identity is a bricolage of the devastation created by the Lebanese Civil War, the trauma of her brother's abduction, and the ruins of a post-war life. Attempting to overcome the persistent threats of an identity crisis, Aneesa relies on the flexible medium of liquids as a fluid means of self-definition. Aneesa's relationship with natural fluids, to begin with, brings to attention several themes of identity, the first being the theme of identity and home. As seen on pages twenty-two and twenty-three in chapter one, the Mediterranean Sea is depicted as a paradoxical milieu, simultaneously arousing feelings of belonging and detachment or displacement. As she walks along the Corniche sidewalk, Aneesa finds herself at home in her familiar surroundings: "Along the water's edge, fisherman stand in their plastic slippers on rocks covered in seaweed, their lines rising and falling with the movement of the sea […] A man on crutches walks up to her and stops to extend a box filled with coloured packets of gum […] That is familiar, as is the smell of the sea, a murky, damp smell that is welcome after all the years away" (Jarrar 22). Aneesa's experience at the Corniche is one of welcoming familiarity. The smell of the sea is the smell of home and her walk along the seashore puts her life into perspective, for "she can hear everything, life and her own heart, humming together" (23). Unlike the feelings of home and belonging experienced in the lines above, the sea described in the following excerpt awakens conflicting emotions:

> Aneesa steps out on to the balcony […] She wraps her arms around her body and looks down on to the street where there is absolute quiet. She feels a sudden longing for permanence and certainty, for the hardiness she has seen in large oak trees in the West, unwavering and placid too. For a moment, as a breeze comes in from the sea, she wishes she could fly back with it to anywhere but here (23).

Contrary to the welcoming sea in the previous excerpt, Aneesa's experience above reveals her detachment from home. Though the sea is not visible to Aneesa and there is no direct contact with water, Aneesa does describe the sea breeze that awakens her need to be "anywhere but here" (23). Where once the sea represented a familiar home, it now echoes Aneesa's cry for her previous Western life of "permanence and certainty" (23). It becomes clear therefore, that Aneesa's homeland, in all its uncertainty and instability, fails to provide the security that she longs for. Juxtaposed with the West, Lebanon can only provide a transitory home marked by impermanence. It is important to note here that Aneesa, by desiring Western "permanence and certainty," or rather solidity, expresses for the first time, her rejection of fluidity (23). Hence, Beirut's liquid life, in all its insecurity and unpredictability, creates fear of the unknown exhibited in a fluid society.

When homeland becomes a foreign land, where does one find home? After an exilic life in the West, what becomes of the Beirut that Aneesa left behind? Does home become another exile or an estranged place? "We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement," argues Edward Said in "Reflections on Exile" (137). Living in Said's modern period, it comes as no surprise that Aneesa becomes "spiritually orphaned and alienated," even when in her own homeland. Exile "is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being," Said further argues (140). "Exiles are cut off from their roots, their

land, their past […] Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives" (140-141). Moreover, in discussing exilic literature or "extraterritorial" literature, the critic George Steiner states the following: "It seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism, which has made so many homeless, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language. Eccentric, aloof, nostalgic, deliberately untimely…" (qtd. in Said 137). It is arguable that the exilic writer, in this case Jarrar, creates a literary character, i.e., Aneesa, who resembles her. In a quasi-barbaric, post-civil war Lebanon, Jarrar's wandering protagonist, "homeless" and "untimely", fails to locate her homeland and ultimately, her nomadic self (137). Aneesa's former exilic life has transformed her; it has changed her perception of homeland. The exilic self remains a part of her even after she has returned to her country. Homeless and with an inevitably fractured self, Aneesa attempts to locate her identity by searching for home. The search however, is not easy. As Aneesa shifts back and forth between a homeland that wills her to be "anywhere but here" (Jarrar 23) and the welcoming familiarity of "the rain-soaked streets of her childhood," Aneesa is caught in a phase of in-betweenness (Jarrar 45). She is in-between foreign land and homeland, in-between her Western and Eastern self, and simply, in-between multiple selves. Even as she describes a random rainy day in her previous Western life, Aneesa fails to feel at home: "Whenever it rains, she carries a large umbrella that she brought with her from Beirut […] She wonders how long it will be before she feels completely a part of this place, before it becomes where she comes from and everything she knows rather than somewhere she has merely been" (90). This experience emphasizes Aneesa's in-between state, revealing how she is out of place in London and Beirut, further fracturing her already dissevered self.

However, accompanying Aneesa's restlessness is what Georg Lukacs in *Theory of the Novel*, terms as a "transcendental homelessness" (qtd. in Said 144). With Lukacs' theory of "transcendental homelessness" comes the modern individual, the nomadic exile capable of transcending borders and barriers (Said 147). The wanderer constructs a home everywhere and anywhere with a firm belief that "homes are always provisional" (147). The wanderer's self, resembling the provisional home, is fluid and fleeting, capable of multiple transformations deemed vital for survival in the modern, globalized word. It is thus, the nomadic self that survives. There is strength in fluidity and mobility, the ability to remain rootless in a borderless and fluctuating world. In the closing paragraph of *Out of Place* (1999), Said's description of the fluid self is analogous to Bauman's modern, liquid identity:

> I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of *flowing currents*. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are "off" and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place" (qtd. in Barbour 300, italics mine).

What Said describes above is the multifaceted identity of the modern individual who thrives on mobility, contradictions, and contrapuntal existence. Identity is merely "a cluster of *flowing currents*," an endless stream constantly in motion that "may be out of place," but is ultimately, in the right place which is no place at all. "Freedom" co-exists with "skepticism" and "dissonances," all of which are the new form of harmony.

Upon describing himself, Said is inadvertently describing Aneesa. Residing in a state of constant in-betweenness, Aneesa's multiple selves offer multiple lifestyles, a possibility to make of herself and her homeland what she sees fit.

Similar to the theory of fluidity that Said discusses in the final paragraph of *Out of Place* is Jarrar's theme of a liquid life made evident during one of Aneesa and Salah's frequent visits to a London park. On pages forty-four and forty-five, and in the presence of "the river, deep and real and redolent of so much history," the following conversation between Aneesa and Salah takes place:

> 'See how fast it moves?' [Salah] asks. 'No single drop of water flows over the same place twice' […]
> 'You know, *habibti*, sometimes I think these are the very things that give me comfort,' Salah says, gesturing at the places and people around them. 'The thought that everything will continue to change no matter how hard I try to stop it from doing so' […] (Jarrar 44-45).

In the lines above, Salah draws an analogy between the flowing waters of the Thames River and the fluidity of life. Mimicking the constant flow of the river, life swiftly moves forward, rapidly changing and alternating along the way. Water never "flows over the same place twice," for it quickly transforms itself (44). The same transformation is experienced by Salah who "grow[s] steadily older, though different and better defined, and that because of this there will always be newness in [him] too" (45). Salah's self-description applies to Aneesa who remains occupied with her identity search. The search is never complete. As long as identities fail to maintain fixed and stable properties, the identity quest can never come to an end.

As argued by Bauman in "Identity – Then, Now, What For?" and in regards to "the reliability and durability of identities, results seem much the same: they are now as

"mobile" as the world itself, changeable and protean, elusive, difficult to hold, uncertain – indeed, flexible – and their story cannot be trusted to be continuous and consistent" (207). However, regardless of the worrisome properties and/or aforementioned qualities attributed to the concept of identity, the experience of the mobile self is one that is "joyful and exhilarating" because the individual is free to "move at will" (207). Unlike the static, immobile individual who is confined by the parameters of a specific place, the mobile self is capable of transformation and adopting multiple forms. In other words, "identities may be chosen if they look promising, or discarded when they disappoint – if they dry up of their past seductive power or are superseded by new, more attractive offers" (207). Similarly, Aneesa's insecure identity provides her with the freedom of identity construction or self-formation. Said freedom however, is accompanied by a vicious cycle of anxiety that the free individual experiences as he/she ponders the durability of identity. Despite the inevitable fear, identity depiction and formation is an ongoing process. "One should rather speak, so [Stuart] Hall suggests, of the identification than of "identity"; of identification as a process, never starting from square one and likely to proceed in all sorts of directions, none of which is truly predetermined by the conditions of its beginnings" (208). Identity formation is thus, a never-ending quest, for there is no finish line, no familiar landmarks along the path. Similar to the Thames River, water that never "flows over the same place twice," the mobile individual refuses to tread the same grounds twice, for his wandering feet are on a constant journey, in search of an identity which, in turn, is a ceaseless process (Jarrar 44).

Similar to the theme of fluidity illustrated through the Thames River, Jarrar uses natural fluids, in this case, the Mediterranean Sea, drawing a connection between

fluidity and Aneesa's identity which is inevitably and irreversibly influenced by Bassam's abduction. In the concluding pages of chapter one, specifically pages sixty-seven till sixty-nine, Aneesa recalls "a persistent image in her mind of a day [she and Bassam] spent together only a week before his abduction" (Jarrar 67). It is a summer day at the beach, a time when "the fighting seem[ed] to have come to a temporary stop and the war [was] far from all their minds" (67). "The sea," as described by Aneesa, "is especially beautiful because rather than being its usual still self in the heat of summer, Aneesa can see ripples of waves in the distance that move down to the shore" (67). In other words, the sea, as portrayed by Aneesa in this excerpt, is a fluid medium, a beautiful setting far from the battlefields and free from the civil war. More importantly, by replaying the beach trip which has become "a persistent image in her mind," Aneesa arguably attempts to keep Bassam alive through the fluid powers of water. "One of [Bassam's] final joyous moments" are spent in fluidity, in the midst of a sea "moving fluidly and silently behind him" (68-69). If Aneesa can consistently recall Bassam's final days in fluidity, then Bassam, resembling the fluidity of the ocean, is resurrected with each memory. Like the endless movement of the waves that lap the shore, Bassam's memory is replayed in the corners of Aneesa's mind, and Aneesa in turn, reassures herself of her own existence through the memory of Bassam who is alive and well. Moreover, Bassam's day spent swimming in the Mediterranean Sea is representative of his rebirth.

As stated in the beach trip described above, by recalling Bassam's joyous day spent in fluidity, Aneesa brings her brother back to life, simultaneously striving to reinstate her identity, which since the war, has become first and foremost dependent on Bassam's safety and well-being. It is arguable that the beach trip has influenced

Aneesa's reaction and experience with water in the sense that she has unconsciously drawn a parallel between water and Bassam. In the presence of natural water, Aneesa remembers her brother, once again restoring Bassam's fluid existence. On pages twenty-four and twenty-five of the first chapter, for example, after receiving "Bassam's" first letter, Aneesa makes a connection between the tap water that flows from the kitchen sink and Bassam. As Waddad begins "to wash the breakfast dishes," Aneesa reassures herself and her mother alike of Bassam's safety. "Bassam is alive, mama," says Aneesa to Waddad (25). In the presence of the flowing water in the kitchen, Aneesa resurrects her brother in the following lines: "That moment in my mother's kitchen, suddenly realizing that Bassam's living and dying, both, were endless, our fears and hopes entangled between them, I shuddered" (25). Hence, Bassam's endless "living and dying" or constant resurrection takes place in Aneesa's mind while tap water continues to flow in the background. Another less obvious example is located on page twenty-one of the first chapter. During the heavily pouring rain, Aneesa and Waddad argue about Bassam, his name once again, resurfacing alongside the flow of natural liquids: "It is mid-morning and Aneesa and her mother have had another argument about Bassam. It is raining hard outside and Aneesa decides to walk along the Beirut Corniche. Big drops of rain splash heavily on to the uneven pavement and on the crests of the mounting waves" (21). In the vivid description of the heavy rain and mounting sea waves is Bassam's name which always co-exists with fluids. Having had an argument about Bassam, Aneesa heads towards the sea: the fluid setting of Bassam's resurrection. By visiting the ocean, Aneesa reminds herself of her brother's safety, simultaneously taking comfort in the proliferation of her own identity.

Similar to the theme of reincarnation perceived through Bassam in the examples above, Aneesa revisits this theme once again on pages 189-190 of chapter six. As she and Samir walk along the Corniche, another link is made between sea, rebirth, and Bassam. In the rainy weather, as "lightning flash[es] on the water" and "big drops of rain begin to fall," Aneesa explains to Samir about the theory of reincarnation in the following lines: "'It's very important to people who live in the mountains,' Aneesa tells Samir. 'They all think they'll have the chance to return for another lifetime and redeem themselves"' (Jarrar 189-190). Walking along the sea, the venue of Bassam's rebirth, Aneesa explains the phenomenon of reincarnation, attempting to convince herself of its powers. If her brother undergoes reincarnation, then perhaps her own rebirth is made possible and she too is granted another chance to remold her fluid identity and "redeem" herself (189). Turning "to face the water," Aneesa resumes her conversation: "'Imagine it, Samir. Imagine being able to come back again and again, to yourself and those you have loved. Do you know what it would mean? […] Still, it's very convenient, isn't it?' she says sharply. 'I mean this denying death. It doesn't bring them back'" (190). Despite denying reincarnation's ability to bring a person back from the dead, Aneesa exhibits obvious willingness to believe in the Druze faith, in the constant chain of transformations and rebirths. If Bassam, in "denying death," is reborn, Aneesa is capable of following suit, and the ocean before her exists as a constant reminder of reincarnation and all it has to offer.

What readers witness in the excerpts above is Aneesa's relationship with her fluid setting or *fluidscape*. As Aneesa moves between pre-war and post-war spaces, between Lebanon and London, natural waters in the form of rain, rivers, and sea become a recording of her fluid self and her inner struggles, as she attempts to achieve a

greater understanding of who she is after Bassam's disappearance. Fluidscapes, similar to landscapes, "are created out of people's understanding and engagement with the world around them," states Barbara Bender in "Time and Landscape." "They are always in process of being shaped and reshaped. Being of the moment and in process, they are always temporal. They are not a record but a recording, and this recording is much more than a reflection of human agency and action; it is creative of them" (Bender 103). Therefore, fluidscapes, as indicated by their name, are fluid settings that undergo constant change, this change being in sync with human perception and human growth which are a part of a perpetual process of transformation. Aneesa thus, relies on a fluid setting that is "creative" of her, a setting that allows her to make of it what she desires. Aware of the conditions of her liquid life, Aneesa has chosen a liquid milieu that grants her the leeway and flexibility necessary for survival in a modern society of perpetual evolution and development. The Corniche seashore, for example, at once represents homeland and a foreign land, her identity traversing the spaces in-between. For Aneesa to maintain human agency and growth, she must continue to surround herself with an environment that is conducive to change, one that refuses stability and solidity.

In her article "Landscapes on-the-move," similar to "Time and Landscape," Bender advocates the modern theory of relativity where "persons and personhood have become partitive, provisional, performative and relational" (76). "Boundaries between persons and things," continues Bender, "have become osmotic and creative of one another, and persons, places and spaces are understood to be intimately imbricated" (76). In this sense, and as stated in the paragraph above, Bender's argument is descriptive of Aneesa whose relationship between setting and self is one which is clearly depicted throughout Jarrar's novel. Via her fluid setting, Aneesa is given the

freedom to explore multiple selves and entertain the possibility of a fleeting identity, or rather identities that, regardless of being ultimately defined by Bassam's abduction, refuse to be grounded to a single place or location. In choosing a liquid milieu as a means of self-identification and self-description, "landscapes are no longer to be separated from human experience or seen as purely visual, instead they are part of a world of movement, relationships, memories and histories" (76). With the waters of the Thames River and Mediterranean Sea, Aneesa creates and maintains a relationship with liquids which reflect the struggles of her ongoing identity crisis. With water, Aneesa is capable of existing somewhere, anywhere the water flows, for "people are always in some relationship to the [fluid]scape they move through – they are never nowhere" (78). In war or peace, annihilation or amity, natural waters continue to flow. By identifying herself through *waterscapes,* Aneesa grants herself sustenance and survival, the ability to repetitively redefine herself. In a nomadic world, waters allow Aneesa to portray herself as the wanderer/traveler. That being said, it is important to note that Aneesa, as seen throughout Jarrar's novel, most frequently relies on waterscapes instead of landscapes because she is arguably aware of the fragility of landscapes, its static properties, and ultimately, its inability to withstand change. "We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They've made us suffer too much," state Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (qtd. in Bender 78). This argument is easily applicable to Aneesa who, refusing anything rooted or fixated, places trust in liquidity which promises perseverance and continuity of the fluid self.

C. Unnatural Fluids

Resembling natural fluids, unnatural liquids in the form of drinks are used to illustrate Aneesa's relentless identity quest. Similar to natural waters, the excerpts linking drinks to Aneesa's identity struggle are categorized according to the highlighted themes. The theme of the fluidity of life, to begin with, is illustrated on pages 125-126 and 188-189 of chapters four and six, respectively. In the excerpt located in chapter four, the narrator describes one of the many visits made by Salah and Aneesa to a London park. As Aneesa sips on coffee from "freshly roasted" beans purchased by Salah from a "Middle-Eastern bakery by [his] house," Aneesa describes the movement of nearby children, simultaneously describing the fluid movement of a liquid life: "Some of them are playing in the sand pit, others are on the swings and on the climbing frame. They move from one to the other with seamless purpose, the transition from one activity to another, from one feeling to another, effortless and true" (Jarrar 126). The ease with which children experience fleeting emotions and their rapid transition from one moment to the next are reminiscent of the conditions of a liquid life. Aware of this connection between liquids and a fluid life, Jarrar places Aneesa in a situation where she can draw parallels between the drinks that she consumes and the properties of a liquid life. As she "lift[s] her head up to see the playground and then bend[s] it forward again to drink her coffee," Aneesa inadvertently makes a connection between the fluidity of life exhibited by the children's behavior and the fluidity of the drink in her hand (Jarrar 126). In the presence of drinks, Aneesa grows more aware of the liquidity of life. Fluids draw attention to fluids. Liquids attract liquids. In this sense, with the continuous consumption of drinks, Aneesa is frequently reminded of fluidity and the importance of maintaining a fluid identity.

The excerpt on pages 188-189 in chapter six, similar to the scene at the London park, once again, illustrates a connection between drinks and the liquidity of life. As Aneesa and Waddad stand on the balcony one morning, watching Ramzi ride his bike near the building's entrance downstairs, Jarrar creates a situation where readers can draw inferences between Aneesa's consumption of drinks and the liquid life she leads. Clutching a cup of coffee in her hands, Aneesa's mind wanders off; she recalls her father in the lines below:

> Aneesa pulls her dressing gown more tightly around her and sips at the cup of coffee she has brought with her. It is exactly as she likes it, strong and bitter. As a child, her father would sometimes let her have a taste from his own cup and was always surprised when she asked for more. Children aren't supposed to like coffee, he'd say with a smile (Jarrar 188).

Following the memories of her father, Aneesa instantly remembers Salah's death. "'Salah has died,' she blurts out" (188). By consuming liquids, she is reminded of those dearest to her: her father and Salah who acts as a father-figure. More importantly, by drinking coffee, she once again becomes aware of the fluidity of life, how the people she loves can easily float in and out of her mind. Staring at Ramzi playing in the distance, her coffee cup in hand, Aneesa realizes that the presence of her loved ones is one that is fluid; it does not leave her. "Aneesa understands that it will always be like this, that the connections she makes on this onward journey of her life will never leave her, touching her skin's surface like a gentle mist that comes and then recedes" (189). The narrator's description of Aneesa's life journey, and more specifically, the use of the phrase, "touching her skin's surface," are suggestive of Aneesa's description of Lebanon and Ramzi in her letters to Salah, located on pages sixteen and thirty-eight, respectively. On these pages, the use of the word, "skin", is used to indicate reincarnation and eternal presence. In the first letter to Salah displayed

on page sixteen, Aneesa makes the following statement about her country: "Lebanon is like a second skin that does not leave me even as I wish it away." On page thirty-eight, in her letter to Salah, Aneesa writes the following when describing Ramzi's new presence in her family's life: "How can I see, in the birth of an eight-year-old boy, the soul of a man killed at that very moment, moving from one body to another, skin to new skin […] ?" Hence, in her description of Lebanon and Ramzi, "skin" is used to indicate rebirth and constant presence. Her country and brother alike will always remain a part of her life, their presence as natural and familiar as her own skin. Going back to the excerpt on page 189, in the narrator's description of Aneesa's father and Salah, the use of the word "skin" reminds readers of its connotation: rebirth and continuity. In other words, Lebanon, Ramzi/Bassam, Aneesa's father, and Salah are all a part of Aneesa's ongoing life journey, their indelible presence unwavering. Aneesa, in her constant search for therapy, is potentially capable of healing in the presence of her country and family, their continuity ensuring her own progress and rebirth.

Similar to the therapeutic effect of liquids seen in the paragraph above, the coffee shared between Aneesa and Waddad on pages sixty-one and sixty-two of chapter one is accompanied by the therapeutic need for closure. Falling under the theme of drinks and therapy, the excerpt located on the aforementioned pages illustrates Aneesa's desperate desire for closure through Waddad who has made the decision to declare Bassam dead. After the passing of the newly-instated law, "the one that gives the relatives of the missing the right to have them declared dead if they've been gone for more than seven years," Waddad can put an end to her family's suffering over Bassam's absence (62). As "Aneesa and Waddad have their morning coffee on the narrow balcony outside the sitting room," and as "they sit in their dressing gowns, sipping their

coffee and looking out at the noisy thoroughfare that leads to a rocky cliff and down the sea," Waddad informs Aneesa of her decision to declare Bassam dead (61). Once again, along with the strong aroma of coffee, comes the promise of therapy. The consumption of coffee is followed by Waddad's decision to bring her family closure. Bassam's rebirth, illustrated in Ramzi's presence, grants Waddad this closure. In other words, therapy, made possible through the fluid process of reincarnation, takes place over coffee time.

Resembling the therapy achieved through drinking coffee in the previous excerpt, on pages sixteen till eighteen of chapter one is the following excerpt that portrays yet another connection between coffee and closure:

> Waddad is in the kitchen stirring a pot of Arabic coffee over the stove. The smell is strong and pleasing. Aneesa watches as she lifts the dark, thick liquid with the spoon and lets it fall back into the pot […]
> 'Good morning, mama.'
> 'Good morning, *habibti*. Sit down and I'll pour the coffee' […]
> The two women sip their coffee noisily and with enjoyment, the scent of cardamom seeds rising from their steaming cups.
> 'I think I've found your brother,' Waddad says moments later (16-17).

A close study of the lines above reveals a connection between the vividly-described Arabic coffee and the resulting therapy that follows its consumption. With the "strong and pleasing" aroma of "the dark, thick liquid" wafting through the air, Waddad discloses the result of her search for Bassam which is concluded in Ramzi's presence (16). As Bassam's reincarnation, Ramzi brings Waddad long-awaited closure, for Bassam's rebirth has put an end to her suffering. In knowing that Bassam is alive and well, Waddad can commence the healing process and Aneesa, through her mother's experience of closure, can follow suit. In other words, the consumption of liquids is

once again therapeutic. Following "the scent of cardamom seeds rising from the steaming cups" is the subsequent rebirth of Bassam who rises from the dead when Waddad speaks of Ramzi (17). Moreover, another indication of therapy and/or mental cleansing is displayed in the repetitive description of running water and the washing of the coffee cups that accompany the mother and daughter's discussion of Ramzi: "Waddad stands up and turns away to place her cup in the sink. She turns the tap on and reaches for the washing-up sponge […] 'Things changed so much for me after you left,' Waddad continues over the sound of the running water. 'I had to manage the search on my own['] […] Soapsuds trickle down the floor between them" (17). In other words, accompanying the drinking of coffee is yet another form of therapy achieved through "washing," "running water," and "soapsuds" (17). When Waddad washes the coffee cups, running her hands under the flowing water, she arguably attempts to wash her hands – and Aneesa's – of their painful past. With soapsuds trickling down her hands, Waddad attempts to cleanse herself and her daughter alike of the past which represents the traumas of war and Bassam's abduction. Therefore, in the passages located on pages sixteen and seventeen, readers witness the merging of natural and unnatural fluids which co-exist and induce a much-needed therapeutic state in Aneesa and Waddad.

As seen in the aforementioned passages, the theme of coffee and closure is revisited in Aneesa's letter to Salah, located on pages thirty-one till thirty-three. In her letter, Aneesa narrates to Salah her mother's search for Bassam, a search which is accompanied by the endless consumption of coffee. "She climbed up endless stairways, knocking on doors, sipping cups of coffee and waiting to hear a sign of recognition at her story," writes Aneesa (31). A few lines later, Aneesa writes the following,

describing Waddad: “She went to the police station in her area and asked to see the officer in charge. He gave her a cup of unsweetened coffee and listened politely until she finished speaking” (32). In the final two paragraphs of her letter ending on page thirty-three, Aneesa writes about Waddad’s therapeutic moment, arguably attempting to once again, achieve therapy through her mother’s experience. More importantly, this therapeutic state is achieved only after the frequent consumption of liquids, as is described on the aforementioned pages. Following the drinking of coffee and whilst standing outside the police station, Waddad “listen[s] to the water from the garden fountain slapping against the marble slabs at its outer edge” (33). Similar to the passage on pages sixteen and seventeen, natural and unnatural fluids co-exist and together, deliver a therapeutic state. As illustrated in the concluding lines of Aneesa’s letter, Waddad, in the merging of natural waters and drinks, begins to heal: “Maybe it was that moment in the palace courtyard when [Waddad’s] anger had suddenly abandoned her and she felt so bereft that she realized she had been looking in all the wrong places and suddenly knew exactly what to do” (33). Therapy therefore, lies in closure, in knowing “exactly what to do,” consequently, ending the long search for Bassam (33). By writing about her mother’s therapeutic experience through liquids, Aneesa attempts to convince herself of the healing powers of fluids, desiring to wash away the pain caused by Bassam’s disappearance.

In the constant flux of fluids, Aneesa remains afloat amidst a world of devastation and destruction. Aware of her “unsettled mind” and “fragile, wavering self,” Aneesa uses fluids as a life-line that fills the gap between her past and present, between war and exile, and ultimately, between her dissevered self or rather, multiple selves (Jarrar 46). Only by walking along the Mediterranean seashore or observing the

flowing waters of the Thames River can Aneesa grow closer to understanding herself. Only in the frequent consumption of drinks, as the pungent aroma of Arabic coffee fills the air, is therapy achieved. Accompanying the pouring of coffee is the pouring of hearts wounded by Bassam's absence and the contemplation of a liquid life. With the stirring of the thick, black liquid is the stirring of souls, for Bassam is brought to life during coffee time, birthed by Aneesa and Waddad's discussion of him. Faltering in between natural and unnatural fluids, Aneesa drifts into a fluid kind of living, described by Jarrar's narrator in the following closing lines of the novel: "[With] the clean dishes stacked dripping on the draining board to dry, the kitchen clock ticking behind them, Aneesa and Waddad will wander once again into their separate lives[,] waiting for moments such as these to come their way again" (233). Aneesa therefore, leads a lifestyle of wandering, or rather, a life of liquids, its dripping as natural as the ticking kitchen clock.

CHAPTER V

FLUIDS IN *BEIRUT, I LOVE YOU*

A. Fluids and Modernity

Set against the backdrop of the 2006 War, *Beirut, I Love You* portrays its female protagonist's identity crisis and search for self-depiction in a volatile country threatened by violence and devastation. In the summer of 2006, the raging war which persisted for thirty-three days, some argue thirty-four days, resulted in the destruction of all forms of infrastructure. Power plants, main highways, and water resource units were destroyed, their ruins attesting to the broken city that is now Beirut. However, and more importantly, in the wake of the war, lies the destruction of the human self. Those who have survived the war have experienced a month of psychological warfare, for the bombs that hailed over Lebanon have also plunged into the psyches of Lebanese citizens who now face a crisis of identity. How does a person define one's self in a rapidly-changing society? With shattered homes came shattered identities and fractured psyches. How then, can one piece together the fragments of a self subjected to instability and insecurity created by war?

Drifting between the war and post-war phases that have marked her existence, Zena, as argued in this chapter, depends on fluids, in the form of natural waters and drinks, as a means of self-definition and subsequent therapy through the complex understanding of the human self. While Zena rapidly moves from one life moment to the next, the flow of fluids, a constant presence in her life, serves as the milieu of Zena's continuity through reincarnation. In the former state of fluids, i.e., natural liquids, rain and the waters of the Mediterranean Sea serve as the medium for Zena's

identity struggles, in all its persistent rebirths and developments, and act as a therapeutic setting. "As a material substance, essential to every organic process, water literally constitutes human "being," providing a vital "natural symbol" of sociality and of human-environmental interdependence," argues Veronica Strang in "Substantial Connections" (155). "Concepts of identity," Strang continues, "based formerly on the continuities provided by "blood and soil," have become commensurately fluid, encompassing post-modern ideas about individual mobility and movement, and acknowledging the contingency and multiplicity of identities in a range of social and ideational contexts" (155). In the case of unnatural liquids in the form of beverages, alcoholic and otherwise, Zena repeatedly describes the act of drinking and her frequent close proximity to drinks. Arguably, Zena's repetitive contact with and consumption of liquids reflect her desire to mimic the fluid qualities of drinks, expressing the need to survive and remain afloat in her ever-changing society. Zena's description of fluids hence, becomes a depiction of her inner self, a "fluid metaphor[] describing personal tides of emotions [and] shifting mental states" (159). Zena's Beirut, though distant from the English cultural landscapes described in Strang's article, falls victim to the conditions of modern society where identity struggles complicate the existence of the individual. In other words, Strang's theory of the mobile, modern individual rings true in El Khalil's setting of a 21st century Lebanon living in the throes of the 2006 War. This chapter argues that the fluidity marking modern society and the individual's interaction with natural and unnatural liquids, are themes highlighted in the novel through the following: Zena's construction of a fluid identity and attempted self-understanding via the steady stream of flowing fluids.

B. Natural Fluids

Aware of the need to survive the modern tide of constant turn-over and change, Zena resorts to natural and unnatural fluids as a means of self-mapping. In the former case, I have divided Zena's relationship with fluids and her close proximity to natural waters into the following sub-themes: fluids and war, fluids and rebirth, and finally, fluids and therapy. In the theme of fluids and war, readers are made aware of Zena's experience with natural fluids during the war. Zena, who defines herself in terms of her homeland, comes to rely on the volatility of fluids that can help her withstand the seemingly never-ending war and carry her across the war zone. On the unnumbered page following the author's dedications and prior to the opening of chapter one, El Khalil borrows from her colleague, Maya Ghannoum, a quote which draws an analogy between natural liquids and war: "It is raining. Outside on the window sill tiny puddles of rain are gathering and then falling off, and then gathering up, and falling off again like mass suicides. The sound of the waterdrops banging against the window is overwhelmingly loud; as loud as the rumors." By using Ghannoum's quote, El Khalil introduces readers to the liquid society of a war-torn Beirut. Similar to the relentless pouring rain, the war in Beirut carries on, seemingly to no end. With the downpour comes the hailing of "mass suicides." Prior to the unfolding of the plot, El Khalil has set the premise for understanding Zena's liquid society and the unmistakable parallel drawn from fluids to war-time Beirut and ultimately, to Zena. Hence, by illustrating the fluid setting of Beirut, the author has introduced readers to the milieu that will influence Zena's mobile and liquid identity. Moreover, the quote reiterates the modern theory of a liquid society; the constant flow of raindrops in Ghannoum's quote reflect the liquid

society of a wartime Beirut, where death and destruction have become the norm; "mass suicides," like the rainy weather, hail over the lands of Beirut.

The theme of fluids and war is revisited on pages ninety-two and ninety-three where Zena portrays a post-war Beirut trying to stay afloat during turbulent times. In the paragraph located at the top of page ninety-two, Zena unintentionally draws an analogy between Beirut and herself, equating Beirut's struggles with her own. Zena however, refuses to accept Beirut's "downfall" as her own and her refusal is indicated in the first line of the paragraph: "But all this… this was not my downfall. It was Beirut" (92). Regardless of her denial, Zena's downfall or survival mimic Beirut's rise and fall. If Beirut is drowning, then she is drowning. Zena faces the same tide that threatens Beirut. Moreover, this selection describes the fluid life that has influenced Beirut and Zena alike, for in describing post-war Beirut, Zena states the following: "She was drowning. I just happened to be in her waters. She, under so much pressure to rebuild overnight, under so much pressure not to cave in to foreign interference, under so much pressure to hold her broken people, she was barely treading above water" (92). The image of a drowning Beirut depicted by Zena reveals the fluidity that has marked modern societies. This image is re-illustrated on page ninety-four, once again painting the picture of a liquid society: "I feel Beirut… she is drowning." What is evident in these images therefore, is the force of modernity. Modernity has created a volatile and unstable environment; it has birthed tidal waves that threaten to drown society and its people, should they refuse the forward movement necessary for survival.

Similar to the above statements made by Zena linking her struggles with that of Beirut, the final line in the first paragraph on page ninety-two makes certain to readers that Zena identifies herself and defines herself through Beirut. Zena concludes the

paragraph as follows: “She was sinking, and like the *Titanic*, she was pulling us all down with her” (92). Hence, not only is Zena admitting that she is sinking with Beirut, but she is also making a connection between Beirut’s drowning and her own initial drowning at the sinking of the *Titanic* described on pages fifteen till nineteen. The *Titanic* analogy reminds readers of Zena’s sea birth, of her fluid identity that is capable of rising from the dead. “I had spent so much time underwater, that I brought something back with me. Sea births were dangerous at the time,” explains Zena about her resurrection at sea (19). Thus, for decades, since the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912, Zena has been capable of reincarnation. Familiar with the fluid setting, she is capable of moving with the flow and reconstructing a series of new identities that come to life throughout the long process of multiple reincarnations. Zena, previously known as Asmahan, Amal, and Hussein, to name a few, exhibits the traits of a flexible individual capable of rapid transformations of identity. Identity becomes a self-made project. After one constructs his/her current identity, contemplation and reflection on the subsequent string of identities has already begun. “Reflections on identity thus carry within themselves a sense of possibility, of being different and making a difference, a potentiality for changing the self and changing society” (Tilley 10). Consequently, what is implied by the *Titanic* analogy is the following equation: If Zena can survive the sinking of the *Titanic*, she can survive the drowning of post-war Beirut. And since Zena is equated with Beirut, her survival is Beirut’s survival, consequently, indicating the fluidity that Beirut possesses and its subsequent potential rising from the ashes of war.

Similar to previous connections made between El Khalil and Bauman, the concept of “instant gratification,” discussed by Zena on page ninety-three, once again reiterates Bauman’s theory of liquid modernity, this time, focusing on Bauman’s

concept of "consumerist syndrome" argued in *Liquid Life*. Though the following excerpt does not include direct references to natural fluids, it does however, occur during Beirut's post-war drowning and acts as a continuation or further elaboration of the sinking Beirut illustrated on page ninety-two. In fact, as previously mentioned, Beirut is still drowning in subsequent selections, as is made clear on page ninety-four. In the current excerpt under study, Zena's portrayal of post-war Lebanese society is also an accurate description of Bauman's modern consumer: "We constructed an alter reality […] Life in Beirut demanded that you live an altered reality. Some chose pills. Some alcohol. Some heroin. Some denial. At the end of the day, it is all the same thing. Escapism. Everything was too much to deal with. Instant gratification" (El Khalil 93). Zena thus, describes a society of individuals who rely on means of instant fulfillment to survive in an altered or alternative reality. In this sense, the individual is a constant consumer, quickly searching for new sources of rapid gratification in the form of drugs. Aware of fleeting time and unpredictable environmental conditions, the individual seizes the opportunity to consume whatever is available and provides instant satisfaction. The individual lives in the moment and is on the move constantly in order to keep up with a fast-paced society. Moreover, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the uncertainty of a modern liquid society enhances the individual's need, in this case Zena's, for an increased consumption of fluids. Hence, the greater the fluidity of one's unpredictable social milieu, the greater the intensity of the desire for consumption and instant gratification. With the war wreaking havoc on every aspect of Zena's life, Zena resorts to the consumption of fluids to better cope with the unpredictability of wartime Beirut.

Similarly, Gerda Reith in "Consumption and its Discontents" argues that individuals addicted to consumption, otherwise known as "addict identities", possess the freedom of self-construction (284). The consumerist, presented daily with a wide selection of commodities, has developed an increased dependency and addiction to consumption (285). Hence, "consumption tends to be presented as a creative, symbolic force that plays a crucial role in shaping identity […] With an increasing number of commodities and lifestyles on offer, identity comes to be defined as a fluid construct rather than an essential, core category, and one whose formation is a matter of personal choice" (285). The individual's freedom in consumption is ultimately, a reflection of the consumer's fluid identity, for "the ideal of fluid identity is founded on the premise of freedom" (285). It is freedom that allows the individual to reach self-understanding and more importantly, self-governance (285). "Government through freedom," as Nelson Rose states, is largely dependent on the act of consumption (qtd. in Reith 285). The freedom and fluidity of the consumerist identity argued by Reith is also seen in Zena whose consumerist identity grants her the ability to move forward, unchained by planning and procrastination. The fluidity of her identity demands instant gratification; Zena will not pause, delay, or hinder her free-flow movement, should she intend to survive.

The fluidity of Zena's identity discussed in the above paragraph is once again, illustrated on pages 139-141, where Zena describes a summer day spent with her best friend, Maya. Half-way through the 2006 War, Zena and Maya decide to "break the norm, leave the house and head for the beach" (El Khalil 139). Their trip to the beach is an act of rebellion against "the idiocy of war" (139). "If the summer passes by without us going to the beach at least once, I'll join Hezbollah and start fighting back," says

Maya. Therefore, going to the beach is equated with fighting the war; it is an alternative to joining the militia of resistance. In this case, the waters of the pool at the beach act as a therapeutic milieu. Swimming in water combats the feeling of helplessness that overwhelms civilians during the war; it transforms the individual from a passive civilian into an active fighter. Zena fights war with water. If Beirut is sinking as previously described on pages ninety-two till ninety-four, then Zena will fight the sinking by floating. Floating therefore, becomes a metaphor for survival, and the act of floating is repeatedly mentioned on page 141: "It was heaven. We floated on our backs for a while without saying anything. It was good […] she giggled quietly and we just kept floating […] We continued to float," says Zena (141). Therefore, the repeated mentioning of the act of floating represents Zena's battle to survive, a battle she can overcome by surrounding herself with water. By remaining in direct contact with water, Zena, in sync with her fluid surroundings, is capable of rapid flexibility and transformation. Instead of hiding at home, Zena finds refuge at the beach where water helps her challenge the war.

Zena's trip to the beach, in addition to revealing her fluid and reflexive identity, represents her attempt to manipulate the uncontrollable conditions of war. By surrounding herself with water, a flexible and fluid environment, she can execute control over the fluid landscape of the beach. While Lebanese landscapes are subjected to the destructible forces of war, the beach serves as a "fluidscape," as termed by Strang, and Zena's territory, thereby remaining under her influence and control (147). In this sense, the trip to the beach is representative of Zena's desire "to find a refuge, to defend a notion of a bounded place with which [she] can identify" (Tilley 13). Though the beach can never serve as "a bounded place," a fact true of all liquid mediums, it

does however provide an identifiable place of refuge (13). Zena binds herself to the beach in an attempt to bind herself to survival. Moreover, as opposed to battlefields and war zones, i.e., bounded landscapes made static because of routine destruction and death, the beach, as a fluidscape, acts as an evolving and volatile milieu. "The crucial point is that place as a stable, relatively closed or bounded" space as seen in warzones or *warscapes*, "has become more and more problematic in the flux of spatial flows that 'open out' places to the world" (14). In other words, while liquid milieus follow the natural flux of the modern, evolving society, promoting the necessity of a fluid identity, static landscapes bind its people to closed and contained spaces governed by routine, in this case, the routine of war. Furthermore, in "Fluidscapes", Strang argues that "water provides ideas and images of process and change that are intrinsically fluid in nature, underlining a reality that identity is never static" (149). Engulfed by water, Zena finds refuge in her fluid surroundings that necessitate and facilitate the fluid reconstruction of her identity. Similar to Strang, Tilley states the following: "Identities must of necessity be improvising and changing, rather than fixed and rule-bound, intimately related to experience and context" (17). Through her trip to the beach, Zena refuses constrained spaces with all its implications and conditions on identity formation.

Similar to the previously discussed theme of fluids and war, the theme of fluids and rebirth reintroduces readers to Zena's perpetual identity formation. Throughout the novel, readers repeatedly witness Zena's reincarnation at sea, for most of Zena's profound life experiences have taken place against the backdrop of the ocean. Resembling the spiritual rebirth that she witnesses on pages eighteen and nineteen, the following excerpt on page 122 of El Khalil's novel, set during the summer war, reminds

Zena of her initial reincarnation and ultimately, of the fluidity of her fluctuating identity:

> One night, they bombed our electricity plants and there was no light in the city. So, I drove to the sea. I followed the tiny gas lights from the fisherman boats and they lead me down to the Corniche. I got out of the car and walked towards the sea. I wanted to be as close as I could. It was calm and quiet and almost deceased. It was so dark that I could not see the horizon […] I was afraid. It was as if I had walked off the Earth. But it was also extremely breathtaking. That obscurity somehow filled me with love (El Khalil 122).

Zena's experience at sea, i.e., the fear, silence, and darkness described above, resembles Zena's experience of drowning following the sinking of the *Titanic*:

> If truth be told, it wasn't until I started drowning that I became incredibly scared. The fear was not of death, but rather of being in such a dark and expansive space. The sea was so big. So endless. And as I fell deeper, it grew darker; the silence deafening […] I lay at the bottom of the sea for almost five-and-a-half years. I wandered in the darkness all by myself [...] I walked for years to no avail […] I walked and walked until I forgot why I was walking […] I surfaced to life in the form of a baby girl […] (17-19).

A comparison of the above excerpts reveals the similarities of the two experiences at sea. In her description of fear and darkness at the Corniche, to begin with, Zena makes the following statement: "It was so dark that I could not see the horizon […] I was afraid" (122). The overwhelming fear and darkness experienced at the Corniche resembles the time spent at the bottom of the ocean after the sinking of the *Titanic*: "The fear was not of death, but rather of being in such a dark and expansive place" (17). Moreover, the silence of the ocean at the Corniche is reminiscent of the silent waters during Zena's drowning, for Zena describes the Corniche Sea as follows: "It was calm and quiet and almost deceased" (122). The same deadly silence is used to

characterize the waters that Zena drowned in: “And as I fell deeper, it grew darker; the silence deafening” (17).

In addition to the aforementioned similarities, Zena’s repeated description of the act of walking towards and/or through the ocean is illustrated in both experiences. “I got out of the car and walked towards the sea […] It was as if I had walked off the Earth,” states Zena on page 122. The frequent act of walking on the Corniche reminds Zena of the time she wandered the bottom of the ocean on pages eighteen and nineteen: “I walked for years to no avail […] I walked and walked until I forgot why I was walking.” Moreover, both experiences take place during times of trauma: drowning after the sinking of the *Titanic* and the 2006 War. It is arguable that the Corniche experience, similar in its traumatic setting and description to her spiritual reincarnation, not only reminds Zena of her initial rebirth, but also reveals Zena’s desire to experience a metaphorical reincarnation. Through the fear, silence, darkness, and trauma, what Zena sees in the waters of the ocean is her awakening, her rise from the battlefields and the hatred of war. The Mediterranean, regardless of its “deceased” tranquility and calmness, “somehow fill[s her] with love” and life (122). With all its contradictions, the sea represents a constant cycle of life and death, for the lifelessly calm waters are always followed by love and “extremely breathtaking beauty” (122). Hence, the Mediterranean, with its endless living and dying, represents reincarnation at sea and is indicative of Zena’s spiritual reincarnation where she “surfaced to life in the form of a baby girl” (19). Zena’s trip to the Corniche represents her desperate desire to rise once again.

Similar to the theme of fluids and rebirth, the theme of fluids and therapy highlights Zena’s dependency on the ocean. By once again referring to the Corniche

trip described above, one is capable of drawing an analogy between sea water and therapy, between Zena and her attempt to achieve a therapeutic state of self-understanding. On pages 123-124, Zena makes known to readers her therapeutic experience at the seashore. Before the emotional breakdown illustrated on page 124, Zena describes her unstable psychological state in the following lines:

> I began to tremble. And then there it was … in a flash, time squeezed itself in two. I felt a great pressure surge through my body. A crack of thunder filled my head. My throat felt like it was going to explode. My ears like they were vomiting blood […] I closed my eyes and a white light flooded my vision. I cupped my hands over my ears and bent down as if to duck an illusionary projectile (123).

In the excerpt above, readers witness Zena's emotional struggles; it is a raging inner battle. Zena's description of the psychological battle she faces reveals the effect that the summer war has had on her. She has internalized the war, swallowed it whole. The description of her senses and emotions are words used to describe war: "explode," blood," and "projectile" (123).

Overwhelmed by her raging emotions, Zena finally breaks down in the following short paragraph which is located on page 124 and concludes chapter thirteen: ""Don't resist," the sea whispered to me. I didn't this time. I fell to the ground and cried and cried and screamed. I screamed into the darkness, asking how long did I have to continue living in fear like this? How long were we, Beirut and I, going to continue to be raped like this?" It is arguable that Zena, attempting to escape the war that has taken over her country and her identity, finds comfort in the throes of the ocean that serves as the medium for Zena's therapy. "Don't resist," the ocean reminds Zena (124). At sea, resistance is replaced by a psychological breakthrough, an emotional release through crying and screaming. In other words, Zena experiences a discharge of

emotions through the act of screaming and crying. Moreover, when the ocean brings out tears in Zena, it allows her to purify herself, to achieve a state of inner purity. "Purity refers to a quality of being. Even when this quality appears on a being's surface, it is perceived as the manifestation of something deep inside. Its beauty can be lost only through a corruption at the being's core. There is no one word to say what is then lost. The loss can be expressed only with a negative compound: we cannot help but say "impure"" (Illich 28). It is through the purifying properties of water, that Zena can attempt to cleanse her impure psyche, tainted by the traumas of war.

A therapeutic state is achieved through the process of reincarnation. As witnessed in the Corniche trip, Zena resorts to the ocean in an attempt to be reborn, to wipe her slate clean and commence anew. Zena's close proximity to the ocean reveals her belief in water's healing and purifying powers. "The purity that water restores or confers has a special connotation of freshness and transparency that transforms the innermost being and so it is often associated with re-birth" (Illich 28). Thus, through her frequent trips to the seashore, Zena attempts to heal via water's transformative properties and its ability to serve as a fluid medium for reincarnation. One can hence argue that Zena visits the seashore with an intention to die so that she can be reborn. In this case, taking into consideration Zena's intention to die at sea, seawater serves as the "ceremony water" used "in the washing of the dead" (29). It is only through purification and cleansing that the body is free from its worldly chains (30). "[O]nly bodies so washed will not stay glued to their environment, will not remain prisoners of this world" (30). Therefore, while at the seashore, when Zena reportedly "turn[s her] back to the sea and fe[els the] foam spray on [her] neck," Zena arguably experiences the commencement of the purification ceremony (El Khalil 123). She prepares herself for

the upcoming process of reincarnation, for "once the dead […] has been washed, [it] can set out on a journey" (Illich 30).

C. Unnatural Fluids

Unnatural fluids in the form of drinks, not unlike natural fluids, portray Zena's dependency on liquids which reflect the fluidity of her identity construction. Throughout El Khalil's novel, readers are familiar with Zena's drinking addiction which is clearly expressed by the protagonist herself and described in detail. Half-way through chapter three, on pages twenty-two and twenty-three, Zena describes her addiction in the following lines:

> I began to drink. A lot […] I often passed out. Or, more accurately, blacked out […] I drank to gain strength […] I drank to live a level of existence that I could not find without drink. It helped me find a voice. And keep it […] All I wanted was to feel alive. To sing. To dance. To drink. Life was changing so quickly and I wanted to change with every second of it […] The world was changing and we had to adapt (El Khalil 22-23).

The above excerpt, which is located after her resurrection following the sinking of the *Titanic* in chapter two and before her September 11 experience in chapter four, reveals the importance of drinks in Zena's life. It is drinking that aids her recovery from the trauma of drowning, and it is drinking that will help her overcome the difficulty of being an Arab in New York on September 11. In this sense, though the excerpt under study does not take place during the war, it reveals the role of drinks that promise to help Zena in coping with the upcoming war, just as it did with the aforementioned experiences.

A closer look at the excerpt brings to attention several themes related to fluids. The theme of fluids and rebirth, to begin with, is made evident in the opening line of the

above selection: “I began to drink. A lot […] I often passed out. Or, more accurately, blacked out” (22). Arguably, when Zena passes out or blacks out, she experiences a form of temporary death. Similar to her previous desire for death at sea, as seen in the Corniche trip, Zena drinks to die. Upon dying, she can rise once again. She can “live a level of existence that [she] could not find without drink” (22). “All I wanted was to feel alive,” states Zena (23). With drinking, Zena can experience a series of reincarnations, illustrating once again, the fluidity of her identity which is made necessary by her liquid life. In the closing lines of the above excerpt, Zena’s following statement introduces another theme, that is, the theme of a liquid life: “Life was changing so quickly and I wanted to change with every second of it […] The world was changing and we had to adapt” (23). In other words, Zena drinks to maintain a fluid identity capable of adapting to a rapidly-changing world. If Zena mimics the fluidity of her environment, then she is capable of survival.

The theme of the fluidity of identity is revisited on page ninety-seven when Zena, upon telling Maya about her binge-drinking with an ex-lover, reports the following: “We drank all the time. We drank wine. We drank whiskey. We drank vodka. We would drink and drink until we were blind with desire. With him, I felt alive because I was always so close to death” (El Khalil 97). What one notices in Zena’s description is the fluidity of identity made possible through reincarnation. By drinking, Zena experiences a series of living and dying, for she “felt alive because [she] was always so close to death” (97). Similarly, drinking brings out her sexuality or heightens her sexual desires. If said desires are satisfied through sex, an indicator of fertility and life, then an analogy is successfully drawn between drinking and living.

The cataloguing of different drinks and the repetitive use of the verb 'drink' represent Zena's desire for prosperity.

Identity is no longer a one-size-fits-all garment that Zena can just don, but rather a garment tailored to her specifications, given that these specifications undergo day-to-day alterations as the human self changes from one moment to the next. Similar to her paintings that await the stroke of an artistic hand, her identity is a blank canvas that demands constant attention. Aware of her daily responsibilities of identity formation, Zena arguably drinks to make easier the frequent task of self-construction. By consuming liquids, she attempts to become more fluid, hence facilitating the aforementioned construction.

Another theme brought to readers' attention by Zena's drinking addiction is the theme of fluids and forgetfulness. On pages ninety-four and ninety-five, while Zena and Maya secretly drink from the bottle of white wine in the privacy of Zena's room, a conversation takes place, revealing the relationship between drinking and induced amnesia:

> "Maya, I can't keep on like this. I have to get better. It's like, one day, I was convinced that I was going to change Lebanon. I was so strong. I could stand up to anyone. And now look, all I do is drink. I want to forget, but I don't know what I am forgetting."
> "Zena, I promise you it will get better soon […] Why do you hold on to the war so much – you weren't even here! You don't have to solve all of Lebanon's problems yourself. Why are you so guilt ridden? […] What happened to Beirut did not happen to you. You cannot assume that grief" (El Khalil 94).

In the conversation above, Zena admits to using alcohol as a means of forgetting the bitterness of the Lebanese Civil War. Zena expresses feelings of guilt concerning a war that she has not even witnessed. "Why do you hold on to the war so much – you weren't even here!" cries Maya. Regardless of not witnessing the Civil War, Zena is

overwhelmed with guilt because she fails to let go of the war. She can't "turn a blind eye" or "not care, just a little," as advised by Maya (95). Contrary to what Maya tells her, everything that has happened to Beirut has ultimately happened to Zena, for she and Beirut are one and the same. Therefore, assuming responsibility for Beirut and struggling with guilt due to her inability "to solve all of Lebanon's problems [her]self," Zena resorts to drinking to drown out the festering guilt (94). Her struggles of living in a post-war country are similarly expressed by El Khalil who, on February 28 at Art 13, London's contemporary art fair, makes the following statement:

> The problems with trying to live in a post war city are many. Nothing works the way it should. Not even the people. We live under the threat that at any time, things could flare up again. We live under the constant humiliation of the horrible things we did to each other only a few years earlier. I remember the stories of the Holiday Inn Hotel. It is one of the highest buildings in Beirut. During the civil war, it was taken over by a militia who found it trendy to throw people off the rooftop and try and shoot them in mid air (aub.edu.lb/alumni/documents).

The statement made by El Khalil is expressive of Zena's reaction to post-war Beirut. There is a need for Lebanon to regain its previous splendor, to recover from the savageness of war so that its citizens can commence the healing process. However, nothing is as it should be or rather, as it was prior to the war. The people have changed and everyone is cloaked in guilt over past war crimes, having to "live under the constant humiliation of the horrible things [they] did to each other only a few years earlier," as El Khalil states above. Consequently, in an attempt to forget, Zena drinks, once again, relying on liquids to reach a therapeutic state. However, how exactly can Zena remember the events of a war she has not witnessed herself? Are her memories not stories spread by word of mouth, passed down from one generation to the next? Like

"the stories of the Holiday Inn Hotel" that El Khalil reportedly remembers, how accurate are the memories that Zena claims to have?

"As Lebanese, we're constantly playing with our memories, either forgetting or remembering […] the book is all about this thin line between reality and dream; how you can think something is true or that it actually happened when in fact it's a memory you have created," El Khalil states in an interview with Emanuelle Degli Esposti, published in *Oasis Magazine* on October 23, 2012 (32). "I did that a lot in the book: took separate incidents that happened in real life and stitched them together to make a new memory. The problem now is that the new version is as real to me as the 'real' version. Sometimes I don't even remember which is which. This is what it means to be Lebanese," El Khalil continues. In other words, Zena, resembling El Khalil and other Lebanese citizens living in post-war Beirut, falls into the trap of fabricating memories and then, believing the memories as if they were real. The stories become war narratives so carefully "stitched" together that one fails to recognize fabrication from fact, reality from recalled tales. In this sense, are Zena's memories not fabricated stories residing in between the realms of reality and dream? One may argue that what Zena tries so desperately to forget is merely stories of a constructed reality.

Regardless of the potential inaccuracy of her memories, the guilt that Zena experiences forces her to drink. "I want to forget but I don't know what I'm forgetting," states Zena (El Khalil 94). By drinking, she forgets the civil war. Zena forgets the war narratives she considers personal memories. With drinking, there is no guilt, only a therapeutic medium of fluidity. There is therapy in fluids that allow her to make of herself what she desires. The definition of therapy experienced by Zena resides in Bauman's theory of consumption and the consumerist individual whose survival in

modern life depends on rapid and frequent consumerism. "The task is consumption, and consumption is an utterly, irredeemably individual pastime, a string of sensations which can be experienced – lived through – only subjectively," argues Bauman in *Liquid Modernity* (97). Consequently, by drinking, Zena undergoes a highly subjective experience that involves individualized sensations and impressions. By engaging in continuous consumption, Zena experiences therapy in knowing she can swiftly move through modernity marked by "the emancipation of time from space" (112). In Zena's modern milieu, "the relation between time and space" is best defined as "processual, mutable and dynamic, not preordained and stagnant" (113). With fluids, travel through time and space is arguably accelerated and facilitated. Furthermore, fluidity creates a blank slate or tabula rasa. There are endless possibilities of identity construction and reformations that prevent Zena from regressing into the state of guilt inflicted by the trauma of the Civil War.

In a world of inconsistencies, the only reliable element or factor in Zena's life is the free-flowing flux of fluids. In their natural and unnatural states, fluids carry Zena across the battlefield, the bombs, and the bloodshed. Fluidity becomes Zena's lifeline; it is a means of survival and therapy. "Is it possible these days to just float? And breathe? Not plan anything?" asks Zena (El Khalil 155). Fluids make this kind of living possible. An unplanned and unpredictable lifestyle, a sense of floating existence takes over Zena only via her constant and direct contact with liquids. Through her drinking addiction and frequent trips to the sea, Zena can heal by undergoing an endless cycle of rebirths. The Mediterranean is her refuge when home seems to have deserted her. Drinking wipes from her mind the traumas of war and rids Zena of the guilt caused

by civil war, of her inability to save Beirut and ease its suffering. Only through fluids can Zena assume a fluid identity capable of prosperity in a fluid life.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Set in the midst of war, destruction, and loss, Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water* (2007) and Zena El Khalil's *Beirut, I Love You* (2009) depict the lives of Aneesa and Zena respectively, and who upon years of living in exile, return to the homeland that is their beloved Lebanon. Through the use of the recurrent motifs illustrated in writing and liquids, Jarrar and El Khalil trace the character development of their female protagonists as they strive for identity construction and self-awareness. Both fluid in nature, writing and liquids provide a flexible milieu for Aneesa's and Zena's quest for identity and therapy.

"It has occurred to me that, along with many other Lebanese of my generation, I have always defined my life in terms of "before" and "after" the civil war that began in1975 and did not end until 15 years later," writes Jarrar in "Family at War" (timesonline.co.uk). "Now that another war has come along, I'm not sure what to think. This is becoming something like an in-between life," states Jarrar in reference to the 2006 War (timesonline.co.uk). Similar to Jarrar, Aneesa, having suffered the loss of her brother during the war, defines herself in terms of the civil war and the trauma it has inflicted on her and her family. Living in a state of in-betweenness, Aneesa searches for her fragmented identity in the many grey areas of her life, for she lives in-between London and Beirut, exile and home, and more importantly, along the border separating the pre-Bassam and post-Bassam phases of her life. In other words, identity is a constant struggle, a patchwork or bricolage of broken selves that Aneesa attempts to piece together.

In El Khalil's novel, Zena, sharing Aneesa's need for self-formation, embarks on a similar journey, trying to locate herself amidst the battle-zone that has become Beirut. To Zena, homeland represents instability. Each day brings with it the incessant need for self-validation. Every waking morning is a resurrection, a blank slate of new opportunities, a person born anew. "She shot my heart over and over. It was always a surprise. It was always an end and a new beginning. The morning after a bottle of vodka. A rebirth," explains Zena about her beloved Beirut (El Khalil 86). Living in a constant series of rebirths, Zena faces the daily challenge of self-formation, a relentless identity struggle.

Set in a modern world of rapid change and evolution, it comes as no surprise that both Aneesa and Zena are repeatedly forced to answer the following questions: Who am I today and who will I be tomorrow? Where and how can I define myself in terms of a shifting and unstable world marked by disruption, disorder and mobility? Identity therefore, is first and foremost, the hardest struggle facing today's individual. As the borders of the self and meanings of homeland and exile change, how can the individual reach a clear definition of the human self? "Meanings are on the move everywhere: they copulate, proliferate, collide and enter surprising alliances, mix and graft, give birth to mutants and monsters," states Bauman in "Identity – Then, Now, What For?" (216). With a plethora of multiple, shifting meanings, the identity struggle is exacerbated. As argued by Tomasz Szkudlarek, "our identities wander contradictory symbols, they emerge as hybrids from displaced meanings prised off from their original contexts" (qtd. in Bauman 216).

Struggling under the burden of their paradoxical identities, Aneesa and Zena resort to writing. In a shifting world of contradictions, writing acts as a constant refuge

that houses their fluid identities. Written texts in the form of letters, blogs, and bullet-point notes become documents for self-valediction, a narrative that is at once, representative of personal and communal history. "History is not just numbers, dates and facts, but equally the telling of stories, and the blending of events into salient narratives," states Sune Haugbolle in "The Historiography and the Memory of the Lebanese Civil War" (10). In the writing of these narratives, Aneesa and Zena write themselves into existence and forge themselves into the history of Lebanon, its wars and peace. Beirut, therefore, acts as a mutual theme in the works of Jarrar and El Khalil, for "it serves as muse and victim, a place of belonging and refuge, a paradoxical city that neither surrenders itself to resignation nor defeat" (Alghadeer 61). Mimicking the strength of their country, Aneesa and Zena demonstrate the same resilience in their writing, their written works functioning as *selfscapes*, a literary milieu where war writers confront their multiple selves. Aneesa and Zena, as fragmented war writers, are best described by Etel Adnan in the following words: "We carry inside our bodies –like explosives –all the deep troubles that befall our countries […] We are the scribes of a scattered self, living fragments, as if the parts of the self were writing down the bits and ends of a perception never complete" (qtd. in Alghadeer 62). Hence, war writers exemplified in Aneesa and Zena, torn by trauma and devastation, search for the many pieces of their scattered selves, their writing serving as a fluid documentation of an ultimately fragmented existence.

In addition to documenting their broken selves, Aneesa's and Zena's writing acts as a war narrative that validates female existence during the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 War. Through their writing, the protagonists write themselves into the Lebanese wars as active participants, women who have suffered and survived to share

their stories. Moreover, Aneesa and Zena use their personal narratives as a constant reminder of the war, their written texts attesting to memories and experiences of war. They write to remember the pain and suffering. They write to fight state-sponsored amnesia. "They tr[y] to capture a part of the war, however small, and make it convey the pulse of the violence," argues cooke in "Women Write War" (54). "Language is the reservoir of collective remembrance. Writing cannot look elsewhere for its scaffolding," continues cooke (57). Thus, by writing about war, Aneesa and Zena can remember the war. If they can successfully remember the war, then the healing process may commence. The various genres of written texts, be it letters, blogs, or bullet-point notes, act as a form of autobiographical writing or a collection of life narratives that validate the fragmented self. When women write about war, what is of importance is the "affirmation of a fluid, elusive identity rather than idealization or aggrandizement of a static self," states cooke in "Lebanon at Bay" (107). Through the affirmation of the fluid self via fluid writing, Aneesa and Zena find therapy and the promise of self-continuity.

Similar to the fluidity in writing, liquids in the novels of Jarrar and El Khalil reflect the protagonists' search for identity and therapy. The never-ending presence of both natural and unnatural fluids acts as a milieu for self-depiction and self-healing. In a world of change and upheaval, fluids flow across battlegrounds and minefields. In wartime and peace, the ceaseless flux of liquids is a fluid abode that withstands time and place. Life in liquidity, as seen in Aneesa and Zena, is a life that promises and necessitates progression. In a borderless world, fluids flow over uncharted lands and accompany the always-wanderer who is never at home, the pilgrim exiled in his own country.

By using writing and liquids as leitmotifs, Jarrar and El Khalil grant their female protagonists the ability to rise from the dead, their former dead self, that is. Living in fluidity, be it through writing or fluids, brings with it an endless chain of rebirths where Aneesa and Zena can find comfort and therapy in a life of blank slates, a constant series of opportunities and new horizons. For the highly fragmented individual broken down by war, Jarrar's and El Khalil's fluid motifs promise a silver lining in an otherwise insecure modern world.

The writing of this thesis necessitates a thorough study and understanding of female war writing, drawing heavily on the works of miriam cooke. In regards to cooke's works, her books titled *War's Other Voices* (1987) and *Women and the War Story* (1996) shed light on the female role during wartime. In her former work, cooke attempts to answer the following questions: "What is the relation between war and literature? What possibilities are created, what restraints imposed by language? What is the role of a group defined as minority – whether by economic/ social indices or by religious affiliation or by gender? How does a minority participate in war, and also contribute to the literature resulting from it?" (1). Living in a war-torn country and patriarchal society, Lebanese women were previously doubly marginalized, defined as the weaker sex and depicted as a minority group of a third-world country. However, as argued by cooke, women of the post-modern era have become active participants of wars, for they "have embarked on war-telling. They are no longer merely passive readers of such stories. Nor are they passive protagonists […] Nor even marginally active protagonists" (2).

By taking to pen and paper, women have become writers of war and documenters of history, especially in Lebanon where the violence and destruction of the

war fueled women's urgency to narrate their experiences. Such is the situation with Jarrar's and El Khalil's female protagonists who used their writing to simultaneously transform themselves and their lives. "The urgency and the violence of the war drove them to portray some of their most intense, traumatic experiences. Breaking out of their silence, women were finally writing their own stories. As they saw the shape of their lives develop and grow under their pens, they came to understand who they had been, and what they could become" (cooke 2-3). By reading cooke's works, one comes to an understanding of war writers, in this case Aneesa and Zena, the motive behind their writing, and ultimately, how "war, the organization of violence against another person, demands to be written" (25).

Similar to *War's Other Voices*, cooke's *Women and the War Story*, as the title implies, highlights women's war narratives, offering an in-depth and expansive study of women as warriors and documenters of their personal war experiences. Coining the term "herstories," cooke argues that "there is no one history, no one story about war, that has greater claim to truth but that history is made up of multiple stories […] which emanate from and then reconstruct events" (4). Juxtaposing female war writers against male war writers, cooke discusses the emergence of a new female war space, a reconstruction of previously-established dichotomies of war and gender (14-15). "Interested in the blurring of binaries in contemporary wars," cooke reveals the works of women writers who, challenging the status quo, fashion their own war stories, their chaotic narrative styles and non-linear plots an expression of the disorder and destruction of their war experiences (15). Drawing on cooke's theories of war and gender, this thesis depicts Aneesa's and Zena's writing as "herstories" that solidify female existence in the Lebanese Civil War and 2006 War, respectively.

By depicting the characters of Aneesa and Zena as influential women writers, Jarrar and El Khalil, through their post-war Lebanese novels, have created a "herstory" within a "herstory". At the heart of the stories of the aforementioned female characters, as this thesis argues, lies the desperate need to define one's self amidst a turbulent world of rapid change and upheaval. Through the use of Zygmunt Buaman's theory of fluidity, this thesis attempted to demonstrate the fluidity of the female self as depicted by Aneesa and Zena whose search for a unified and single identity is an ultimately never-ending quest. By relying on Bauman's arguments of a liquid modern life, this thesis portrayed the female protagonists in a post-war world of modernity where there exists, as discussed by Bauman in *Liquid Times*, a "collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting, and the disappearance or weakening of social structures in which thinking, planning and acting could be inscribed for a long time to come," thus, "lead[ing] to a splicing of both political history and individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes which are in principle infinite" (3). Similar to the liquidity of the modern world in which they reside, Aneesa's and Zena's writing is of a fluid nature, this fluidity serving as a mirror of the writers' inevitably dissevered selves. That being said, this thesis made a humble and novel attempt at introducing Bauman's modernist theories to post-war Anglophone Lebanese novels, emphasizing the link between a modern world and a modern self which, try as it might, is never solidified or singular. In their quest for self-definition, Aneesa's and Zena's writing, as shown in this paper, fluctuates in sync with the protagonists' multifaceted, fluid selves, and in this process and the perpetual unknown of modern life, rests the potential for therapy.

In its discussion of writing therapy, this thesis drew on the works of critics of many approaches. Regardless of these differences, all these approaches "presume that

of a self which needs to become conscious of its internal conflicts to bring them into relationship and harmony" (Jolly 48). Similarly, in these approaches exists the notion of the self that is simultaneously "defined through emotional blockages" and its resilience or the ability to "change" (49). It is arguable that emotional barriers or obstacles can be overcome through writing, and the act of writing itself reminds the writer of his/her ability to evolve and adapt to a liquid milieu. In a fluid and fleeting world, writing, in all its forms and genres, helps the individual answer questions about his/her rapidly-changing self. In other words, as argued by Furedi, "social fragmentation and fluidity, individuation and change constantly throw up questions like 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?'" (qtd. in Jolly 51). Similarly, this thesis benefited from Michael White and David Epston's theory of narrative therapy which is made clear in the following lines: "The construction and reconstruction of our life narratives, in an attempt to understand and give meaning to events in our lives and construct our identities, have become the object of postmodern therapeutic conversations exemplified in narrative therapy" (qtd. in Knoetze 461). In other words, and in accordance with White and Epson's theory of therapeutic narratives, this thesis demonstrated the benefits of writing therapy attempted by the female protagonists in Jarrar's and El Khalil's novels. Through the close study of the protagonists' writing, this thesis demonstrated the advantages and motives behind writing therapy witnessed in Aneesa and Zena, emphasizing a written text's ability "to highlight unique outcomes and amplify alternative life stories and narratives, to encourage the shaping of new and preferred identities" (462).

Despite the previously stated limitations, this thesis offered a critical analysis of the aforesaid novels by Jarrar and El Khalil, drawing attention to works that have

scarcely been subjected to academic study. It can therefore, serve as a secondary resource for future papers and dissertations concerning the works of Jarrar and El Khalil. Finally, this thesis made an innovative link between the fluidity of the self, modern milieu, and writing in post-war Lebanese novels, a correlation that has not been attempted by previous studies.

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