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Syrine Hout. *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012. Pp. 246. US\$63.70.

Syrine Hout identifies a “new literary and cultural trend” (11) in eleven works of fiction by six novelists from the Lebanese diasporas in the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia: Rabih Alameddine and Patricia Sarrafian Ward (Lebanese American), Tony Hanania and Nathalie Abi-Ezzi (Lebanese British), Rawi Hage (Lebanese Canadian), and Nada Awar Jarrar (Lebanese Australian). All of these authors write in English about the civil war, their experiences of “home,” and exile. Hout reads their novels as illustrations of “imaginative” returns and argues that they manifest the idea of cultural hybridity “not only on the levels of languages, settings and themes, but most prominently in a state, or a predicament, of in-betweenness which reflects a complex consciousness characterised by mixed modes and moods, such as irony, parody, satire, nostalgia and sentimentality” (9).

Hout divides her book into four parts according to the novels’ protagonists’ experiences of home and exile. In Part I, each chapter compares a nostalgic text with a nostophobic one. Chapter one contrasts Alameddine’s *Koolaid: The Art of War* (1998) with Hanania’s *Unreal City* (1999). The former is nostalgic while the latter is critical of home. However, both define nation and home not by political ideology but by an “emotional reality” (15), strongly influenced by the father-son relationship, that goes beyond the notion of homeland as nation. These texts reveal that exile and nation are not opposing realities but a state of cultural inbetweenness. Chapter two draws on Svetlana Boym’s work on nostalgia and Leo Spitzer’s work on memory and discusses works that deal with questions of exile, diaspora, home, and identity from opposing angles. Alameddine’s *The Perv: Stories* (1999) represents a “sickness of home” that is a result of both “ironic nostalgia” and “critical memory” (Hout 15); in contrast, Jarrar’s *Somewhere, Home* (2003) symbolizes a “homesickness” that is a result of “tender nostalgia” and “nostalgic memory” (Hout 15).

Part II of Hout’s text draws on trauma studies by writers such as Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead and compares Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* (2003) with Alameddine’s *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001). In Ward’s novel, Marianna sees herself as “fully” Lebanese and cannot adjust to exile, whereas Sarah, a character in Alameddine’s novel, is half American

and finds herself in between homes. Although both novels represent the catastrophic effect of the civil war on its victims, *The Bullet Collection* is nostalgic while *I, the Divine* is anti-nostalgic. The two authors were “too young at the time to translate their fears and hopes into writing” (Hout 12). Both, Hout argues, use conventions of trauma narrative such as indirection, fragmentation, and temporal disorientation. She observes that since young war survivors often want to remember the traumatic past while older ones tend to want to forget it, the texts provide an “anti-amnesiac and generation-specific testimony to the long-term effects of the Lebanese Civil War” (11). In Lebanon, Hout suggests, “state-sponsored forgetfulness becomes a strategy to suppress political memory” (2). By describing their traumatic war experiences, the authors go against the nation’s trend of collective amnesia.

Part III of the text deals with novels that Hout contends represent childhood traumas that result from combat and the hazards of correlating manhood with militarism. Each chapter explores depictions of impoverished youths who join militias because they cannot afford to leave Lebanon during the civil war. Chapter four studies Alameddine’s *The Hakawati* (2008) and Abi-Ezzi’s *A Girl Made of Dust* (2008). Both texts revisit the psycho-social effects of the civil war, particularly children’s loss of innocence. When teenagers join militias at home, fraternal bonds with their fellow partisans replace familial bonds. Hage’s *De Niro’s Game* (2006), the subject of chapter five, investigates themes of military participation, political extremism, and family relations across generations. Two seventeen-year-old Lebanese friends, Bassam and George, face the question of whether to remain in Lebanon or to leave and avoid military involvement. Both are caught up in the dirty game of war; hence the novel’s references to the 1978 American film about the Vietnam War, *The Deer Hunter*, in which Robert De Niro plays Russian roulette. Hout asserts that Hage chose his title to “highlight the link between militia fighting, drug addiction and this deadly game” (130). She sees the novel, which depicts the civil war as orchestrated by regional and overseas powers, as a critique of “political sectarianism, religious superstition, mafia-like local politics, and foreign intervention” (131). Part IV compares Hage’s *Cockroach* (2008) with Jarrar’s *A Good Land* (2009) as novels of exile versus repatriation. *Cockroach*, which is both an existentialist and magic realist novel, tells the story of a nameless man who has suffered a personal childhood trauma because of the civil war in Lebanon, to the extent that he attempts to commit suicide when he immigrates to Canada. Canadian immigration authorities refer him to a therapist to whom he confesses his innermost traumatic memories. He feels he belongs neither in Lebanon nor in Canada. In contrast, *A Good Land* is a narrative

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of *nostos* in which a teenage Lebanese girl, who was forced to leave Lebanon for Australia with her parents during the civil war, returns to Beirut. There, Layla feels at “home” both literally and metaphorically because she finds herself, love, and friendship.

Hout concludes that Anglophone Lebanese war fiction is transnational literature that is able to “commemorate its recent history of war, even if their primary by-product has been and continues to be expatriation” (202). A few studies of Anglophone Arab writers have been produced—Geoffrey Nash’s *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* (2007) and Layla Al Maleh’s *Arab Voices in Diaspora* (2009), for example—but there are few books on Lebanese diasporic post-war literature. Although it may have bitten off more than it can chew, I recommend this well-written, well-researched, and wide-ranging book to all interested in the literature of war and exile or Anglophone Arab writing.

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### Works Cited

- Al Maleh, Layla, ed. *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. Print. Cross/Cultures 115.
- Nash, Geoffrey. *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.