



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE EVOLUTION OF IMAGES DURING THE LEBANESE  
CIVIL WAR IN NATHALIE ABI-EZZI'S *A GIRL MADE OF DUST*  
AND ZEINA ABIRACHED'S *A GAME FOR SWALLOWS*

by  
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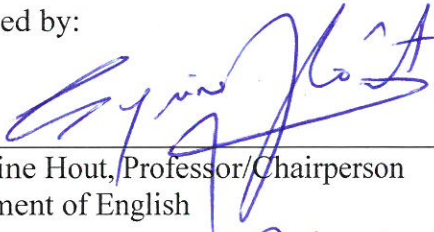
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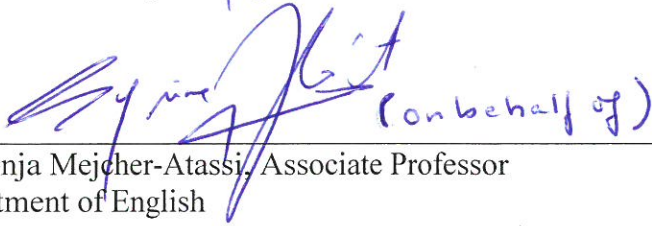
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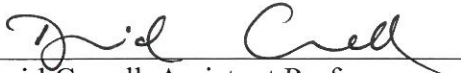
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I wish you were here. I wish you could be here, to start with, on my graduation day.

# AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Nibal Ramzi Abou Mrad for Master of Arts  
Major: English Literature

Title: The Evolution of Images during the Lebanese Civil War in Nathalie Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust* and Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*

This thesis discusses two postwar Anglophone Lebanese narratives: Nathalie Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust* (2008) and Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows* (2007; translated in 2012), a literary novel and a graphic novel, respectively. It questions the Lebanese civil war's effects and outcomes on children and their families through the study of images from the main young female characters' perspectives in their narrations.

Postwar Anglophone narratives are numerous, since the war caused a literary outburst and unleashed the younger generation's creativity and literary experimentations. The thesis focuses on the psychological aspects of war's effects on children. They grow in resilience and empathy, they develop emotional intelligence, altruism and hope. They also definitely grow in their experiences through horrendous life conditions, losing their childhood innocence in the process.

Both works are extremely rich in imagery, whether verbal or pictorial, and this study aims at tracing the transformation of their main characters from a stage of childhood to one of adulthood, through a thorough close reading and personal interpretations of these images. They are examples of how the writers' narratives are dominated by their memories and/or postmemories of the war years they have spent in Beirut. As such, the evaluation of their verbal and pictorial representations demonstrates the children's forced and early maturation, in a context where time stops, space constantly shrinks, and yet they don't stop decaying.

The research conducted aims at asserting that both genres, the literary and the graphic novels, represent a form of resistance, memory, and individual growth, in the context of the Lebanese civil war. Therefore, the primary texts studied lead us to new questions to be figured out in future studies: whether the analysis of other images, in other works, about other wars, also result in describing journeys of evolution, which may then arguably also qualify as journeys of forceful and accelerated growth.

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*To Siham, my beloved mother  
Whose adoring soul sustains me still  
I wish you were here*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 1975, Lebanon's biggest evil arose from within itself – the fifteen-year Lebanese civil war which left a wrecked country in its aftermath and most importantly a broken people. Now, over a quarter of a century following its end in 1990, the Lebanese are still trying to cope with their painful past, one that they had to grow up with, fear, dream of, imagine, or even adopt as one's own.

The influence of the Lebanese civil war on people's lives became more and more visible once it started to spread in Lebanese artworks, whether through painting, literature, music, photography or other media. Miriam Cooke states that a lot of painters, sculptors, musicians, poets and writers responded creatively to the war and tried to do what the political and economic analysts could not. They tried to capture the pulse of the violence (4). Artists seem to have the urge to talk about the past, whether they lived through it or were told about it to the extent they ended up embracing it as part of their own past experiences. They picture the war, its brutality, dangers and consequences. As a matter of fact, much has been written about Lebanese Anglophone postwar narratives: the way they describe the war, its drastic traumatizing outcomes, as well as the ways in which a certain traumatized generation can give birth to and transfer new traumas to younger generations. In *Postcolonial Comics*, Lena Irmgard Merhej speaks of historical traumas being expressed in “stories of suffering, resilience and resistance” (208).

Moreover, the July-August 2006 war with Israel has also shown the continuity of this artistic outburst. Literary narratives continued to prevail, giving writers the chance to concretize warfare. Carol N. Fadda-Conrey quotes Nubar Hovsepian who claims that literary works act as “soft weapons” that discuss the war as something lived and concrete, rather than an abstract experience (163). Nonetheless, the 2006 war also witnessed the beginning of an immensely impactful medium – the blogosphere - for following the political conflict, as well as for voicing people’s opinions, struggles, and the war’s effects on their daily lives. “Blogs became the medium of choice for many who wanted to follow and understand the conflict,” and similarly, Harb cites W. Ward, who states that the Israel-Hizbollah 2006 war has been the most blogged about war in history (255). It also paved the way for alternative media to break the silence and for new art forms to emerge, such as comics and photography, all for the purpose of showing various perspectives of experiencing the war which constitutes an effort to face and reconcile with an upsetting past (Fadda-Conrey 169). The importance of speaking about wars is consequently proven to be necessary and vital. As Roseanne Khalaf notes, many Lebanese youth highlight the importance of having venues where they could speak up about wars, express, voice themselves and be heard (50).

#### **A. Collective Amnesia and Postmemory**

Unfortunately, the youth’s desire to come to terms with past wars is hindered by an imposed collective amnesia in Lebanon. “Instead of freeing up discourses of remembering, it seems that memories of the war were effectively silenced, giving rise to an overdetermined collective amnesia informed by political and commercial expediency” (Launchbury 457). Nevertheless, young generations seem to have a tendency to figure out the past, and are

driven by a curiosity that pushes them to unveil it. Doing so displays the dangers and risks of what Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory.” Young people, “descendants of victim survivors” (*The Generation of Postmemory* 3) get to a point where they remember a past that they have never experienced, that was never theirs. Postmemory is the result of children’s describing, analyzing and re-living their parents’ past. They internalize the past of previous generations to the extent that they endanger their present lives by being caught up in it, and by building their present lives on the basis of a past long gone. They therefore risk embracing painful traumas that could jeopardize their own lives. Unfortunately enough, this attachment to the past and its continuity in one’s present have evident effects on the lives of many Lebanese youth. Nigel Hunt discusses how young generations risk losing their identities between past and present, as they try to build the latter by building on the past (105). Related to this point, Hirsch confirms that “to grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation” (“The Generation of Postmemory” 107).

Likewise, Craig Larkin talks about the memory of a Lebanese generation who have grown up conquered not by traumatic happenings but by narrations of events that preceded their birth (615). As an example of this, he showcases a young boy called Rami who says that family stories of the Lebanese civil war continue to haunt his present existence as well as disrupt his perceptions and attitudes towards life (619). Moreover, he explores the civil war legacy and how the youth in particular deal with their national past, highlighting how some long to remember while others hopelessly want to forget. Furthermore, Larkin confers

the limitations of traumatic postmemory and its impact on the children's identity formation, historical consciousness, and social interaction. They find it very hard to situate their lives between an irredeemable past and an unimaginable future, out of which comes the great need to examine how they seek to resist, subvert, or reimagine their family histories of political conflicts and violence. Such are the struggles of what may then be called third-generation members, very different from second-generation members who are to be discussed next.

### **B. Second-Generation Literature**

A remarkable number of then children and teenagers during the Lebanese civil war seek to reconstruct and embrace their pasts in their present in and through second-generation writings and narratives. In their literary works, they include trauma, pain, as well as a desire to build a new Lebanon (Lang 151). They therefore try to come to terms with their past, against all forms of state-sponsored amnesia. Hiyam Yared says that writing rescued her from all that is unspoken, from imposed silence. Therefore, literature saves the writer from the suppression of war memory applied by the country's political and economic elites (Lang 35). Likewise, the civil war destroyed childhood memories and places and replaced them with an emptiness and void that are extremely hard to face. However, Iman Humaydan states that art and literature could be helpful in order to retrieve these lost places and memories. In this way, writers prove their commitment to war memory and work towards reconstructing it in their literary works (Lang 165). Moreover, second-generation writers express the effects that the war had on them by discussing the unpleasant events that they have witnessed and try to find ways to repair whatever could be saved. On that Marianne Hirsch states:

second-generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma. They are shaped by the child's confusion and responsibility, by the desire to repair, and by the consciousness that the child's own existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss. ("The Generation of Postmemory" 112)

Not only does second-generation literature want to reclaim the past but it also wants to condemn the war, as Abbas Beydoun affirms (Lang 127). In order to do so, writers and artists begin to reflect reality as it really is, and "blood, violence, and destruction, and the visible and invisible wounds the war had inflicted on the population, had become the focus of literary production" (Lang127). They start to convey Lebanon's bare and brutal reality even better than history books could, where Lebanon is no longer idealized but is ferocious and bloody (Lang 38). In "Art on a Green Line", Johny Alam says that artists vividly display or write about everyday life experiences in war, to the extent that "lines between truth and fiction, past and present, memory and history, home and exile, and personal and collective trauma are blurred."

This artistic and literary outbreak during and following the Lebanese civil war is claimed to have a cathartic and liberating effect on writers and society as a whole. Literature thus heals the wounds inflicted on the people by the war and by the Lebanese political system. For instance, Iman Humaydan states that literature allows her to free herself of the repressed sufferings of war. She believes that through writing, she extracts pain out of her by

putting it on paper. It helps her to let go of the violence that the war did to her and to her mind, as well as to her general state of being (Lang 155).

In addition, not only does literature have a cathartic effect on writers' lives, but by allowing readers to have more than one perspective about a certain incident, it also permits them to get involved and understand it even better. "Mieke Bal suggests that deployment of narratives when each party gives its own version of a single event can contribute towards a more complete understanding of a conflict" (Irmgard Merhej, 208). Moreover, Lang claims that writers believe that discussing the horrors of the past and addressing them would allow a society to have a better and more peaceful future, and would prevent such terrible events from happening again. They believe that the rationale behind the commitment to memory remains unaffected: to remember the war is the only way of breaking the vicious circle of repetitive sectarian fights, and the sole way to future peaceful co-existence (Lang 152).

### ***1. Postwar Lebanese Novels***

This commitment to war memory mentioned earlier is discussed in various types of literary genres. However, many state that it is the novel that best embraces the topic of the Lebanese civil war, its truthful reality, as well as its consequences on the people. Lang says that it is the novel genre specifically that has been equated with civil war literature since the 1980s (2). Moreover, writers opine that the novel is now widely perceived to be the most important genre of Arabic literature, replacing poetry. They also add that the civil war novel is considered to be the beginning of a suitable Lebanese novelistic literary tradition, and that is because the Lebanese civil war triggered writers to experiment with both genre and content in their literary works. It inspired writers to react artistically to the destruction in

Lebanon of lives, families, and institutions, which pushed them to experiment with new techniques and literary forms. Syrine Hout writes: “Elias Khoury believes that, paradoxically, the bloody conflict facilitated the birth of the modern experimental Lebanese novel because the protracted violence broke many social, sexual, religious and moral taboos and thus paved the way towards narrative innovation in both form and content” (*Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction* 1).

Furthermore, novels are proven to be forms of truthful discourses as Rabee Jaber states that it is the only literary genre that is up to the task of discovering truth (Lang 39). However, contemporary Lebanese novelists not only have the intention of transmitting events, but also aim at engaging their readers. They transmit a certain version of life and of how war was experienced. Hout quotes Patricia Sarrafian Ward who says that “the novel speaks truthfully about growing up in war, suffering from depression, and what it is like to leave one’s homeland” (“Cultural Hybridity” 332). Likewise, Hout states that Anglophone Lebanese novels do not claim to be historical. They do not focus on the historical narration of events, but rather on the effects of such events and experiences on people’s lives and memories (“Cultural Hybridity” 332). Consequently, novelists convey acute observations about lives affected by war. Their characters make it easier for readers to understand how it feels like to undergo its turbulent events , by highlighting how protagonists “end up half mad, impoverished, alienated, drug addicted, and or dead” (“Cultural Hybridity” 333). Elias Khoury writes: “the war led to a new wave of novels and a new way of thinking about Lebanese society... The specificity of these novels is that they provide a social testimony of what went on in Lebanon” (Lang 41).

## *2. Postwar Lebanese Comics*

Besides novels, comics are also a major genre which abounds in images and representations of the Lebanese civil war. In fact, war narratives are a dominant genre in Lebanese adult comics, which are the highest and most translated in the Arab world despite their rather recent birth (Irmgard Merhej 206). They are a representational medium that has no restrictions whatsoever on its themes and purposes as Eszter Szep claims (24). Also, their cartoon-like sketches allow them to represent new ideas and therefore new ways of seeing things. Comics hence embody and amplify new concepts by simplifying them in a way that no other literary genre can (McCloud 67-68).

Moreover, comics have proven to be a rather visual medium which touches upon the topic of trauma and consequently mark a shift in the concept of witnessing and testimony (Szep 22). They give voice to the voiceless and marginalized people. Szep adds that they not only represent traumatic events but also have the potential to convey the processes of overcoming them (32). On that, Zeina Abirached stresses the urge she had once she started working on her comics; “I started to draw comics on the day when I had a vital need to tell a story, and at the same time to do memory work on our history, to try to replace the unsaid things with words and images, to try to understand” (“Artist’s Statement” 71). These graphic narratives of traumatic events and histories creatively represent trauma as Hillary Chute confirms (459). The combination of image and text gives them a hidden power to allow “secrets and ‘postsecrets’ to emerge, as identities are textually and graphically ‘(re)constructed’ in the aftermath of trauma”, as Rodrigue Pulda claims (“Afterward” 345).

Simplified images of comics make their characters more approachable and understandable to a wider audience (Irwin 107). Chute, quoting Charles McGrath, also discusses this accessibility of comics and their openness to a wide readership: “The New York Times Magazine, in a cover article in July 2004, asserted that this ‘new literary form’ is ‘what novels used to be – an accessible, vernacular form with mass appeal’” (453). Besides, other than their distinctive approachability, images of graphic formations are chiefly effective in transmitting emotionally substantial content (Irwin 110). Nonetheless, not only are they holders of dense emotional content, but they also evoke the readers’ emotional and bodily experiences and memories: “they produce affect in the viewer”, as Szep states (23). They aim at involving readers and urging them to react in various ways. On that Felix Lang asserts that “these narratives are always calling their readers’ attention visually and spatially to the act, process, and duration of interpretation, making them a deliberate form of communication that aims to involve readers and produce some kind of response in them, be it compassion, understanding, respect, or simply entertainment” (177).

Once readers of comics get involved in the work, they become empathetic with the characters’ feelings and motivated to criticize the political situations conveyed in them. Juliet Jane Fall states that comics can represent and make visible people’s vulnerability, focusing on their agency and autonomy beyond their status of victims, and can do much more than simply taking note of their instability, in order to provide a political basis for critical outrage; she adds that the beauty of comics and their aesthetic value make them even more potent in doing so (105-106). This ability to engage other people’s empathy while reading comic books is also highlighted by Henry John Pratt who states that they can do so to a greater

extent than novels (“Medium Specificity” 103). Likewise, John F. Barber contends that comics’ images “invite readers to dwell, to reflect, to meditate, in a way that pure text cannot and will not” (489). I however take an opposing stand in my argument, for I disagree with the supremacy of comics over pure word-based literary works. I believe that pure text, similarly to comics, also has the ability to be accessible to the readers, to evoke and stimulate their emotions and sympathy, to draw special attention on spatial representations, as well as to make visible the vulnerability of characters and individuals.

### **C. Argument Statement**

This thesis aims at exploring the effects the Lebanese civil war had on children, as well as on their relationships with their parents in times of war as presented in Lebanese Anglophone literary and visual narratives. It traces their behavioral changes as they move from childhood to an older and/or more mature age, focusing on the switch from a state of innocence and dependence to one in which they develop the drive to initiate and act. Furthermore, it discusses children’s understanding of the war, their desires to change things and make them better, to make sure their parents and loved ones are fine, as well as the importance of their familial bonds. It does so by closely reading two narratives written from a child’s perspective in times of the Lebanese civil war, tracing the extents to which parents seem to be either a soothing and/or an aggravating factor in the child’s life. To do so, I have selected one novel, Nathalie Abi-Ezzi’s *A Girl Made of Dust* (2008), and one visual literary work, Zeina Abirached’s comic book *A Game for Swallows* (2007).

I have chosen these two works for my research for several reasons. Both are written by female diasporic Lebanese writers whose ages are relatively close and yet their

protagonists are female children and remain as such by the end. Nathalie Abi-Ezzi was three years old when the war started in 1975, and Zeina Abirached was born amidst all the chaos in 1981. Their works are written from a female child's perspective, and adopting a first-person narrative voice. Their main characters narrate the war of adults. They also show that children are highly perceptive of their surroundings and are able to recognize the naked reality of war, its dangers and consequences. Furthermore, they are great examples that describe children's loss of innocence and the way they grow up not necessarily in the real physical dimension but rather mentally as well as emotionally, in times of armed conflicts. As Eszter Szep says: "It is nearly impossible to preserve the innocence of childhood during war" (28). In addition, both works' main characters undergo similar experiences of fear, displacement, and worry about losing their parents. They all want to be involved and are motivated by a will to fix things, to make changes of a past that seems to have them entrapped. Similar to Marianne Hirsch's belief in the constructive power of second-generation members' artworks, memoirs and fiction, these two works are driven by the children's desire to repair/reconstruct things and mend a broken past. Unlike in other postwar literary works like Patricia Sarrafian-Ward's *The Bullet Collection*, or Lamia Ziade's *Bye Bye Babylon*, Abi-Ezzi's and Abirached's main characters do not grow up in age but rather remain children, losing however their childhood innocence, and exemplifying how children in wars must mentally, psychologically and emotionally grow up too soon.

Both *A Game for Swallows* and *A Girl Made of Dust* are rich in imagery, detailed depictions, metaphors, as well as vivid drawings of the past, all of which highlight children's visual memories and the impact of a war that imprisons them, partly in their own thought

patterns. I explore the meanings and roles of these images and symbols, especially by focusing on the recurrent ones. For as Walter Benjamin believes, art is a source of knowledge and perception to people who have access to it (Weigel 354). This thesis thus aims at discovering the use of these visual aspects: be they expressed in words (*A Girl Made of Dust*) and/or in panels combining both words and images (*A Game for Swallows*). It focuses on when they show up in the narratives, where they occur in the texts, and how they are interwoven with the narrative events. As Daniel Chandler claims in his study of semiotics, the meaning of certain signs and symbols doesn't lie in their relation to other signs but rather in the social context of their use (9). He also adds that we, humans, seem to be driven by a desire to make meanings, we are *homo significans* – meaning makers. We definitely make meanings through our creation and interpretation of signs (13). Similarly, W.J.T. Mitchell argues that there is no purely visual perception of images but rather a more hybrid and mixed discernment. He believes that “all media are mixed media” in the sense that neither text nor image is independent from the other. One needs to articulate in language what he/she sees in the image in order to transfer what it holds into knowledge, in the same way a reader needs to visualize what the text comprises in his/her mind's eye in order to make sense of it (“There Are No Visual Media” 395).

Moreover, the thesis argues, in general terms, that the usage and implementation of such images, signs and motifs, enable and fortify the understanding of war events, for both the reader and the child narrator. This also goes along with what Chandler states while highlighting the importance of semiotics or the study of signs. He argues that studying semiotics can make people more aware of their mediating role, as well as people's own

personal role in constructing social realities. Consequently, it becomes less likely for people to take reality for granted and independent of human interpretation. People have to realize that information and meanings of things are not “contained” or “transmitted” to them, but they have to actively engage themselves in creating meanings, through an intricate interaction of codes and conventions which they are usually unaware of (10-11). Likewise, Mitchell also argues that readers/viewers of images have to know what pictures mean and what they do, what is that they communicate and whether and how they affect human emotions and awareness (“What Do Pictures ‘Really’ Want?” 71). He adds that images are definitely not innocent or powerless, they unquestionably have powers and yet they are much weaker than the authority that we readers/viewers give to them (“What Do Pictures ‘Really’ Want?” 74).

In this thesis, I argue specifically that *A Game for Swallows* and *A Girl Made of Dust* could both at some point be considered as variants of Bildungsromane of their main characters, Zeina and Ruba, respectively, representing the great pace of their enforced growth. I discuss this mainly through Sarah E. Maier’s lens and definition of the Bildungsroman. She believes it portrays one’s development, and finds struggles to be necessary in leading to an individual’s growth (318). I agree with her definition because I thoroughly focus on character progress and maturation, and the importance of difficulties and hardships in leading to the necessary loss of innocence. Maier’s defining characteristics of the Bildungsroman will be discussed further in the following chapter.

I also find it crucial for me to mention the notion of time. Arguing that both my primary works present their main characters’ maturation and loss of childhood is intriguing

bearing in mind the brevity of their time spans. *A Girl Made of Dust* covers only a few months of Ruba's life, while *A Game for Swallows* depicts only a few days of Zeina's. This is an issue that I am completely aware of and yet will be dealing with later in my chapters.

I mainly focus on the psychological effects that war has on children. My argument is consequently based on psychological theories as well as on a comparative close reading of both verbal and visual images, within and, when warranted, across these two works. I aim to do so in order to show how literature allows psychology of trauma and maturation to overcome its disciplinary limitations, giving literature thus a special standing in helping psychology discover the effects of war on children. In service of my aforementioned argument, I trace the maturation of the two young female characters via the transformations and/or decay of these images. I find imagery showing emotional/mental growth very evident in both works, a fact which pushes me towards a comparative study, regardless of its type, i.e. textual (*A Girl Made of Dust*) or pictorial and textual (*A Game for Swallows*). At this level of my research and close readings, I see transformations in these images, ones that parallel the protagonists' growth. I find it also interesting to mention that the word "Bildungsroman" originates from the German word "Bild", meaning "image or picture", "bildung" meaning education and formation, while "roman" stands for the word "novel". Put together, "Bildungsroman" can stand for the formative years of a character in a novel, as well as for the formation and evolution of images as reflecting this very growth.

Not much has been written about Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust*. Other than book reviews and summaries, it is only in Syrine Hout's work that we see helpful insights about the novel. She focuses on how some children paid the price of the war through militarization

by joining militias. She writes about children's loss of innocence in Abi-Ezzi's work, especially by shedding light on the main character's (Ruba's) brother, Naji. She adds that children become more aggressive towards themselves as well as towards others in order to find an outlet for their feelings and fears: "being 'dazed and confused' as a result of neither understanding nor adequately coping with the atrocities, resorting instead to aggression towards oneself and others, is an accurate depiction of the many young children and adolescents populating post-war novels by authors who were too young at the time to vent their frustrations artistically" (*Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction* 105). She adds that the main character, Ruba, notices her brother's rising irritation, defiance, and accusations towards their hopeless father. Consequently, Hout states that Naji resorts to the militia and strays away from innocence, in order to prove his manhood in the absence of his father as a role model (*Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction* 122).

Similar to Hout, in my thesis I also discuss children's vulnerability and their loss of innocence in war in *A Girl Made of Dust*; however, my focus is on Ruba, not on her brother. I also benefit from Hout's perceptions of the way children and adults affect each other, and the way children prove to be the saviors of adults. I largely write about Ruba's growth, loss of childhood innocence, emotional intelligence, and consequently her desire to cure her father.

Furthermore, apart from book reviews of Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*, I have found a few articles by Carla Calargé and Gueydan-Turek, Emma Monroy, Myriem El Maïzi, and Dominique Renard. Calargé and Gueydan-Turek discuss how recent art works have emerged in order to defy collective amnesia in Lebanon, and the importance of the

images in comics, which express meanings when words fail. They also discuss the impotence of adults in times of war and most importantly the way children lose their childhood. On that, they quote Susan Suleiman:

For if all those who were there experienced trauma, the specific experience of children was that the trauma occurred (or at least began) before the formation of stable identity that we associate with adulthood and in some cases before any conscious sense of self. Paradoxically, their ‘premature bewilderment’ was often accompanied by premature aging, having to act as an adult while still a child. (215)

On the other hand, Monroy discusses Abirached’s need to “recreate Beirut through drawing” (593). She writes about the Lebanese people’s “making do” tactics as a form of resistance despite the restrictions of the war. As such, her main focus is on how the civil war continuously dictates space reduction and how Abirached’s characters try to recreate space for their daily struggles to take place. She believes that “just as some panels map out a space of resistance for the characters, the book as a whole represents a re-charting of Abirached’s lived experience of war” (582). Therefore, she agrees with Calargé and Gueydan-Turek that Abirached’s graphic novel breaks the endorsed silence about the civil war.

However, I will be mainly referring to interpretations by Myriem El Maïzi and Dominique Renard in particular in this thesis. El Maïzi highlights how Abirached succeeds in revealing and discussing traumatic experiences of her life, and how she creates a collective memory against the widespread amnesia. Moreover, El Maïzi primarily focuses on Abirached’s narrative style in comics, the narrativity of images as a medium, as well as their power and ability to testify, to allow the artist to express himself/herself, and to represent

trauma. In “Bande Dessinée, Autobiographie et Guerre au Liban” she clearly mentions the importance of the reduction of physical space in Abirached’s comic and speaks of the narrowed spaces of childhood.

Dominique Renard goes along with El Maïzi’s work because he also focuses on certain representations in Abirached’s panels. He indicates how she represents the hell of everyday life during the war, interprets and discusses the importance of the wall-hanging that Zeina and her family had in their living room, and agrees with El Maïzi on children’s reduced spaces.

When it comes to *A Game for Swallows*, I offer a different interpretation than Renard’s of the wall-hanging in Zeina’s house in my close reading. Nonetheless, I follow both of his and El Maïzi’s observations of the tightening of physical space and people’s confinement during the war. I carefully write about how Zeina depicts space becoming tighter and smaller, how both she and Ruba suffer from detention in rather closed gloomy spaces in abject circumstances.

#### **D. War’s Effects on Children and the Family Unit: A Review of Psychological Studies**

Needless to say, the Lebanese civil war has affected everyone who has experienced it, whether adults or teenagers. However, the ones who must have struggled and most probably still do because of it were children then. Surprisingly enough, children, contrary to common beliefs, understand to a certain extent the danger and seriousness of war, as well as its effects on their lives and surroundings. Jillian Rodd writes that children’s comments and images about the war indicate that they understand its threats and dangers, even though they

are unable to express clearly their understanding of its nature (119). Consequently, children's behaviors and feelings in times of political conflicts reflect their influence by the tumultuous events around them, even if they are not directly affected by them. They therefore express feelings of fear, sadness, worry, anger and confusion (Walker et al. 191). In addition to that, children lose their families, their homes, as well as everything that could be said to be "normal" in a child's life. On that Paramjit Joshi and Deborah O'Donnell state that the violence of war often leads to severe negative events such as "loss of loved ones, displacement, lack of educational structure, and drastic changes in daily routine and community values" (275).

All of the above leave scars, traumas, and terrifying memories in the children's psychological lives and minds that are definitely very hard to let go of or heal. Mona Macksoud and J. Lawrence Aber believe that if children go through the traumatizing event while surrounded by their parents, the results would be of a smaller impact on their lives and would be overcome faster as well (71). Accordingly, she adds that being separated from one's parents in war leads to depressive symptoms more than any other war trauma (80). Likewise, Joshi and O'Donnell speak of findings that emphasize the importance of having a steady emotional relationship with one's parents in strengthening the child's ability to handle hostile conditions (287). The importance of family and peer groups is significantly emphasized as such, as well as the extent to which parental adjustments and behavior affect the children's actions (Bates et al. 171). The latter have this constant need for parental support and protection and, consequently, the health of the family unit is crucial.

However, unfortunately enough, the Lebanese civil war's effects highly manifested themselves in psychological, depressive and physical symptoms on the family unit. It certainly destroyed traditional family structures. Even though the war affected everything and everyone, its effects on the family seemed to be the most complex (Farhood 198).

Joanne Riebschleger discusses the state of children whose parents suffer from mental illnesses, and shows the children's desire to gain more information about their sick parent's case and treatment options for psychiatric illnesses (153). They indirectly suffer a lot from their parents' condition and may sometimes blame themselves for the latter's symptoms. However, in spite of the difficulties of living with a psychiatrically sick parent, "there is evidence that personal characteristics and interpersonal connections may aid youth in achieving healthier development, increasing coping, and especially, enhancing resilience" (153).

As such, the child-parent relationship proves to be key in the children's lives. Moreover, this relationship is even more important in times of war. Parents supposedly provide comfort and safety which prove the importance of them being physically close to their children (Szep 30). Nonetheless, parents in post-war Lebanon sometimes fail to do so. The disadvantages of the transmission of trauma and illness by family members have been widely discussed in conjunction with the concept of postmemory.

In spite of or maybe even because of the horrifying wars and conflicts, children as well as teenagers harbor a desire to try to make sense of things, to understand and even try to fix whatever or whoever is broken and shattered around them. On the one hand, Sandra Rafman speaks of adolescents' engagement in search of meaning for the war (473), while on

the other hand, Macksoud and Aber focus on children doing so. The latter state that exposure to long-lasting violence may boost children's ability to plan and pursue important and difficult objectives, leading in initiating activities, finding solutions to complications, and persevering in tough times (71).

Children's exposure to wars and their tendency to develop psychological illnesses shed light on the necessity of treatments and therapy. In *Reaching the Vulnerable Child: Therapy with Traumatized Children*, the importance lies in getting over the past, understanding it, and being able to overcome its pressures and outcomes in order to attain recovery. Children need to make sense of their lives, make meaning out of them to head towards a better future. Therefore, patients in therapy have to explore their past, distinguish it from their present and then become "authors of the future chapters of their lives" (Rymaszewska and Philpot 13). It is often believed that moving on from one's past is very hard and is more so for traumatized children, because the magnitude of their traumas and experiences can be so great that it overshadows their present. However, "the past must be faced, analyzed, understood and, finally accepted. Then progress, recovery, is possible" (Rymaszewska and Philpot 15). Jillian Rodd agrees with this idea and yet adds that children's understanding of war relies on its effects on people and their loved ones. They reason about it and speak of it as bad and wrong, because they are concerned about other people's lives and well-being, and they do so out of "concern for life in general rather than from egocentric concerns or the satisfaction of needs and desires" (117). Moreover, this interest becomes a "social learning experience" in which they long to know more about their own understanding and awareness of the impact of war on their own and others' lives (120).

Consequently, this yearning and care for others push children even further to search for meaning, find solutions, and help solve dilemmas in conflictual contexts. Sandra Rafman, Mona Macksoud, and J. Lawrence Aber, all agree on this point. Rafman speaks of how adults underestimate children's responses to war and presents a study that focuses on their responses to armed conflicts and political violence on a rather moral dimension. She finds that they try very hard to understand and experience the other's predicament. They sympathize with them and have the desire to find solutions for these dilemmas (469). Surprisingly enough, they seem to do well in coping with all the exposure to violence that they experience. They grow in resilience and resolution, they move from being victims to "competent constructors of their" shattered "universe" (471). They do so because they realize that their own personal recovery is dependent on that of their society and political environment (476). Similarly, Macksoud and Aber discuss how exposure to chronic violence creates empathy for human suffering in children, strengthens their altruistic sentiments and planful behavior, as well as their commitment to serve victims of violence, condemning injustice, and finding solutions to problems through difficult times (71). They claim that "one explanation could be the tendency for those that witness violence committed to others to become fervent advocates of humanitarian issues as a way of mastering their own feelings of pain" (84). As such, their approach and response could be a vestige of the state of grief they found themselves in.

Moreover, children's reinforcing and altruistic responses to war prove their resilience, resistance, and wish for peace. Tugade and Fredrickson highlight the importance of children's positive emotions in building their resilience against hardships and perils. They

discuss studies that acknowledge the adaptive benefits of such positive emotionality in the coping process. They cite findings which indicate that positive emotions have a distinctive ability to lessen the effects of lingering negative ones (149). They transform the positively emotional person into a “more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated, and healthy individual” (147). Therefore, they believe that when one is able to process his emotions properly and skillfully, he/she will have the ability to solve problems, make plans, and attain more achievements in life (145). In *Vulnerable Children*, children are proven to feel empathy towards those in danger and adversity, and thus use their positive and humanitarian emotions in order to help them.

#### **E. Thesis Outline**

Chapter II traces Ruba’s growth in Abi-Ezzi’s *A Girl Made of Dust*. It sheds light on very specific verbal images that Ruba uses and often refers to in her narrative. It is also through this examination of the textual images and the way they change and/or disappear, that I highlight the psychological effects that the war inflicts on Ruba as well as the novel being a demonstration of Ruba’s journey to maturation. Interpreting the use of these images, Ruba’s feelings in times of war are clarified, her anger, fear, helplessness as well as her realization that everything and everyone is ephemeral, losing hence the innocence and naivety of childhood.

On another hand, in chapter III, I trace the presence and importance of certain pictorial images in the work of Zeina Abirached’s *A Game for Swallows*. The process also aims at supporting this thesis’ main claim, that children grow up and lose their childhood innocence in times of war. It is discussed through the close reading of remarkable images

that hold meanings of danger, loss, displacement, family and hope. Chapter III shows how Zeina, Abirached's main character, just like Ruba, is on a journey of growth and forced maturation.

Following my two chapters, in my conclusion, I return to the discussion of the power of pure text versus comics, in raising empathy in the readers and succeeding in expressing convincingly the child's maturation.

## CHAPTER II

### Verbal Imagery in Nathalie Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust*

Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust* is narrated by Ruba, an eight-year old child, who describes her life in wartime Beirut. She seems to be highly perceptive of everything that goes on around her, as well as of her closest family members. She clearly realizes war's brutality, dangers, and its consequences on her family. Furthermore, Ruba matures in the course of the novel, as she moves from a state of innocence to one of experience. She has a curiosity to figure things out, to understand, and to try to make things right.

The novel traces Ruba's life in Ein Doura with her parents, grandmother, and brother Naji from 1981 and 1982. At that time Ruba is seven years old and awaits her eighth birthday: "it had taken for ever to get to 1981, and would take forever again to reach my eighth birthday" (Abi-Ezzi 5). She describes how life changes once war gets closer to her village. She grows up amidst all the chaos of war and deals with its drastic consequences on her family, lifestyle and surroundings. Therefore, Ruba loses her childhood innocence and becomes more acquainted with the fierce ways of the world. As such, she recognizes, for example, that the witch she feared was only their neighbor, as well as that her father is ill and unstable. She also begins to notice the absurdity of people's enmity, of political conflicts, and of the differences in coping with war's ruthlessness, as well as many other discoveries that will be discussed later in this chapter. At eight years of age, Ruba proves to be highly stylistic by using lots of concretizing imagery and colors when telling her story.

In this chapter, as outlined in the introduction, I will trace Ruba's growth and maturation process during the few months in which she survives the war. To do so, I will be using psychological theories of child development and coping strategies, namely attachment theory and emotional intelligence, as well as close readings and interpretations of very specific recurrent images that Ruba uses at different points in the novel. As such, I argue that *A Girl Made of Dust* can be considered a contemporary alternative of a Bildungsroman, which displays Ruba's growth and gradual loss of innocence. This growth leads Ruba to a fuller understanding of war and its consequences on her life at large and those of others.

### **A. A Child's Mandatory Growth**

Sarah E. Maier states that the Bildungsroman examines the normal course of someone's life; in which every stage has its own value and is at the basis of a higher stage. The dissonances of life appear to be necessary transit points in people's paths towards maturity and concord (318). She adds that the term "Bildungsroman" encompasses a character's formation, growth, education, socialization, culture, as well as self-development (317). Moreover, in *Children's Thinking: Cognitive Development and Individual Differences*, David F. Bjorklund argues that children learn through their perceptions and interpretations of perceptual information. In doing so, they gain knowledge which adds to and transforms their prior knowledge (184). In addition, in order for a child to be able to narrate past events, Bjorklund claims that:

A young child must master many aspects of memory if he or she is to remember events. First, an event must be attended to and perceived. Then, the child must make some sense of that event so that it can be represented in his or her mind and recalled

later on. If a child doesn't attend to the important aspects of an event or cannot make sense of what he or she experienced, there is really nothing to remember. (278)

Consequently, Ruba makes sense of her day-to-day war experiences, remembers them with high accuracy and uses them in her tale. However, in order to write about one's past, even though the children's tales are sometimes verbatim information put into stories, they tell about the children's lives which are best thought of as constructions. These constructions are based on the children's experiences, background knowledge, their abilities in processing information, as well as social contexts in which the remembering of events is being done (Bjorklund 278-79). Abi-Ezzi thus proves to have processed her past life events in Beirut in order to be able to write her narrative through Ruba's.

Below are the psychological theories that discuss the impact of war on children, the way they lose their innocence and grow up in the painful process, their understanding and reactions to it, their resilience, as well as their positive emotional intelligence and their problem-solving skills. The theoretical and psychological works will be followed by a close reading of the most recurrent images in *A Girl Made of Dust*. The novel can thus be perceived as covering Ruba's coming-of-age. It comprises her arduous and conflicted growth through and into a social order initiated by the loss of safety. Moreover, although *A Girl Made of Dust* covers events during the Lebanese civil war, the hopes and dreams of Ruba incessantly continue to drive the plot.

## **B. Psychological Lens**

### ***1. Children's Observations in Times of War***

People fail to understand the impact that wars have on children. The latter's moral understanding of and response to social and political events has often been neglected and denied (Rafman 468). Children experience and witness corrupt acts during wars and times of political violence, such as torture or death of family and loved ones, mutilation, displacements, disappearances and sexual exploitation. In *A Girl Made of Dust*, Ruba knows of the killing of Ali and its aftermath, a kind Muslim teenager who roasted nuts for a living. She is also separated from her Muslim friend Karim whose family left the war-torn country, as well as notices how her brother Naji loses his childhood and gets drifted into a right-wing militia group. He becomes angry most of the time. "I glared. 'You never want to do anything anymore.' He continued flicking earth out of a hole, his face pursed tightly. 'Don't be such a baby, there's no such thing as witches.' It was as though he'd shoved me away. Why didn't he agree with me anymore?" (Abi-Ezzi 102).

Additionally, Ruba doesn't fail to recognize the effects of war on her parents and grandmother. All seem to her worried and anxious. Consequently, Ruba regrets having to grow up and become an adult, as seen in her conversation with her mother: "'It's only muscle cramps. You're growing up that's all.' I rubbed my calves. 'Then I don't want to. It's painful being stretched big. Besides, I'll have to be worried all the time like Teta, or sit all the time like Papi, or clean all the time like you, or be angry like Naji'" (Abi-Ezzi 54). However, Ruba starts to wander away from her absolute innocence and begins to discover things, understand, and see from adults' perspectives. This is clear when she sits in her

father's chair for the first time. She describes how she gets to see things differently as if from a new angle:

I saw things from the chair that I had never seen from anywhere else: a crack in the corner of the ceiling opposite, the way the light fell so you could see the new dust on the coffee-table even though Mami had dusted today. The vase of artificial flowers looked more artificial from here, the pink, red, yellow and orange plastic ridged, the leaves that hadn't been pulled out hanging loose on the stems. The sofa was threadbare where we sat on it, with a loganberry-cordial stain that had been my fault. (Abi-Ezzi 110)

Nonetheless, regardless of all the adults' attempts to keep children oblivious to war, they do not seem to have a monopoly on information. Jillian Rodd states that children have shown certain knowledge and attitudes in their spontaneous reactions and comments on war. They seem to base their understanding on reality as they experience and perceive it in person (110-111). They condemn war and consider it to be bad based on their personal moral judgments and out of concern for others, their well-being and safety (Rodd 119). Ruba is actually almost always concerned about others and wants them to be happy. "I prayed: that Papi would get better, and that Teta wouldn't remember I hadn't apologized about the chickens. I prayed too that Naji would stop being angry all the time without saying what about, and that Mami would be happier" (Abi-Ezzi 130).

Children therefore endure a lot in order to resolve moral dilemmas in war contexts. They try very hard to interpret and assess their social reality. They consequently begin to make moral judgments from a rather early age and are able to differentiate between the

world as it really is and as they think it should be. Moreover, Sandra Rafman adds that there are early signs of children's mindfulness of the erroneousness of behaviors causing damage and pain (469). Jillian Rodd claims that this interest children have in war could be used as a social learning experience in which they develop a rather social understanding and become more aware of the effects war has on their own and others' lives (120). Once they cultivate clearer knowledge of war events, children start maturing and learn better about the world of adults in which they find themselves to be unwillingly immersed. Such is the case in Abi-Ezzi's novel in which Ruba gathers information about war events and incidents and gradually starts to understand more what war is really about. She continuously searches for answers and once found, she is unwillingly stuck with a desire of making everything better for herself and everyone else.

## ***2. Attachment Theory – The Importance of Parents in Children's Lives***

Attachment theory is a developmental theory of the regulation of emotions in families. It was first developed by John Bowlby in 1969 aiming at offering a better understanding of psychological problems which arise in children as well as in adults. Bowlby's central idea is that humans have a fundamental survival instinct that pushes them to seek protection and safety from their parents, whenever they find themselves in dangerous contexts. He further argues that this need develops in order to shape a rather general sense of how we expect others to see us and react towards us. Therefore, the capacity to give, seek and receive comfort and reassurance from family members lies at the heart of attachment theory. As such, these feelings of care and protection not only produce relief from anxiety, but also positive emotions of trust, affection and love (Dallos and Veter 494-95). This

highlights the importance of parents for children and their well-being. For instance, Ruba worries that her mother might one day leave them behind: “a few nights ago Mami had come out of her room looking like someone else in a green dress and a golden belt. Her hair was done in a different way, and she was wearing red lipstick. I’d been scared that she’d enjoy herself so much she wouldn’t come back” (Abi-Ezzi 119).

Moreover, in “Attachment Theory and Mindfulness,” mindfulness is defined as a complex and multifaceted construct, which paves the way to a person’s growth and maturation. Snyder et al. discuss Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson’s view of mindfulness, which states that it consists of intention, attention, and attitude. “Intention provides the purpose for why one is paying attention and it sets the direction for the practice. Attention is said to refer to the conscious attention towards the “here and now” of one’s moment-to-moment experience. By focusing one’s attention on present-moment sensations and experiences, the practitioner can learn to see through her habitual reactions and cultivate healthier, more adaptive ways of responding to life circumstances (Shapiro et al. 2005; Teasdale et al. 2000). Finally, attitude refers to how one pays attention, infusing the attention with a quality of acceptance, openness, and discernment” (Snyder et al. 712). Ruba’s growth is therefore pinpointed since she goes through the process of mindfulness and its different phases. Intention lies in her need for her father’s presence which pushes her to pay more attention to how things are. Attention is visible in her focus on the here and now, as she focuses on everything going on around her. She observes thoroughly and questions things in order to find out about her father’s real problem. And lastly, attitude is in the way she searches for answers. She is tenacious in her questionings and once answers are revealed to

her, she sympathizes with her father, and understands how bad he must have felt; “I glanced up at Papi. He seemed different – broken, as though someone had let him fall from a height” (Abi-Ezzi 159).

Nonetheless, due to their moral opinions, empathy and concern for others, children develop a stronger emotional intelligence, grow in resistance, grasp the importance of their families around them, as well as their relationship with their parents and the importance of their presence in their lives. They therefore depend on their parents to regulate their emotional states, as Galit Halevi et al. write. Furthermore, they also claim that according to attachment theory, children seek comfort from their parents whenever they feel threatened or distressed. Their comfort is organized around their attachment figures’ availability and approachability during stressful times (1184). Ruba has a great need to feel her parents around her being safe and responsive. However, since her father is not emotionally approachable with any of them in the family, she seems to rely on her mother to provide her with parental security and feelings: “I wanted Mami to sit on my bed until I felt sleepy, and searched the house for her. But with the passing of the thunder she had vanished. I stumbled, breathless, from room to room, but when I peered out through the net of the kitchen door, I found her” (Abi-Ezzi 48-9).

Moreover, the combination of vulnerability and resilience in children especially after a traumatic event is bewildering (Van EE et al. 459). Children recognize that their own recovery from traumatic events, health and well-being are bound to those of their parents as well as to their social and political surroundings (Rafman 476). They feel safe once their parents feel well, surround them, and provide them with love, tenderness and strength. Ruba

intensely feels and enjoys the importance of her mother's love for her: "Her arms tightened round me till my bones hurt. It was a beautiful, wonderful pain" (Abi-Ezzi 172). Her state of mind is therefore highly linked to that of her parents. She worries and wants both of them to be happy and at ease so that she feels the same; "Papi tucked in his shirt and, sitting at the table, slipped on his shoes. His hair was combed and shining wet, and when he looked up his face was kind. It was a good day, then" (Abi-Ezzi 50).

On the other hand, family life as well as the parents' states of being didn't easily go back to normal after wars. Elisa Van EE et al. discuss how parents and especially fathers came back to the heart of the family "as distant characters and were not able to adjust to balanced family life after the war" (462). This is exactly the case of Ruba's father, Nabeel. The latter comes back from Beirut one day, withdraws himself and keeps quiet most of the time. Ruba notices the changes in her father's behavior and states that she realizes at a certain point that he is "crazy," he was also "as quiet as a stone" (Abi-Ezzi 8).

Consequently, Ruba has to deal with the outcomes of living with a parent who has a psychic illness. Joanne Riebschleger declares that mental illnesses are global ones among adults and the children are unfortunately their unintended and invisible sufferers (151). Ruba notices her father's changes, feels his absence, and needs to compensate the feeling of emptiness it gives her. "I leant against uncle Wadih on the sofa and the heat of him came through his clothes. I couldn't remember whether Papi was this warm or not because I couldn't remember ever having leant against him" (Abi-Ezzi 40).

Riebschleger adds that children who grow up with parents suffering from a psychiatric disorder show their need to have more information and become more

knowledgeable about their parent's case, as well as its mental health treatment (153). Karen Zilberstein writes about Bowlby's attachment theory focusing on the importance of being close to one's parents: "To receive adequate care, infants and young children require closeness to caregivers and they establish various strategies for maintaining proximity and eliciting care and protection. Those strategies derive from the child's perception of the caregiver's availability and what works to maximize that availability. As children age and require less proximity, they continue to turn to their attachment figures when in distress or when facing challenges (93). In *A Girl Made of Dust*, Ruba tries hard to understand what the problem of her father is. She tries to get more information and addresses her uncle: "Uncle, what happened to Papi that day he changed? When I was little. When you were here" (Abi-Ezzi 64). Then she ceaselessly continues trying to figure things out from the Roseman: "but something bad happened to Papi, didn't it? Please tell me. Please." "But I want to know!" (Abi-Ezzi 136-7). Eventually, she gets helpful answers from her grandmother about the traumatic event that led her father to the state he is in.

In fact, Nabeel is highly affected by an event that happened with him in Beirut. Ruba's grandmother tells her the story of the incident. A girl asked him to walk with her for a while, after she had asked him to buy a pickled ear that she had on her. Nabeel ends up shouting and pushing her away and then she falls, shot by a sniper. Guilt has never left him ever since: "'the bottle smashes and she falls among the glass. She doesn't get up again.' Teta swallowed hard. 'Who can blame him if his eyes can't forget it?'" (Abi-Ezzi 158) Guilt-stricken, Nabeel finds it very hard to let go of the memory, keeps incomplete notes about the girl on a paper under his chair which he barely leaves, his interrupted narrative

being a reminder of his unsuccessful trials of getting over the horrible incident.

Consequently, due to his distant, “dry” behavior, Ruba and her brother end up believing that he was under a spell cast by an evil witch.

### ***3. Emotional Intelligence – Problem-Solving Strategies***

For an emotion to be elicited in an individual depends on how personally relevant or important it is to one’s concerns and circumstances, as stated in *Handbook on Positive Emotions*. Therefore, if one’s concerns are strongly implicated, strong emotions are likely to prevail (Tugade et al. eds. 13-14). Therefore, it is important for people to be able to nurture their ability on having positive emotions, because their most common defining characteristics are that they are adaptive, they involve motivation, and they feel good (Tugade et al. eds. 15). Moreover, positive emotions help people going through tough and stressful situations in the coping process aimed at survival. As a matter of fact, laboratory experiments have demonstrated that evoking positive emotions in difficult times and circumstances is the most efficient way to quell or “undo” the lingering after effects of negative emotions, which is known as the “undoing hypothesis” (Fredrickson 1371). Not only do positive emotions speed up recovery from negative ones, but they also fuel individuals with resilience. It turns out that resilient people experience more positive emotions in times of adversity and distress compared to those who are less resilient (Fredrickson 1372). Tugade and Fredrickson agree that harnessing positive emotions while one undergoes negative feelings is enough to develop resilience (Tugade et al. eds. 28). When one goes through tough times, feeling positive and optimistic is very helpful in making that person feel better and stronger in the process of overcoming hardships.

Moreover, Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory provides a valuable framework through which to understand the significance of positive emotions, especially when dealing with negative emotional circumstances. It stipulates that positive and negative emotions have different functions and effects: "Whereas negative emotions are associated with specific action tendencies that focus and narrow thoughts and actions (to prepare the body for fight or flight), positive emotions should broaden one's thoughts and actions, and by consequence build important personal resources" (317). Therefore, positive emotions broaden people's mindsets and encourage them to discover novel ways of behavior. As an outcome, these broadened mindsets allow the people concerned to build their physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources, thus leading to their growth and maturation in various domains (Tugade et al. eds. 29). Smith and Lazarus agree with Tugade et al. since they also argue that positive emotions promote exploration as well as motivation for mastery and achievement. Smith adds that they stimulate diligence in a way that endorses development and mastery (Tugade et al. eds. 21). In this chapter I will discuss how Ruba, in *A Girl Made of Dust*, fits in these aforementioned ideas of positive emotions which allow her to go on a journey of self-exploration, resistance, maturity and a growth process.

On another hand, Sandra Rafman argues that whenever the provocation is more equivocal and difficult, and when they see themselves to be failing, children develop a more aggressive determination and propose even more challenging resolutions (475). They consequently try to understand things in order to provide a sense of safety, unity and esteem to themselves, all while addressing the emotions of the trauma and making them rather bearable. To them, creating a continuous narrative of the series of traumatic events is

considered therapeutic and relieving (Rafman 475). Just like how Ruba constantly works on figuring things out and tries to understand: “I wanted to sit in his chair. Maybe if I sat in it I would understand” (Abi-Ezzi 109). She also keeps interrogating others in order to find out the truth: “‘But why?’ I hesitated before asking the question that no one ever asked. ‘Why did he change?’” (Abi-Ezzi 156).

However, despite the difficulties and the effects that war has on children, researchers have found out that the latter are often able to react positively even in the most negative conditions (Paksuniemi et al. 123). According to Michele M. Tugade and Barbara L. Fredrickson, following the “broaden-and build theory,” children are able to use positive emotions in order to produce “more creative and variable actions.” They found out that positive emotions certainly broaden one’s thought-action repertoire (147). Children in question as such transform themselves, become more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals (Tugade and Fredrickson 147). Ruba proves to be an emotionally intelligent person. She remains optimistic, pursues energetic approaches to life, continues to be curious about things and finds benefits and new resolutions to the negative experiences she goes through.

Likewise, the broaden-and build theory also posits that one’s positive emotions “build personal and social resources to help individuals achieve better lives in the future” (Tugade and Fredrickson 160). Their abundance appears to be essential for effective optimal personal and social functioning (Tugade and Fredrickson 161). Ruba’s optimism and positivity are clear despite all her doubts and fears, because she still hopes for her father’s progress: “Still holding the envelope, I slipped off the chair. And as my feet touched the

floor I realized how much I wanted Papi back. Standing there gazing at it, the chair became covered in warm light again. It seemed to reassure me that spells, no matter what sort they were, could be broken” (Abi-Ezzi 112). Similarly, Tugade et al. argue that hope orients people toward attaining a certain unrealized goal, motivated by the extent to which the goal is relevant to the person concerned. However, they add that hope in itself is incongruent and is stress-related, and yet, what is important to a hopeful person is to remain committed to the rather uncertain goal instead of abandoning it (21-22). This fits Ruba’s situation who remains hopeful in spite of the extreme stressful ambiance she is in. Yet, not only is Ruba emotionally intelligent because of her optimism but also because of her various means to know what her father’s problem is. She asks several adults, tries to sit in his place, until she discovers in the end a letter that helps her uncover everything she needed. Moreover, since emotionally intelligent people grow in resilience and creativity, Ruba finds courage and determination to secretly go with her father to save her friend Amal: “I was going with Papi. Amal wouldn’t come with him otherwise. I knew she wouldn’t” (Abi-Ezzi 225-6). Likewise, Mona Macksoud claims that the presence of family members with their children in times of conflict leads to an increase in the latter’s prosocial behavior. They therefore like to help people in need, become advocates of humanitarian issues, and want to protect the vulnerable and weak, all of which could be their own means to master their own feelings of pain (84). Maybe by going with her father to save Amal, Ruba understands his reasons in going and anticipates the results and repercussions of such a behavior from his side, on his life as well as hers.

### C. Healing Words and Images – A Close Reading

When writers allow their main characters to free themselves from pain and trauma, they in a way put the atrocities they had personally endured into words. Nathalie Abi-Ezzi is definitely finding ways to transform her Lebanese war memories into something less harmful and savage. El Nossery and Hubbell state that art changes and renders pain through images, shapes and even words. “Victims and witnesses attempt to overcome the barriers created by trauma, employing literary and visual devices so that healing may begin” (2). Accordingly, Abi-Ezzi employs a great amount of figurative language or, as W.J.T. Mitchell calls it, “verbal imagery.” Mitchell claims that a writer’s verbal images could have a stronger impact than the actual images of the objects he/she aims to represent. In *Iconology*, he argues that:

Words when well chosen, have so great force in them that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves. The reader finds a scene drawn in stronger colors and painted more to the life in his imagination by the help of words than by an actual survey of the scene which they describe. In this case the poet seems to get the better of nature; he takes, indeed, the landscape after her but gives it more vigorous touches, heightens its beauty, and so enlivens the whole piece that the images which flow from objects themselves appear weak and faint in comparison of those that come from the expressions. (23)

Below is a closer look and interpretation of several images in Nathalie Abi-Ezzi’s novel. The analysis of these visual and symbolic objects exemplifies and supports this thesis’ claim, which argues that children’s meaning-making and understanding of their life events relies on reading and linking these images to their context. It also traces Ruba’s evolution

from states of innocence to ones of experience and adulthood. Once Ruba matures and starts to understand war's events and effects, the same images seem to disappear or change in the novel as well. I discuss how specific images that Ruba uses in her narrative help her in her maturation process, as well as how they show Ruba's growth and maturation to the reader.

In *A Girl Made of Dust*, I focus on specific recurrent images and metaphors that Ruba employs while telling her story. I also interpret them, their location in the narrative, as well as their effect on Ruba and her life, in order to create meaning out of them, certainly in relation to their context. I specifically discuss ten recurrent vivid images: the forest, the cicadas, the fig-heart, the cactus, flowers, dust, the glass eye, the red stain, the helicopter and the Virgin Mary. I divided these images into three groups: natural images, miscellaneous images, and religious images.

## ***1. Natural Images***

### **a. The Forest**

Tracing the "forest" from place of play and a safe haven for Ruba to one withered with time illustrates how Ruba begins to understand war and its effects on her surroundings. Before the shelling gets worse and reaches Ruba's village of Ein Doura, Ruba describes the forest as a safe, lively, and happy place: "I pointed the short distance down the slope to where the trees were singing, their chirps stitched together in an endless row. The forest was the best place to be, with its green pine needles and grasses, its brown trunks and rock, its bright colored flowers, gleaming insects, thorn bushes, and the dry red earth of its narrow paths" (Abi-Ezzi 5). However, the forest starts to lose its health with the approach of the

dangers of war. Ruba runs to it once in order to find and talk to her brother Naji but finds it changing. Abi-Ezzi writes: “The forest had changed. Apart from several new craters where bombs had landed, the leaves had fallen off bushes, and flowers had died away. Only the pines remained, upright and unchanged” (100). Moreover, Ruba continues to have hopes about this place and its safety. She continues to long to go to the forest although, deep down, she knows that she is gradually losing it. This is clear when she asks her mother if she could go:

I wanted to see the rock-roses open their pink and white flowers with impossibly thin petals; to find the green and white lilies that still held the last rainwater, and hunt out the rarer ones, foul-smelling things with a single red petal wrapped round a black column. I wanted to see bees and caterpillars, squat to watch the march and scurry of ants. I wanted to be in the forest again, before it was gone. (Abi-Ezzi 131-2)

In addition to that, further attention to the description of the forest proves how it gradually dies the more Ruba knows and learns about the effects of war on her life and surroundings. After her brother Naji’s injury, she starts to see less trees and colors in the forest: “from there I could see our house at the bottom of the road, and beyond, the dark treetops of the forest, fewer now than before” (Abi-Ezzi 139).

Things in the forest reach a climax with Ali’s torture and murder. The forest disappears and dies with his death and Ruba starts to lose her feelings of security in it: “Ali had liked it there because he could feel the wind on his face, but now I saw why the forest felt different. Further down the slope, it had vanished. The whole bottom part of it was gone, the hillside torn up in giant bites. The trees had fallen away like blades of grass, leaving

wounds of red earth and white rock. The tree with the hollow in its trunk where I'd found a broken blue eggshell, the patch of edible thistles, the old carob tree we'd set up our tent under, the hollow where lilies grew in spring, the slope where Karim had fallen and I'd picked the grit out of his knee – gone” (Abi-Ezzi 212).

Even though the forest dies and Ruba recognizes it no longer, she still fights for it to remain a safe haven for her. She recalls it and brings it back to her mind, memory and imagination when she finds herself stuck in one room with all her parents and neighbors due to heavy shelling. She recalls it with all its beauty and warmth:

Strange flowers were opening, and red and black butterflies floated and bobbed on the air. I walked down the worn paths again, touching the tree bark and tall grasses covered with bubbles that donkeys must have spat as they passed. The sticky green smell of pine cones was everywhere, and soon the dry brown pods hanging from the old carob tree would start to stink. The pine needles crunched under my feet; an empty cone dried out by the heat crackled as I trod on it. The trees were warm with sun and the yellow sap that flowed beneath their flaky skins, and the forest was alive. (Abi-Ezzi 222)

Nevertheless, unfortunately enough, Ruba wakes up and gets to realize the contrast between her memories of the forest and its actual final bitter and deathly reality. She therefore understands that she has to deal with war's effects when she says: “I took my hands from my eyes. It was dark and the forest was gone. At the bottom of the slope, I knew that few trees were left, and that soon they would be gone as well” (Abi-Ezzi 222). Abi-Ezzi clearly overuses the word “gone” in Ruba's narrative when speaking of the forest. It appears in

several examples mentioned earlier, emphasizing as such Ruba's loss of the feeling of safety. Her happy and sheltered place is wrecked, conquering with its disappearance, all chances of fun and secure childhood times.

The contrast between Ruba's memory of the forest and its reality relates to what Bjorklund claims and which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter; once children remember events and experiences in relation to their context, it signifies their skills in processing information and hence their maturation.

b. The Cicadas

The cicadas are a further example of an image that, when traced, and whose use is interpreted, could signify Ruba's comprehension of death. She begins learning how to accept the course of life events. At first, the cicadas are mentioned to be in the lively forest, and Ruba's grandmother tells her that once they don't hum, they convey someone's death: "The hot sky had bleached itself white and cicadas hummed back and forth, back and forth, as if they were sawing the trees. Teta had said once that each time they stopped a person had died, but they didn't stop often" (Abi-Ezzi 1). However, Ruba doesn't encounter them to be quiet in the beginning of the novel, which shows her state of innocence in the ways of the world: "The cicadas in the valley throbbed on and on like blood pumping round an aching head" (Abi-Ezzi 13). And yet, with the progress of events in the child narrator's tale, the cicadas begin to hide, as if foretelling that death is near, that Ruba is about to experience loss. This could be seen when Ruba says: "Houses dotted the dark green slopes, and the cicadas hissed and throbbed from their hiding-places" (Abi-Ezzi 179). Eventually, Ruba gets to a point where she experiences the death of a person she genuinely liked, and the cicadas stop

humming upon Ali's death. After the latter's death, Ruba goes to the forest, buries his glass eye, and at once realizes what is different there: "But something had changed, and as I turned back, I noticed that the cicadas had stopped singing" (Abi-Ezzi 212).

c. The Fig-Heart

The fig-heart image is noticed to also help foster Ruba's understanding of life matters, and here specifically of the importance and influence of her father's well-being on that of her mother's. Ruba compares her mother's heart to a dried-up fig, and this metaphor shows up in the novel for the first time when Aida is watering the plants and purposefully leaves the cactus unwatered. On that Ruba reflects: "Mami didn't like it and kept hoping it would die, but it wouldn't. She didn't want to throw it away yet I knew she didn't want to water it either. Perhaps her heart had dried out and withered in the heat like a fig. For a moment I pictured it, purple and shrunken, inside her chest" (Abi-Ezzi 11). The metaphor shows up again when Ruba goes with her mother, grandmother and brother to church. She then ponders what her mother asks from God, who was in fact pleading for her husband's health, praying for Nabeel to come back to them. Ruba actually wonders: "'What does Mami want then?' I thought of her hardened, dried-up fig heart" (Abi-Ezzi 18). The last time Aida's dried-fig heart is mentioned when she actually receives a compliment from Wadih, Ruba's uncle, who says: "We don't give compliments easily, do we, my mother? And it is a compliment. A mean person can't cook well. You have to have a big heart, a generous hand and an honest eye to make good food" (Abi-Ezzi 39). While Wadih hints at Aida's big and generous heart, Ruba thinks of the effect of such sweet and thankful words on her mother: "Mami stopped, holding a bunch of knives and forks like flowers, and her face was suddenly

full of light. Perhaps her shrunken-fig heart was swelling again” (Abi-Ezzi 39). The dried-fig-heart metaphor, even though not often repeated in the novel, goes along with Ruba’s understanding of how bad her mother needs her father’s presence and active role within the family. Thus, Ruba remains constantly worried about her mother being fed up, or wanting more than Nabeel has to offer and provide, which might push her to give up and leave them behind.

d. The Cactus

A rather positive and more hopeful metaphor is that of the cactus. In the beginning of her narrative, Ruba talks about a time when her mother is watering the flowers on the veranda, and she speaks of the cactus being alone out there: “Thin streams slid across the veranda and into the gutter. They oozed out from the bottom of every pot except for the leaning cactus tied to a pole that stood alone in the corner” (Abi-Ezzi 11). Once Ruba leaves the veranda to the living room, her father sees her cuts caused by her fall in the forest. The latter tells her to be careful and then grows quiet. Ruba then compares him to the cactus for the first time: “Papi had turned into a statue with its eyes fixed on the floor. When he lifted his head again he seemed surprised that I was still there. As I left, it came to me that he was like the cactus. He sat in the corner all hard and dry, as though someone had forgotten to water him” (Abi-Ezzi 12). Moreover, she continues the cactus metaphor in order to describe her father’s state. She uses it again when her grandmother cries and worries about having death hovering around her family: “Beside the wall, the cactus drooped a little lower than before. One of its arms had shriveled from lack of water. Just as I thought of watering it myself, the kitchen door opened and uncle stepped out to smoke a cigarette (61). Another

example is when Nabeel is very angry with Naji for spending his time with militia boys. He angrily argues with him and then shrivels in his seat: “I heard the breath leak out of Papi, and Naji grimaced in pain as Papi’s fingers dug into him. Then Papi’s arm fell to his side. He wilted like the thirsty cactus outside” (Abi-Ezzi 148). The use of the child narrator’s metaphor of the cactus here is to reflect Nabeel’s feelings of shame and helplessness for not being able to act and protect his own kids therefore, he bows like the cactus on the veranda.

The cactus metaphor appears for the last time at the end of the novel, after Ruba discovers her father’s incident with the girl in Beirut, and after he gets to save Amal and feels rather healed. As a matter of fact, in a study on the meaning of the cactus as a symbol, Nasser Abufarha discusses how it symbolizes strength and resilience with its deep rootedness in the earth and its resistance to life-threatening conditions. He adds that it’s a “tree that refuses to die” and is defiant against hardships (363). Abufarha’s opinion of the cactus agrees with that of Abu Shaqra in *City of Collision*, who shows his surprise towards it, having “a shocking ability to flower out of thorny death” (Zakaria 323). He also adds that cacti are additionally symbols of patience, endurance and resistance. This, therefore, fits Nabeel’s state in the end, who gets over his depressive phase and seems to gradually overcome his traumatic event in Beirut. Ruba notices Nabeel’s improvement and, therefore, when she sees him drink, the cactus in her imagination finally gets watered and consequently compares him to a less dry cactus: “I had one last thought: I was glad he’d drunk all that water, and that he was no longer a cactus standing motionless in a pot full of dry cracked earth” (Abi-Ezzi 236). This is how Abi-Ezzi actually ends her novel, choosing to do so with a rather hopeful note, suggesting or hinting at better future days for Ruba and her family.

e. Flowers

Flowers also teach Ruba and help her evolve from a state of innocence to one of experience. She often pictures them being watered and in need of care and love in order to stay alive: “Mami watered the fuschias, marigolds and geraniums set out against the walls” (Abi-Ezzi 10) or when she thanks the Rose Man for offering her a rose for her birthday: “He often smiled at his bed of rosebushes out on the veranda or touched them as he watered, but I’d never known him pick one before now” (Abi-Ezzi 26). They accompany Ruba’s life events and fade and shrink on painful incidents. When her uncle Wadih leaves them to Beirut, “the jasmines and fuschias shriveled. The geraniums scattered blackened petals round the cans that had once contained cooking grease and milk powder, and still showed happy cows and brilliant-toothed children” (Abi-Ezzi 79). They also lose color and seem to wither on her brother’s injury: “Nothing had color any more. The life had drained from everything in dark pools hours ago. In that tiny moment, a *thup* had stopped him, just as it had stopped Papi, and now the floors and flowers and books and trees didn’t want to go on (169). Similarly, flowers start to smell and look shocking when Ruba awaits her brother Naji to come home after being hospitalized:

I put my nose into an enormous dark red rose and breathed in. It smelt of candy-floss, or honey dropped in cool water, and had opened so wide that the tiny yellow stalks in the center showed. Closing my eyes, I was filled slowly with happiness. ‘Naji’s coming home,’ I whispered. The petals tickled my cheek, but when I opened my eyes

again, their redness shocked me. They looked like blood-soaked paper, and the sweeter-than-honey scent was sickly. (Abi-Ezzi 184)

The use of flowers in this case could convey how Ruba recognizes that life is not going to be the same again, especially for Naji which makes her feel sad and sick. In addition, flowers also appear in the text when Ruba starts comprehending the war's consequences on her surroundings: "The forest had changed. Apart from several new craters where bombs had landed, the leaves had fallen off bushes, and flowers had died away" (Abi-Ezzi 100).

Nonetheless, flowers do not only occur as fading on painful situations, but they also teach Ruba that we are all bound to die. The Rose Man once tells her that it is of no use to pray because "we're like plants – we're here and then we're not" (Abi-Ezzi 18). As such, Ruba gets to learn about the nature of life and death throughout her experiences during the war. Flowers as well as her grandmother shed light on the importance of water being a major source of life and health. Her grandmother once tells her mother about how to plant something, focusing on the necessity of patience, care and water: "You... you have to wait till it gets roots before you can plant it. Put it in water, that's all. In water. Then give it some good earth" (Abi-Ezzi 221-2). Ruba feels really happy upon seeing her father drink since she desperately needs her parents' presence around her. They also occur more than once, highlighting the importance of her mother's support and presence: "Mami was stroking my hair again, firm and hard now. Even now in early autumn, the flowers in her perfume smelt of spring. They would still smell of spring when winter came" (Abi-Ezzi 210-11).

On another hand, flowers are to be contrasted with plastic flowers which show up only in relation to her father and his terrible state. The plastic flowers accompany her father

on his dark days, and allow her to learn about how serious his condition is. “Naji watched calmly as Papi stood rocking and trembling, his black eyes filled with a deeper blackness. There might have been a crack like stone breaking, then Papi was flowing across the room. Nothing else moved – the walls, the plastic flowers, the tray of cigarettes, an orange coloring pencil sticking out from under the sofa” (Abi-Ezzi 86). A further example is when Ruba compares her father to a statue: “In the vase on the table the plastic flowers were dusty, and the smell of burnt pastry hung in the air. Papi had turned into a statue with its eyes fixed on the floor” (Abi-Ezzi 12).

## ***2. Miscellaneous Images***

### **a. Dust**

Dust is one of the things that Ruba keeps perceiving and acknowledging in her story. It was one of the things that stayed and persisted in spite of the war. It covered Lebanon and was unaffected by wind, rain or bombs. In Abi-Ezzi’s novel, dust metaphorically stands for war, life, as well as death, both of Beirut and its people. It occurs twenty-six times and appears in relation to war, people affected by it, destruction, painful experiences, memories, secrets and death. Benedict Giomo states that the entire social environment is disintegrating into particles and particulars, becoming dust before our eyes. He asserts dust’s most significant implication, being “earth as a place of burial” (24). However, dust doesn’t only signify that, but is also related to war and military approaches. It signifies the approach of an enemy in military conducts and gives immediate and conclusive proof of mass action (Echols 285). Therefore, it proves to be “not-so humble a substance” (Echols 288). Paul B.

Sears, an American scientist, states that “the mere presence of dust, as well as its make-up, often has a story to tell” (3). In Abi-Ezzi’s novel, it truly tells the story of armed conflict.

Gary Alan Fine and Tim Hallett mention how dust is the outcome of bombs, ruins and therefore wars. He supports this idea by giving the example of the enormous amount of dust encountered after the 9/11 incident in the United States, the dust resulting from the violent destructions. This is the same in *A Girl Made of Dust* where dust subsists everywhere, whether in Ein Douwra or in Beirut, displaying a war-torn environment: “Dust swirled in the road below, and the thunder of the blades filled every tiny space in the world. It throbbed through my bones and crowded into my head” (Abi-Ezzi 143).

People affected by the war also get a share of dust’s portraying abilities. It shows how people dealing with war’s consequences and suffering from its heart-breaking penalties perceive dust around them and have to endure its heavy sore burden. Nabeel stays caught in a specific traumatic event of the war and seems unable to let go. This makes of him a passive, useless man unable to support his family and whom Ruba compares to a dry cactus. His situation reminds us of Saree Makdisi’s statement that “self-recognition is itself a painful experience: a moment in which one recalls one’s pain and feels it all over again with renewed intensity” (209). His portion of dust is very clear when Ruba sits in his chair and describes what she sees. She seems to be seeing her father’s gloomy perspective: “I saw things from the chair that I had never seen from anywhere else: a crack in the corner of the ceiling opposite, the way the light fell so you could see the new dust on the coffee table even though Mami had dusted today” (Abi-Ezzi 110). This example also puts Nabeel’s viewpoint

in contrast to Aida's, as he keeps on seeing darkness and dirt while she tries to clean and brighten things up.

Furthermore, death of people in the war plays a crucial role in shaping the characters' lives. Not surprisingly, dust is present at such incidents too. With Nabeel, death is depicted in the girl whose murder causes his distress. He describes her as covered in dust from head to toe and concludes that "she was nothing but a girl made of dust" (Abi-Ezzi 111).

Additionally, examining dust also gets us to clarify the novel's ending. It appears in Nabeel's memories. He remembers dust and this hurtful and shocking memory is transformed with a new kind of hopeful dust, one resulting from a courageous act of his own doing when he saves Amal, which enables him to restore himself. On that, Ruba says: "Papi half smiled. 'The girl comes complete with a jarful of dust'" (Abi-Ezzi 235). This agrees with Saree Makdisi who states that when one thinks of the memories of the war, they still seem to be raw and undigested (204). It's because the past persists and haunts its victims unless they deal with it in an appropriate way (Haugbolle 196). Nabeel seems to heal by the end of the novel as Ruba hints at the cactus being finally watered and less dry, because he was able to find a way to stop the past from haunting him and controlling his every move.

Consequently, dust gives Nabeel a chance for a new life; he seems to be reborn at the end of the novel, rising from dust to life. As such, considering dust in *A Girl Made of Dust* through the sociological lens of Fine and Hallet, we realize its importance in understanding Ruba's life and setting it in context. Through the examination of the recurrent "dust" in the novel, we get to witness its reverberations on the characters' everyday lives and the larger social order and structure in which they live. The more dust occurs, the more Ruba gets to

know about her surroundings and especially about her father's state. This helps her shape her conceptions of life and understand it more fully, definitely from a more grown-up viewpoint.

As discussed above, dust takes us into Ruba's struggles throughout times of war, shows us her sense of helplessness towards things that occur and are beyond her control, as well as her successes and defeats. Hence, it does really help us grasp the bigger picture of her traumatic early life.

b. The Glass Eye

The glass eye symbolizes death as a consequence of political conflict in Beirut and Ruba's understanding of it. Like dust changing into *kishk*, and the forest reaching complete decay, both the glass eye and the cicadas disappear from the narrative to designate Ruba's understanding of death, and therefore her maturing from a state of innocence to one of experience. Ruba finds the glass eye when she falls in the forest. At first, she doesn't realize whose it is or even what it is. Her approach to it is childish in the beginning like when she shows it to Naji: "He gasped. The glass eye jumped up and down twice in his palm, and I sat on my heels and laughed. It looked funny lying in his hand without a body round it, and I thought about people being made up of separate parts – ears and fingers, hair and belly-buttons" (Abi-Ezzi 7). However, the glass eye appears again in Ruba's narrative when she realizes that Ali has been murdered: "As I'd leant against Mami in the wardrobe and felt her warm tears against my face, I had realized who the glass eye belonged to, I'd realized what Ali had lost in the forest. He'd searched but couldn't find it because I already had" (Abi-Ezzi 212). Consequently, Ruba, reaching a better point of understanding death, of knowing that people shall all go back to dust at some point in their human journeys, buries Ali's glass eye:

“The eye shook in my palm, then dropped into the earth. After I’d covered it, I stuck a paper windmill I’d brought with me into the ground, and the colored wheel glistened as it turned into flashes of red and yellow” (Abi-Ezzi 212).

Nonetheless, the glass eye symbolizes Ruba’s growth and move from childhood to a more mature vision of life as well. In the beginning of the novel, Ruba believes that her father is in a terrible state because of a curse that a witch had inflicted upon him. She hence thinks of the glass eye as a means to break the witch’s curse to save her father: “It was then that the idea came to me. Perhaps I could help Papi. If the witch had put a curse on him, maybe the evil eye in my pocket could undo it” (Abi-Ezzi 64). However, throughout the novel, Ruba grows up, matures, and as such understands that there is no witch, that her father is the way he is because of something that had happened to him in Beirut. She realizes that Latife was a regular woman, who even knows her grandmother and is also Amal’s grandmother, and who has made many sacrifices to protect her granddaughter.

### c. The Red Stain

The image of the red stain is a very remarkable one to be discussed here, and which unlike the previous ones, is more positive and leads Ruba to a better and hopeful attitude towards life. It also symbolizes her resilience and survival through the drastically rough times of the Lebanese civil war, as well as ends on a rather positive note.

Even though at an early age, Ruba notices and realizes that something is wrong with her father. She describes how distant and absent he is in the house, as well as how rarely he plays the father’s role properly. In the beginning of her narrative, Ruba starts by describing

the red stain on her father's forehead to be funny and trivial, but she also has a desire to remove: "Above my picture of Ali Baba with the forty thieves, Papi's face looked even more square than usual – a big brown square with a funny reddish mark on his forehead like shoe polish that I had always wanted to rub off" (Abi-Ezzi 11-12). Nevertheless, Ruba's perception of this stain changes with time. She sees how it darkens once her father is put in an uncomfortable situation, like when he sees Karim wearing a mask on the *Burbara* feast, or when he talks to Naji about hanging out with militia boys: "Papi swung round. 'Where did those boys take you? Up to see their soldier friends?' The spilt vinegar mark on his forehead was clear and dark" (Abi-Ezzi 146). Furthermore, ever since Ruba starts to learn how serious this mark is, her wishes for its removal start to appear: "There was no stopping now. Next to the hand on his forehead, the spilt vinegar mark was pulling my finger towards it. If it could only be wiped away" (Abi-Ezzi 105). With time, her desire and determination grow and become more persistent, and so she willingly decides to find a way to remove that stain. She becomes highly motivated by its anticipated positive outcomes:

My fingers moved through the silence towards him. And suddenly, in the hollowness of the house, it was clear that I was going to wipe off that mark and free him; wake him up into the person he used to be. He would move and rub his eyes, blink a few times, then with a smile he would get up and – It was like pressing a button. The dead thing in his lap became a hand again, sprang up alive and bit me hard. It held my wrist so I couldn't move. (Abi-Ezzi 105)

Ruba clearly longs to have her father back and feel his presence and tenderness more often, and fortunately enough, by the end of her narrative, she discovers what had caused her

father's trauma, pursues and even succeeds in her mission of healing him. Once done, Ruba says: "I touched his hand and it was warm and soft, the knuckles no longer like pebbles but flesh and bone, each one round and good and comforting. And as he bent to kiss me in the dim light, I thought that the stain on his forehead was paler, as though it had been washed away. When he stood up again he was smiling, and it was like a gift, that smile" (Abi-Ezzi 236).

d. The Helicopter

Ruba encounters the helicopter when she and her brother Naji are playing next to the church at the top of the hill. Her perception of it could be divided into three different levels: the concrete physical perception, the childlike perception, and the adult and rather more cognitive one. Once Ruba goes through the afore mentioned levels, the helicopter could be added to the list of images that shape *A Girl Made of Dust* as demonstrating Ruba's loss of childhood and, in this case, her maturation and more reasonable adult understanding of war events.

At first, Ruba perceives the concrete physical presence of the helicopter in the sky. "It's a helicopter! A gunship helicopter!' Still clutching the kite-string in one hand, he pointed as though I couldn't see it for myself. 'Look! It's using the buildings and trees as cover so the militia in the valley on the other side of the hill won't be able to see it and shoot it down'" (Abi-Ezzi 142). However, Ruba's childlike innocence shows up and is clear when she speaks of how her perception of the helicopter suddenly changes into a giant bee. "Then suddenly it changed, or the way I was seeing it changed. Because now I was looking at two round glass eyes, and it was an enormous bee with a dozen stings and sharp, whirry metal

wings. Yes. A giant bee, that's what it was" (Abi-Ezzi 143). Yet, even from her childlike imagination and innocent ways of perceiving worldly things, Ruba imagines the helicopter to be a bee, one that stings and causes pain. She must feel the danger the helicopter embodies.

Eventually, the bee disappears and Ruba gets to see the helicopter as a helicopter again. Once back home, she learns about the true meaning and cause of the presence of that helicopter on the hill. She recognizes that due to her father's angry reaction and her mother's worry. Moreover, she overhears her parents speaking about it and therefore gains a more mature perspective of the dangerous event. "“They're Israelis firing back across the valley,' Papi explained to Mami as the noise from outside faded away" (Abi-Ezzi 145).

### ***3. Religious Images***

#### ***a. The Virgin Mary***

The Virgin Mary occurs several times throughout the novel. Her presence at different times, as well as the way Ruba identifies her, go along with other discussed occurrences that prove Ruba's maturity process with the evolution of events and the passing of time.

The first time the Virgin Mary is mentioned in *A Girl Made of Dust* is when Ruba falls in the forest and her grandmother tells her that the latter saved her. In the beginning, Ruba reflects the understanding of an eight-year-old. She doesn't understand how the Virgin Mary could have saved her if she hadn't seen her there. Moreover, Ruba's innocent understanding is visible when she talks of the Virgin as a mere plastic bottle. "“The Virgin?' I gazed at the little yellow-haired woman in a blue dress standing on the dressing-table. She was really only a bottle filled with holy water that you could see if you unscrewed her crown

and I didn't see how she could have saved me that morning" (Abi-Ezzi 2). Ruba couldn't understand how that plastic bottle is the mother of Christ (Abi-Ezzi 98). A further example of her childhood is when she doesn't seem interested in hearing anything about the Virgin Mary unless the latter does something fun: "I didn't really want to hear about the Virgin Mary unless Teta put her into a story and made her do something exciting like swim out to sea, or play hide-and-seek with God, or dig a tunnel all the way to Beirut and live in it" (Abi-Ezzi 2).

Furthermore, the contrast between a perspective of innocence and that of experience is also shown through the contrast of Ruba's and her grandmother's different views of and beliefs in the Virgin Mary. When speaking about Ruba's falling in the forest, Ruba's skepticism about the Virgin's presence is contrasted to her grandmother's certainty. "But she couldn't have saved me because she wasn't even there.' Teta smiled. 'She was there'" (Abi-Ezzi 2).

However, with time, while Ruba has to grow up and mature during the Lebanese civil war, her juvenile attitude towards the Virgin Mary gradually alters. This is obvious especially after her brother's injury. Upon that incident, Ruba feels very stressed out and worried about him. She consequently outpours all her anger on that plastic bottle. She must have had more hope in the latter's ability of keeping them safe than she had previously shown. "Picking her up, I bit down hard. I bit down on her feet and hands. I bit down on her face. I bit down on her golden crown until it began to turn between my teeth. And when it did, I unscrewed it and drank the holy water from her head, every last drop. Then, wiping my mouth, I left her lying crownless and empty on the dressing-table" (Abi-Ezzi 169-170).

Ruba's reaction conveys her stress, fear and anger during times of war, which likewise reflects her maturation and her loss of childhood innocence at a rather early age.

#### **D. Ruba – Innocent No More**

Not surprisingly, Ruba's reflections and descriptions of people and her surroundings reflect a very sad, realistic and negative view of life. They depict war's brutal effects on her family and village, and all the natural metaphors that she uses turn out to be dry and almost dying. However, by the end of the novel, the "arid" characters start to get less and less dehydrated, giving a more knowledgeable and a rather positive view of life.

All of the images and metaphors discussed in this chapter trace Ruba's switch from childhood to adulthood. They show how children lose their childhood in times of war, and how she grows up and matures. She begins to understand what life is about: what makes her happy, the importance and impact of her family around and on her, life's blows and dangers, what death is, as well as maintaining hope in a rather hopeless world.

## CHAPTER III

### Pictorial Imagery in Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*

Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows* is a comic that traces a night in the main character's life during the Lebanese civil war. In that night, Zeina knows how it feels to live without her parents during wartime Beirut, and therefore highlights the importance of family and the presence of adults in the children's lives, especially in times of struggle. As such, children's vulnerability and dependence on their parents is evidently demonstrated. The graphic narrative also includes flashbacks to pre-war times that her parents, neighbors or relatives had experienced. Moreover, Zeina gradually learns about the effects that war has on her surroundings. She recognizes the worry it inflicts upon people, as well as the drastic consequences of death and displacement.

In the comic, Zeina draws a single night of the year 1984 in East Beirut, in which her parents couldn't reach back home due to heavy shelling. She consequently finds herself to be her brother's main source of security and distraction. She draws how childhood in war is unfortunately often interrupted by war incidents, in addition to having to grow up too soon.

Zeina hasn't known anything but war for the first ten years of her life. In *A Game for Swallows*, she has the intention to memorialize the Lebanese civil war and its effects upon herself, people, as well as Lebanon itself. "It happened in 2002, when the rebuilding of Beirut was in full swing, at the moment when they were carefully erasing all the traces of the war and rebuilding the city just as it had been before, without taking the trouble to do any memorial work. Even today we do not have a single memorial, no place that symbolically

says ‘it happened’ (“Artist’s Statement” 71). However, many of Zeina Abirached’s works tackle the issue of the Lebanese civil war such as *Je Me Souviens* (2009), *Beyrouth Catharsis* (2006), and *Le Jeu des Hirondelles* (2006). Through her comics, Zeina describes and draws things from the perspective of the child that she was then (“Artist’s Statement 71). Therefore, she transmits children’s empathy, vulnerability and resilience in times of war and turmoil, as well as highlights the importance of the child-parent relationship in such periods. Similarly, in his study of Zeina Abirached’s work in its original French version *Le Jeu des Hirondelles*, Dominique Renard writes about the Lebanese generation’s ignorance of the civil war and the collective amnesia that prevailed in families in which parents wouldn’t share its history with their children in order to spare them from painful memories (5).

In this chapter, I argue that *A Game for Swallows*, similarly to *A Girl Made of Dust*, is a depiction of its child narrator’s unavoidable growth, in which Zeina must grow up yet not by choice. The graphic novel gradually displays Zeina’s maturation throughout the war, and how her evolution is evident in the way certain objects are portrayed. As stated in the introduction, I will prove her loss of childhood and its innocence through theory on memory and its crucial role in helping people make sense of their lives as well as grow in resilience and empathy. Moreover, I will do so by highlighting the importance of parents’ presence to children and the repercussions of their absence in times of conflicts and dangers, as it has already been discussed in the previous chapter. However, most important here is the discussion of comic visualities and means of reading and interpreting comics. Before delving into close-reading specific recurrent images in *A Game for Swallows* later in this chapter, I will discuss means of reading comics, highlighting the juxtaposition of word and image and

its strength as a double medium. Eventually, *A Game for Swallows* proves to portray Zeina's rapid life tempo, in which lies an undercurrent of mourning, not just for a lost childhood but also a lost home.

### **A. Children Remember: Making Sense of One's Life**

Wars have affected people's lives from cradle to grave. As mentioned earlier, these effects burden children's mental health and their development (Qouta et al. 310). In "Childhood in the shadow of war: filled with work and play," the importance of remembering such events in the case of children, in order to help them make sense of their lives is discussed. "Retrospection means also remembering, sharing, contemplating, and situating one's life as a part of the history. Indeed, memories are used for constructing survival stories that highlight the ways of coping and conquering adversities of life" (Paksuniemi et al. 117). While doing so, children prove to be highly optimistic and constructive towards these torturous events and begin to develop positive and hopeful emotions. Consequently, they grow in resilience and emotional intelligence which helps them lessen the resonance of such negative events in their lives (Tugade and Fredrickson 150-51). The more children find ways to cope with their difficult present, the stronger they become in dealing with its repercussions on their personal futures.

Abirached displays her memories through which she tells her story in ultimately geometrical black and white panels. Ester Szep argues that regularity and precision in the shape of the panels suggest order, and "a sense of people and things having their place." As such, it is as if the chaos of the war is replaced by these geometric relationships between people in the narrative, with order in the design, and order in humans' emotions (32).

Moreover, *A Game for Swallows* tells the survival story of Zeina and her family, and it does so in black and white images. Myriem El Maizi writes of how Hillary Chute comments on the use of black and white as a means that highlights the depth and thickness of the memories being drawn, rather than their scarcity (257). She adds that the black and white technique is highly dramatic, displaying a gloomy frame that refuses to show and pointing to trauma's unrepresentability (260). Nonetheless, eventually, Abirached succeeds in revealing her traumatic experience rather stylistically and contributes to the creation of a collective memory of the Lebanese civil war as she had originally intended. She does so because her traumatic realist work is not just a mimetic representation of the events but becomes a source of knowledge and engages the readers in meaning-making. Michael Rothberg writes about how a traumatic realist project "transforms its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to post-traumatic culture" (El Maizi 266). Therefore, Abirached's remembrance and artistic approach towards her recollections help her as well as others to acknowledge wartime events, and to understand, even if slightly, the absurdity and confusion that dominated their past life memories. Thus, comics' ability to engage their readers, to bring together various semantic systems into a field where meaning is both collaborative and competitive – between images and frames, and between reader and writer, allows them to create communities across time, whether past, present or future ones (Hayek 187). As such, Abirached's comics allow her to confront the collective amnesia that prevailed after the Lebanese civil war, to allow readers to make use of their present days in a rather more sane way, as well as save them from ruining their future for not confronting their past.

## **B. Expansion of Time and Space and the Absence of Parents**

As mentioned in the introduction as well as in the first chapter, children in times of war suffer tremendously, and end up living the consequences of such events for many years that follow. Furthermore, based on attachment theory discussed earlier, children tend to be in better states when surrounded by their parents. However, war stressors obviously have negative impacts on the emotional functioning of all children and findings highlight “the significance of a stable emotional relationship between parents and children in strengthening the child’s ability to cope with unfavorable circumstances” (Joshi and O’Donnell 287). Even though children cannot clearly express themselves and their understanding of war, their comments and images prove the opposite (Rodd 119). However, they are anxious due to their concern for others and for the universal right to life in general, rather than a personal egocentric worry about themselves (Rodd 117). From here comes the importance of the parents’ health and existence in their lives and especially in difficult and dangerous times. Joan Tephly claims that the consequences of wartime stress were clearly apparent in children, and separation from parents appeared to result in more disturbing side effects than the witness of wartime destruction (273). I find it normal for children to be affected by their parents’ absence more than by war events, since the former are children’s main source of security and love, with whom they believe to be safe regardless of the circumstances.

In *A Game for Swallows*, Zeina draws the effects of her parents’ absence from home. Most of the novel covers one single night in which her parents couldn’t get back, and the complexity of the comic strip as a narrative instrument meets the requirements of the formulation of trauma that such an event causes; “if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative

formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequences.” Myriem El Maizi therefore thinks it necessary to analyze how Abirached “develops an aesthetic which, in a game of the visual and the discursive, constantly renegotiates the possibility of testimony and the very representability of the trauma” (251). Abirached’s *A Game for Swallows* gives her the chance to express her feelings about the war and to testify its consequences on her life and on that of others around her.

Zeina showcases her fear and worry when separated from her parents. She finds herself responsible for her younger brother and tries to make him feel better. Both of their sad facial and bodily expressions display their emotional states too (Figures 1 and 2). This is contrasted with times when her parents were around, the kids looked happy and Zeina says that she felt they were safe once gathered together in the foyer (41). She also asks her parents on the phone about when they would be back home: “Mom? When are you and Pop coming back?” (42). Moreover, Zeina and her brother seem to look for adults’ presence, hoping to find feelings of safety and comfort. They spend remarkable times hugging their neighbors and especially Anhala, a character known for her genuine motherly kindness (Figure 3).



Fig.1: Abirached 111. Image cropped.



Fig.2: Abirached 140. Image cropped.



Fig.3: Abirached 143. Image cropped.

A further proof of Zeina's need for her parents is seen through her representation of time and space. Once Anahala leaves them and goes to the kitchen, the kids are drawn in a bigger than usual black panel, all worried and scared, feeling so small in such a big dark and lonely space. On another hand, time also dilates in the same way as panels expand upon the

parents' absence. The fact that the novel covers one single night is an example of this, as well as when the kids and neighbors are waiting with the representation of the slow passing of seconds (Figure 4). On that Abirached states: "I wanted to express the degree to which time seems long in those moments, and the extent to which one worries and imagines all the scenarios, the most dramatic ones... Time dilates, and the least second (tick) counts" ("Artist's Statement" 80). This shows the ability of comics to portray the dynamic movements of time and space through still images.



Fig.4: Abirached 153.

Several examples on the slow passing of time or the way Ruba perceives it to be are present in Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust* too. However, time stopping is thought to be due

to the feeling of utter confinement, of being stuck in Ruba's village and home, incapable of going out of the house. Her father says that for the people living in Ein Douwra, time stands still (135). Moreover, Abi-Ezzi differentiates between the actual passing of real time and the way characters in war perceive it. She does so through Ruba's depictions of it in her narrative, the way she speaks of it being very slow, even slower than her old neighbor, the Rose Man:

Mami always said that time passed quickly, and maybe it did in other places – in Beirut or on the beach or in the Roman temples at Baalbek that were in our history books at school, or at the top of the snowiest mountain – but here in Ein Douwra, it went slowly. The Rose Man came down the stairs onto the far end of the veranda, smiled at his roses as he walked past them, and carried on up the hill, easing himself from foot to foot, lifting and settling his stick, stopping at every fifth or sixth step to rest and look around. He was slow, and time moved even slower than he did. It had taken for ever to get to 1981, and would take for ever again to reach my eighth birthday. (4-5)

A further example occurs when the shelling gets very bad and Ruba is gathered with her parents and neighbors in the corridor:

In the silences between blasts, the clock ticked on, and Mami peeled apples that no one ate. The one in her hand turned round and round, the red peel not breaking till the whole fruit was white. When it was done she put it on the plate, took up another and began peeling again. A shell wailed and everyone paused to hear where it would land. Then the earth shook, and the sound of breaking glass came from the living room.

‘The window,’ moaned Ghada, biting her lip. An apple skin broke, fell half on and half off Mami’s lap and hung there, a short coil of flecked red, while on the floor at her feet, the plate of naked white apples had begun to turn brown. (221)

This feeling of forever passing between 1975 and 1981 stresses how time dilates in wartime and dangerous situations. Moreover, Abi-Ezzi’s detailed description of every action emphasizes even more its stillness. Accordingly, the more static, slow and dilated both Ruba and Zeina feel it to be, the more it makes of Abi-Ezzi’s novel as well as Abirached’s graphic narrative possibilities of Bildungsromane of their main protagonists. In spite of covering relatively short time spans, unlike Bildungsromane that cover long journeys of their main characters, both Zeina and Ruba seem to spend quite a long time in the war zones. As such, days have the impact of and even feel like much longer time periods, giving both narrators enough time to go through experiences, to attain emotional maturity, learn, go on quests for the meaning of life, and leave their childhood innocence behind.

Similarly to Ruba in *A Girl Made of Dust*, Zeina has to grow up ahead of time. She goes through tough times that a child must not encounter, and is shown to drown in worry, straying away from childhood innocence and play. This is shown in the contrasted panels of Zeina’s play with her brother (Figure 5), to both of their fear as seen previously in figures 1, 2, and 3. Moreover, this separation from one’s parents gives children the chance to grow in empathy and resilience. This has been discussed in the previous chapter with attachment theory and emotional intelligence. Zeina becomes a stronger kid, despite her own fear, because she actually doesn’t have any other choice. Although she definitely feels a lot of

stress and tension such as in figure 2 where she unconsciously pulls hard on her brother's neck, she stays by his side and is often displayed having her arm around him.



Fig.5: Abirached 21.

### C. Comic Visualities

After having worked on metaphorical and verbal imagery in *A Girl Made of Dust*, it remains highly crucial for me to discuss the importance of the visual images with which *A Game for Swallows* abounds. I hope to answer, few questions that Barthes raises in *Image Music Text*: “what is the signifying structure of ‘illustration’? Does the image duplicate certain of the information given in the text by a phenomenon of redundancy or does the text add a fresh information to the image?” (38). I aim to show how the visual images help Zeina in the maturation process and how they let the readers know she is maturing too. Moreover, I

will discuss how the images here, in juxtaposition with verbal language, seem to say more than words do. Images express more emotions and help Zeina highlight her childlike perspective because “the comic directs the reader’s attention to the precariousness of childhood in war through its childlike imagery and the text” (Hayek 183). On that also, speaking of comics, Marianne Hirsch reflects on the relationship between the visual and the verbal, and argues that comics are biocular texts par excellence, emphasizing the conjunction between word and image. Comics ask us to read back and forth between both the visual and the verbal on the page, highlighting the narrativity of images (El Maizi 254). In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, Gillian Rose argues that this narrativity of images is supported on the basis that picturing and seeing are pervasive aspects of the process by which human beings get to know the world as it really is for them. This could be because “seeing comes before words” (Rose 2-3). However, regardless of which comes first, the juxtaposition between images and text is crucial. Barbara Postema argues that this association highlights the comic’s images to be an excellent narrative (495). Similarly, David Carrier points out that even without text, the images of comics develop a coherent visual story. He claims that their ability to tell a story is not dependent on words and even their mere succession on the pages guarantees their capacity of narrating (Postema 500). Readers of comics can make sense of a narrative even in panels where words do not exist.

Nonetheless, many objections assert that text is more detailed and “much fuller than the illustration that the latter seems a mere token” (Postema 496). They believe that pictorial media lack precise narrations in comparison to textual ones, as well as can depict actions and

characters' intentions, motivations and feelings, however only to a very limited extent (Ranta 7). I believe these objections to be underestimating of the power of images, for sometimes a single image can bring an entire narrative to its viewer's mind which shows the immense potential of narrativity that images have. Images are definitely rich in connotations and symbols which the viewer has to infer, by involving himself/herself and by contextualizing the images in such a way that makes them gain even more narrative value.

As such, in order to understand comics, readers play a major role in interpretation and meaning-making. The genre relies both on the semiotic understanding of its signs, images and symbols, as well as on the readers' ability to interpret and make meaning while filling in the narrative gaps (Dittmer 228). It is therefore the combination of what is seen on the page with what is not visualized that allows readers to make the most out of comics. As Mitchell claims: "the images we see in the world only make sense, in fact, in relation to the words that circulate through them and that we bring to them" (140). This highlights the importance of the reader in bringing meaning to the images which happens at the site of audiencing, where the role the audience plays is key.

Moreover, a comic book reader must take into consideration the display of panels: their geometric shape, form or color, their proportion or size on pages, as well as their location. He/she must also consider the representation of speech, sounds and noises in the panels, which brings us to the comics' ability to represent whatever is believed or felt to be unimaginable and unspeakable. On that Marianne Hirsch quotes Spiegelman who states that seeing and reading comics are an attempt "to see beyond the given-to-be-seen and to say what cannot be otherwise said" ("Editor's Column" 1215). As such, the literary and visual

arts combined are one more effective mechanism in “transmitting pain when words are insufficient. Images can guarantee the passage from ‘telling everything’ to ‘showing everything’” (Nevine El Nossery and Hubbell 2-3). Zeina Abirached herself admits that she started to draw comics the day she had a vital need to tell a story, and at the same time to do memory work on her history, to try to replace the unsaid things with words and images, and hence to try to make sense of things (“Artist’s Statement” 7).

In *A Game for Swallows*, Abirached illustrates horrible moments of her childhood in Beirut. Dominique Renard writes that Zeina represents the hell of everyday life and the extent of solidarity among people living in a city at war (12). He discusses the importance of the title and the representation of the kids - Zeina and her brother – in highlighting that *A Game for Swallows* conveys a child’s perspective. In the title, he links the game of the swallows with children’s play, games, and the world of childhood. Whereas in his discussion of the book cover, he points out that Zeina draws herself as well as her brother in white clothes and slightly smiling eyes unlike all other characters, and as such emphasizing their innocence and gullibility.

Nevertheless, Abirached certainly focuses on displaying both the concepts of time and place during the war. The former seems to be agonizingly slow, while the latter sheds light on situations of confinement, displacement, safety and danger. Chute speaks of comics to be a medium that highly experiments in representations of place and time, and is hence suitable for narratives that are marked and obsessed with them (17). She adds that it is a form that “relies on space to represent time” and has become structurally equipped to challenge

dominant modes of storytelling and history writing (456). This is because graphic narratives have become more and more popular in the last few years as a narrative form.

#### **D. Close Reading**

Images and text constantly interact with one another in *A Game for Swallows*. Likewise, in an interview with W.J.T. Mitchell, he claims that “literature is a structure of words in which pictures, scenes, and images of all kinds are nested.” He argues that it is important for readers to be able to both read and see, hear and behold, as they make sense of the world (Anfang 140). Therefore, meaning lies not exclusively in either words or images, but in their combination.

Below is a close reading of recurrent remarkable images found in *A Game for Swallows*. I will discuss the images and representations of the wall hanging, the boat, the wall of swallows, and physical space, in order to understand and know more about Zeina, as well as trace her maturation as discussed earlier. Moreover, as Pratt argues, I also tend to get narrative information from the author’s style and layout choices. These factors combined create the general mood of the narrative and allow the reader to better interpret and understand (“Narrative in Comics” 110). It is the study of the author’s style, the visualities, and the context of the work that help the reader make the most out of it.

##### ***1. The Wall Hanging***

###### **a. The Actual Wall Hanging**

The wall hanging is an image found in most of the panels in *A Game for Swallows*, whether parts of it or its entirety. It sometimes dominates entire panels, while it is also often

a part of the background of hundreds of panels in the comic as Ester Szep notices: “it provides a small yet fixed point of reference in the massive darkness the characters are frequently depicted against” (30). Abirached says it materializes the war raging the country. Moreover, it proves to be of crucial importance to the argument of this thesis, for studying its presence or lack thereof, its location and even its drawings, helps both Zeina as well as the readers understand the cruelty of war, and separates the young girl from the nested security of childhood.

Kress and Van Leeuwen discuss spatial dimensions of margin and center. They claim that some visual images are mainly composed of a dominant center rather than a left-right or top-bottom structure. They add that for something to be at the center it means it is “presented as the nucleus of the information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient” (113). And since the wall hanging is clearly centered several times in the comic (Figure 6), the importance of analyzing its meaning and presence is made essential.

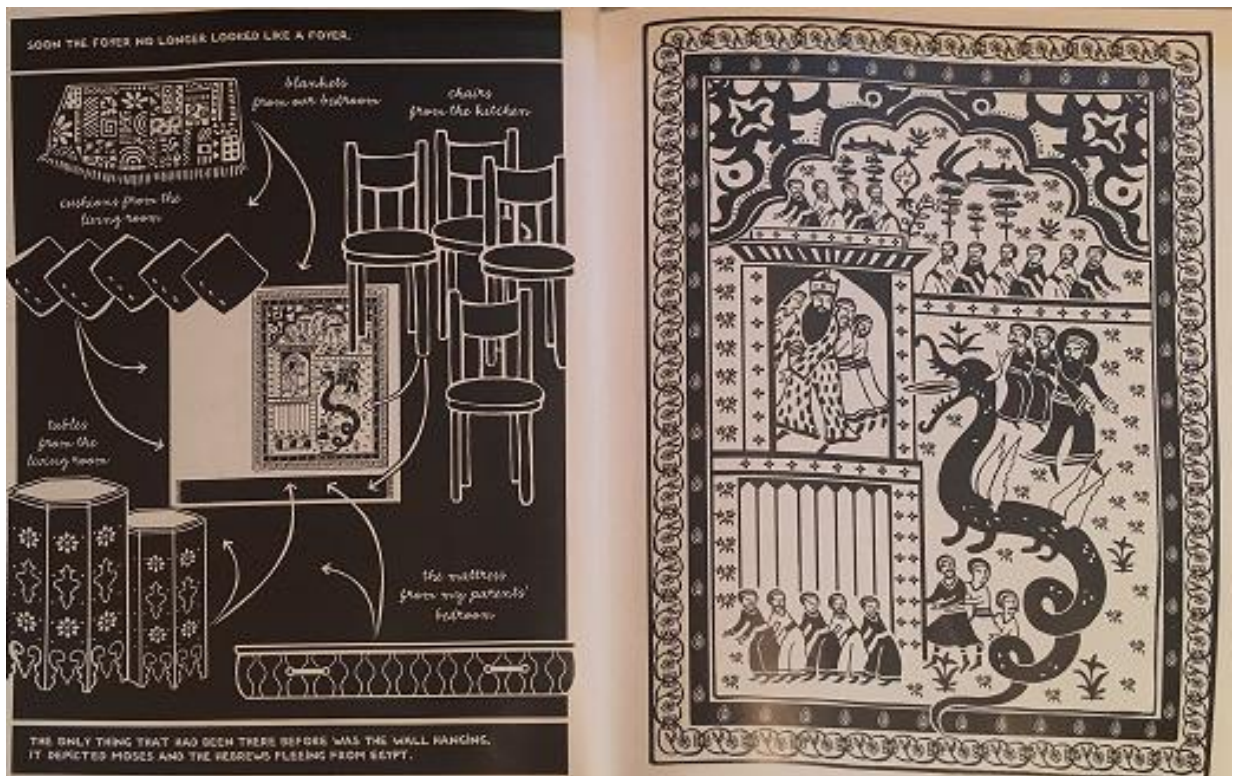


Fig.6: Abirached 38-39.

In a statement of hers, Abirached speaks of the importance of that wall hanging, admitting that it gave her a feeling of security: “For me, so long as we were in the entryway, nothing could happen to us, thanks to the wall hanging. That wall hanging was a bit like my talisman. I knew that it would protect us” (*A Game for Swallows* 76). Therefore, the physical presence of the wall hanging provided Zeina with safety and protection, in times when people needed a lot more than a furniture item to feel safe and survive. Dominique Renard also writes about its reassuring effect. He adds that it maintains the continuity of family history, being transmitted from one generation to another (156).

In her narrative, Zeina informs the reader about the origin of the wall hanging, saying that it was the only thing left to her father by his parents. Her father found it in the attic and

she in turn found it hung in their foyer ever since she was born. It depicted Moses and the Hebrews fleeing from Egypt, as stated by Zeina herself. On that, Renard argues that it represents fleeing from mortal menace, and anticipates the fate of its owners, who find leaving their homeland to be mandatory for their survival (38). Abirached adds that having not known her paternal grandparents, she had always linked them to that wall hanging somehow. Being in the foyer, with her parents and the wall hanging, made her feel safe in spite of obvious dangers (*A Game for Swallows* 41). However, it is important to notice that the presence of these three factors together only appears twice in the entire comic. Once when Zeina explains the importance of the wall hanging and its effects on her (*A Game for Swallows* 41), and the second when her parents get back home after being stuck at her grandmother's due to heavy shelling (*A Game for Swallows* 158). These three factors – her parents, the foyer, and the wall hanging - are displayed together again only once after her parents are back home safely, which therefore shows how seldom Zeina felt safe during the times of the Lebanese civil war.

Moreover, tracking the wall hanging in the narrative allows me to argue that Zeina had to grow up too soon, had to encounter atrocities that no child should, and as such lost all feelings of protection and stability, both emotional and physical, that a child must have. Unfortunately, this feeling of insecurity and uncertainty isn't limited to Zeina's stay in Lebanon during the war, but apparently accompanies her throughout her life. She announces that a shell had landed in her bedroom and they soon after had to leave (166-67). The wall hanging is drawn deserted with empty chairs in the foyer where it ends up being abandoned and left behind, while Zeina and her family had to flee. And even though her parents come

back to their apartment a while later to gather a few things, one of which is the wall hanging obviously, Zeina never gets the chance to have the wall hanging, her parents, and the foyer combined ever again.

Nonetheless, the importance of the wall hanging as a recurrent image in the comic is reinforced by its complexity as an image. I will demonstrate this through further analysis of the images drawn on the wall hanging itself: the dragon, as well as Moses and the Hebrews fleeing from Egypt.

#### b. The Dragon

The wall hanging in Zeina's foyer shows Moses and his people in their dangerous escape. A relatively huge dragon is drawn with them which they seem to fear and run away from. In *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art*, Sara Kuehn claims that the dragon has always been of a highly rich symbolic and mythical value. "It has been called one of the most complex symbolisms of the history of cultures" due to its ambiguous contradicting aspects of both maleficence and beneficence (5). She adds that the dragon motif is often found on items pertaining to hunt or war for dragon iconography carries implicit connotations of endowing their owners with empowering qualities, and it was believed to provide the owner with safety against real or imaginary dangers. "The belief in the magical power of images meant that they could function as talismans intended, for instance, to promote well-being and to protect from the power of evil. Hence the serpent or dragon comes to be looked upon as harbinger of good luck and bestower of prosperity" (35). Such is the case of the wall hanging in which the dragon is drawn, because Zeina believes it has a talismanic power in her life and provides her with safety as mentioned earlier.

Likewise, Dominique Renard believes the dragon belongs to childish imagination and presents itself in the comic as a threatening obstacle that symbolizes war (23). In addition, Renard mentions another useful interpretation of the dragon, considering it as representative of a mythical middle-eastern serpent. It therefore personifies the aggressive and hostile powers of evil (37).

However, tracing the image of the dragon in *A Game for Swallows* as I have done to other images also in *A Girl Made of Dust*, shows how images in both works change or even disappear from the narrators' lives, and could be seen as hints of the children characters' maturation and loss of innocence in the Lebanese civil war period. In his study, Renard does not mention anything related to the mutation or the disappearance of the dragon from Zeina's narrative. Similarly to previously mentioned images, the dragon in the wall hanging both changes and disappears. The last time it is displayed, it is drawn alone, out of the wall hanging, dominating a single panel occupying an entire page (Figure 7). Furthermore, this time, the dragon's wings turn to black, unlike all its previous occurrences, designating a change in Zeina's life. Instead of talismanic white wings, the black-winged dragon changes everything. This time, things got worse than ever, a shell had landed in her own bedroom, and things went particularly wrong (*A Game for Swallows* 167). With the dragon's metamorphosis out of the wall hanging, and with the wall hanging being left behind while they had to leave, I could say that both these factors add to the value of this thesis' argument, and show the increased extent of insecurity and danger in Zeina's life.



Fig.7: Abirached 167.

c. Moses and the Hebrews

Alongside the wall hanging itself and the dragon in it, the representation of its people is the last aspect of it that will be discussed now. They represent Moses and his people fleeing from Egypt in harsh and dangerous conditions. They seem to share the characters' worries and fears since their concerned and scared faces match those of Zeina's parents and neighbors. Often times, they appear on the same level of the characters but in the background, when characters are discussing something pretty serious and perturbing. They are there every time the neighbors are gathered and depicted to be conversing, mostly before Nour and Sami, Zeina's parents, get back home safely. For instance, they seem to turn around towards Chucri's voice announcing a news flash (Figure 8). Another example is when Anhala and Madame Linda are discussing Farah and Ramzi's delay (*A Game for Swallows* 105). And a further example is when the people in the wall hanging are depicted as

if sharing Chucri and Ernest's anticipating and worried thoughts about Zeina's parents' delay (Figure 9).



Fig.8: Abirached 83.



Fig.9: Abirached 144.

Nonetheless, the presence of Moses' people in the wall hanging is highly symbolic and of crucial significance to Zeina's narrative. They had to go through drastic dangers and spend forty years in the wilderness. Furthermore, a lot of them die in the process and never get the chance to attain their aim and reach their final destination and homeland. However, Moses' people triumph eventually, as they have been promised to. They find themselves moving out of slavery to a land flowing with milk and honey. As such, they attain safety, deliverance and hope. As David M. Carr writes in *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*: "People died never seeing their homeland again, and many others wondered whether they or their children would get a chance to leave Babylon, their 'Egypt,' for home.

Chastened by decades of waiting, these exiles found a believable story of deliverance in the book of Exodus, with its story of exodus after a long process. Nothing was easy, nothing came immediately, but release from forced exile did eventually come” (4). Consequently, Moses’ story not only represents hardships but also ends on a hopeful note of conquering and surviving trauma. Carr adds that the Exodus story moves beyond trauma to survival of it (5). All of this can be paralleled to Zeina’s life circumstances. She and her family and neighbors are going through hardships that could last for a very long time. And yet, deep within, in spite of it all, they hope to get over their trouble and survive. Hence, the wall hanging anticipates their exilic future and yet gives a hopeful note on their return home one day.

Abirached could have used the story of Moses in the wall hanging to highlight the outcomes of exile and to anticipate her own. Moses, the child, lives a life of exile among foreigners and is given a foreign name. David M. Carr argues that as such, “we see the cultural cross-currents that many exiles face while living as a cultural minority. They take on foreign names and/ or customs while maintaining ties to their own cultures” (2). This idea of exile and having to grow up away from home is also considered through a close personal interpretation of another recurrent image in the comic, that of the boat, which will be discussed next.

## ***2. The Boat***

A further image showing Zeina relinquishing her childhood innocence damaged by the civil war is that of the boat. Even though the boat appears only two times at the end of Zeina’s narrative, I find its presence of crucial importance to the meaning-making of her future, evolution and fate. By the end of the narrative Zeina mentions how she learns to write

her name which highlights how young and vulnerable she is (Figure 10). However, Abirached displays how her name starts to gradually fade on the lines (Figure 11). Letters change and disappear to end up as the image of a desolate tiny boat amidst a vast gloomy ocean, in the same way as Zeina’s own innocence and childhood change and disappear in that transitional geographical passage (Figures 12-13). The graphic novel ends as such, with Zeina saying that “once more, we had to leave” (186-188).

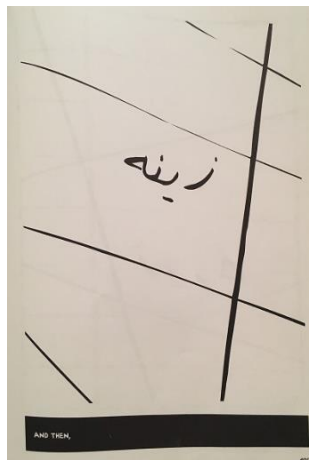


Fig.10: Abirached 185.

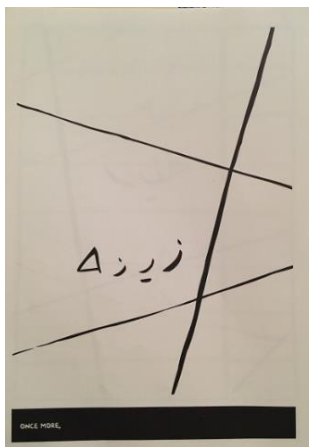


Fig.11: Abirached 186.

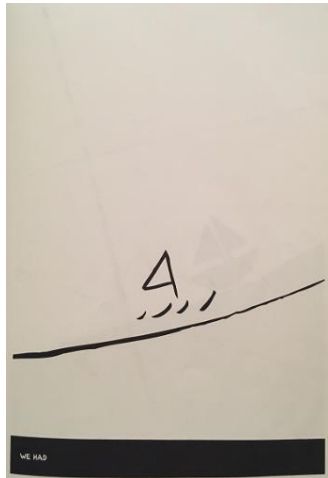


Fig.12: Abirached 187.



Fig.13: Abirached 188.

This image of the boat, even though only found at the end of the narrative is tremendously expressive of Zeina’s life conditions. We get to understand that the situation in Beirut was even more dangerous than before, because as Davenport et al. argue, people leave their homes to the unknown when they feel that their physical security is intensely endangered (31). They hypothesize that “refugees will tend to move from states participating in such wars to countries that are not” (34). Moreover, in *Symbolism of Ships and the Sea*, Michael McCaughan writes:

The emblematic ship is an enduring cultural symbol, or root metaphor, deeply embedded in human consciousness. Its symbolic meanings are keyed directly to the natural world of the oceans, where salt-laden reality prevails in the immensity of sea and sky. This is a place of otherness, an unpredictable and alien environment possessing great beauty and destructive power. It both attracts and repels humanity through conflicting emotions of awe and fear. From earliest times seafarers have sailed from the shores of home, navigating far out on to the trackless and unfathomable deep. Questing for what lies beyond the horizon. (54)

McCaughan's statement clearly explains the risky changes in Zeina's life, as well as their unknown and uncertain outcomes.

Moreover, the image of the boat could also be associated with that of the wall hanging and Moses' story. The Hebrew reinterpretation of Moses' name meaning "I drew him out of the water," is therefore linked to water deliverance which "anticipates his later deliverance of his people at the Egyptian Red Sea" (Carr 2). Zeina, having experienced war daily, certainly struggles to regain trust in the world, one that robbed her of the certainty of home, and of the warmth of childhood. Her passage through water is hence a means towards liberation and hopefully a safer shore.

### ***3. The Wall of Swallows***

The graphic novel abounds in panels of Zeina's constricted neighborhood, hidden behind walls and barbed wire. As mentioned earlier, she struggles through confinement and closed spaces in search of safety and survival. However, when things become unbearable in

Beirut, she and her family decide to go on the move towards safer grounds. On their way, Zeina notices a wall that they go past in her parents' car, on which is written: "Mourir Partir Revenir C'est le Jeu des Hirondelles" meaning to die to leave to return, it's a game for swallows (172). Here the meaning of the wall that resisted all bombardments is given through the words that adorn it, for a blank wall would have most probably been unnoticed. Image and words combined shed light on Zeina's ambiguous fate, leaving the country towards what lies behind the wall. This could be seen as if designating the mystery that lies ahead, the unstable future that could be awaiting them, and the elusiveness of the unknown.

Furthermore, it is the message written on the wall that adds to its importance in the meaning-making of their leaving. The image of swallows leaving and returning could be paralleled to the Lebanese people's deepest desires of coming back to their homeland one day, once and if the war is over. In a personal statement, Abirached states that what she wished to tell is: "those departures, those returns, those deaths, all those movements inside the country or towards the outside, which made migrant beings of us... swallows!" ("Artist's Statement" 82). Swallows are considered an archetypal metaphor for the idea of returning, through their migratory cycle and vernal return (E.K.Borthwick). They herald the commencement of spring and of better and happier times. In addition, even though Borthwick writes that swallows' cries are traditionally associated with lamentation especially in Greek literature, he adds that these hibernal birds are highly devoted to their family units (14-15). They are emblems of familial harmony and loyalty (Borthwick 17). As such, Abirached compares the Lebanese people leaving their country to swallows, greatly devoted to their Lebanese roots, lamenting their sorrowful and sad fate. She ends however with a

rather hopeful note about their desire and eagerness to return. The graffiti on the wall makes the message accessible to everyone and sounds the muted voices of the Lebanese people during wartime.

#### ***4. Physical Space VS the Comics Space***

One last image I will discuss is that of physical space. In a statement of hers, Abirached declares that when she was a child, she thought that her street was a dead end, and that Beirut ended at the bottom of the street (“Artist’s Statement” 70). Unlike what childhood should be, filled with exploration and play, Zeina’s was strictly confined and kept behind walls, sandbag barriers and demarcation lines. Her building was the only space she ever knew, which is contrasted to prewar times in Beirut. Her narrowed space is distinguished from that of the older generation’s early days. Her grandmother speaks of how they used to wander all over Lebanon saying they “traveled all over the country! North to south! Hasroun, the cedars, Laklouk, Bologna, Aley, Souk El-Gharb, Nabeh El-Safa, Kfarnis, The Beqaa, Jezzine, Bkassine... you name it!” (18).

Unfortunately enough, and contrarily to her older family and neighbors, Zeina longs to explore a basic and very specific space of her childhood, her building. And yet, even there, space keeps shrinking due to the heavy dangerous war circumstances. Nonetheless, just like Zeina goes on a journey of exploration of the only environment she has left, exploring it with her is central to this thesis. In *Semiotics the Basics*, Chandler claims that spatial relations are dominant in visual signs, and we need to recognize the importance of such spatial syntagmatic relations whose layout contributes to meaning making (110). As such, studying

spatial relations amongst and within panels clarifies what it feels to a child, like Zeina, to grow up in a warzone.

Abirached artistically displays the closed spaces she was stuck in. She starts her narrative with the demarcation line narrowing Beirut's surface, dividing it between east and west (Figure 14). She then goes closer to her neighborhood, set behind walls, sandbags and barbed wire (Figure 15). Her text, here, goes along with the visual panels in order to explain and intensify the shut places being represented. In "Comics as literature? Reading graphic narrative," Hillary Chute argues that comics readers actively engage in filling in the gaps between panels, as well as work with the "often disjunctive back-and-forth of reading and looking for meaning" (452). Here Abirached adds to the panels: "In the neighborhoods along the demarcation line, walls of sandbags sever the streets. Containers taken from the docks of the deserted port stand in the middle of alleys to protect residents from snipers' bullets. Buildings shut themselves away behind walls of cinder blocks and metal drums. Inside these divided sectors, life is organized around the cease-fires" (*A Game for Swallows* 14).

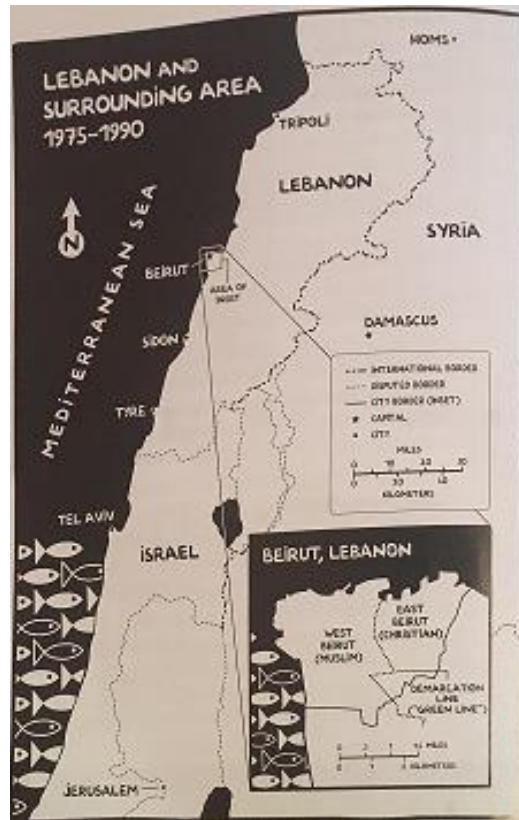


Fig.14: Abirached 10.

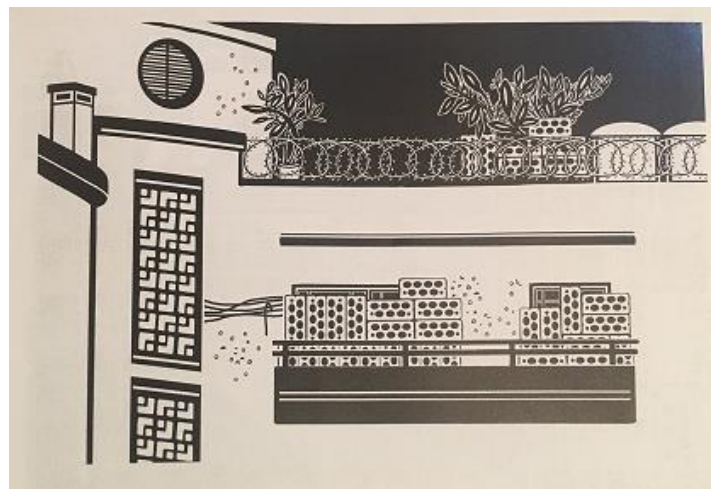


Fig.15: Abirached 11.

From Beirut the divided city to her neighborhood, Zeina goes further to display an even smaller spatial unit, her building. It is displayed with the word “here” taking only a small part of a relatively immense surrounding. The building resides on the east side of half a

city, clearly seen as cut into two, visually by the gutter, while looking at once on both pages 24 and 25 (Figure 16). Buildings in *A Game for Swallows* are always shown on the lower parts of panels, and as Myriem El Maizi writes, they “appear to be crushed both by clouds and by the heavy black in which consists the upper half of the sticker” (253). As such, Abirached contrasts the insignificant size of the buildings to the enormity and intensity of the events to which they had to succumb. Space on top of the buildings is dominated by smoky black clouds, or else by onomatopoeic words giving voice to what originates the clouds in the first place, bombardments (Figure 17). Angela Ndalians showcases how Robert Peterson comments on the use of onomatopoeic words stating that the sound-like experience fuses with, as well as conveys, the essence of lived sensations (244). For example when Abirached uses the onomatopoeic word “baaarroom” as seen in figure 17 below, with the size of the letters she conveys how loud the sound is, how it dominated the skies of Beirut by taking over two pages, and therefore pinpointing at how long-lasting and scary it is.

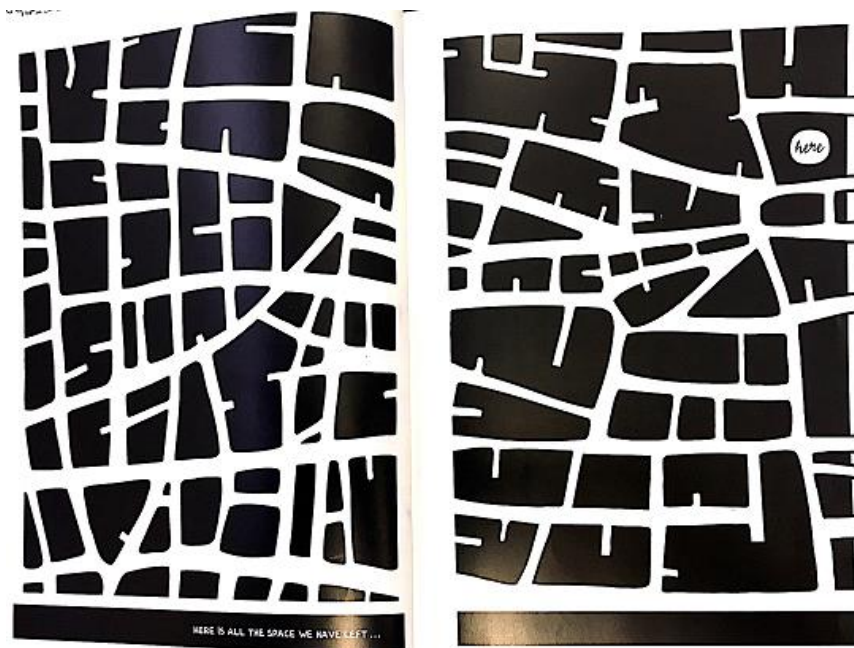


Fig.16: Abirached 24-25.



Fig.17: Abirached 136-137.

And yet, space doesn't stop shrinking at the buildings' level but continues to do so, in order to reach Zeina's apartment and finally only the foyer in that apartment (Figure 18). While writing about one of Zeina Abirached's war comics *Beirut Catharsis*, Dominique Renard argues that reduced space signifies not only the partitioning of the city but also the small universe of childhood (8). However, I strongly disagree with him on this, because even though children's physical worlds revolve around that of their parents, they are still supposed to roam rather freely in these areas, unlike what Zeina experiences and writes about. Myriem El Maizi also writes about this and about the necessity of perceiving the urgent alarming reduction of safe space in Zeina's apartment. The way Zeina draws the different part of her parents' apartment thus makes it possible to put into perspective how all the pieces were gradually condemned, leaving only the "tiny square" (Abirached 34) of the entrance where the chairs, cushions and other items had to be sorted (El Maizi 255). Consequently, for a

child to be confined in a tiny dark room with at least eight other people, in a country being ravished by bombs and surrounded with battlefields, is definitely not what childhood should be about. These images of shrinking space decrease Zeina's chances of living a normal childhood, if not living one at all. The smaller the space becomes, the further Zeina strays from childhood, the heavier is the weight, the gloomier is the memory, and the deeper is the trauma.

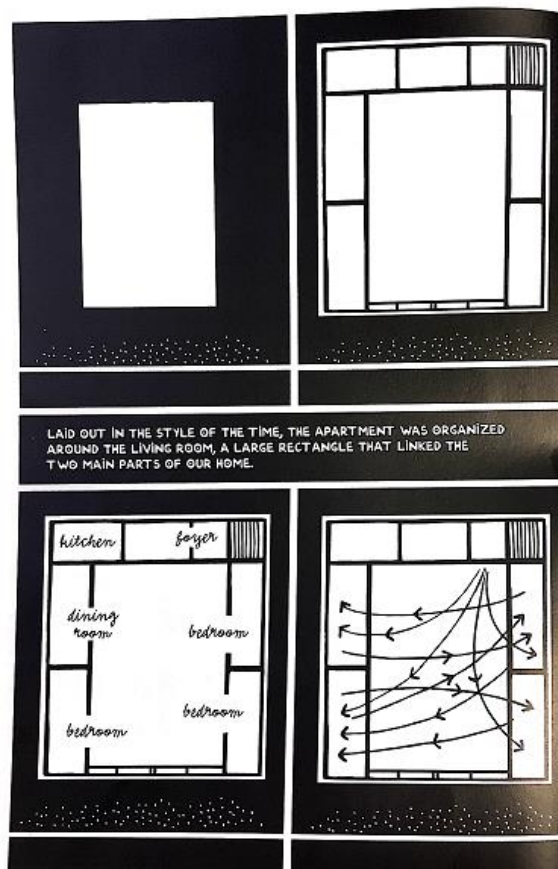


Fig.18: Abirached 34.

One last representation of space remains to be tackled: the ocean. Unlike all the previous constricted places mentioned, the image of an ocean is as open and wide as the sky. Abirached ends her comic with a solitary fragile-looking boat sailing practically towards the

unknown. This image of the ocean goes along with that of the boat discussed earlier as a symbol of a journey towards liberation and security. Dominique Renard states that in the last few pages of Zeina's work where she draws the boat and the ocean, there is an experience of a new definite victory of life, conveyed through the white color and the width of the ocean as an open space of freedom (40). However, unlike Renard, I find the process of leaving Lebanon not easy but dangerous and dreadful, through which Zeina has to undergo displacement, severe threatening conditions, and no promises of victory. The mystery of the sea is paralleled to that of Zeina's future; neither she nor her family know about what lies ahead. Nevertheless, they leave Beirut and definitely hope to survive the nautical escape.

The representation of space is also crucial in Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust*. In the novel, Abi-Ezzi hints at the divided city of Beirut in a conversation that goes on between Ruba's father and their neighbor: "Now if you're Christian and die in West Beirut," said the Rose Man, "or a Muslim who dies in the East, they have to convert you before you can be buried" (44). As such Abi-Ezzi conveys the image of a split city and its people accordingly. Moreover, she starts by displaying open spaces and a freedom in roaming them, until these same spaces start to close and become tighter.

At first, Ruba is still capable of moving freely inside her own house: "I stumbled, breathless, from room to room, but when I peered out through the net of the kitchen door, I found her. She was on the veranda, clutching the metal railings with both hands, while behind her Teta stood unmoving in the blackening twilight" (49). She could still move from one room to another as well as go out on the veranda. Ruba could also go to church, to the forest, to school, and even go on school trips to Jbeil: "In the weeks after Eid el Burbara,

leading up to Christmas, Mami took us to church so many times that even the priest was tired of seeing us, and school blossomed into color” (88). However, this lack of restrictions in moving around gradually changes, and Abi-Ezzi starts anticipating events: “A week later on a school day evening, Karim and I walked in silence down the main street, past trees that were hushed and motionless as if they too were scared” (65). She hints at bad and scary events coming their way.

Eventually, Ruba’s space shrinks and tightens like Zeina’s. She isn’t allowed to go to the forest any more: “To the forest, then? The puffy green clouds of treetops were only at the bottom of the slope, but they might as well have been on the other side of the world because Mami said no” (131). Even though the forest is too close to her house, Ruba gets stuck indoors to guarantee her safety. In addition to that, the doors and windows of her house are shut, allowing darkness to prevail, and allowing smells to linger inside:

Naji was painting toy soldiers so his room smelt of enamel paint and the old trainers he wouldn’t let Mami throw away. My bedroom smelt of cotton and books, Mami and Papi’s room smelt of ironed sheets. The silvery sharpness of detergent wafted from the bathroom, the dining room smelt of polish, and in the kitchen, where Mami was kneading a great ball of dough, the air was tickly warm with the scent of yeast and olive oil. (134)

This feeling of confinement increases with time, and Ruba’s house shrinks even further. With the shelling getting even worse than before, Ruba finds herself in the corridor of her house with eight other people, a common place of refuge as in *A Game for Swallows*. Ruba feels restrained in a constricted space, and finds herself longing for the outside: “Two

days ago I'd discovered that if I stood in the hall doorway I could see every room in the flat, and I went there now. Yes, everything was still visible from here – bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom – and suddenly the flat seemed small. I had never thought of it as small before. If only I could be outside” (134-135).

Similar to Zeina's case in *A Game for Swallows*, the reduction of space in *A Girl Made of Dust* hinders Ruba's chances of a playful childhood. Space tightens and Ruba grows older, forced to grow up sooner than she is supposed to.

### **E. Zeina – Innocent No More**

Through the close reading and interpretation of the images discussed above, we get to see how *A Game for Swallows* exposes Zeina's coming of age and maturation. She loses all chances of a childhood in Beirut. She doesn't get the opportunity to wander in her country, not even her own neighborhood. She goes through a childhood lived in gloomy closed spaces, and suffers from the hardships of forced displacement with her family.

The images interpreted also highlight the dangers that she encounters as well as the vagueness of her future. And yet, Zeina, similarly to Ruba in *A Girl Made of Dust*, ends on a hopeful vision of her rather doomed fate. She joins the game of swallows, letting her childhood and innocence die in Beirut, leaving her perilous past behind, and hoping, like Moses, to attain liberation, safety, and maybe one day return home.

In the end, after having discussed several images and their possible connotations in *A Game for Swallows* in this chapter, I will finish up by discussing how explicit is the content of comic books in comparison to verbal language and imagery. In the following conclusion

of this thesis, I aim at stressing how crucial and beneficial the use of images is, whether verbal or pictorial, in the process of narrating events.

## CONCLUSION

### Towards a New Textual/Pictorial Reading Approach of War Narratives

The Lebanese civil war left behind a people that could not face its atrocious fate. It intensely affected people's lives, their lifestyles, homes, families and futures. It also triggered Lebanese artists to express their feelings about war in an outbreak of postwar artworks. In their artistic creations, Lebanese artists try to fight the collective amnesia that surrounded the brutal events, trying to voice themselves and maybe find a cathartic relief.

In my thesis the focus was on the impact of war precisely on children's lives. My previous chapters discussed the psychological aspects of such an experience on children and their loss of innocence. However, I highlighted the way they have to grow up and mature too soon through the study of images in their adult narratives. In doing so, I argued that these images as discussed (can) lay the foundation for variants of modern Bildungsromane of the main characters in Abi-Ezzi's *A Girl Made of Dust* and Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*.

The images discussed in both works, whether textual or visual, convey to the reader/viewer what children go through in war, what they feel, learn, lose, and long for. Both children whose images I scrutinize, Ruba (*A Girl Made of Dust*) and Zeina (*A Game for Swallows*), are seen to be maturing at a young age. I aimed at conveying the importance of images in literary works by postwar Lebanese writers in demonstrating that point.

Nonetheless, the genres in which these images were traced turned out to be irrelevant in my

study, for both verbal and pictorial images proved to be indispensable in epitomizing children's move to adulthood.

From here derives my curiosity about the importance of imagery and the ability of considering images as a means of tracing self-transformation and growth in different literary genres. Could writers' earnestness in capturing the Lebanese civil war, acknowledging it and its repercussions on children's innocence and maturation process, be found whenever images are found as well? My thesis would then only be considered a stepping stone for upcoming studies in proving so.

For future research, Patricia Sarrafian Ward's *The Bullet Collection* (2003) could be considered as another example of a novel, as well as Lamia Ziade's illustrative book *Bye Bye Babylon* (2011), which is a genre that lies between novels and comics. Ward's novel is a testimony of the psychic damages of the war, in which she proves to be stylistically powerful, where she blends pain with imagery. Marianna, Sarrafian Ward's main character, also frequently uses verbal imagery in her narrative: "I am in this dark wooden room, a coffin, looking out onto a bright-colored world of leaves and grass, and onto my sister, who has always been kind to me no matter her troubles" (11). On the other hand, *Bye Bye Babylon* has a very peculiar sketching style as "it juxtaposes full-page pictures mostly in color (very bright ones in a pop culture style) with short texts (several lines to a half page) without direct links with each picture" (Reyns-Chikuma and Ben Lazreg 761) (Figure 19). Unlike comics, it doesn't follow the traditional pattern of panels and captions but is a narrative rich in colorful illustrations instead, forming as such a unique visual record of a child's memoir. Moreover, Ziade's work mixes her innocent perspective as a child with that

of horror and war scenes, through the use of contrasting images of carefree people with images of war.

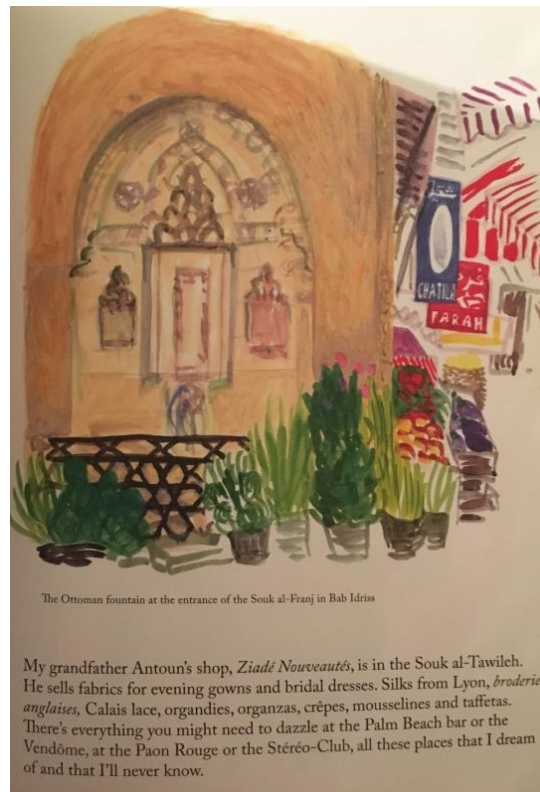


Fig.19: Ziade.

A further interesting endeavor would be to research whether the implementation and analysis of imagery (textual and/or pictorial) can also form journeys of evolution and characters' imposed maturation in wars other than the Lebanese civil war, in different contexts, different artworks, of characters of various ages and suffering from different familial conditions... Can the use of images, their interpretations based on close readings, become a new reading approach in which children's voices that are at stake be revealed?

Both textual and pictorial images prove to be highly significant in children's narratives of war. They shape the narrators' growth and resilience in face of adversities, oppose people's oblivion of the civil war, and are means of confrontation with one's past. I aimed at proving so. However, serving only one deeper purpose, which is to make visible to the reader the extent to which children are affected by wars and the various ways in which their lives are ruined. At the heart of all this lies the importance of a much broader and universal aim: reminding readers that childhood expires whenever it grows up in war zones.

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