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"Qui me rendra présent?": Francophone Representations of Lebanese Civil War Memory

Paul Naanou
College of William and Mary

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**“Qui me rendra présent?”
Francophone Representations of
Lebanese Civil War Memory**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in French and Francophone Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

Paul Naanou

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Magali Compan, Director

Nathan Rabalais

Sibel Zandi-Sayek

Williamsburg, VA
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For Mado,
For being the proof that no war
can crush a loving heart.

انشاءالله تعاطفك تذوب كل الحقد بالدنيا

INTRODUCTION

Every 9/11 at William and Mary, the Sunken Garden is lined with hundreds of small American flags and a member of the Queen's Guard places a memorial wreath at its entrance. Students solemnly walk around the garden on their way to class instead of crossing it as a way to show respect to the space commemorating the suffering inflicted upon the American nation that fateful September day. Others pause to reflect and mourn the loss of their fellow compatriots. Seeing the meticulously organized rows of flags reminds the entire campus community of the immense sense of fragility we felt as a collective, rooted in the loss of so many American lives and the contempt expressed for our values of our nation. The Sunken Garden ultimately developed into a site where this shared memory coalesced and recreated so that its impact on entire United States would never be forgotten, effectively transforming it into a *lieu de mémoire*.

French historian Pierre Nora designates *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of remembrance, as where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (7), but also "where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with sense that memory has been torn--but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (7). In this working definition, Nora addresses the *enjeux* tied to the question of memory transmission within heterogeneous societies, specifically the need to reconcile the effects of a destabilizing past and the need for a semblance of constancy. What happens, however, when such societies have no *lieux de mémoire* to perform the work necessary to achieve this task? How do they make sense of the ghosts of the past when it leaves no traces?

The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) remains one of the most polarizing events in the field of Middle Eastern history. Many have hypothesized different reasons for why the war broke out, but they all fall into three main categories. One school of thought, popularized by Ghassan Tuéni

in his book *Une guerre pour les autres*, affirms that foreign powers, namely Palestinians, Israelis, and Syrians entered Lebanon to advance their own agendas in a “war of others.” Another maintains that the instigators of the conflict were Lebanese militias who prioritized their own political goals. Lastly, some claim it was the result of latent tensions caused by political and economic inequalities¹. In spite of the contentious debates surrounding the causes as well as the actors of the war, there is agreement on numbers: “144,000 killed; 184,000 injured; 13,000 kidnapped; and at least 17,000 missing” (Ghosn and Khoury 382).

Although statistics offer a semblance of definitiveness, they are not enough to resolve the lagging uncertainties of fifteen years of conflict and violence. The Taif Agreement of 1990 put an end to the war and a law of general amnesty pardoned all crimes that had occurred before March 1991, the time around which the law was passed. However, as Sune Haugbolle argues, the Taif Agreement “offered no solution to several of the contentions that led to the war and fueled it” (67) and the amnesty law worked under the assumption that “amnesty was necessary...to reintegrate the largest number of people by excusing, or ignoring, their crimes” (70). This superficial reconciliation coupled with an official collective forgetting cover up an ongoing entrenching of deep-seated intra-sectarian conflicts into Lebanon’s social landscape, impeding the writing of a collective memory of the war and consequently, the nation.

What are the ways in which the Lebanese grapple with the lack of memory resources? With the need for more than just statistics? What spaces allow them to ask and make sense of their questions? What resources can they consult, or even create, to destabilize the boundaries of memory put up by dominating, political forces and proceed in their quest for truth(s)? How can creative works contribute to this process? As Françoise Lionnet and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-

¹ See Lucia Volk’s summary in *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon* (p. 105).

François affirm, literature emerges as this sought-after locus that “unsettles this selective ordering of knowledge, contributing alternative insights that illuminate other realities [and] the truths that cannot be quantified” (1223).

As this study and others before it demonstrate², literature, or more generally, cultural production in Lebanon has emerged as a *lieu de mémoire*, that runs counter to the official, hegemonic amnesia discourse of the Lebanese state. A profusion of films, novels, poetry, art, and works of other genres attest to culture’s role in reconstructing memory.

This thesis proposes an analysis of a subcategory of Lebanon’s creative outpouring after the civil war: francophone Lebanese cultural production. Although francophone writing encompasses a large part of Lebanon’s creative works, it has received little attention in anglophone academic circles, with the notable exception of one book-length study³. The interest of this thesis is to establish French’s authenticity as a language for living a Lebanese experience and to shed light on a selection of francophone works (poetry, a graphic novel, a film, and a novel) and how they make use of different mechanisms for memory production.

How does the time frame in which francophone Lebanese artists produce their work affect their representations of war memory? How does the multiplicity of genres underline the complexity and multidimensionality of Lebanese war memory? I argue that Lebanese artists, by producing work of various genres, broaden and fine-tune the war memory landscape due to the fact that these genres’ various epistemologies for memory production lend themselves to calling attention to and highlighting the different facets of the war.

² For a study that explore the relationship between memory and cultural production in Lebanon, see *War and Memory in Lebanon* by Sune Haugbolle (2010),

³ See Michelle Hartman’s *Native Talk, Stranger Tongue* (2014)

The beginning of the study evokes a poetic text from the late 1980's written and published right before the end of the civil war and serves to foreground Francophone texts in the larger landscape of Lebanese war-related cultural production. Furthermore, it legitimizes French as a linguistic system for expressing a Lebanese perspective. The latter part focuses on contemporary texts (post-2010) of different genres first to emphasize that even today the civil war preoccupies the musings of Lebanese artists and secondly, to illustrate the diversity and richness of memory-focused texts and the processes by which they are created,

Can a Lebanese Text Speak French?

Lebanon, existing on the peripheries of the occidental/oriental paradigm, produces artists whose work is revealing of its linguistic diversity. However, a surge in artistic creation in languages other than Arabic, the official language of the state, does not readily translate to an impression on the collective Lebanese consciousness.

The French Mandate in Lebanon (1920-1943) spurred the widespread use of the French language in the state and was sustained due to “the proliferation of French-language schools, the development and favoring of certain social and sectarian groups, and opportunities for people to advance socially through French-language acquisition and mastery” (Hartman 40). To elaborate on the latter, Beirut had become an important port city within the scheme of the growing world economy by the 20th century allowing for the French-speaking Lebanese elites “to become a part of a cosmopolitan global elite” (39).

Nonetheless, even in today's Lebanon, French is seen as a bourgeois language and a marker of colonial sympathies and Christian nationalist sentiment⁴. However, this thesis challenges the

⁴ As Michelle Hartman notes, “French speakers had certain powers and privileges within mandate Lebanon, particularly insofar as many of them worked with the French to develop the shape of the

notion that “writing in French is a ‘choice’ born out of a sense of Christian nationalist superiority or a false consciousness that betrays an elitist attitude toward ordinary Lebanese” (Hartman 2). Many Lebanese who write in French do not actively choose it, but rather are obligated to use it as it is the one language they were taught or can write competently⁵.

As far as the French language’s role as a vehicle for a Christian nationalist agenda is concerned, such is a reductive analysis of the language’s social and political position in the Lebanese state. Reputable francophone non-Christian writers exist in Lebanon such as Salah Stétié, winner of the *Grand prix de la francophonie* in 1996 and a Sunni Muslim and Nadia Tuéni, a poet of a Druze background whose work figures into the scheme of this study. Furthermore, as Katia Haddad argues, “ce sont surtout les populations urbaines, essentiellement alors les communautés grecque-orthodoxe et musulmane sunnite...qui sont donc devenues les plus francophones des communautés libanaises” [it was especially urban populations, so essentially the Greek orthodox and Sunni Muslim communities that became the most francophone of Lebanese communities] (66) as French schools migrated to city centers at the turn of the 20th century and although “les chrétiens restent nettement plus francophones que les musulmans, la progression de la connaissance du français chez les jeunes est remarquable dans toutes les communautés” [Christians remain more francophone the Muslims, a growing knowledge of French among young people from all communities is remarkable⁶] (72).

Francophone writing in Lebanon deserves to be treated on the same footing as that of Arabic writing. In lieu of reinforcing the myth of French as a marginal language, this study

modern Lebanese nation-state. These elites were mostly of Christian background, able to attend private schools, and dominated the literary as well as the social and economic spheres at the time” (40).

⁵ Etel Adnan, author of the award-winning novel *Sitt Marie-Rose* (1978), for example, was limited to French because of her education (Hartman 2).

⁶ All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

revitalizes the authenticity of French in communicating a veritable Lebanese experience and stresses the language's ability to negotiate multiple Lebanese narratives. Through an analysis of works that construct inclusive memories of war, this thesis pushes beyond the dominant paradigm of French as sectarian and politically suspect.

Understanding Collective Memory

Although the choice to study Lebanese francophone cultural production elicits the question of justification, this thesis is concerned first and foremost with the ways in which these texts delineate and contour civil war memory. Memory studies witnessed a boom in the 1980's which has continued into the 21st century. Terms such as Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* and the notion of collective memory are now commonplace in academic discourse. Maurice Halbwachs' publications on collective memory, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925) and *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), posit memory as a sociological process. He defines collective memory as a group's understanding of the past, however in addition to being formed by its past experiences, memory is refined to conform to the present needs of the group.

Halbwachs also distinguishes collective memory from what he calls *mémoire autobiographique* and *mémoire historique*. The former (autobiographical memory) accounts for the idea of individual memory, but is argued to be non-existent. An individual's memories are inevitably shaped by the frameworks of the social group of which they are a part suggesting that autobiographical memory eventually integrates into collective memory. Historical memory, on the other hand, renegotiates memory when collective memory is no longer possible, that is, when a group's connection to the past has been severed and its social frameworks become outdated.

The notion of cultural trauma relies on Halbwachs' theory of collective memory. As defined by Jeffrey Alexander, cultural trauma is "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness" (1). What is important, however, is not the traumatic event itself, but the way in which the group grapples with the event's aftermath and its altering of the group's identity. Collective memory coupled with cultural trauma produces a scheme for contextualizing how the cultural products explored in this study renegotiate Lebanese identity undermined after the civil war. Furthermore, postmemory, defined by Marianne Hirsch as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (103) provides the necessary framework for characterizing the work of Lebanon's diasporic and post-war generation.

A Collective Forgetting

An integral part of Halbwachs' definition of collective memory is the idea that a group reframes the way it understands the past such that it conforms to the group's present state. This process of reshaping memory discourse can involve exaggeration, addition, or even omission. The latter has been emphasized in the works of many social theorists and philosophers, most notably that of 19th century philosopher Ernest Renan.

For Renan, "l'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger" [forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are an essential factor in the formation of a nation, and therefore advancement in history studies is often a danger for the

concept of nationality] (Renan 7-8). This claim implies that forgetting enables a group to move past a traumatic event with a reaffirmed sense of collective identity. An artificial sense of homogeneity needs to be acknowledged by all the peoples of a collective in order to maintain the existence of said collective, a homogeneity rooted in what Susan Sontag calls “the general understanding that human beings everywhere do terrible things to one another” (116). Memory needs to be “faulty and limited” (115) so as to prevent nuances that can spur heterogeneity from coming into focus. For example, the process of constructing the American nation ignored the atrocities inflicted onto the American Indian population and perpetuated national myths of peaceful interaction between them and European colonizers so as to promote a seemingly guilt-free, functioning society. Another example is that of the Malagasy Uprising of 1947 in which French military forces killed and captured Malagasy nationalists. Up until Jacques Chirac’s presidency, France refused to acknowledge the event in order to maintain solid political ties with Madagascar. Nonetheless, collective forgetting is merely a mask for trauma. Indeed, amnesiac societies, though they present a façade of “togetherness,” maintain a trauma-marked affect that only begins to dissipate once a *devoir de mémoire* has occurred.

In Lebanon, where state-sponsored forgetting was initiated through the passing of the 1991 general amnesty law, the effectiveness of Renan’s proposed theories as well as its limitations are propelled to the surface in readings of memory-focused cultural production.

Rethinking the Archive

The word “archive” instills a sense of ambiguity at every turn. As a signifier, does it refer to a document, a reserve, a building of reserved documents? For purposes of this thesis’ methodology, it is essential to consider the archive as a site of memory construction.

Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* remains one of the most influential bodies of work concerning the theory of the archive. Derrida argues that the archive, inheriting meaning from the Greek word *arkheion*, is more complex than a *physical* reserve for memory. Archives effectively reproduce events in their construction for two main reasons. First, they exist in different forms which determine what is omitted and included in the reconstruction process. Secondly, archives gain meaning through hermeneutical invention, an act that can only be performed by those in a privileged position within a socially defined hegemonic order. Both the archive's ontological nature as well as the question of accessibility make it vulnerable to selective remembering, thereby challenging its supposed neutrality.

Also central to Derrida's concept of the archive is the influence of the death drive, inspired by his work on Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The archive is born out of the contentious interplay between the death drive, the inherent psychological desire to destroy traces of the past, and the archive drive, a passion to record and preserve sparked by fear of the death drive. Archives, because they are dependent on the whims of this delicate relationship, instigate and perpetuate a hierarchy of remembered events.

In Lebanon, where there is a dearth of an official archival record, unconventional vehicles of documentation have had to take on its role. With the exception of UMAM Documentation and Research, an NGO founded in 2004 that focuses on the collecting and preserving artifacts of Lebanese civil war memory, it has fallen upon the shoulders of art to construct the archive. Iman Humaydan, the well-renowned Arabophone novelist, professes that in Lebanon, "[authors] mostly write out of fear, fear of losing [their] country" (Humaydan). Her statement hints at Derrida's discussion of the death drive's relevance in guiding the genesis of the archival record. However, though art claims to participate in archival construction, such does not exempt it from political

intricacies surrounding the archive's legitimacy within its social framework. In considering post-war Lebanese artistic creation, it is necessary to question if its sociocultural position qualifies it as a "meaningful" archive; an objective made even more onerous by state-sponsored amnesia.

Inherently ephemeral, trauma provokes reactions that are transitory in nature, but that leave their mark on a collective's psyche. However, especially when marginalized groups are concerned, trauma does not leave an *official* archival record, making it difficult to construct the narratives of these peoples. A pertinent example to the United States is the Native American population who have little to no vestiges of their violent oppression and uprooting at the hands of European colonizers.

It remains, nonetheless, that the archival drive instills a desire to record this ephemerality, even though the notion of an ephemeral archive is an oxymoron. In order to reconcile this seemingly contradictory epistemology, Ann Cvetkovich asserts that "trauma challenges common understandings of what constitutes an archive" (7). It effectively gives form to new genres of expression, genres that Cvetkovich terms "archives of feeling," or cultural texts that act as "repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (7). In analyzing the trauma-marked cultural texts of this thesis, I consider how some act as "archives of feeling" in order to better elucidate how they save trauma-marked memory from oblivion.

Thesis Overview

This thesis will analyze the ways in which francophone texts communicate the experience of the Lebanese civil war and negotiate the obstacles and boundaries of memorialization. Each of the subsequent chapters will examine a cultural text of a different formal genre (a collection of

poetry, a graphic novel, a film, and a novel) and through an interdisciplinary approach combining literary analysis and memory/trauma studies, will unveil and elaborate on the elements and techniques they use to engage Lebanon's *devoir de mémoire*.

The first chapter investigates the emergence of a francophone war literature in Lebanon by considering Nadia Tuéni's poetry collection *Archives Sentimentales d'une guerre au Liban*. The collection was published in 1982, following the second phase of the civil war (1977-1982). The first part of the chapter highlights the ways in which Tuéni's poetry appropriates the French language for a Lebanese context, thereby legitimizing its use in future Lebanese post-war francophone production and ends with readings of select poems from the collection that rely heavily on trauma and memory discourse. Furthermore, the experimental poetics of the literature which replicate painful emotions in their readings serve to demonstrate how the collection acts as an archive of feelings.

The second chapter analyzes a graphic novel, a genre that has received less critical attention in academic circles, entitled *Le temps des grenades* (2015). The text is written by Kamal Hakim, a graduate of Lebanon's Académie libanaise des beaux-arts in his mid 20's and thus, a member of the post-war generation. The graphic novel enjoys a growing popularity in Lebanon today and it is evident that the war remains relevant to Lebanese society given that it has become a subject matter of this emergent medium. However, more than just attributing credibility to the graphic novel as an able vehicle for memory representation, the objective of the chapter is to induce how Hakim's generation articulates the experience of war despite not having lived it, bringing into question postmemory.

In the third chapter, I consider the film *Incendies* (2010), the only cultural product to come from the diaspora. Inspired by the play of the same name written by Wajdi Mouawad, the film

project was headed by the French director Denis Villeneuve. Set in between Canada and Daresh, a fictional country⁷, the film considers how physical distance affects the trauma experience. Similar to *Le temps des grenades*, the film passes on the responsibility of narrativizing the story of war to the post-generation, however, unlike the post-generation of *Le temps des grenades*, the one in *Incendies* was raised outside of a Lebanese context. This insistence on the diaspora evokes the idea that detachment may assist in and facilitate the writing of a collective, healing war memory.

The final chapter analyzes a very recent publication from 2016, Hyam Yared's novel *Tout est halluciné*. The inclusion of this text attests to the ongoing relevance of memory in Lebanon's present-day social and cultural scene due to its publication date and offers this study the opportunity to conclude how the 25 years that have passed since the official end of the civil war have informed the processes by which memory-centric cultural products come into existence. It specifically addresses the forgetting/remembering binary that seems to be the crux of the memory debate in both the social and political spheres of Lebanon today and reimagines memory construction as a hybrid endeavor.

In writing this thesis, I hope to highlight how impactful the memory of the war, or lack thereof, has been on all of Lebanon's groups (religious, ethnic, social, linguistic, etc.) and by addressing the multiplicity of media and platforms through which memory is voiced, I aim to paint the construction of war memory as both an ongoing and complex process. Furthermore, although memory cultures inform the production of these texts, I demonstrate that cultural products ultimately inscribe the limitations of representing memory and inform and transform future proposals for memory portrayal.

⁷ Although Lebanon is not explicitly mentioned in the play or film, Daresh bears a striking similarity to Lebanon on a physical, social, political, and cultural level.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY LEBANESE FRANCOPHONE REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR: NADIA TUÉNI'S *ARCHIVES SENTIMENTALES D'UNE GUERRE AU LIBAN*

“Écrire en français égale écrire en bourgeois, écrire en riche, écrire en élèves privilégiés d'écoles privilégiées où l'on paie...cher...la gloire de devenir un sous-produit d'un certain Occident” [To write in French means to write in bourgeois, to write in rich, to write in privileged school children from privileged schools where one pays a great amount for the glory of becoming a by-product of a certain West⁸] (Tuéni, *La Prose* 63). Nadia Tuéni, one of the most well-respected poets in Lebanese history, presents the French language in her homeland in a critical, negative light. She conflates French with elitism and wealth, claims it is used to aspire to a Western identity, and makes no mention of it being an expression of authentic Lebanese experiences. Despite this stance, however, she herself chooses French to write poetry that claims Lebanese identity as its subject.

How can French express a Lebanese reality? How does Tuéni establish herself as a Lebanese poet? Tuéni was bilingual in French and Arabic and attempted to write poetry in the latter⁹, but she was more at ease with the former¹⁰. Still, do the institutional sociopolitical remnants of the French protectorate in Lebanon, like the language, impede Tuéni from telling an authentic

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, translations of all prose in this chapter are my own.

⁹ See *La Terre Arrêtée* (1984), Tuéni's posthumous poetry collection composed of pieces of writing recovered by Tuéni's husband, Ghassan Tuéni.

¹⁰ J'écris en français parce que le français est la langue que je crois connaître le mieux. Il est vrai que je suis libanaise, et qu'au Liban, l'arabe est la langue officielle, mais j'ai toujours été dans des écoles françaises et, plus tard, j'ai fait des études de droit dans une université de Beyrouth, toujours en français. Donc il est naturel que je connaisse le français, peut-être un peu mieux que l'arabe, et que, tout naturellement, j'en sois venue à m'exprimer en français. [I write in French because French is the language I believe to know the best. It is true that I am Lebanese and that in Lebanon, Arabic is the official language, but I was always in French schools, and later on, when I studied law at a Beirut university, it was still in French. So, it is natural that I know French, probably a little better than Arabic, and that I came to express myself in French] (Tuéni, *La Prose* 67).

Lebanese experience? This question posits itself in her political conception of poetry: “Devrons-nous sans cesse nous justifier aux yeux des nôtres (je veux dire ceux avec lesquels nous partageons histoire, intérêts, et terre) pour avoir délaissé l’arabe?” [Will we always have to justify ourselves to our people (I mean those with whom we share a history, interests, and land) for having put Arabic off to the side?] (63). For Tuéni, nationhood and collective identity transcend linguistic preferences. She aligns herself with Lebanon by claiming a belonging to its people (“des nôtres”) and although cognizant of the elitist connotations inextricably linked to the French language, she refuses to let French writing equate to the forging of a false Lebanese consciousness.

In this chapter, I focus on two of the effects of Nadia Tuéni’s writing. First, I examine how her writing, one of the francophone corpuses treating the civil war in Lebanon, asserts itself as an authentic vehicle for dealing with the subject. Second, I consider the ways in which her collection *Archives Sentimentales d’une guerre au Liban* grapples with the trauma of war and proposes a post-war Lebanese identity. The text ultimately functions to justify Lebanon francophone literature’s potential to attribute sense and meaning to the damages brought on by war.

The “French-ness” of Nadia Tuéni’s Poetry

Tuéni’s poetry has evidently been marked by her French-education and readings of canonical French poets. As Christophe Ippolito asserts in his English/French anthology of Tuéni’s last two poetic collections, the languages of “Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and surrealist poetry have had a decisive influence on [her] poetry” (Ippolito backcover). Nonetheless, as suggested by her participation in the Arab literary magazine *Shi’r* and her claim that “on retrouve le rythme et la musicalité de la phrase arabe” [one can find the rhythm and musicality of the Arabic sentence]

(Tuéni, *La Prose* 68) in her poetry, Arabic writing undoubtedly impacted her literary consciousness.

In her collection *Liban: Vingt poèmes pour un amour* [Lebanon: Twenty poems for One Love], the importance Lebanon holds in Tuéni's writing comes to light; every text is a dedication to one of the country's unique locations. The collection was written in 1979 during the war and one poem in particular, "Beyrouth," (re)imagines the urban center of violence:

Quelle soit courtisane, érudite, ou dévote,
Péninsule des bruits, des couleurs, et de l'or,
Qui cherche à l'horizon la tendresse d'un port,
Elle est mille fois morte, mille fois revécue.
Beyrouth des cent palais, et Béryte des pierres
Où l'on vient de partout ériger ces statues,
Qui font prier les hommes, et font hurler les guerres.

[Let her be courtesan, scholar, or saint,
a peninsula of din, of color, and of gold,
a hub of rose sailing like a fleet
which scans the horizon for a harbor's tenderness.
She has died a thousand times and been reborn a thousand
times.
Beirut of a hundred palaces, Beryte of the stones
Where pilgrims from everywhere have raised statues
That make men pray and wars begin¹¹] (Ippolito 10-11)

A first reading of this poem is reminiscent of symbolist, Rimbaudian poetics, specifically in poems such as *L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple*:

Ô cité douloureuse, ô cité quasi morte,
La tête et les deux seins jetés vers l'Avenir
Ouvrant sur ta pâleur ses milliards de portes,
Cité que le Passé sombre pourrait bénir (Rimbaud 97)

[Oh painful city, oh city almost dead
Your head and two breasts thrown to the Future
Opening upon your paleness its thousand doors
City whose dark past can bless]

¹¹ For the Nadia Tuéni poetry cited in this chapter, if the poem is cited from Christophe Ippolito's anthology, then the English translation is not my own. However, the English translation for a poem cited from Tuéni's *Œuvres complètes* is mine.

In both of these poems, the urban space is feminized and subjected to unsolicited new architectural structures (the “thousand doors” in Rimbaud’s poem and the “statues” in Tuéni’s) which redefine its role. The “statues,” by making men pray and war begin, is a metaphor for various religious sectarian fractures of Lebanese society that aggravated the violence of war. Although they originally celebrated the diversity of Lebanon, these statues eventually come to demand a prioritization of religious (sub)identity over national identity.

Beyond just the poet-specific influences on Tuéni’s poetry, we also find the marks of the more general Orientalist discourse exploited by the French romantics. Tuéni, despite experiencing Lebanese/Arab life firsthand, partially imagines Lebanon through the language of these foreign writers. In his introduction to his landmark study *Orientalism*, Edward Said begins by discussing the “Orientalizing” of none other than Beirut:

On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975-1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted down area it had once seemed to belong to...the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval”...The Orient was almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (Said 1).

The writings of Chateaubriand, Nerval, and Lamartine do indeed construct an almost surreal, mythic Lebanon and Tuéni borrows this language. The treasured ports of Lamartine’s *Voyages en Orient* are romanticized by Tuéni through the images of a fleet like a “hub of rose” and the warm personifying of the harbor achieved through attributing the quality of “tenderness” to it. Likewise, the use of “courtisane” conjures up the trope of the exotic woman, giving yet another orientalist dimension to the feminized Beirut of the poem. Even if Tuéni were to want to romanticize her homeland, employing the language of French poets who fail to recognize all the realities of the country only serves to legitimize the inauthentic representations which they create.

Towards a Lebanese Literature: The Arab Literary Influence

Such indications of French literary influence appear to be suspect and could question the Lebanese authenticity of Tuéni's poetry; however, to do so would be to ignore the impact Arabic writing also had on her creative outpouring. Tuéni did indeed participate in the Arabic literary scene with her most notable contributions being to the literary magazine *Shi'r*. Founded in 1957, by the Lebanese poet Yousef El Khal, the publication sought "to revive Arabic poetry and to free it from formalism and the crushing weight of tradition" (Arsanios). In order to realize this goal, members "[broke] away from a set language, from a known city, and from the dominant realm of politics" (Arsanios). As Elise Salem points out, Adonis, a well-respected poet and contributor to *Shi'r*, found the Arab mind to be "fettered by tradition and enslaved by worn-out expressions" (Salem 103). He envisioned the poet as "the one who can conceive of new meanings, new symbols, new ways of perceiving, reading, understanding, and hence living" (103). This discourse surrounding the Arabic language positions it in the collective imaginary as a distorted linguistic system replete with anachronistic clichés and intrinsic falsification; this along with the tendency to move towards a poetry open to international influence seems to epistemologically justify and encourage a repurposing of the Arabic language and the use of other languages to give rise to a renewed, poetic, and Arab spirit. No longer does the adjective "Arab" signify a linguistic system, rather a sociocultural reality, creating an opening for Lebanese/Arab francophone writers to remove French from its colonial, right-wing conservative Christian context and appropriate it to communicate a Lebanese experience.

Through this process of opening up literature to international influence, the cultural and political become one as notions of nationhood and identity are reconciled. Since the time of the French mandate, different factions of Lebanese society set forth various models for nation-

forming. For instance, the French-admiring Maronites aligned themselves with the West and based their nationalist agenda on nostalgic tropes of the Phoenicians, an ancient sea-faring people who once inhabited the shores of Lebanon. Many Muslims, on the other hand, characterized Lebanon as Arab; in essence, implying the nation should be built on pan-Arab ideologies. Hence, reclaiming Arab poetry by drawing upon Western and Eastern poetic tropes advocates for the reconciliation of these two opposing structures and the creation of both an occidental and oriental Lebanon. Even if such was not an explicit objective of the magazine, nations are constructed through “cultural and political processes of meaning-making” (Haugbolle 30) and thus, the publication inconspicuously creates a collective, albeit elitist, national imaginary.

There are undeniable similarities between Tuéni’s “Beyrouth” and Nizar Qabbani’s “Sitt al dunia, ya Beirut” [Beirut, Lady of the World], a poem from the Arabic modernist literary corpus, written slightly earlier than Tuéni’s poem. Nizar Qabbani, a pioneer in Arabic modern poetry and according to Tuéni, the political consciousness of the Arabs (Tuéni, *La Prose* 20), included the poem in his collection *Ila Beirut al-Untha Ma’Hubbi* [To Beirut, the Woman, with my Love] in which he feminizes Beirut and plays on the trope of gendered violence (“We confess before one God/That we used to envy you/And your *beauty* irritated us” (Salem 131), however what likens Tuéni’s “Beyrouth” to the Qabbani poem more than to Rimbaud’s *L’Orgie parisienne* is the use of anaphora to give new life to Beirut. Qabbani’s imperative “قومي” or “rise” offers to Beirut one of several possibilities for resurrection:

قومي من تحت الموج الأزرق، يا عشتار
 قومي كقصيدة ورد
 او قومي كقصيدة نار (Qabbani 34)

Rise from under the blue waves, O Ishtar,
 Rise like a poem of roses,
 Or rise like a poem of fire (Salem 131)

Fire, earth, and water, three of the four classical elements, are all means by which Beirut could gain new life. The diversity yet summing totality of these elements is symbolic of Beirut's history as a geographical space for many different peoples and by extension, different identities.

Tuényi makes use of the "qu'elle soit" structure to show the different realities that Beirut can choose, thereby endowing the city with the autonomy to recreate itself:

Qu'elle soit religieuse, ou qu'elle soit sorcière,
Ou qu'elle soit les deux, ou qu'elle soit charnière,
Du portail de la mer ou des grilles du levant
Qu'elle soit sanguinaire ou qu'elle soit d'eau bénite,
Qu'elle soit innocente, ou qu'elle soit meurtrière,
En étant phénicienne, arabe, ou roturière,
En étant Levantine aux multiples vertiges

[Let her be nun or sorceress or both,
or let her be the hinge
of the sea's portal or the gateway to the East,
let her be adored or let her be cursed,
let her be thirsty for blood or holy water,
let her be innocent or let her be a murderess.
By being Phoenician, Arabic, or of the people-
Levantine-or of such dizzying variety] (Ippolito 10-11)

Each verse offers seemingly opposing ideas of what Beirut can be, however just as the poetic stylistics reconcile both Arabic and Western literary traditions, the ontological presents a model for their coexistence, achieved textually by having metonyms of religious/secular and Phoenician/Arab identity occupy the same verse and imaginatively through the construction of Orientalist and oriental imagery (i.e. "of the sea's portal or the gateway to the East"). Beirut becomes a "hinge" that consistently swings between multiple forms of being occasionally looking to its Phoenician past ("sea's portal") and at other times its Arab/Muslim background ("gateway to the East"). However, by the end of the poem, these two identities have been reconciled; a new label, "Levantine," is privileged over "Phoenician" and "Arab," by evoking it as an independent identity in the last verse. Lebanon is effectively Levantine; no longer a place that consistently

oscillates between two competing concepts of identity, but rather an identity that combines the two and constructs one greater than the sum of its parts.

Towards a Lebanese Literature: Deconstructing and Rejecting French Literary and Political Consciousness

As already shown, Tuéni's poetics were marked by French culture and her readings of 19th century French romantic and symbolist poetry and she herself cites Rimbaud and Mallarmé when asked which writers could have possibly marked her own language (Tuéni, *La Prose* 95). Even the title of her first collection, *Les Textes blonds*¹², is a play on the French expression "les têtes blondes," a metonym for children marked by the homogenous white race of the French at the time. Nevertheless, her poetry goes beyond a mere imitation of canonical French writers. In order to forge her own poetic style and eradicate suspicion that her writing in French translates to a desire to belong to the West, Tuéni subverts conventional elements of French romanticism and symbolism. This work of deconstruction is made evident in Tuéni's last collection before her death *Archives Sentimentales d'une Guerre au Liban* in which she explores the effects of the Lebanese civil war on the nation. Take for example the sun in this work; instead of the bright sun of the French romantics, a symbol of hope and general positivity, Tuéni's sun's is put out:

Soleil ô soleil,
Éteint par l'eau du souvenir.

[Sun oh sun,
extinguished by the water of memory] (Ippolito 62-63)

¹² *Les Textes blonds* (1967) was Tuéni's first poetry collection. Written after the death of her 7-year-old daughter, Nayla, from cancer, the collection was written to grapple with the traumatic loss.

The water/sun paradigm taken to be an apotheosis and culmination of divinity in the works of the symbolists¹³ admired by Tuéni, instead becomes a symbol of loss and trauma (“extinguished”). The Lebanese civil war completely destabilized the sense of security once felt in Lebanon, here reflected through the reconfiguration of traditional meanings associated with the poetic sun. However, even though Tuéni’s (re)writing of these conventional romantic symbols mimics the unsettling work of war, it enables her claim control over the traumatic experience, but more importantly, over her identity. Her poetics no longer ascribe to the traditions of classical French poetry, nor to those of Arab poetry, rather, her style metaphorically reflects the Lebanese experience unique in its reconstruction of all its histories and cultures.

Tuéni makes specific references to deconstructing poetic conventions:

“En terre d’orient
le langage est mouvement
Forcez le rempart des syllabes,
Cassez l’écriture à chaque ouragan.”
Et sur la véranda, l’Egérie gantée,
Changeait les décors
Du Moyen-Orient (Tuéni, *Œuvres complètes* 309).

[“In the land of the Orient
Language is movement
Force down the rampart of syllables,
Break writing at the onset of every hurricane.”
And on the veranda, the gloved Muse,
Changed the décor
Of the Middle East]

Language is “movement” and therefore, dynamic. Only in its evolving state can it express the reality of an evolving people. The strict metric poetic forms of romantic French poetry are too rigid to do the Orient justice (“force down the rampart of syllables) and instead, language must be broken when faced with violence (“at the onset of every hurricane”).

¹³ See Rimbaud’s “*L’Eternité*”: “Elle est retrouvée/Quoi? – L’Eternité./C’est la mer allée/Avec le soleil.

This whole process, however, is not a flamboyant, demonstrative one. Its genius is rooted in its secrecy. Tuéni, without boasting, writes surreptitiously (“the gloved Muse”), and quietly reconfigures poetry/language as well as the order of the Middle East and Lebanon (“changed the décor/of the Middle East”).

This rejection of French influence can also be read in texts from Tuéni’s poem, “Le jardin du Consul” [The Garden of the Consul]. Critics have previously read the space of the consul’s garden as one of nostalgia, a reincarnation of a former Lebanon (Jabbour 155-57) and Tuéni herself said the inspiration for the poem was Lebanon in 1936 (Tuéni, *La Prose* 104), a time when the nation was under the French mandate system. However, Tuéni herself never claims this poem was a yearning for the past, rather, it appears that she actually criticizes the institutions of the French mandate:

*Derrière les forteresses de nos inimitiés
Le jardin du Consul brille de mille fêtes
Celles qu’au souvenir ajoutent les années*
Du collier des ogives
Se détache un matin.
Le Consul avait un coeur d’encre,
Un amour de papier
Sa tendresse se prononçait
Comme elle se balançait.
Sur une faille d’outre-mer le Consul écrivait:
“Je hais ceux qui aiment le bruit du bruit,
les automnes voraces,
le sommeil et le souvenir du sommeil;
encore plus,
ceux qui cassent le paysage
par besoin de rire” (Tuéni, *Œuvres complètes* 304)

[*Behind the strongholds of our hatred
The Consulate’s Garden is illuminated by a thousand festivals
Those that are added to memory by the years*
The necklace of warheads
Separates itself from the morning.
The Consul had a heart for ink
A love of paper

His tenderness was said
Like it was swung
On an “Outre-mer’s” fracture, the Consul wrote:
“I hate those who like the sound of noise,
the voracious autumns
Sleep and the memory of sleep,
Even more,
Those who break the landscape
Because of the need to laugh]

The first three verses of this poem imagine the consul’s garden as a “spectacular” space (“illuminated by a thousand festivals”) suggesting a return to an orientalist image of Lebanon. Yet this time, Tuéni satirizes such a depiction: she places the garden, a space associated with the French consul, behind strongholds to separate it from an entity embodying “hatred,” possibly the Lebanese people, to emphasize the rupture between these two social/political groups. These verses also reinforce this separation on a typographical level through indentation and italicization and their adherence to the classical French alexandrine. The rest of verses, however, are sharper and discordant with either no rhyme or broken rhymes, protesting the impositions of the French system and foreshadowing mayhem about to cross the strongholds. Additionally, more detachment imagery is interspersed throughout the rest of the poem (“the necklace of warheads/separates itself from the morning”, “break the landscape”, “Outre-mer’s fracture”) working to invalidate the myth that Lebanon was a unified country up until the start of the war in 1975.

The consul of the poem affirms his despise for those “who like the sound of noise,” which he emphasizes by choosing to convey his thoughts through silent writing instead of audible speaking. The noise is read as that of the Lebanese “populace” on the other side of the strongholds who want to be heard, but whose voices are silenced by the imposition of a Western presence. The poetic voice criticizes the inability of the consul to listen to these voices and allies herself with them before any other group. In fact, disapproval for French colonialism in general emerges in this

poem by the allusion to an “Outre-mer’s fracture,” a reference to France’s overseas territories and departments¹⁴. Tuéni, by expressing her discontent through writing (the consul’s preferred means of communicating) and in French (the language of the consul), subverts the consul’s intended use for the two and becomes a *porte-parole* for those whose experiences were trivialized by France’s political presence. In effect, the poetic voice of *Archives Sentimentales* proudly takes ownership of this role:

Je baisse la voix pour mieux entendre
Hurler Pays; pour dire le mal
...
J’habite le silence
Pour mieux contrôler le pouls de la race

[I lower my voice to better hear
the Country howl; to utter the sorrow
...
I inhabit the silence
To better regulate the race’s pulse] (Ippolito 84-85)

Tuéni actively lends her ear to the cries of the Lebanese people because it is through listening to their voices that she forges a conception of what it means to belong to Lebanon and claim the title of “Lebanese.”

Archives of Feeling: Writing Sensation and Sense into War

The on-set of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 led to a complete reconfiguration of daily life – traversing the city of Beirut became a risky endeavor, buying bread was no longer the monotonous task it once was, and even crossing the street could mean putting one’s life in danger. Although undoubtedly a part of the Lebanese bourgeoisie, Tuéni undeniably experienced the daily horrors of war, be it the fear of a bombing in a public space or even that of being stopped in a car

¹⁴ Territoires et Départements d’Outre-Mer (TOMs, DOMs)

to be asked the religious group to which she belonged. However, beyond just altering the Lebanese *quotidien*, the war engendered a sense of uncertainty: Lebanon was not the unified nation it was assumed to be and underneath the image of a stable society lurked a tension waiting for the opportune moment to erupt.

Nadia Tuéni bares her anguish at witnessing her nation's dissipation and traumatization as well as her own in *Archives Sentimentales d'une guerre au Liban* [Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon]. The images of a weakening female body interspersed throughout the collection also run parallel to Tuéni's personal relate. Stricken by a cancer that led to her death, Tuéni's body was also withering at the time of writing.

Nevertheless, the title of the work seems contradictory, a result of placing the word "archives," traditionally seen as unbiased, clear-cut repositories for historical information, next to "sentimental." This creative choice, however, suggests that the process of archiving, in order to fully capture the war, must take into account the human experience of it. Future generations, to process the gravity of violence, need more than figures and dates. Only through "archives of feeling" that grant them access to the visceral, emotional journey of the Lebanese from 1975 to 1990 can they begin to understand the conflict's impact. Tuéni's collection privileges transmitting agony over history and uses the epistemologies of poetic language to create a reading experience that reflects the heartache she underwent while writing and in doing so, saves emotion from ephemerality.

The poetic voice in *Archives Sentimentales* effectively evinces the common symptoms of latent trauma that surface only after contact with the trauma-provoking event: reoccurring dreams:

Nuit après jour,
je navigue en sommeil,
vers les mêmes peurs familières,
de chevaux sauvages,

plus fous encore par orages lumière.
laissez-moi errer
dans vos yeux où rien ne rassure,
mais où se noie splendide,
la terre. (Tuéni, *Œuvres complètes* 317)

[Night after day
I navigate through my sleep
Towards the same familiar fears,
Of wild horses,
Crazier from the light hurricanes.
Let me wander
In your eyes where nothing is certain,
But where splendidly drowns
The land]

It is during sleep that the poetic voice begins to make sense of war, but the beginnings of the cognizing process are scattered; the “wild horses” and the “light hurricanes” seem almost displaced, unrelated to the grander scheme of warfare, however “hallucinations are generally of events all too accessible in their horrible truth” (Caruth 6). In fact, it is the anxiety of recalling these images that permits the memory of these random events and the absence of assurance, conveyed by eyes where “nothing is certain,” that underpins the randomness of the trauma meaning-making process.

In the second half of this poem, the fruits of the cognizing process begin to take shape as the poetic voice specifies the main burden of her trauma; the loss of her now drowning land (*la terre*). By manipulating the traditional syntax of the last two lines (adverb-verb-subject vs. subject-adverb-verb), Tuéni creates an enjambment thereby isolating “la terre” on a textual level and bringing all focus to it. This stylistic choice metaphorically brings the rest of the collection’s attempts to redefine and recreate this land, the Lebanon engendered by writing *Liban: Vingt poèmes pour un amour* that Tuéni loved so deeply, to the center of the reader’s attention. It was effectively with the release of this penultimate poetry collection that Tuéni’s poetic rebirth

occurred, that she became a *poète engagé* (Jabbour 124) and that her concern shifted from personal tragedy to the Lebanese nation's collective suffering (125).

The poetic voice's quest for her land is dispersed as trauma has reconfigured its ability to imagine as well as its past imaginary. The doubt plaguing the process of nation creation resorts to interrogative language in hopes that such discourse will give rise to rational thought:

Suis-je né d'un mensonge
dans un pays qui n'existait pas?

[Was I born of a lie
in a country that did not exist?] (Ippolito 88-89)

Laughter is another motif invoked throughout the collection, whether inanimate objects personified through laughter or whether the poetic voice is laughing herself. Nonetheless, similar to the sun and wind whose romantic connotations are subverted, laughter is evidently not to be read as a sign of merriment, but rather as a symptom of trauma. It appears mad and malicious:

Alors, au soleil imposé,
À la pénombre souhaitée,
Il s'agit de comprendre que le rire est un leurre,
À-égale-distance-du-créditeur-et-de-sa-creature (Tuéni, *Œuvres complètes*
312).

[Under the imposed sun,
In the desired shadow,
It's about understanding that laughter is a trick
Equidistant from the creator and his creation]

This last verse is a clear allusion to Baudelaire's essay entitled "On the Essence of Laughter:"

...En effet, comme le rire est essentiellement humain, il est essentiellement contradictoire, c'est-à-dire qu'il est à la fois signe d'une grandeur infinie et d'une misère infinie, misère infinie relativement à l'Être absolu dont il possède la conception, grandeur infinie relativement aux animaux. *C'est du choc perpétuel de ces deux infinis que se dégage le rire.* (emphasis added, Baudelaire 20)

[...In fact, because laughter is essentially human, it is essentially contradictory, that is to say it is all at once a sign of infinite grandeur and infinite misery, infinitely miserable compared to the Supreme Being by which it only possesses the conception and infinitely grandiose in comparison to His creations. *It is a perpetual shock rooted in these two infinities from which laughter originates.*]

The poetic language attempts to articulate trauma. Though the “imposed sun” may make the dastardly effects of war noticeable to the eye, there is movement towards an “understanding” that the laughter, here conflated with traumatic shock, is nothing but a “trick” inhibiting trauma victims from making meaning of the harrowing experience.

Kevin Newmark’s analysis of Baudelaire’s essay demonstrates a shift in perceiving laughter solely as a symptom of individual trauma towards that of a collective one. Laughter designates a “loss of equilibrium” (244) which is in accordance with sense of destabilization conjured up in Tuéni’s poetry on an epistemological as well as ontological level. In addition, Baudelaire’s argument that “joy was not expressed through laughter...man’s face was simple and all of a piece; his features were undistorted by the laughter that now agitates all nations” (244) renders laughter a “characteristic sign of commotion or even redirection for the course of nations” (244), a phenomenon alluded to in Tuéni’s poem:

Dans la bouche noire des villes
Sonne le glas des fleurs.
Le pays est mort de beauté
Tué par un éclat de rire.
Un obus dans la terre a creusé un sourire.

[In the dark mouth of the cities,
tolls the death knell of the flowers,
The land has died of beauty,
Killed by a burst of laughter.
A bombshell in the ground has hollowed out a smile] (Ippolito 62-63)

Nouns and verbs associated with weaponry and destruction (i.e. burst, bombshell, hollowed) serve to paint laughter as the product of violence. The country dies because of a “burst of laughter” and

trauma has reconfigured past conceptions of nationhood conveyed by the hollowing out of the Lebanese earth. A smile, related to the earlier invocation of deceitful laughter, permanently marks the Lebanese land, symbolic of the artificial, insincere image of a stable nation that Lebanon so desperately attempts to put forth.

In her previous collection, *Liban: 20 poèmes pour un amour*, Tuéni used a summer garden as a metaphor for her Lebanese *terre*:

IL FUT UN LIBAN DES JARDINS,
COMME IL EST UNE SAISON DOUCE.

[ONCE THERE WAS A LEBANON OF THE GARDENS
JUST AS THERE IS A SEASON THAT IS TEMPERATE] (Ippolito 48-49)

However, *Archives Sentimentales* bears witness to the transformation of this garden brought on by war:

Et je rirai de voir pousser
L'herbe violente de la guerre.
Ô cette haine,
Ô cette haine qui féconde la terre,
Comme sang chaud de femme.

[And I will laugh to see grow
the violent grass of war.
Oh this hate,
Oh this hate that fecundates the earth,
Like a woman's warm blood] (Ippolito 78-79)

The garden now grows “violent grass” fertilized by a “woman’s warm blood.” Like in a woman’s uterus during her menstruation cycle, Lebanon experiences no fertility. This knowledge has traumatically marked the poetic voice’s memory, signaled once again by the reference to laughter (“And I will laugh to see grow”) as well as by the repeating the line “oh this hate.” Repetition, a semantic technique used to stress an idea or restate it with reaffirmed certainty, demonstrates how the poetic voice is beginning to make sense of trauma because she can now give it a name.

The Question of Separation

Although Tuéni spent the first two years of the civil war in Lebanon, in 1977, she and her husband, Ghassan Tuéni, moved to New York where he worked for the United Nations as the ambassador for Lebanon and even though she was constantly traveling between Lebanon and New York from 1977-1982, the majority of *Archives Sentimentales* was completed in New York (“Home, Politics, and Exile,” Hout 102). The physical distance between Tuéni and her homeland, as well as the ongoing war, visibly impacted her way of writing to make sense of trauma:

En plein soleil
Avec le vent autour du cou
Et fouets de pluie dans la bouche,
En plein soleil,
Je regarde suinter les murs de ma mémoire.
Tu es celui qui, à trois pas,
M’as tendu ses cheveux pour que je m’y accroche.
Fais-donc voler toutes ces balles
Qui tuent ou ne tuent pas selon des règles de tendresse
Lâche-moi à present
Car je chavire de l’autre côté de mon ventre
Rouge du sang de tous.
Et je ris en plein soleil,
Parce que la folie moissonne le paysage,
Studieusement.
Même toi à trois pas mets un hiver sur ton visage
Pour m’arracher mon souffle et
L’accrocher à la frontière d’à côté.
Alors en plein soleil
Je meurs d’incohérence
En éclats

[In the heat of the sun,
with the wind round my neck
and rain whipping at my mouth,
in the heat of the sun,
I watch the walls of my memory sweat.
It was you who, just a step away,
Held out your hair so that I might cling to it.
Discard, then, all these bullets
That kill or do not kill according to the rules of tenderness.
Now, let go of me,

For I capsize on the other side of my womb¹⁵
Red with the blood of us all.
And I laugh in the heat of the sun,
Because madness garners the landscape,
Studiously.
Even you just a step away wear winter upon your face
So as to wrest from me my life's breath
And hang it over the border.
So in the heat of the sun
I die of incoherence
In bursts.] (Ippolito 72-73)

Once again, we see the subversion of traditional romantic imagery here; the sun (“in the heat of the sun”) sets the stage for the violence described in the poem and the wind, a conventional leitmotiv for poetic inspiration, now becomes a means to oppression, insinuated by the noose/wind (“wind round my neck”) metaphor. Indeed, the wind being imbued with the potential to hurt the neck, a possible metonym for the poetic voice’s actual vocal cords, implies that these romantic poetic conventions are inept at adequately communicating the Lebanese war tragedy.

The theme which seems to predominate the text, however, is the notion of physical distance. The poetic voice addresses herself to a specific interlocutor, the “tu” (“you”) who appears to be within close proximity (“just a step away”), but also a sense of detachment (“held out your hair so that I might cling to it”). At one point, the poetic voice cries out “Now, let me go” because her womb is “red with the blood of us all.” The menstruation imagery seems to have shifted from the personal to the collective; although the poetic voice has within her grasp the blood (the supposed source of life) of all her compatriots, she is in a state of infertility. In addition, the reference to capsizing to the other side of the womb can be read as a miscarriage, but a miscarriage of what? In effect, the “tu” could be a common Lebanese identity that unified the nation, however, in distancing herself from it and in bearing witness to a loss through the miscarriage metaphor, the

¹⁵ I have modified the translation of this verse from the Ippolito anthology to bring attention to the image of capsizing.

poetic voice indirectly admits that such an identity has disappeared during war. The final verse consolidates this idea; no longer capable of hanging on to the “tu” and feeling ripped apart from all notions of Lebanese identity she could once claim to, the poetic voice dies in “bursts,” a metaphorically-fitting image. All she can point to with certainty is the “madness that garners the landscape” that provokes the ubiquitous trauma-marked laughter (“and I laugh in the heat of the sun”) formerly noted.

Poetry: The Power to Repair

Though the poetic voice feels a dominating sense of loss, there is a sense of hope interspersed throughout *Archives Sentimentales*. The act of writing the collection not only posits Tuéni as a voice for the populace, but it also allows her to recreate her scattered nation. As John Berger said in his noteworthy essay “The Hour of Poetry,” every authentic poem “contributes to the labour of poetry... to bring together what life has separated or violence has torn apart... Poetry can repair no loss, but it defies the space which separates. And it does this by its continual labor of reassembling what has been scattered” (249). Although the poetic voice is now in “bursts,” poetry is what will piece her back together:

Qui me rendra présent?
Menacé, donc vivant,
Blessé, donc étant
Peureux, donc effrayant,
Debout, donc flamboyant.

Qui me rendra présent?

[Who will make me real?
Threatened, therefore living,
Wounded, therefore being,
Fearful, therefore frightening,
Erect, therefore a flame tree.

Who will make me real? (Ippolito 88-89)

Tuéni, knowing she was on the verge of death, wrote this collection aware that she would not herself be able to realize her desires for Lebanon's future. Her poetry sets upon awakening an urgency within its readers, an urgency to bear witness to the trauma experience, to authenticate their lived experiences, and to make her hopes for a Lebanon that faces its past directly a reality. With a poetic language created to legitimize the Lebanese experience, she implores her readers to rework the Lebanese earth, to make it fertile by reclaiming a fractured national identity. Rather than view traumatic memory as something to be forgotten in order to move forward, Tuéni conceives of it as a raw and true testament to living life ("threatened, therefore living") and only in recognizing its realness can the Lebanese begin to claim control over its grip on them and "defy the space which spaces" or negate the divisions trauma so emphatically outlined.

CHAPTER TWO

VISUALIZING VIOLENCE IN KAMAL HAKIM'S LE TEMPS DES GRENADES

Despite the commonly-held belief that the graphic novel belongs under the heading of popular literature and deviates from so-called “literary fiction,” it is a genre whose complexity and hybridity make it an apt medium for representing and conveying trauma experiences. As Rocco Versaci argues in his discussion of Holocaust literature, the “comic book displays its potential as a sophisticated literature by extending the elements of two important forms of Holocaust representation: written memoir and photography” (83). In fact, it is the ability of the graphic novel to heighten the sensory experience by combining the visual and textual that makes it unique and in treating a subject as sensory as war, the graphic novel emerges as a narrative model well-equipped for depicting its memory. The popularity of graphic novels for illustrating violent events is evidenced by the vast majority of publications available¹⁶.

The graphic novel has also witnessed a great surge in popularity in Lebanon, notably as a medium to treat the civil war¹⁷. It emerges as an apt genre because “the unique relationship of text and image in comics becomes a means of overcoming the problem of representing suffering” (Hayek 184) and as Ghenwa Hayek notes, “particularly in Lebanon, where images of combat are omnipresent and have been since the early days of the civil war, the search for alternative modes of representing conflict in an ethical manner continues to occupy artists and writers” (184).

¹⁶ As Magali Compan remarks, “titles such as *Charley's War*, *White Death*, *C'était la guerre des tranchées*, *War Brothers*, to name just a few, reveal the potential of non-fiction comics to complexly tell story based on real events” (Compan 51). Other note-worthy titles include Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* and *Maus II*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

¹⁷ Popular titles treating the civil war include Zeina Abirached's [*Beyrouth*] *Catharsis* and *Mourir, partir, revenir – Le jeu des hirondelles* and Arabic language comics such as Lena Merhej's *A'ataqid Anna Sanakunu Hadi'in Fi-l Harib al Muqbila*.

In *Le temps des grenades*, Kamal Hakim sketches, both literally and figuratively, the story of a Lebanese family “qui s’est arrêtée en 1982” [that ended in 1982¹⁸] (Hakim backcover). The work is “une histoire aux dimensions autobiographiques” [a story of autobiographical dimensions] (Awit) and the protagonist, the 33-year old¹⁹ Kamal Hakim himself, is in Lebanon in the year 2015 preparing for a trip to Paris. There, he hopes to meet a contact who can tell him more about his uncle Karim who was killed in 1982 around the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Throughout the narrative, Kamal interviews and questions different people who knew his uncle and we see his attempts not only to piece together his uncle’s story, but to make sense of his own as well.

Although the main focus of the narrative appears to be the constructing of uncle Karim’s story, I argue the implicit and central work of the text is to construct the identity of Kamal himself and by doing so, demonstrate the challenges facing the post-war generation as they attempt to write their own personal memories as well as a collective memory of the war. Moreover, I will show how the text reveals the symptomatic repetition of the traumatic war memory latent in Lebanese society.

The Graphic Novel as Bildungsroman

In his treatment of Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust memory graphic novels *Maus I* and *Maus II*, Versaci addresses what he calls two main barriers of second generation Holocaust writing. Firstly, the second generation “has the need to access the past, but is impeded by the specific burdens that the Holocaust places on communicability” (Versaci 87) and therefore, finds itself “drastically affected by an event that they never directly experienced and cannot easily discuss”

¹⁸ All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁹ In the novel, Kamal Hakim says he is “l’âge de Christ” [Christ’s age] (15), so I assume 33 years of age.

(87). Secondly, Spiegelman, as a second generation writer, has a “fragmented sense of identity” (87) because of the experience and his “quest to discover and represent what his parents went through is a means by which he can reassemble his sense of self” (87). The graphic novel presents itself as a form of representation that helps resolve these problems by forging a hybrid form of artistic production. In fact, “it is comics’ ability to represent and produce meaning in a medium other than the purely textual language of literature or the purely visual language of the image, that makes it a privileged medium for communicating the precariousness of life at [the] limits of representation and imagination” (Hayek 183). For Kamal, who struggles to come to terms with who he is and express his uncertainty, the graphic novel serves to better delineate the different components of his fractured identity by offering up for use a variety of visual and textual epistemologies, particularly evident in the graphic novel’s representations of Hakim’s inability to grow up while haunted by his family’s past.

Near the beginning of the narrative, we see a pair of legs. We determine they belong to a male given the hair and boxers (p. 8) and observe his arms are dangling beside his thighs as he is hunched over. The city of Beirut is awake, hustling and bustling, but this character has visibly slept in. A speech balloon containing the Levantine Arabic exclamation “Lek yalla!” [Come on!], a common expression of impatience or annoyance, is printed. All of these images evoke representations of the archetypal apathetic, irresponsible adolescent. However, once we turn to the next frame, we realize he is none other than the forlorn grown Kamal sitting outside a Parisian café to whom we were previously introduced on the first page. He then admits to having already rescheduled his meeting with his grandmother twice, offering an indication of unreliability and another sign of adolescent-like behavior.

Moreover, in a later scene, as he sifts through boxes of his uncle's possessions to find clues, he sits crisscross on the floor and goes from a face reminiscent of a tantrum in one frame to one of delight when his grandmother calls him in another (p. 24). All these instances, rendered capable by the progression of frames inherent to the graphic novel as well as these visual details highlighted by the author, reinforce a characterization of Kamal as an adult whose maturation has been stunted.

As far as the verbal elements of the text are concerned, many a rhetorical quip are interspersed throughout the telling of the story, revealing a focus on a character whose maturation has been inhibited. When discussing the print material he amassed to research his uncle's story, Kamal mentions the "différentes caches dans lesquelles s'étaient faufileés quelques numéros de Playboy... bref c'était ma caverne d'Ali Baba" [different piles that a few Playboy magazines had snuck into... I mean, it was my Aladdin's cave] (Hakim 18). With this aside, Kamal conveys a pride in his secret exploration of his budding teenage sexuality, creating a disconnect between the veritable character and the representation of a 32-year old man that we expect. This lack of maturity manifests itself in his relationships as well; because Kamal is unable to have a conversation about the adult topic of paying rent with his girlfriend, she leaves him and he makes no effort whatsoever to negotiate the source of contention. In this case, rather, it is a lack of textual dialogue that sheds light on the way in which Kamal is trapped in the past and unable to fulfill what is expected of him as an adult (45). The disorder of his interpersonal relationship bleeds into his intrapersonal capacities.

Kamal's seemingly perpetual child/adolescent state of maturity appears to stem from the decision he took as a young boy to explore the mystery surrounding his uncle Karim's death. We first learn of this decision when he says that from the time he was a little boy, he noticed Karim's death was his grandmother's "talon d'Achille" [Achille's heel] (15). Kamal does not shy away

from making his closeness to his grandmother well-known; he spends many an afternoon helping her tend to her garden and he evens proudly claims the embarrassing title “un fils à grand-mère” [a grandma’s boy]. The order of the revelation of these facts would lead us to believe Kamal’s intentions are solely altruistic in avenging his uncle because he wants to bring his grandmother closure (“Je m’étais fait serment, à 8 ans, de trouver les coupables et de venger la mort de mon oncle” [I made a promise to myself at 8 years old, to find the people guilty and avenge my uncle’s death] (15)), and although he explicitly states “j’ai ce besoin urgent qui me poursuit de tenir ce serment, pas juste pour ma grand-mère...pour moi” [I had the urgent need to stay true to this promise, not just for my grandma...for me] (15), the mission eventually becomes primarily for himself. Still engulfed in the need to know what happened to his uncle, and unable to place himself within the context of neither his family history nor Lebanese society, he cannot mature until he has sewn together the various threads of his family’s and nation’s story.

Pomegranates and Handgrenades

The choice of title of Kamal Hakim’s graphic novel makes clear the paramount role that war plays in the context of Kamal’s family’s history as well as Lebanon’s collective history. “Le temps des grenades” bears a striking resemblance to the title of the popular French song “Le temps des cerises” by Jean Baptiste Clement. Given that the only difference is the last word and both “cerises” [cherries] and “grenades” [pomegranates] are fruits, the allusion seems very probable. The song, written five years before the Paris Commune, became associated with the revolutionary spirit. Its lyrics express what the hopes were for France in left-leaning circles:

Quand nous chanterons le temps des cerises
Et gai rossignol et merle moqueur
Seront tous en fête.
Les belles auront la folie en tête

Et les amoureux du soleil au cœur.
Quand nous chanterons le temps des cerises
Sifflera bien mieux le merle moqueur.

[When we will sing of the cherry season
And the gay hummingbird and the mocking blackbird
Will be celebrating
The beautiful woman will be in a craze
And the lovers of the sun in our hearts
When we will sing of the cherry season
The blackbird will sing more in tune]

All images connote joy and wonder. The idea of flourishing evoked by the cherries and the conventionally positive symbols such as the sun and singing birds make it so that war is an unimaginable reality. This is the vision that the Lebanese, while withstanding the daily fear tactics and encumbrance of the civil war, clung to. The hope for an improved future was what enabled the nation to maintain its resilience.

With this idea in mind, the pomegranate depicted in the novel becomes a symbol for this hope when we first see it in a plate in child Kamal's hands (p. 13). The first frame on the page and the frame with the pomegranate both occur in the same physical setting, Kamal's grandmother's garden and a bench, but in different time frames. In the first one, adult Kamal holds his cell phone with a sad expression on his face. In the next frame, there is a close-up on the phone with a speech bubble saying "Rien..." [nothing...]. This word, in fact, summarizes the general consensus about the aftermath of the war; *nothing* was accomplished and the hope for a future like the one from "Le temps des cerises" was unfulfilled.

In the other scene, the child version of Kamal has replaced the adult on the bench and in place of the phone is a pomegranate on a plate. Instead of upset, however, he seems ecstatic. Although the frame is set during the time of the war, child Kamal wears a hopeful expression; for one, he is in his grandmother's garden, reminiscent of Nadia Tuéni's garden, which forges a space

of peace and security, and secondly, his imagination is free to envision an improved Lebanon after the war.

The pomegranate can be read as a *trace-mémoire*, or a physical object which connects to the collective past²⁰. In a Proustian fashion, the fruit takes Kamal back to the bench, but in child form, to remind him of when his family, as well as the nation, appeared to be brimming with optimism. As a conventional symbol of fertility and prosperity, the pomegranate aptly carries this symbolic weight.

Nevertheless, the *trace-mémoire* is unique in the sense that its capabilities are not fixed and capable of evolving²¹ and the pomegranate does just that. As Kamal says, “petit, je détestais les grenades que je trouvais acides et faussement sucrées” [when I was young, I hated pomegranates because I found them acidic and of a deceiving sweetness] (13). With this line, Kamal foreshadows the deception that was in-store for the Lebanon following the war and the pomegranate becomes a *trace-mémoire* of the failed aspiration.

Although a literary symbol for growth, the pomegranate has also been linked to death and temptation, primarily in Greek mythology. Hades, king of the underworld, made Persephone, daughter of Demeter, return to the underworld because she ate pomegranate seeds to satisfy her hunger, which led to grave repercussions (Hamilton 59). The narrative of the graphic novel is in fact ridden with death, both figurative (the death of hope) and literal (the death of uncle Karim).

The pomegranate continues to evolve to symbolize this forthcoming deception and does so quite explicitly during Kamal’s interview with his uncle’s friend Rafic (p. 39). As Rafic reflects on Karim’s various political projects, the outline of the pomegranate appears, except this time it is

²⁰ See Marve McCusker’s discussion of *trace-mémoire* in *Patrick Chamoiseau: Recovering Memory*, p. 102-103

²¹ Ibid.

mostly white with a little red at the bottom and splatters of a darker red surrounding it. This is one of the rare instances in which the graphic novelist uses color, signaling the importance of this symbol. In fact, the fruit has taken on the image of the other translation for “grenades,” “hand grenades.” As a symbol of violence and destruction, hand grenades imply that the reality covered up by hope reveals itself as one rooted in death, trauma, and violence.

The Specter in the City

The author of the text makes use of three main colors for his comic; yellow, white, and black. For the most part, all the frames are predominantly yellow: characters, places, and objects are sketched in black and then shaded in yellow. On the other hand, the few frames depicting flashbacks are more colorful and more detailed than depictions of the present. How does this contrast work to make a statement about the implications of memory for present-day Lebanese society? As Kamal implies throughout his investigative work, the war continues to mark both his family and the nation itself. Be it in giving the names of those who died during the war to newborns (Hakim 23), fearing a bombing because a family lights fireworks to celebrate a child’s academic successes (14), or obsessing over the story of an uncle’s death, the war marks the daily consciousness of the Lebanese and prevents the furthering of the collective Lebanese story. For this reason, using a monotonous color scheme to depict the present-day effectively captures the spirit of a Lebanon hindered from progress. In addition, by imagining the collective nation as stunted, the personal story of Kamal turns into a metonymy for a nation stuck in limbo. Reality lacks vitality and the inability to explore the taboos of memory freezes Lebanon in its morose state.

Another aspect of the graphic novel related to color is the artistic depiction of Kamal. Throughout the entire novel, Kamal is always white, unlike the other characters who are usually

shaded in yellow and rarely another color. The only time he is yellow himself is when he points out to his readers, by breaking the fourth wall, that “ce côté anti-clérical, on en a tous hérité dans la famille, ce qui complique un peu les choses dans un pays où tout passe par le religieux et le communautaire” [this anticlerical side, we all inherited it in my family, which complicates things in a community where everything is based on religion and community] (p. 33). For this one moment, he feels as if he understands his place within a “we” (his family, in this case) and for a moment, he feels no sense of a fragmentation, justifying his color changing to match that of the other characters. The breaking the fourth wall, moreover, solidifies this sense of solidarity²².

Nevertheless, for the rest of the time, he is white, a bystander, almost ghost-like, active yet not implicated in society. Take, for example, the scene in which Kamal goes to a party with his peers (p. 29). In the first frame, we see his friends sitting around a table laughing and engaging in conversation, and though he is physically in this circle, he is not engaged. He stares down into his glass with a forlorn expression and his white color is a stark contrast to the homogenous yellow of his peers. He confirms the theory that he is trapped in the past through his inner thoughts because he is “dans un pays qui n’a jamais su tourner la page de la guerre” [in a country that didn’t know how to turn the page about war]. Although a party would make one assume otherwise, the dull yellow of the scene insinuates that such an event is just another way to mask the malaise of war memory.

Effectively, the one person with whom he is able to communicate meaningfully is his brother Karim (who bears the name of the uncle), who later makes an appearance at the party. The

²² “Where there is apparent ‘eye-contact’ between a depicted character and the viewer, the former seems to be ‘demanding’ something of the latter, whereas lack of eye contact invites detached scrutiny [...] finally, [a horizontal angle] is thought to indicate the degree of involvement a viewer is invited to feel with a person in an image, with a full frontal view indicating a maximum degree of involvement” (Elisabeth El Refaie 183)

conversation about Karim's unsuccessful job as a history professor offers more proof of the distressed society the two live in and in addition, it follows logically that Kamal connects to Karim as they both were marked by the mystery of their uncle to different degrees.

Karim and Kamal: Doubling the Past in the Present

Imagining Kamal as ghost-like not only explains the disconnected interactions with his surroundings, yet also reinforces the strong connection Kamal shares with his uncle, Karim. The figure of Karim haunts Kamal's life and marks who he is. A looming shadow of Karim imprints itself on the white child version of Kamal (p. 32). The size of the shadow is impressive; it takes up almost the entire frame and covers the child version of Kamal as well as those of his brother and cousin. This choice of dimension emphasizes the impact that Karim's memory and lack thereof continue to have on the post-war generation and furthermore, because the children's facial expressions communicate an ambiguous sentiment (awe, fear, etc.), we are reminded once again that the way in which this memory affects the family and the larger society is unclear.

Rather than aspiring to mature into an individual, Kamal feels predestined to live up to the expectation of his idealized uncle and not surprisingly, the similarities between the two abound. As Hayek states in her discussion of Lebanese graphic war literature, "in their autobiographical comics...the young adults of the present are forced by the ongoing conflict to come to terms with the experiences of their parents' generation, which in turn brings about an empathy and understanding rendered as physical similarity" (190). Upon seeing the shadow imprinted on Kamal, for example, we could easily mistake it for his own before learning it is Karim's through the textual code. Such ambiguity strengthens the connection established between the two, and

furthermore, validates the graphic novel's ability to communicate uncertainty by privileging the visual before the textual.

After interviewing Anne, a former friend of his uncle's, Kamal learns of how his uncle was debating leaving Lebanon and immediately makes the connection to his own life: "Je me retrouve 30 ans après sa mort à me poser les mêmes questions. Partir refaire sa vie à l'étranger ou pas?" [I find myself, 30 years after his death, asking myself the same questions. Leave and start over abroad or not?] (Hakim 28). Anne stresses, however, that "il n'est jamais parti" [he never left] (27) and we see Kamal write this sentence and say it aloud to himself (p. 27). Once again, having a visual zoomed in on this sentence allows the narrative to encourage us to focus our attention on this singular idea/phrase.

How is it that Karim never left? This phrase, like the memory, returns to haunt Kamal's consciousness. After leaving the party where he was with his brother Karim, we see a frame with two speech bubbles on the inside with one saying "c'est vrai qu'en fait, il n'est jamais parti" [it's true actually, he never left] (31) in response to a question about whether or not the uncle would have left the party. The choice to place these speech bubbles in an empty, white frame is impactful (p. 31), because it becomes a visual incarnation for how the uncle's absence fills the lives of this post-war generation. The uncle's ghost-like presence has effectively overtaken his life and he cannot even go through life's most mundane actions, such as leaving a party, without asking what his uncle would have done. Kamal lives out the unrealized part of his uncle's life in many ways, and for this reason, it becomes more plausible as to why he appears like a specter himself. Carrying out the unfinished life of a man who passed, he cannot fully belong to the present.

Women as the Bearers of Memory

As Kamal attests, “on dit que les femmes sont ‘les porteuses de mémoire’” [they say women are the ‘bearers of memory’] (33). Women, as the bearers of posterity, act as the bridge between the past and the future. They carry the memories of a people and also bring the future into the world. However, to what extent does this truth manifest itself throughout this narrative?

The woman of this *récit* are hardly present. Kamal’s mother makes fleeting appearances and although she is said to have been perpetually marked by her brother’s death, this internal struggle is explored very little. The one indirect characterization attesting to her internal struggle is that she keeps a framed photo of his uncle that “servait d’idéal dans la maison” [served as an ideal in the house] (33), reinforcing how the uncle’s memory loomed over Kamal in the public as well as in the private spheres of his life.

Kamal’s grandmother is the most ubiquitous female character of the graphic novel. She is the first source of inspiration for Kamal’s investigative project. Still, rarely does she bring up the war or her son’s memory. The majority of her interactions with Kamal are comprised of small talks; wrapping Christmas gifts, petunias that need to be pruned, or her arthritis. Even as a child, Kamal’s “teta” did everything in her power to hide the war from her grandson. During a particularly frightful violent episode of the war, his grandmother picked him up from school, took him to the popular Bristol restaurant, and amidst the bombings, tells him “des histoires drôles” [funny stories] (p. 10).

The supposed role of remembering, conferred to these women, is left undone. Without any principal actors carrying out the role of commemoration, the post-war generation and the post-war society of Lebanon fall deeper into a state of limbo. Potential for the country to shed its yellow shade and come to know colorful nuance appears to be an improbable turn of events.

Malaise and Repetitive Memory

Kamal, as has been argued, is stunted in his understanding of himself. He is unable to move beyond the memory of his uncle's death and it plagues his *quotidien*. Whether it be during an interview or when he rummages through boxes, he learns a new detail about his uncle only to realize he is more lost than before. He is stuck in a cycle of false hope and disappointment.

This personal experience of Kamal's establishes the framework for a collective Lebanese memory of the war. Despite the war officially ending in 1990, the cycle of violence seems never-ending. Conflict with Israel occurred again in 2005, sectarian and religious violence fills the mundane of daily life, and discussion about the war gains traction in the national public discourse, only to be silenced again by the 1991 amnesty law that heavily influenced the public's disposition to open, honest conversation. In fact, this law which demonstrated disregard for official memory, or a memory that could be accepted as truth in the daily public discourse, has made all forms of remembering difficult to achieve:

La polémique autour du projet d'écriture d'un livre d'histoire unifié pour les écoles libanaises – l'histoire enseignée s'arrêtant à l'année 1943, celle de l'indépendance du Liban – est suffisamment éloquente. Approcher les années de guerre s'avère d'autant plus compliqué que le décret de la Loi d'amnistie générale du 26 août 1991, promulguée par le gouvernement libanais et s'appliquant aux crimes perpétrés par toutes les milices et groupes armés pendant la guerre civile, s'accompagne de ce que l'on peut considérer comme une amnésie qu'elle impose et entretient, et faisant finalement l'affaire de tous les acteurs de la guerre. La volonté commune d'occulter le passé s'avérant finalement plus commode que le fait de le ressusciter rend effectivement difficile tout travail de mémoire (Tamraz 463).

[The controversy surrounding the project of writing a consolidated history textbook for Lebanese schools – knowing that taught history ends at 1943, the year of Lebanon's independence – is quite complicated. To discuss the war years turns out to be more complicated given the General Amnesty law passed on August 26, 1991, promoted by the Lebanese government and applied to crimes committed by all factions and armed groups during the civil war. It is accompanied by what we can consider an amnesia that the law imposes and maintains, and affects all those

involved during the war. The desire to ellipse the past turns out to be easier than recalling it, which makes all commemorative efforts difficult.]

In fact, Kamal articulates a collective experience defined by malaise. The Lebanese believe the narratives (replete with holes) that they have personally accepted are sufficient to satisfy their hunger. Like Persephone and the pomegranate seeds, they look for a temporary, facile solution to their hunger for understanding. However, in sharing these narratives, it becomes apparent their incompleteness fuels societal malaise. Whatever the forms of memory (official, collective, personal, etc.), refusing to consider them creates uneasiness which spreads into every crevasse of the society. Every time one of Kamal's interviewees seems to make a breakthrough, he or she falls back on daily minutia. A story is never fully explored, which inevitably leads to having to start at the very beginning every time and reattempt to heal an already bothered wound. This cycle never becomes a path to recovery, desired by the Lebanese but difficult to forge.

In his interview with Anne, for example, Kamal scribbles impassionedly into his notebook, excited about what he finds out. Nevertheless, just as he begins to feel as if the story could be pieced together and his understanding of himself can finally be solidified, Anne changes the subject and asks "Ta maman va bien sinon? Ça fait longtemps qu'on s'est pas vues elle et moi" [Is your mom doing well? It's been a longtime since we last saw each other, she and I] (Hakim 27). Whether Anne's memory is too painful or too blurry to be shared, she cannot fully explore the narrative she has to offer, stunting Kamal's maturation, her own recovery, and on a larger scale, the Lebanese nation's recovery.

Kamal repeats these interviews with his father, Rafic, one of his uncle's best friends, and Rimette, another friend. Both stop telling their stories because they are either too painful (Rafic), they are tired (Rafic), or because they know someone who could better inform Kamal (Rimette). Whatever the excuse, no individual has pieced together a complete memory.

This uncertainty is also depicted in the habits of the post-war generation. Kamal and his nation may be stuck, but the collective post-war generation is also victim to this paralysis. The endless partying and bar-hopping in the novel and in present-day Lebanon, alluded to by Rafic²³, and the desire for instant gratification are reflective of a group that privileges temporary relief over the pressing, difficult questions and quests. Whenever recalling a memory becomes uncomfortable, people can fall back on silence; transiently comforting, but disastrous in the grand scheme of things.

At the end of the comic, we begin where we started outside the same Parisian café where Kamal left us. His phone rings and he receives news of his grandmother's passing and the narrative ends with him ordering a coffee. Even the construction of the narrative, one that starts and ends in the same place, serves as a metonym for Lebanon's perpetual malaise. We were prepared for a grand revelation after reading about Kamal's multiple interviews, but we are left disappointed feeling that the story lead nowhere, just like Kamal's project, and just like Lebanon's memory project. The only satisfaction, fleeting at best, that we gain is seeing Kamal seek temporary refuge in the mundane, like his cup of coffee.

²³ "Mon fils n'est toujours pas rentré. Ils s'amuse comment les jeunes de sa generation?" [My son still isn't back? How do the young people of his generation have fun?] (Hakim 39)

CHAPTER THREE

SHIFTING MEMORY IN DENNIS VILLENEUVE'S *INCENDIES*

In speaking about his conception of the Lebanese civil war, Wajdi Mouawad, writer of the theatrical play *Incendies*, observed:

J'ai été traumatisé par le fait qu'on n'a pas été capable de me raconter les événements qui ont marqué ma vie de façon majeure et qui l'ont transformée durablement. La guerre du Liban ne m'a jamais été racontée. On était incapable de me dire qui tirait sur qui, pour quelles raisons et pourquoi tout cela avait commencé. Il y a donc chez moi une réelle obsession, un besoin viscéral de comprendre pourquoi je suis ce que je suis, pourquoi je suis québéco-franco-libanais (Makhlouf, "Wajdi Mouawad, l'écrivain qui chemine vers le pays perdu").

[I was traumatized by the fact that no one was capable of telling me about the events that affected my life in a major way and that transformed it. I was never told the story of the Lebanese war. No one could tell me who shot who, for what reasons the whole thing had started. That's why I have a real obsession, a visceral need, to understand how I am what I am, why I am French, Quebecois, and Lebanese²⁴.]

As we see in the precedent chapter on *Le Temps des grenades*, the inability to articulate the memory of the war pervades and dominates the consciousness of the post-war generation, evidenced here in Mouawad's testimony. This disconnect between the traumatized war generation and their progeny has subjected the latter to existential uncertainty. Who am I? How do I fit into my family's narrative? My nation's narrative? How does the past define me in all of these contexts? These questions plague the daily musings of the post-war generation who face the repercussions of a war they did not initiate.

In the graphic novel *Le Temps des grenades*, the main character Kamal, despite his best efforts to bring to light the memories of his uncle's death and by extension, his family's and nation's war experiences, ends right where he began. Memory remains inaccessible and consequently, Kamal's identity remains in limbo.

²⁴ All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Denis Villeneuve's film adaptation of *Incendies*, in a similar vein to *Le Temps des grenades*, makes the question of identity and postmemory the crux of the plot. Two generations, a war generation represented by the character Nawal, and a post-war generation represented by Jeanne and Simon (Nawal's twins), find themselves questioning their personal and collective identities. A civil war that exacerbated religious and social tensions in the fictional setting, Daresh, shattered their sense of identity. After Nawal's death, Jeanne and Simon embark on a quest with the little knowledge they have in order to discover the truth behind their mother's past, their father's and brother's past, their own past, and that of their family's motherland.

After her Palestinian lover is murdered by her brothers, Nawal gives birth to a son she is forced to give up, however before doing so, she tattoos his heel with three dots. Following a stint writing for a political newspaper, she returns to the orphanage to which her son was taken in hopes of reuniting with him. To her misfortune, the orphanage he was in was burned and she finds herself in the middle of a ruthless killing spree of innocent Muslims. These violent events lead her to seek revenge for a war that took both the man she loved and the son she longed for, and she ends up assassinating the leader of the Christian militia, landing herself in jail. Many years later near the end of her imprisonment, she is tortured and raped by Abou Tarek, the prison's expert torturer, and impregnated by him. After giving birth to twins, the result of the violent act, she is forced to move to Canada and raise these children that she did not originally want. Twenty some years later, Nawal comes face to face with Abou Tarek at a public swimming pool in Canada and seeing the three-point tattoo on his heel, realizes that this same man was both her rapist and her son, born out of love. The shock causes her stroke which leads to her death.

How does the story of Nawal function to reveal the overarching history of a suffering nation? How does the process of reconstructing the narrative, realized by Jeanne and Simon,

suggest the possibility of rebuilding both a family and nationhood in the face of a traumatic past? Unlike *Le Temps des grenades*, I argue that *Incendies* demonstrates how to overcome the obstacles impeding the writing of memory discourse, and more specifically, demonstrates how the agency to do so is placed in the hands of the post-war generation.

Affective Geographies: Beirut and Daresh

Wajdi Mouawad was born in Lebanon in 1968 where he spent his childhood. After the civil war broke out in 1975, he and his family moved to France where he spent his adolescent years and later settled in Quebec (“Wajdi Mouawad (1968-).”), a *parcours* that explains why he labels himself as “québéco-franco-libanais” [Quebecois-French-Lebanese]. Mouawad brought his play *Incendies* to the stage in 2003 and since then, it has struck a chord with audiences around the world. The 2007 production at the Tarragon Theatre in Canada won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction (Jones).

The play makes the geographical setting of the scenario ambiguous, a defining characteristic of the script to which Dennis Villeneuve’s film adaptation remains faithful. In the film, Nawal, Jeanne, Simon, and Nihab find themselves, at one point or another, in the imagined city of Daresh. Although the setting is fictitious, many parallels can be drawn between it and Mouawad’s birthplace: Lebanon.

One of the first glimpses into Nawal’s life occurs when she and her Palestinian lover, Wahib, attempt to evade Nawal’s family. To their misfortune, Nawal’s brothers find them, kill Wahib, and almost kill Nawal until their grandmother stops them. Visual and discursive signs offer the audience background information to explain the reason for the murder: Nawal wears a cross, revealing that she is from a Christian family and Nawal’s brother tells Wahib to “go back home”

and promises to “seek [his people] in [their] camps and slaughter [them].” The scenario is paradigmatic of the Christian/Palestinian conflict proliferating the discourse around the first years of the Lebanese civil war.

Daresh, the country in which it is located²⁵, and the representations of other geographies also mirror those of other moments of the Lebanese civil war. For example, when Nawal goes to the south to find her son, she must pass through border control. In 1982, a shift in focus occurred in the major schemata characterizing the civil war from the Palestinian migration to Israel’s invasion and religious tension. The south became a hotbed for conflict as Israeli faced resistant armies -- which legitimizes Villeneuve’s decision to portray the south as a heavily policed and patrolled region in the film.

Given that the parallels between both the imagined and veritable geographies abound, the inevitable question that arises is why not have *Incendies* take place in Lebanon itself? The Lebanese civil war played an intricate role in forging Mouawad’s identity and furthermore, depicting the futility of Lebanon’s war emerged as a pressing *devoir* for the post-war generation.

It appears, however, that for Mouawad, the message of *Incendies* transcends the boundaries of his personal geographies: “*Incendies* n’est pas une pièce sur la guerre, à proprement parler. C’est une pièce sur les promesses qu’on ne tient pas, sur les tentatives désespérées de consolation, (...) sur la façon de rester humain dans un contexte inhumain” [*Incendies* is not a play about war, strictly speaking. It’s a play about promises we do not keep, about the desperate attempts to console, (...) about how to say human in an inhuman context”] (*Incendies*). No scene encapsulates this notion better than the opening scene of the film. A young boy, later revealed to be Nihab, fixes the viewer. We know nothing about the sociopolitical context of the film -- all we see is the anguish

²⁵ Although the city Daresh is named, no title is given for the larger country in which the film takes place

in the child's eyes. No matter what his background is, the viewer can identify with the universal experience of pain communicated through his gaze. His look serves to break the fourth wall and destabilize the Western viewer, pushing him outside of his occidental isolation, destabilizing his comfort zone and what the West has collectively coined as "history."

Lebanon is not unique in terms of managing and understanding violence and sectarianism. Mouawad argues the Lebanese struggle is one with which we all need to identify in order to avoid a similar conflict from occurring elsewhere. In his writing of *Incendies*, he proposes a shared discourse on suffering and violence to which all audiences can refer so they can recognize the dangers of war. In situating his play in an ambiguous geographical space, its subject matter is liberated from the confines of one place and one people.

Rewriting the Greek (Lebanese?) Tragedy

The Greeks defined tragedy as "the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of hubris, fate, and the will of the gods" (Webster). Although *Incendies* does not follow the fixed structure of the genre, many of its features can be found in the film. Given that Mouawad cites *Oedipus Rex* as a play he directed that permitted him to "progresser dans son travail sur ses propres pièces" [make progress in his work on his own plays] ("Incendies: Dossier Pédagogique."), it comes as no surprise that *Incendies* borrows many of the same *quiproquos* from the classical text.

Traditionally, the Greek tragedy works under the assumption that humans are flawed because of their *hubris*, or excessive pride, and that an act of *hamartia*, or misjudgment inevitably committed by the tragic hero, will lead to a life plagued by the burden and undesirable consequences of said act. Such a framework could be used to explain the collective trauma of

Lebanon in its post-war society as an effect of its ruthless, pride-fueled violent war. However, by creating a scenario reminiscent a quasi-Greek tragedy and by subverting the expectation of a tragic ending, Mouawad challenges the expectation that Lebanon will be perpetually plagued by the traumatic memory and suggests that it can reassemble its fractured society.

Oedipus Rex written by Sophocles is one of the most prominent Greek tragedies and discussed extensively in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The play recounts the story of King Oedipus who summons the prophet Tiresias to help him understand why there is a plague ravaging the city of Thebes. Tiresias says it occurred because the murderer of the former king Laius was not found and that it is actually Oedipus himself. Oedipus' wife Jocasta tells him not to trust in the prophets because she and her former husband, Laius himself, were once told by any oracle that their son would kill Laius and sleep with her, but she is convinced Laius was actually murdered by a band of many robbers. Oedipus had been told he would kill his father and sleep with his mother which led him to leave his parents for the city of Thebes.

Oedipus later learns from a messenger that his father, Polybus, has died but that Polybus was not his real father because the messenger delivered Oedipus to him when he was still an infant. It is then revealed that Oedipus was indeed Laius' son and that the former king instructed one of his shepherds to get rid of the child so the prophecy that Oedipus would kill him and sleep with Jocasta would not be fulfilled. Oedipus then realizes he did murder Laius' after getting into a drunken argument on his way to Thebes. In typical "Greek tragedy" fashion, Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus gorges his eyes out, bound to live with the tragic truth for the rest of his life.

Incendies loosely follows this template: Nawal and Nihab are both ironically unaware of how their respective actions to avenge or find the other led to their incestuous act up until the very

end of the film²⁶. Nonetheless, the subversion of the Greek tragedy schema is evinced in the way the characters in *Incendies* cope and understand their tragic circumstances. Though learning the true identity of her son prompts her stroke, Nawal seeks reconciliation in the face of trauma, contrary to *Oedipus Rex*'s Jocasta. The twins and Nihad also could have allowed the truth to paralyze them, but rather, they are able to find forgiveness and closure to move on.

Nawal, as a symbol of the war generation, demonstrates how the Lebanese who lived through violence are incapable of confronting the memory of the violent event. Faced with the truth that her struggles were carried out in vain because the son she wanted to avenge was ultimately also her rapist, she has a stroke and goes into a coma. Nevertheless, rather than allow for this trauma to trickle into the lives of her children (the post-war generation), she writes clues during a brief period of consciousness; these clues help her twins make sense of the tragedies she lived. Although Jeanne and Simon's belonging to the diasporic Lebanese community gives them a more objective lens through which to consider post-war Lebanese society, Nawal forces them on a quest to her motherland, underlining the need to connect with the space of violence, the country itself, to fully process the legacy of war. In fact, the cinematographic choices highlight this connection to land, evidenced by the plethora of walking scenes with both Nawal and Jeanne.

Nawal also writes two letters for Nihad, one for the rapist and one for her son, but she privileges the latter. She sincerely confides in him that "rien n'est plus beau que d'être ensemble" [nothing is more beautiful than being together]. She puts the love for him and the hope for reconciliation and forgiveness before resentment and her personal anguish.

Why this insistence on unity in her letter? On reunion? Nawal's actions are a metonym for

²⁶ Nihad is revealed to have been radicalized only because he wanted attention from his mother, and by committing acts of terror, he believed his picture would be distributed all over the country and that his mother would see it and know he made something of himself.

the collective damage inflicted onto Lebanese society provoked by perpetuating sectarian violence. She acknowledges that her children live in a world dictated by her unfortunate decisions. In fact, the birth of the twins from an act of rape posits itself as metaphor for a generation born from violence and fracture. Although she cannot absolve herself nor her children of the pain and consequences of the violent act, she pines for acceptance of the tragedy and from there, for peace and reconciliation. By choosing to love her son, she accepts both sides of him, or more symbolically, “she accepts that one plus one can still equal one” (Williams).

The characters who represent the post-war generation also demonstrate their aptness to break free from the paralysis of truth. Despite their shock upon learning they were born from rape, the twins come to terms with the knowledge by immersing themselves in water. The viewer sees their fast and intense strokes and kicks, symbolic of an attempt to rid themselves of the tragic truth. However, they end up stopping and coming back to the surface, breathing heavily, but visibly at peace; a message reinforced by their embrace. Water plays its conventional role as a healer, as a giver of new life. By going back into the liquid, symbolic of amniotic fluid, Jeanne and Simon are reborn with the strength to journey beyond their past.

Nihad, on the other hand, exhibited a need to avenge his past throughout the entire movie and becomes a sniper out of the desire for his mother to see him all over Daresh. Distraught as to how she could have abandoned him, he wants her to know his worth. Even after the war when he moves to Canada, his new job as a window cleaner is reflective of a need to erase the traces of the past. Nonetheless, at the end, he begins to mend wounds given the knowledge that his mother loved him and continued to love him, even after learning that he violated her. He visits her grave, suggesting he ultimately understood her message that being together is the most beautiful thing.

Ending on a note of love rather than eternal tragedy redresses the conventions of the Greek

tragedy and in doing so, demonstrates how Lebanon can itself defy the expectation that it will remain in a state of paralysis and instead, make sense of its tragic past with a renewed sense of stability.

Memorializing from the Diaspora

One of the most remarkable post-Lebanon civil war phenomena was the mass exodus of Lebanese to Western countries such as Canada, France, and the United States. Wajdi Mouawad can himself be included within this Lebanese diaspora, having moved to France later in his childhood.

Although diasporic cultural products can be read as being less connected to the motherland of its authors, Syrine Hout argues that the literary production of both Anglophone and Francophone authors in the West does not “diminish their ties to Lebanon” (*Postwar Anglophone Lebanese Fiction* 5). In fact, these authors “write their postwar narratives with hindsight, which gives them a critical distance from the immediacy of internecine violence” (Hout, “Memory, Home, and Exile” 219). This idea of retrospection is privileged within the narrative construction of *Incendies*’ plot, achieved by endowing Jeanne and Simon, twins whose “outsider” perspective became possible because of their mother’s exile, with the mission of healing the wounds of their mother’s and motherland’s trauma.

Lebanon’s civil war was fueled by sectarianism, which renders the need to take an objective stance when reflecting on it for someone within the country seemingly impossible. Rather than prioritize national identity, Lebanese have tended to recede into their confessional or socioeconomic groups and use these contexts to inform an understanding of themselves. This approach only adds insult to the national injuries. However, diasporic cultural production

systematically negates these divisive labels, and in the case of Lebanon, the different religious persuasions and socioeconomic hierarchies become invisible.

When Jeanne and Simon embark on their journey to discover their mother's story, they move through the fictional Daresh without the biases of the city's inhabitants, which makes them more open to the multiplicity of memorial perspectives of the people they meet. In fact, it is only by sewing together the different threads of knowledge they garner from their diverse encounters that they create the tapestry that is their mother's story. Jeanne puts her trust in professors from Daresh's French university, a poor school janitor, a group of disdainful country women, and a bourgeois notary. Simon also goes to a southern Muslim village, trusting that its people will make it known that he is in the country so that the head of his mother's terrorist group will reach out to him.

Jeanne and Simon, because of their outsider position, are able to facilitate an intersectarian dialogue that proves itself key in mending the wounds of the painful past. This conclusion infuses the diasporic position with legitimacy with regards to articulating and remembering the war experience. In order to diversify and expand the dialogue surrounding Lebanon's violent past, the Lebanese in exile as well as those still in the country must begin to conceive a Lebanese cultural production that surpasses the nation's own boundaries and rather one that is transcontinental in nature.

Les Jumeaux: Representations of the Post-War Generation

Simon and Jeanne are brother and sister, but more importantly, they are twins. The first sequence of the film is entitled "Les jumeaux," hinting at the significance of such a relationship. As a symbol of multiplicity, twins represent the community's identity through their respective

relationships with the other; both Simon and Jeanne belong to the post-war generation, but incarnate the two different experiences of this group: amnesia and memory.

After their mother's death, we find Jeanne and Simon in an office with their mother's former boss, a notary, who informs them of the stipulations of her will. To their surprise, they must take a letter to the father they never knew and the brother they did not know existed. Once this occurs, "le silence sera brisé, les promesses tenues, et une pierre pourra être posée sur ma tombe" [the silence will be broken, promises kept, and a tombstone can be placed on my tomb]. These lines from Nawal's letter exemplify the symptoms of the post-war experience, namely by alluding to the silence reigning over any dialogue on the civil war and its memory. Although amending the wounds of the war was important to Nawal, revealed by the letters she wrote for all those involved in her telling of it, she could not fulfill the task alone. The truth is too much to grasp, evidenced by the fact that she has a stroke after learning her son was her rapist. For this reason, she entrusts her children with the role of mending the wounds of their family's trauma, and metaphorically, of the collective nation's trauma.

Although they are asked to realize her wishes, the twins are at odds concerning how to approach the task. Jeanne, the girl, shows herself to be curious about her mother's story. Although she is shown to be a successful math student on her way to professorship, it is apparent that the ghosts of her mother's past haunt her. For example, she appears caught up in her own thoughts about Nawal as she is being introduced to teach a class and she later confides her concerns to her academic advisor. She visibly cannot move on until she has answers, inspiring her decision to go to Daresh.

Simon, on the other hand, represents the amnesiac experience of the post-war generation. When the notary goes into detail about the letter his mother left for him, Simon attempts to rush

the conversation. Apathetic and uninterested, he copes with his mother's passing through forgetting. He seems to be more distant from his mother than Jeanne was, shown by his ease in calling her "le secrétaire" [secretary] instead of "mom" when speaking to the notary. Moreover, the development of his personal identity is given less attention than his sister's; we have no insight into his career, his motivations, and his portrayal tends to be crafted with respect to his interactions with Jeanne.

This doubling trope is not unique to *Incendies* and surfaces in other Lebanese francophone narratives such as Ramy Zein's novel *La levée des couleurs* in which a brother and sister pairing witness the massacre of their family. The brother Karim excels at school, never mentions his family, and distances himself from his sister Siham, who, on the contrary, struggles to assimilate to life at her boarding school and thinks obsessively about her family and avenging their deaths.

Bearers and Facilitators of Memory

It is interesting to note that in both *La levée des couleurs* and *Incendies*, it is the sister who pursues the project of memory reconstruction while the brother finds comfort in denial and forgetting. Consequently, the idea of women as bearers of memory, evoked yet unrealized in *Le Temps des grenades*, comes to fruition through Zein's and Villeneuve's depictions of war. Although the women of *Incendies* first appear to follow the example of the women in Kamal Hakim's graphic novel as "memory hidens," they eventually prove Hakim's assertion that women are the bearers of memory.

Nawal initially appears to be concerned with putting the past behind her. Her twins know very little about her past life and confronting her past, namely her son/rapist, leads to her death. Still, she demonstrates a desire for her progeny to confront the past and make meaning of it. Even

in her comatose state, she dictates letters to the notary, Monsieur Lebel, urging Jeanne and Simon to embark on the journey they pursue.

Furthermore, Jeanne, as already discussed, obsessively pursues the past. Her future does not exist without her ancestors' past and she yearns to reclaim the histories denied to her during her mother's lifetime. This need encourages her to fulfill her mother's mission, knowing that through it, she will arrive at the answers she longingly desires.

Monsieur Lebel, could also be said to be a bearer of memory, however it appears rather that his concern is not Nawal's past, but her children's present. He becomes a guide whose primary concern is facilitating the healing process necessitated by a painful past. He ultimately commits an act of humanity needed in a country where sectarian affiliations blinded people to the human needs of their "others" and becomes the foil to the violence and cruelty of Nawal's past life.

As previously mentioned, the 1991 amnesty law encouraged a structural forgetting in Lebanese society that left people "bereft of a unifying national narrative and a cogent sense of self" (Larkin 620). This systemic amnesia has made written archives a rarity, thereby regulating memory "exclusively to the private realms of the family, home, and local community" (621). Because memory has been concentrated in these social structures, the main method of reconstructing war experiences has been through the stories told within them. This, nonetheless, perpetuates sectarian memory cultures and encourages selective amnesia, hence subverting a national collective forgetting. By reinforcing the worth of sectarian identities, the reimagining of a unified *Lebanese* nation recedes from view.

This evocation of the archive consequently raises the question: what constitutes an archive for the Lebanese civil war? An archive, as defined by the *Random House Dictionary*, is "a place where documents and other materials of public or historical interest are preserved" but this

precision fails to specify what these “documents and other materials” are. If the “archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record” (Manoff 12) and in the case of Lebanon, the official discourse surrounding sites of memory inconspicuously disregards these “modes” of commemoration that could actually aid in the construction of a broader, all-encompassing memory culture.

Incendies criticizes the narrow-minded epistemology of archival creation and combats it by legitimizing other vehicles of memory. When Jeanne first arrives in Daresh, she struggles to start the *devoir de mémoire* her mom instructed her to pursue; all that the notary Lebel presents to her are Nawal’s written letter as well as a photograph of her during the war. Traditionally, it is the former that merits the title of archive, but the latter reveals to be more effective in guiding Jeanne. The passport photo shows Nawal with a stoic look, offering a visceral emotional glimpse into the war experience, and also bears the name of the jail she was imprisoned in, a clue which provokes the chain of discoveries that ensue. The representation of the photograph is used to delineate the limitations of the official archival record and justify visual media’s role in constructing memory.

Although the film stresses alternate archives in the face of a lack of written archives, it is important to note that Jeanne and Simon’s quest is inspired by Nawal’s letter and concludes with another one, which serves to reaffirm the significance of written archives. Nonetheless, these letters lack objective historical details and rather, appeal to the affective facets of the war experience such as keeping promises and holding steadfast to familial love. Though national archives are few and far in between, the post-war experience is one defined by creating archives of feeling to counteract the dearth of written archives. Similar in this vein to Nadia Tuéni’s *Archives Sentimentales d’une Guerre au Liban*, Nawal memorializes the *human* experience of war,

hoping that it will emphasize how conflict tears away from us that which we hold dear to our hearts, and that it will become the dominant institutionalized memory culture of the Lebanese people.

Ultimately, however, whether the archives consulted are visual or written in nature, both originate from the same place: the notary Monsieur Lebel. From the beginning of the film, his character is constructed through his associations with the archive, represented by the folders always in his hand or the massive stacks to which he has access. He is the origin and the facilitator of Jeanne and Simon's journey in Daresh and furthermore, his name Lebel, meaning "the handsome one" in French, makes him a symbol for the idea that this quest is rooted in beauty, or more specifically, in Nawal's love for all her children.

Conclusion

The war in Lebanon was a collection of "ones." Different groups with individual interests reinforced the image of a fractured Lebanon. Though different narratives, like *Le Temps des grenades*, depict Lebanon as stuck in this state, *Incendies*, through its story of one family, offers hope for a nation. These "ones," whether they be the Christians, the Sunnis, the Shi'ites, the francophones, the artists, etc., can come together and still make "one," but with the label "Lebanese" as their common denominator.

CHAPTER FOUR

REASSESSING MEMORY IN HYAM YARED'S *TOUT EST HALLUCINÉ*

In his article “The Memory of the City,” the well-renowned Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury declares:

the huge machine that is reconstructing and regenerating the city [Beirut] is already wiping out the memory of old Beirut, relentlessly tossing the rubble of the old city into the sea. The city's center, today, is an empty space, a placeless space, a hole in memory. How are we to preserve the memory of this place in the face of such frightening architectural amnesia? In this city systematically ravaged by civil war, the only space left for memory is literature (Khoury 139)

This passage alludes to the projects of memory erasure which occupied the consciousness of Lebanese intellectual circles, namely the Solidère project headed by Prime Minister Rafic Hariri which saw the overhaul of Beirut's war-torn city center and the building of a “state-of-the-art” downtown. Writers and other artists alike perceived this project as an effect of the Lebanese 1991 amnesty law, which fostered a collective forgetting of the war. Many intellectuals, however, foresaw a danger in these attempts to bury memory. For them, it was vital to articulate the harrowing experience of war. As Khoury also remarks, however, a space for the intellectuals to counter the amnesiac trends of Lebanon's post-war society did emerge in the form of literature, notably the novel.

Hyam Yared's 2016 novel *Tout est halluciné*, printed by the French publishing house Fayard, is representative of how even today, the need to privilege memory remains at the forefront of Lebanese literary consciousness. A decade into the 21st century and Lebanese fiction continues to focus in on the country's civil war as evinced by titles such as Iman Humaydan's *Other Lives*, Elias Khoury's *Sinalcool*, and Layla 'Id's *Bar Number 2*.

Other Lives tells the story of a woman, who, after leaving Lebanon, returns to the country to repossess her childhood home and past memories only to realize the war has made such a task

impossible. ‘Id’s novel, on the other hand, recounts the meeting of two strangers, a man and a woman, at a bar. Through the woman’s perspective, we learn how memory can deceive and mislead. Yared’s *Tout est halluciné* similarly engages with the *devoir de mémoire* in Lebanon by exploring the impacts of amnesia on the self and society. How does the novel expand upon the previous texts engaging memory in the Lebanese context? What is at stake in remembering the war? Is Wajdi Mouawad’s faith in the second generation in resolving the trauma of war shared by Hyam Yared?

Although I consider the novel within the context of what Felix Lang terms the “second generation of post-civil war writers” in his study *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel – Memory, Trauma, and Capital*, I argue that it transcends the paradigmatic schemes associated with those writers. *Tout est halluciné*, like the work of the second generation writers, calls on writing’s power to make sense of trauma as well as to archive the past, however it emphasizes the need to recognize writing’s limitations, imposed by patriarchal and confessional institutions, to fulfill both acts.

I will first give a brief overview of the Lebanese post-civil war novel so as to delineate the contours of the literary landscape in which *Tout est halluciné* finds itself. I will then detail the ways in which literature and writing are both successful and impeded as trauma-exploring and archiving devices.

I. The Lebanese Postwar Novel

Although the novel entered the Arab world in the late 19th century²⁷, it did not witness a true coming-of-age until the Lebanese civil war. As Felix Lang claims, today, Lebanon’s civil war

27 The novel in the Arab world began with “loose translations and adaptations of European novels” (The Encyclopedia of the Novel by Logan 60) in the late 1800’s. Although first conceived through a Western lens, Arab writers made the genre their own an example being Jurji Zaidan’s original novels based on

novels “rank among the most innovative and experimental works of Arabic literature” (Lang 127) and “Lubnān al-shā‘ir” [the Lebanon of poets²⁸] became “Lubnān al-riwā‘ī” [the Lebanon of novelists] (58).

According to Stefan Meyer, the Lebanese Civil War affected the Arab novel by leading to experimentation “with a radical fragmentation of form, in an attempt to express the sense of complete dislocation caused by the conflict” (Meyer 117), causing “women writers to emerge with their own perspective,” and privileging an “increased introversion on the part of writers” (118). The first leitmotif delineated by Meyer figures into Felix Lang’s description of what he terms the “first generation” of Lebanese post-civil war writers.

This first generation made up of writers such as Elias Khoury was rich in both arabophone and francophone literary production²⁹. Despite this difference in their linguistic choices, however, the authors of this first generation wrote “as part of a counter-hegemonic discourse seeking to challenge the war narratives developed by the different warring factions” (Lang 69). Many of the arabophone authors were involved with the Lebanese Left, which predisposed them to a disillusionment with the Lebanese sociopolitical system (63).

In terms of literary stylistics, a notable trend of first generation civil war writing is a tendency to deconstruct. As Lang notes, “the body, the city, the country are divided up or blown to pieces, language and memory have become unreliable, and time has lost its meaning” (114). Destabilized by the war, writers struggled to piece together what had been broken, preferring to highlight the disfiguration of society on both a physical and physiological level. Writing a novel,

themes from Arab Islamic history (60). However, literary historians consider *Zaynab* by the Egyptian writer Husayn Haykal and published in 1913 to be the first full-fledged Arab novel (Lang 58).

²⁸ All translations in this chapter are mine unless otherwise noted.

²⁹ Noteworthy examples of this generation’s novels include Elias Khoury’s *Little Mountain*, Rashid al-Daif’s *Passage to Dusk*, Hanan al-Shaykh’s *The Story of Zahra*, and Ghada Samman’s *Beirut Nightmares* in the arabophone tradition and Elie Sabbag’s *L’Ombre d’une ville* in the francophone tradition.

because of its ability to organize ideas into a cohesive narrative, appeals to these disoriented Lebanese writers, however the novels they write end up reflecting the ruptures of their surroundings through their “nonlinear” (114) and “fragmented” form. An example of this deconstructive imagery emerges in Elie Pierre Sabbag’s francophone novel *L’Ombre d’une ville*, in which he falls back on the trope of a feminized, violated Beirut seen in Nadia Tuéni’s poetry:

Quelle maladie s’emparait de Beyrouth? Quelques jours par mois, elle crachait du sang, vomissait des fers tordus. (Sabbag 103)

[What sickness was coming over Beirut? For a few days every month she would spit blood and vomit twisted steel³⁰.]

Through their writing, the first generation gave visibility to the war which had been removed from official discourse and through their fragmented style of writing, they brought attention to the prevalence of sectarian war narratives which perpetuated the image of a dismantled Lebanon.

As time passed, however, cultural production inevitably changed as the face of the Lebanese writer changed. In the late 80’s and early 90’s, a new generation of Lebanese who had either experienced the war as children or were born into the post-war society put pen to paper. Arabophone as well as francophone novels³¹ persisted as dominant in the literary field, and as before, these new novels shared a common set of characteristics despite the difference in language.

Unlike the war generation whose writing made use of a deconstructivist approach to highlight the dismemberment of Lebanese society, these new writers exhibited a preference for “literary reconstruction, rather than deconstruction, of war-time and postwar Beirut” (129). The idea of the archive became a landmark of the nouveau literary consciousness. Literature as an

³⁰ Lang’s translation

³¹ Among the commonly cited names of second generation writers are the francophones Ramy Zein (*La Levée des couleurs*), Alexandre Najjar (*L’École de la Guerre*), and Hyam Yared and the arabophones Iman Humaydan (*Bas in Beirut*), Rabee Jaber (*The Mehlis Report*), and Hala Kawtharani (*al-Usbū’ al-Akhīr*)

archiving device even figures into authors' own discussions of their craft. Iman Humaydan, an award-winning novelist among the second generation post-civil war writers, claims writing as:

an attempt to archive the country, piece-by-piece, place-by-place, fragment-by-fragment. It was the fear of loss that made our literature take the nature of an archiving device, where one needed to register the slightest detail, as if literature had a mission of salvation (Humaydan)

Although fictional, by creating archives of war through their literature, these authors engendered “a frame for fragments of life and the self that no longer exists in reality because houses have been destroyed, the city has been divided, [and] neighbors, friends, and family have been killed” (Lang, 165) and in order to reconstruct Lebanon, second generation writers implemented “precise and reliable temporal and spatial frameworks” (Lang 2014, 489). Their texts “abound with dates, days, street names and numbers, names of restaurants, take-aways, and cafés” (489).

In spite of this shift in approach to treating war memory, the second generation, like their predecessors, continued a counter-hegemonic discourse against the official political discourse by forging a space to challenge state-sponsored amnesia. Through imagining these spaces in precise details, they prevent Lebanon from relapsing into a state of uncertainty and doubt. With this newfound ability to archive, no place or person is deemed unworthy of the collective's record.

II. Writing, Sex, and Trauma

Hyam Yared, a Lebanese francophone writer, explores social injustice in Lebanon through literature. Born in Beirut in 1975, Yared has written two collections of poetry and four novels and founded the Centre PEN Liban, an organization that defends “free speech” and “promotes Lebanese literature” (“Hyam Yared”). Her 2009 novel, *Sous la tonnelle*, which won both the Prix Phénix and the Prix Richelieu de la Francophonie, marks her first treatment of the Lebanese Civil

War. The novel's protagonist (and narrator) returns to her deceased grandmother's home, located right on the line that divided Beirut during the war, to find the latter's letters, journals, and drawings. In perusing over these personal archives, the protagonist begins to piece together the mystery of her grandmother's past and write a history of wartime Beirut.

Yared's latest novel *Tout est halluciné*, however, takes a different approach. The novel, nominated for the Prix Roman France Télévisions shortly after its release in February 2016, garnered success in both French and Lebanese circles. Its protagonist Justine, unlike *Sous la tonnelle*'s protagonist who had a depository of archives at her disposal, lacks tangible written documents for reconstructing her memory. Waking up from coma with amnesia at the age of five in Cairo, Egypt, Justine has no recollection of who she is or where she is from. Her father refuses to reveal her past to her and even forbids her from pronouncing the name of their homeland, "Liban" [Lebanon], or even the word "mère" [mother], preferring to fill in the missing pieces with stories of the Byzantine Empire. Her aunt Mado, on the hand, teaches her an appreciation for word etymologies. Although they do not provide Justine with the details of her path, her father and aunt's interest in ancient civilizations and word origins initiate Justine's cosmological search. Their obsession with origins makes Justine acknowledge the need for a genesis mythology, a story of birth on which personal and collective identity can be built. She also spends her childhood reading books and experiencing different ways of life vicariously through her close school friends. These habits pique her curiosity and further intensify her desire to know her past, pushing her towards Beirut where she fulfills her own coming-of-age journey.

Analogies of Trauma

Justine's amnesia is two-fold in nature. She longs to know both who her mother is and what her motherland is like. Her yearning to resolve her personal amnesia parallels a grander socio-political amnesia concerning her identity. Justine's quest to fill in the gaps of her memory is effectively analogous to that of post-war Lebanon. Rather than face the traumatic memories of its war past, Lebanon privileges state-sponsored forgetting rendering the collective consciousness amnesiac comparable to how Justine's traumatic coma gave rise to her own amnesia.

Recognizing the parallel relationship between Justine and Lebanon allows for her *récit* to address her personal struggles post-civil war and allude to the larger-scale one plaguing the Lebanese nation. As Jeffrey Alexander affirms in his study *Trauma*, trauma is resolved "not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self" (5), highlighting the need to resolve Justine's individual, interior conflicts before addressing those of Lebanon.

In the Justine-Lebanon analogy, Justine's father comes to symbolize the Lebanese state that promoted collective amnesia. After she awakens from her coma in her amnesiac state, the doctors tell her father that "les souvenirs dans ces cas, sont irrécupérables, sauf volontairement de la part de votre fille" [memories, in these cases, are unrecoverable, except if your daughter voluntarily does recover them] (Yared 45) to which he responds "tant mieux, pour le reste, sa volonté, je m'en charge" [all the better, as far as the rest is concerned, what she wants, I'll take care of it] (45). Despite Justine's profound desire to reconstruct her memory, her father delegitimizes her attempts to do so.

Throughout her childhood, Justine's father denies her resources that could enable her to reconstruct her memory. For example, the day after her father installs a television in their Cairene apartment, Justine happens to turn it on and witness a journalist discussing "les accords de Taëf"

[Taef agreement] and “*Loubnan*” [Lebanon] (33). The TV provides clues to her past, however her father immediately turns it off crying “Rien. Oublie!” [It’s nothing. Forget it!] (33). He effectively throws it out the next day with Justine believing that “il ne voulait pas d’autres fenêtres sur le monde que celles qu’il s’obstinait à obstruer” [he did not want other windows to the world except for the ones he was obstinately obstructing] (40).

Within the space of his apartment, Justine’s father constructs a world inspired by the history of the Byzantine Empire. His career as a restaurateur of iconographic art serves as metaphor for his reconstructing of the past to suit his own vision. As a pious Christian, he admires the Byzantines because Christians were the majority in the Middle East during their reign. In projecting a history of a time when the Lebanese nation was nonexistent onto Justine, her father prevents her experiencing to the multiplicity of memory narratives surrounding the country and maintains her amnesia.

Mapping Trauma

According to Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, “traumatic memories...need to be integrated with existing mental schemes and be transformed into narrative language” (176). The role of the narrative in making sense of trauma explains not only the profusion of novels in post-civil war Lebanon, but the reason for which *Tout est halluciné* focuses in on Justine’s relationship with writing.

In her first-person narrative, Justine makes several references to both language and writing. Much of her discourse is rooted in the power of words and she demonstrates an awareness of language’s ability to stabilize scattered, fragmented thought: “J’ai gardé le désir de m’enraciner partout, surtout dans le langage” [I kept the desire to anchor myself in everything, especially in

language] (Yared 62). The image of rootedness in language appeals to Justine's need to establish fixedness in the face of tormenting uncertainty, yet also evokes the notion of memory based in multiple origins. Justine requires contact with multiple memory narratives in order to construct her own.

The relationship between language and trauma becomes manifest through both implicit and explicit depictions throughout the novel. For example, Justine experiences problems with speech, namely stuttering. Her close friend, Mehdi, deems this physiological manifestation of destabilized language to be the consequence of trauma:

Pour Mehdi, mon bégaiement était sans aucun doute le signe d'un langage "traumatisé," d'une peur enracinée dans chaque lettre, chaque son émis. Lui seul réussirait à faire disparaître chez moi ce qu'il appelait "des croches-pieds mentaux. Des pièges." "Tes médecins ne comprennent rien. Il y a dans ta voix, disait-il, toute la symbolique des peuples apeurés, réduits aux bégaiements par les colonisateurs et leurs collabos (168-169).

[For Mehdi, my stuttering was without a doubt a sign of a "traumatized" language, of a fear rooted in every letter, every emitted sound. Only he would be successful in making these "trip-ups and traps" disappear. Your doctors don't know anything. In your voice, he said, resides the emblem of scared peoples, reduced to stuttering by their colonizers and their accomplices]

The colonizer/colonized paradigm illustrates the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic forces at play in the novel. Experiencing uncertainty with regards to what is considered conforming behavior in the colonial world, the colonized act reticently similar to how Justine, unsure of what she knows, speaks in a way telling of her doubt.

So as to develop a sense of confidence in language, Justine turns to books. Discovering novels at her aunt Mado's house, she devours Agatha Christie's *Meurtre au champagne* which provides her with words to imagine who and where her mother is: "La première fois que je l'avais lu, l'évidence de cette possibilité m'avait frappée. Ma mère avait très bien pu mourir de la même mort que Rosemary Barton...le roman proposait moult façons d'élucider [le] mystère [de ma

mère]” [The first time I read it, the evidence of this possibility struck me. My mother could indeed have died the same death as Rosemary Barton...the novel proposed many ways to shed light on [the] mystery [of my mom]] (77). Reading emerges as a heuristic method for filling the emptiness imposed by Justine’s amnesia, allowing her to hypothesize possibilities for the mysteries of her past.

Nonetheless, although reading provides a means for deducing possible explanations of her past to liberate her from her anguish, it is in crafting her own words and stories that she harnesses control over her trauma. With “un stylo Parker” [a Parker pen], Justine’s aunt Mado opens the doors to the world of writing: “Quand la vie te semble injuste, quand tu es triste, quand tu es en colère, tu peux te retirer du monde avec ça. Rien que ça” [When life seems unjust, when you’re sad, when you’re mad, you can remove yourself from the world with this. Nothing but this] (111), and in putting pen to paper, Justine reclaims her autonomy:

Au début, le stylo m’avait servi à tracer quelque chose qui ressemblait à des pensées alignées comme les membres d’un corps trop nu. Maladroïtement étendu. Les mots trébuchaient sur les pages. Une phrase après l’autre, je réinitialisais ma mémoire, découvrant que l’on m’avait menti. Que le vide n’existait pas puisqu’il encerclait tout. Qu’en écrivant, je remettais à zero les compteurs d’une mémoire qui ne m’appartenait pas (111).

[At first, the pen let me sketch something that looked like well-ordered thoughts, like the parts of a body all too naked. Awkwardly spread out. The words jumped on the pages. One sentence after another, I reinitialized my memory, discovering that they had lied to me, that the emptiness didn’t exist because it surrounded everything. By writing, I reset the counters of a memory that did not belong to me to zero.]

Writing liberates Justine, bringing her to the realization that her amnesia was constructed by others. In putting pen to paper, she shapes the emptiness of her mind and expels her father’s filler memories formerly acting as placeholders to prevent authentic recollections from occupying her amnesiac gaps.

Memory and the Female Body

In the previous citation, Justine's writing not only permits her to form her own consciousness but alludes to a reclaiming of her own body via a simile comparing aligned thoughts to the aligned parts of naked body. Hélène Cixous professes to women in her essay, *The Laugh of Medusa*, "write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours. take it" (Cixous 876) which establishes the link between writing and the female body. She affirms that "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural-hence political, typically *masculine*-economy" (emphasis added, 879) to the same effect that their sexualities have been policed by patriarchal institutions. This paradigmatic framework makes sense of the connection between Justine's writing and her body and how her relationship with her father affected it.

Upon moving to Beirut, Justine meets Dalal, a Lebanese-Palestinian photographer whose frank discussion of sex as well as her comfort with her own sexuality allow her to share a discourse that relates Justine's story to Cixous' ideas. She tells Justine that "[son] corps est [sa] meilleure mémoire" [her body is her best memory] (55) and links the body to the act of writing:

Si tu ne baisses pas les armes, si tu ne touches pas ton corps, si tu ne te laisses pas toucher, tu ne seras jamais libre. Il faut se mettre à terre pour vivre. À terre dans ta peau, tu comprends? Tu ne pourras jamais rien lire ou écrire de valable sans ça. Rien

[If you don't put down your guard, if you don't touch your body, if you don't allow yourself to be touched, you will never be free. You need to place yourself within the world to live. On Earth in your skin, you get it? You can't read or write anything meaningful without that. Nothing.] (139).

Dalal pierces through the taboo surrounding talk of sex and effectively paves the way for unrestricted expression concerning other ignominious subjects such as war memory, responding to Yared's assertion that "the idea of shame and silence needs to be overcome" (Lang 152) in Lebanese society in order to write a coherent memory narrative. However, such proves to be difficult for Justine with a father who embodies the patriarchal structures of Lebanese society. As

a teenager, Justine hides her sexual development: “pour plaire à mon père, j’ai longtemps réprimé tout indice relatif à ma féminité naissante” [to please my father, I suppressed any relative sign of my budding femininity for a long time] (138) and despite the passion felt in Dalal’s remarks, Justine, slightly irked, leaves the room saying “j’ai des frontières à transcrire par écrit” [I have borders to transcribe in writing] (140). The use of the word “borders” illustrates the limiting structures engrained into Justine’s psyche from her birth.

The connection between writing and the body is reinforced in a scene where Justine’s father scolds her after he finds her journal:

La première fois que mon père s’était rendu compte de mon passe-temps, sa colère s’était abattue sur moi comme un déluge... Il m’avait surpris à l’heure du coucher, étendue sur le ventre, le livre rouge de ma tante et le stylo en main, à portée de mon regard. J’étais trop concentrée pour entendre ses pas à proximité de ma chambre. En me trouvant dans cette position, il avait pensé à un devoir de dernière minute, avant de se rendre compte que je tenais un journal. “Je rêve ou tu écris?” Il tenait mon calepin rouge entre deux doigts, dégoûté (114).

[The first time my dad took realized what my hobby was, his anger fell upon me like a deluge... he had surprised me at bedtime, lying on my stomach, my aunt’s red book and a pen in hand, within my sight. I was too invested to hear his footsteps approaching my room. Finding me in this position, he thought I was doing homework at the last minute before he realized I was holding a journal. “Am I dreaming or are you writing?” He held my red notebook between his two fingers, disgusted.]

A reading of this scene abounds with sexual undertones. The paragraph seems cryptic owing to the fact that the act of writing is not named until the father interrogates “Are you writing?” and it produces a suspenseful effect because details are enumerated one at a time in short sentences (i.e. étendue sur le ventre, le livre rouge de ma tante et le stylo en main). Moreover, framing the scene during “bedtime,” the conventional time for sexual activity, and mentioning the father’s approaching footsteps as well as his disgusted reaction are reminiscent of a scene in which a prudent parent catches his child masturbating. The ironic reading imposes the taboos of sex onto

writing, delineating the relationship between the two acts and reasserting the role of Justine's father as a symbol of patriarchal oppression.

Furthermore, the father's comment to Justine, "ton écriture est un miroir inutile" [your writing is a useless mirror] (115), recalls Elias Khoury's famous commentary on the Lebanese novel: "the novel is a relatively new genre. It permits societies or groups to think about themselves. If, in a society, you don't have novels, then you don't have a mirror" (Lang 40). The exchange stresses how the father represents the Lebanese state, discouraging resistance to the imposed amnesia and trivializing the multiplicity of other narratives. He essentially conceives of writing as ineffective counter-hegemonic discourse that undermines the only reflection that counts, found in "le visage de Dieu" [God's face] (Yared 115). Nonetheless, by implying truth is found in God, he encourages the Lebanese to recede back to their respective religious communities. Such a suggestion divides the country and exacerbates sectarian violence. The fact does remain, however, that the Lebanese state system is built upon a confessional system, which in effect, limits writing as a tool for transcending sectarian belongings and engendering a Lebanese identity.

III. Archiving War Memory

Felix Lang, noting that Hyam Yared's *Sous la tonnelle*, inscribes her in the group that he terms the "second generation" of post-civil war writers. He identifies a focus on the archive as a defining characteristic of their novels to be the archival reconstruction, notably how mapping the physical spaces in which they take place serves as a means for reconstructing war-torn Lebanon. Although Lang demonstrates how *Sous la tonnelle* falls underneath the umbrella of second-generation writing, *Tout est halluciné* rejects the label by exploring the constraints of the archiving process.

The idea of the archive is one that continues to be a source of debate. Who participates in the creation and interpretation of the archive? How effective is the archive in addressing the multiplicity of memory? In *Archive Fever*, Derrida stresses that “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (11). The archive, by virtue of its nature, exists within a social framework dictated by a delineated hierarchy and thus, is only created and interpreted by those high up enough in the hegemonic structure to access it. If a proposed archive “does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record” (Manoff 12).

In Lebanon, the political elite responsible for regulating what becomes an archive preferred to abstain from promoting a national archiving project, necessary for establishing a collective amnesia. The disregard for archival reconstitution led to an emptiness in society yearning to be filled, analogous to Justine’s desire to furnish her amnesia with memory, inspiring her writing or more generally, a creation of postcolonial archives. As her friend Samar said, “la trace, tu peux l’inventer” [a memory trace, you can invent it] (Yared 67), prompting Justine’s *prise de conscience* that she can create memories despite the lack of resources available to her for memory construction.

The second generation’s novels are examples of the theorized post in Lebanese society. Nonetheless, these literary postcolonial archives, although *existent*, are not necessarily *visible*, which evokes the question of the postcolonial archive’s limitations. Indeed, there are sociological realities in Lebanon which inhibit literature in its quest to fulfill all the roles of the theorized postcolonial archive. The notable hindrances are that book consumption in the country is

significantly low (Lang 17), Lebanese texts are almost never institutionalized in cultural and educational practices (17), and the literary field constructs itself in opposition to politics (35), inadvertently making it so that literature remains in the hands of a cultural elite, not necessarily synonymous with the political elite regulating the archive. Lebanese Francophone literature is all the more susceptible to such a fate given the sizable difference between the Arab and French speaking populations in the country.

Yared's *Tout est halluciné* does participate, to a certain extent, in postcolonial archival creation, and certain parts of the text fit within the paradigm of second-generation writing. However, the narrative concludes writing is a restricted form of memorializing that negates multiple memory discourses.

Archiving the City

One of the more prominent ways in which *Tout est halluciné* reads like a “second generation” novel is by archiving the physical spaces in which it takes place. As Lang notes, second generation’s writing is profuse with precise spatial and temporal references which can be seen in some chapters of the novels. Split into four parts, the narration oscillates between Cairo and Beirut, however it is only in Cairo city that the readers bear witness to a thorough mapping of the city space. In failing to treat Beirut with the same attention to detail that Cairo receives, the novel subverts the notion that all second-generation writing archives space.

Returning to Cairo with Dalal to meet her friend Mehdi, Justine lists specific points of reference its geography: “La place Tahrir grouillait de monde et la rue Champollion n’était pas loin, à equidistance de la place et de l’auberge de jeunesse où Dalal avait reserve une chambre double” [Tahrir Square was full of people and Chapollion road was not far, equidistant from Tahrir

Square and the hostel where Dalal had reserved a double room] (Yared 349). She even mentions the name of the road to which her father always took her as a child, “rue Abd el-Hamid Saïd” (433). Justine’s mapping out Cairo establishes a fixed representation of the city which serves to reinforce how novelistic writing functions as an archiving device.

Beirut, on the other hand, hazily materializes with references to precise spaces few and far in between. Although standard fixtures of Beirut, such as the Hamra and the Achrafiyieh³², are painted into the novel’s representation of the city, these were also the only spatial frameworks to appear in the writings of the first-generation writers who rejected the archiving process by emphasizing the city’s dislocated geography. On a plane to Beirut for the first time, Justine looks out of her seat window and confesses that “vu d’en haut, Beyrouth n’avait rien déclenché. D’en bas, ce fut encore pire” [from above, Beirut didn’t evoke anything. On the ground, it was even worse] (170). This reaction is unanticipated, considering Justine’s prior excitement to set foot in her imagined homeland. Her first-person narrative lacks precise descriptions of the space, painting the city in a figurative emptiness.

An example of this emptiness can be traced in Dalal’s insistence that “vingt ans de guerre [ont été] balayés comme on essuie une fine couche de poussière sur un meuble” [twenty years of war were swept up just like you wipe a thin layer of dust off of furniture] (289). The imagery conjures up Elias Khoury’s description of a city of architectural amnesia. Even Justine’s musings on the city’s landscape as well as its sociological state speak to a superficial, monolithic reality:

la contrefaçon de cette ville, ses façades mal ravalées, pas ravalées du tout, perdues dans un amas de grate-ciel en béton, ses femmes liftées toutes générations confondues, dont les pires étaient des midinettes sapées en amazones prêtes à la chasse aux hommes, ses gravats disparus, ses humains, tout dans cette ville

³² The Achrafiyieh and Hamra are neighborhoods of East and West Beirut, respectively and have both served as cardinal points for indicating location in Beirut. As constants in the Lebanese collective imaginary, they can be read as *lieux de mémoire*.

reformatée m'effrayait au point de me faire sombrer dans ce vieux réflexe hérité de l'enfance (177)

[The counterfeiting of this city, its facades badly taken over, not taken over at all, lost in a mass of concrete skyscrapers. Its woman with their surgical lifts makes it so that all generations blend into one. The worst women were the Amazonian-like ones ready to hunt men. Everything that was reformatted in the city, its faded rubble, its humans, scared me to the point of making me sink back into my old childhood reflexes]

The blending of the generations of women is metonymic of a blending of the entire city, a blending that not only erased the vestiges of war, but of Beirut's diverse identities and memories. Women, in removing traces of aging, remove traces of their past. This physical amnesia makes it appear as if these women have forged a collective identity by resembling one another. Despite the war, amnesia seems to have afforded them the opportunity to start life anew, however underneath it lurks remnants of violence as suggested by their readiness to "hunt men."

The *décalage* between the imaginings of Cairo and Beirut, nevertheless, could be attributed to two possibilities. The first one proposes that certain physical spaces in the novel are connected to Justine's changing psychosocial states. Cairo, for example, was the setting in which Justine had yet to claim full autonomy over herself; her father mapped out the city for her, chose her school, and managed her schedule. Though the city emerges as stable in description, it is a stability to which Justine can bear no claim. Beirut, on the other hand, as a place of unknowns for Justine, but one that can belong to her because before her departure, her father tells her "pour être libre, il faut être autonome" [to be free, you need to be autonomous] (169), marking the point in the novel in which he relinquishes control over her actions. The potential for Beirut to be filled via Justine's descriptions signals the potential for her freedom in all senses of the word.

A key scene occurs when Justine takes initiative by going on a date with Jahiz, a man she meets at the market. Justine provides the readers with the location of the outing: "Jahiz m'avait

invitée à aller boire un verre à Kahwet el-Rawda, un café populaire en bord de mer, sur la corniche très prisée de Beyrouth” [Jahiz invited me to get a drink at Kahwet el-Rawda, a popular seaside café, on the commonly frequented cornice of Beirut] (209) signaling a breakthrough in her quest for autonomy. Justine even opens herself up to the idea of sex and an orgasm with Jahiz after Dalal’s insistence on “l’impact d’un seul orgasme sur ta mémoire” [the impact of only one orgasm on your memory]. Reclaiming control over her sexuality permits Justine to better archive Beirut through her first-person narration. However, the experience proves to be underwhelming for Justine, having been denied an orgasm by Jahiz. Afterwards, her first-person narrative retreats to its former tendency to imagine Beirut through vaguer language and she struggles with writing her next novel, two instances that reinforce the link between writing and the body.

Negotiating Remembrance and Forgetting

Justine’s main objective throughout the novel was to reconstruct a memory of which she had no trace. She implies that in the face of amnesia, the only sensible course of action is retracing the past. However, the ending of the novel calls this approach into question.

As Ernest Renan argues in his essay *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation*, “l’oubli, et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d’une nation, et c’est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger” [forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are an essential factor in the formation of a nation, and therefore advancement in history studies is often a danger for the concept of nationality] (7-8). For a people to move forward, to agree upon a notion of identity, they occasionally have to put the past behind them because the violence of the past can inhibit this process.

After reading the letter her father left for her after her death providing answers to the questions she had asked her entire life, Justine claims that “[elle] aurai[t] tout donné pour un coma au moment d’ouvrir [sa] lettre’ [she would have given everything for a coma after opening her letter] (Yared 411), implying that looking to the past does more harm than good and that forgetting is the key to healing in the face of trauma.

The letter reveals that Justine’s mother, Sana, left her to be a martyr for the cause of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party of Antoun Saadé. Rather than “considerer que sa fille représentait, à elle seule, un territoire” [consider that her daughter represented a territory] (426), Sana privileges her national territory. This metaphor comparing Justine to “territory” reasserts the Justine/Lebanon analogy and illustrates how both she and the country suffer from a “plaie d’abandon” [wound of abandonment] (Makhlouf, "Hyam Yared écrit pour trouer le silence”).

The reveal haunts Justine. Her past is one of violence and abandonment. Her gaps, once free to filled with whatever she imagined, were now plagued by painful memories that only served to further alienate her from herself. This reaction leads to a reconsideration of Justine’s father role who professes at the beginning of his letter that “aucun miroir déformant ne pourra nous détourner du réel” [no distorting mirror can lead us away from what is real] (Yared 416). His statement is reminiscent of Renan’s idea that forgetting is the sole approach that ensures progress into the future because once the past surfaces, it is almost impossible to cover it up. However, this new knowledge does not excuse the father for his decisions; in maintaining Justine’s amnesia, he also caused her pain and as is revealed in his letter, it was he who caused her coma after he accidentally shooting a gun whose bullet grazed her head.

Justine’s journey represents the dilemma of memory: should one remember or forget in order to heal from a traumatic experience? Justine claims at the end that “qu’écrire, c’est courir

après le manque. L'imaginer, c'est être libre." [that to write is to run after emptiness. To imagine it is to be free] (437) which could be read to mean that forgetting is the more effective route because it endows the self with the autonomy to imagine a convenient past which creates the foundation for a convenient future. Nevertheless, she is only able to come to this conclusion after reconstructing her past and deciding that it is not sufficient because she goes through with reading her father's letter. Justine must in fact come to know the pain in remembering to acknowledge the ingenuity found in forgetting.

As Khoury's quote at the beginning of the chapter explains, Beirut may have been reconstructed and rebuilt, but the city center by means of its emptiness ("a placeless space, a hole in memory") feeds the societal malaise. It is a piece included for a puzzle of Beirut that has no designated space once all other pieces have been put together. No complete reconstruction can shake the nagging feeling that there are parts of the narrative left untreated. Yared herself writes a novel that seeks to archive and reconstruct post-war Lebanon, however as the conclusion insinuates, in the face of amnesia, these new literary archives just might not be enough to engender a satisfactory national mythology.

EPILOGUE

The construction of collective memory remains an intricate process whose trajectory is reconfigured by the slightest change in the social and political forces at play. It is not however a process that ever arrives at a definite stage of completeness, always being restructure and reimagined.

In trying to sew together a Lebanese collective memory, the ever-present sectarian and ideological threads of Lebanon's societal fabric seam their way into its production. Cultural media, whether they be literature, the visual arts, or film and cinema, serve as sites for this memory accessible to the public by virtue of their material nature. However, this does not exclude them from criticism. Constructed within liminal spaces shaped by the sociopolitical contexts that inform them, cultural texts are limited in their capacity to vehicle inclusive récits and thus distort *national* collective memory. As laid out previously, francophone cultural products, although authentically representative of Lebanese experiences, are only accessible by a fraction, typically a wealthier fraction, of Lebanese society. Moreover, a vast majority of cultural texts require purchase and a certain level of analytic work, a skill acquired through sufficient schooling and instruction. This caveat excludes low-socioeconomic groups in Lebanese society who effectively make up the majority of the country's population, inexorably precluding them from this specific dialogue on memory and the questions it raises. As a result, it is important to pay attention to all media that claim to take part in writing collective memory. What other sites of remembrance are there? How do these other sites expand and refine memory discourse in order to give visibility to all the peoples of the Lebanese nation?

A pertinent category of other sites to consider is public spaces. Museums and memorials emerge as effective actors in expanding the *devoir de mémoire* and moreover, posit themselves as resources available to groups that exist on all levels of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

The need for a public museum commemorating the experience of the civil war, despite the 1991 amnesty law, is being realized thanks to the Beit Beirut program. Funded by both the city of Beirut and well as the French government, the name of this museum/cultural center hybrid (opened in 2017) translates to “Beirut’s House,” an appellation that promotes the creation of a space that can act as a home for all Beirut’s diverse groups. Situated on the line of demarcation that divided Beirut into Christian and Muslim regions during the war, it encourages the writing of a new war narrative that transcends sectarian divisions.

The museum is located in the Barakat Building or “Yellow House,” which served as a forward control post and sniper base during the war. In addition to restoring the original house, the designers sought to “preserv[e] the traces of time and war to highlight the unique character of the building and its evolution through the years” (Beit Beirut). The museum’s architect, Yousef Haidar, affirms that “we [the Lebanese] all still bear the scars of war” (Kirk), suggesting that at the basis of the project is an acknowledgement of a collective, Lebanese suffering which thereby sets the stage for exhibitions that emphasize the universality of the violent experience.

In her study *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon*, Lucia Volk analyzes the significance of statues and other memorials that commemorate those lost throughout Lebanon’s history. One of the sites she brings attention to is the Mazzacurati statues in Beirut’s Martyr’s Square in the heart of the city’s downtown. These memorials pay homage to Lebanese and Arab nationalists who were hanged during World War I by Jamal Pasha, an Ottoman military leader.

During the civil war, these statues were decimated by sniper attacks and fires, inevitable because of their position along the Beirut line of demarcation which split the city into East and West Beirut. Following the end of the civil war, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri commissioned their renovation by the Department of Sacred Art at the University of the Holy Spirit. Hariri took part in imposing an official forgetting and his decision to renovate these statues and thus, to erase traces of violence, could be read as a continuation of this effort. However, as Volk argues, “by putting a Maronite university in charge of this high-profile restoration project—a university with a reputation for promoting a fierce Christian separatist ideology during the [civil war]—the *Sunni* prime minister (re)infused the memorial honoring the independence martyrs of 1916 with the symbolism of Muslim and Christian coexistence” (emphasis added, 110). Such an analysis suggests that Hariri simultaneously inscribes these structures as well as a new collective identity into the post-war landscape.

Another stand-out structure is the tank pyramid (see Figure 1) found at the entrance of the Defense Ministry in Beirut. Designed by the French-American artist Arman, the 5000-ton amalgam of tanks and other vehicles fixed in concrete represents the end of the war. However, as the only monument that commemorates the civil war, it remains on the outskirts of Lebanese collective memory.

Normally seen while driving on the highway, it is conceived as an after-thought and a lack of signage identifying it or addressing its significance spares it from becoming a part of official memory discourse. As can be seen in the photograph, its barren surroundings contribute to it appearing isolated and detached from the rest of the country’s geography. Moreover, the choice of concrete, a cold and industrial material, lends to making it forgettable. However, Arman intended for placing the military fixtures in concrete to “eradicate their original use and render them forever

still and silent” (Razzouk). He also hoped for it to be a warning to those who wanted to make more war because it is a reminder that “Lebanon has suffered a lot” (Razzouk).



Fig. 1: "A Hope for Peace." Personal Photograph by Author. May 2016

Erecting public memorials continues to gain popularity well into the 21st century and offer another medium through which the Lebanese can communicate and represent the impact of war on their nation’s and people’s identity. Although literature and art begin to give shape to a collective imaginary, it is vital to recognize the value these public spaces as well as other media like music videos, blogs, street art, and documentaries. Though these vehicles for memory have historically received less critical treatment, such is not to say that the experiences they address and the ways in which they do so are less valuable or less pertinent.

What the texts analyzed in this thesis reveal and what a study of public memorials will also illustrate is that the Lebanese, in order to address the state of malaise incurred from trauma and a lethargy-inducing amnesia, require a space – be it textual, visual, auditory, etc. – in which they can articulate the harrowing nature of their war experience(s). Though their work can lead to more questions than answers, the need to interrogate, to reflect, and to process are pertinent to

constructing a national identity. Overlooking a traumatic past stifles progress and only in making sense through constructive practices can the nation establish a solid platform on which to envision and build its future.

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