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Affective Geographies: Virginia Woolf and Arab Women Writers Narrate Memory

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Affective Geographies: Virginia Woolf and Arab Women Writers Narrate Memory

by

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For Catherine D. Stewart,
who taught me to love walking in cities,
to celebrate memory's complexities,
and to write my own story.

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Affective Geographies:
Virginia Woolf and Arab Women Writers Narrate Memory

by

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Affective Geographies engages a cross-cultural group of writers who long for lost places and pasts but express that longing critically. The writers articulate affective memories to contest linear and politically legible narratives about place. I focus on nostalgia and forgetting to theorize a memory practice in which authors navigate ambiguous, ongoing loss. I construct an associative canon of women writers like the contemporary Arab authors Miral al-Tahawy, Leila Ahmed, Hoda Barakat, Ghada al-Samman, and Jean Said Makdisi and the British Modernist Virginia Woolf. Scholars who read these authors globally often shy away from explorations of affect, particularly nostalgia or sentimentality. I advocate, however, for a comparative reading that emphasizes the authors' aesthetic and affective resonances despite the differences in their contexts, audiences, and publication histories. Each writer uses personal experience, ambivalent feelings, and complex memory structures to claim and re-narrate their own histories, pushing back against dominant political narratives and becoming sources for critical reflection. Female writers in particular use affective memory to contest gender-based distinctions in the political and domestic spheres. In Chapter One, I describe how

autobiography and memoir projects from Leila Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, and Leonard Woolf introduce ambivalent feelings about the past to leave their narration of complex histories open. I develop a theorization of ambivalent nostalgia in order to compare three disparate authors with diverse relationships to colonial and domestic histories. In Chapter Two, I argue that Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* reconfigure the negative connotations of female memory, most notably sentimentality, as a practice of empathy and community formation rather than an exercise in backwards-gazing. I demonstrate that in both novels, the act of walking through city space provokes a dynamic and embodied form of memory. In Chapter Three, I explore how Woolf and Hoda Barakat resist medical discourses that seek to pathologize experiences of desire, longing, and female narration. Finally, Chapter Four details how forgetting can become an essential tool for narration, allowing the writer to shape and renegotiate her past.

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Introduction

On June 18, 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees released its annual Global Trends Report. The report announced a new record for “worldwide displacement,” with 59.5 million people around the globe forcibly displaced during 2014.¹ The unprecedented numbers of displaced persons moving through the European Union and in the Americas have impacted the current political climate.² An influx of new people into these regions has resulted in global anxieties about the integrity of national borders and allegiances.

At a moment when American political candidates have proposed walls and rejected Syrian refugees seeking asylum and when European countries in the Schengen Zone have re-instated border checks,³ I advance in this dissertation definitions of place and belonging that contrast these stringent borders. Through my research, I contest the idea that place can ever be static, uninformed by personal history, or categorized by a single national narrative. Instead, I read literary texts that expand locations to allow for the multiple histories, narratives, and geographies of each inhabitant. The texts accommodate multiplicities that make it possible to account for immigrant and transnational experiences of space and history.

¹ The report continues by saying, “Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world’s 24th biggest” (UNHCR).

² The International Organization for Migration counted 1,011,712 migrants and refugees reaching Europe in 2015; as of February 23rd, 2016 totals already exceeded 100,000 arrivals in Greece and Italy alone (“Mediterranean”).

³ As of March 2, 2016, 8 of the 26 countries in the Schengen Zone’s passport free system had reimposed their borders (Rankin).

I argue in this project that immigrants, exiles, and travelers are uniquely suited to narrate space's multiplicities. They unite the disparate locations of their lives through their bodies, memories, and texts. In her 2000 novel *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith describes native-born residents' tendency to think of immigrants as "blank people": "constantly on the move, footloose, able to change course at any moment . . . free of any kind of baggage, happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this greenandpleasantlibertarianlandofthefree" (465). Contemporary political rhetoric supports the illusion of displaced persons as "blank people," suggesting that migrants and refugees must either happily assimilate to their new home or stand out as a clear threat to national security.⁴ As a literary scholar, however, I am interested in how literature accounts for the negotiation of multiple spaces and pasts. Writers develop aesthetic narrative strategies to enact what Smith calls "a mockery of that idea, neutral place" (464).

Affective Geographies engages a cross-cultural group of writers who long for lost places but express that longing critically. I focus primarily on a group of contemporary Arab women writers that include Miral al-Tahawy, Leila Ahmed, Hoda Barakat, Ghada

⁴ Germany, the European nation that received the most asylum applications in 2015, offers a particularly remarkable example of assimilation expectations during the migration crisis. Government agencies in conjunction with cultural and communication companies now offer an app called "Ankommen" for migrants needing access to information about German language, employment, and culture. Quartz Daily notes that "developers added information on, for example, freedom of religion in Germany, while an article on gender equality was added after a mass assault against women in Cologne" (Wong). The app demonstrates how modern technology facilitates assimilation while reflecting a host's anxieties about threatening incoming populations.

al-Samman, and Jean Makdisi Said. Due to diverse experiences of exile and immigration, none of these women currently live in the countries of their births.⁵ Their short stories, novels, and memoirs similarly reflect the complex political and social environments that travelers, immigrants, and displaced persons encounter. The writers articulate affective memories to contest linear and politically legible narratives about place. They express memories colored by versions of nostalgia and forgetting. I address both of these key concepts to theorize the memory practice in which authors navigate ambiguous, ongoing loss. In describing ambiguous loss, writers combine the personal and political and orient themselves simultaneously towards the past, present, and future.

The writers in my project construct a dynamic amalgamation of histories through processes of forgetting, reconstruction, and longing. The memories they articulate invent rather than return, transform rather than repeat. Finally, the majority of the texts in my study engage memory not only through temporality but through space; characters remain home, inhabit rooms, travel abroad, and walk through cities as they experience their pasts and presents.

⁵ Though their work is often contained by the “Arab women writer” label, Ahmed, al-Tahawy, Barakat, and al-Samman incorporate the lived experiences of Kurds, Copts, and Egyptian Jews, contesting the notion of any “Arab” country as exclusively Arab or Muslim. As Leila Ahmed notes in *A Border Passage*, “Arab” itself is a constructed term, employed by British occupiers and later reclaimed by postcolonial revolutionaries. Gamal Abdul Nasser, she notes, “fully grasped that he was Arab only a few years before I got slapped for not knowing that I was Arab. For Nasser seems to have understood that he was Arab precisely by intently studying the marks and runes the imperialists had made upon the landscape” (269). As Nasser claims the term “Arab” for his pan-Arab movement of the 1950’s, Ahmed argues that his use of the word responds directly to imperial histories. One is not born but rather becomes Arab, Ahmed suggests, just as Simone de Beauvoir famously asserted that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman” (301). Ahmed further suggests that becoming Arab is not always a voluntary process, as educational and political structures push citizens to identify themselves in specific ways.

While this project is rooted in Middle Eastern Studies and contemporary scholarship in Arabic literature, I develop a unique comparative framework between the writers listed above and Virginia Woolf, whose corpus serves as a major theoretical spine for the project. As a writer interested in both memory's temporal and spatial elements, Virginia Woolf consistently innovated literary strategies for narrating a figure's movement through space and into the past. Her numerous essays on memoir and autobiography emphasize the importance of narration accommodating "two levels of existence . . . the rapid passage of events and actions [and] the slow opening up of single and solemn moments of concentrated emotion" ("De Quincey's Autobiography" 457). In Woolf's writing, the "events and actions" and people she narrates are always "in relation to certain background rods or conceptions" ("A Sketch of the Past" 73). Her efforts to register the constantly changing dynamics among personal feeling, memory, location, and events result in intensely material connections among memory, the body, and space.

Woolf staged dynamic encounters among space, the past, the body, politics, and personal feeling on a relatively local map. She lived the entirety of her life in England and specifically in London and Sussex. With the exception of a few short trips to continental Europe and a longer early voyage with family to Greece, Italy, and Turkey, she traveled rarely. And yet within the country of her birth she described how the categories most frequently used to define human beings, especially those based on gender and nationality, are constructed and exclusionary. In *Three Guineas*, she questions what nation means for "the educated man's sister":

What does ‘patriotism mean to her? Has she the same reasons for being proud of England, for loving England, for defending England? . . . History and biography when questioned would seem to show that her position in the home of freedom has been different from her brother’s; and psychology would seem to hint that history is not without its effect upon mind and body. (9)

Combining individual experience with historical narration, Woolf questions women’s access to feelings of nationality and patriotism. She insists that political structures reinforced by historical narrative make England something other than the ironic “home of freedom” for its female inhabitants. In this passage, Woolf describes history’s impact “upon mind and body” while also suggesting that individual experience can transform the geography of a space.

In this project, I compare the way Woolf narrates affective geographies to contest exclusionary definitions of belonging with similar aesthetic approaches in the works of contemporary Arab women writers.⁶ In reading these authors comparatively, I construct an affective, associative canon of women writers who use personal experience,

⁶ Because the writers in my study challenge the coherence of political, national, and identitarian categories, I approach the identitarian terms in my title—Arab and women—cautiously. Acknowledging the constructed nature of terms like “Arab” and “woman,” I retain them in my study to mark the histories and identities the writers below contest. Scholarship on Arab-American and Global Arab literature frequently uses the term “Arab” to refer to a shared linguistic heritage, connoting those who write in or have access to an Arabic literary tradition. I study writers, though, who publish in Arabic and English. Others, like Hoda Barakat, also engage Francophone traditions through educational structures left behind by European occupation in Lebanon. In my case, then, I use “Arab” specifically to respond to the term’s constructed history. The term links my project to the rhetoric of the pan-Arab movement in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Exploring the word “Arab” allows me to describe how the term advances a political identity in addition to its linguistic or ethnic components. Finally, despite the political usefulness of these terms, I remain aware that a major problem in this project’s title and framework is the juxtaposition of a category of writers (“Arab women”) with a singular, named British author. Virginia Woolf functions as a major comparative through line in this project, as she comes into conversation with each of the Arab women writers—Leila Ahmed, Hoda Barakat, Jean Said Makdisi, Ghada al-Samman, and Miral al-Tahawy—that I discuss here. The difficulties of naming this comparison speaks to the challenges of highlighting connections between writers while still emphasizing their specific identities and contexts.

ambivalent feelings, and complex memory structures to speak back to a range of political and historical events. The texts in my project cover a wide-range of twentieth and twenty-first century events, including World War I, the transition from Victorian to Edwardian England, Egyptian independence and the Nasser revolution, the Six-Day War of 1967, the Lebanese Civil War, September 11th, and President Obama's election. I explore the troubling emergence of linear, broadly legible, and ideologically unambiguous narratives to describe colonialism, revolution and independence, sectarian conflict, urban development, and other forms of "progress." I argue that these narratives, typically developed by powerful government or family structures, are in keeping with Frantz Fanon's definition of "national consciousness," which he describes as "a crude, empty fragile shell" when revolutions simply replace one bourgeoisie and government with another (97). A truly independent country, he explains, will forgo "the symbols of the nation," focusing instead on "social and political consciousness" and "humanism" (144). The writers in my project advance this humanism by through strategic expressions of nostalgia and other forms of affective memory. In focusing on personal experience, they contest ideologically clear political rhetorics. I define political rhetoric as polarizing, exclusionary, and linear descriptions of what it means to be of a particular nation, ethnicity, or gender in the wake of imperial intervention, revolution, defeat, or migration. Political rhetoric eventually solidifies into historical narratives that tell singular stories about events. Personal memory contradicts the limits placed on the rememberer's situation by those political rhetorics, specifically regarding place and belonging.

Given their diverse experience of geography and history, the authors in my study would seem to make for strange bedfellows—the rooted British novelist of the early 20th century and the routed Arab writers producing work today.⁷ The comparison becomes especially challenging given the opposing legacies of imperialism that inform each body of work. While Woolf writes critically about the British Empire, she does so from within the metropolis as the wife of a former colonial administrator. Leila Ahmed and Jean Said Makdisi, on the other hand, grew up under British occupation of Egypt, and other writers like Hoda Barakat were exposed to colonial reverberations through educational systems and later conflicts. The writers, then, are separated by these specific power, linguistic, and educational structures in addition to temporal and geographic distance. My decision to compare their works, however, has little to do with overlapping life histories, locations, or shared traditions. Instead, I advocate for a comparative reading between widely disparate texts in order to articulate their aesthetic and affective resonances.

Performing a comparative reading when the terms of the comparison are not immediately apparent or obvious raises questions about what constitutes critical and ethical comparison, where “critical” refers to both scholarly responsibility and crucial connections to a current moment. Ethics determine whether the comparison can do justice to the specificity of each text while also reaching a conclusion about the texts in relation to each other. The goal of this dissertation is to bring into focus a comparative reading practice not based on intertextuality or questions of influence—that is, it describes

⁷ I borrow the distinction between roots and routes—as well as the overlap between them—from James Clifford, whose 1997 collection *Routes* defines location as “an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations” (11).

something other than the contemporary Arab writers in this project referencing Woolf directly or wrestling with the inheritances of a Western feminist practice. Instead, I focus on reading these texts as responding to similar questions about how writers claim personal memories, geographies, and canons in the service of narrating complex, ambivalent histories.

Global, Contrapuntal, and Connective Readings

My comparative framework emerges from recent developments in World and Transnational Literatures, although I argue that those fields need to take personal and affective experience more seriously. As Global Arab Literature becomes its own field of inquiry⁸ and scholarship debates Woolf's political and global awareness,⁹ readings of Woolf and of Arabic literature seek to expand the borders of earlier canons. Woolf Studies and Global Arab Studies share similar recent moves from contained readings to more expansive scholarly accounts that narrate texts' global movements. Woolf and the

⁸ 2015 marked the first meeting of the Global Arab and Arab American forum (GAAM) at the Modern Language Association. As Wail S. Hassan and Carol Fadda-Conrey remarked during meetings at that conference, Global Arab literature is a relatively new field of study emerging to accommodate the large number of ethnically Arab authors writing outside the Arab world and, occasionally, writing in languages other than Arabic. The term "Global Arab" reflects both local and transnational sensibilities, accounting for a range of diverse movements, relationships to place, and literary articulations of those movements and spaces.

⁹ See Kathy Phillips' *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (1994), Jed Esty's "Virginia Woolf's Colony and the Adolescence of Modernist Fiction" (2007), Jane Marcus's *Hearts of Darkness* (2004), and Rebecca Walkowitz's "Virginia Woolf's Evasion: Critical Cosmopolitanism and British Modernism" (2006). Finally, the recent edited collection *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place* from editors Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth lays out the major trends in spatial theory to suggest how they might more effectively inform readings of Woolf's fiction and politics, arguing that "It was through discourses of space that Woolf articulated the exclusions and boundaries that regulated women's bodies and minds" (2). Theirs is a global account, as they focus on novels like *A Voyage Out* (1915), *Orlando* (1928), and *Jacob's Room* (1922) in which "travels serve to implicate her characters in larger cultural and imperial networks and underline Woolf's relationship conception of space" (2).

Arab women on my list have entered canons of world literature and global modernism and they circulate in translation, scholarship, and readership. However, the scholars who read these texts globally often shy away from explorations of affect, particularly nostalgia or sentimentality. When scholars do point to nostalgia or sentiment in these texts, they level charges of apolitical or conservative sensibilities. In Carol Fadda-Conrey's otherwise insightful account of "antiassimilationist and transnational modes of Arab-American belonging that ultimately transform dominant and exclusionary US understandings of national membership and citizenship," her very emphasis on the creative, the transnational, and the personal makes her wary of particular affects (3). In her work, nostalgia comes under fire as the polar opposite of critical thought. Fadda-Conrey describes, for example, "translocal negotiations . . . informed by an antinostalgic, critical perspective" and "restrictive ethnic and diasporic performances of homeland rituals that are dictated by immigrants' nostalgia and by constricting gender roles" (118, 42).¹⁰ Fadda-Conrey draws clear boundaries between the critical, the political, and expansive, non-reductive gender roles on the one hand and anti-political, constricting nostalgia on the other.

In contrast to Fadda-Conrey, who conflates politics and anti-nostalgia to explore the global components of Arab literature, I show that the texts in my project become part of a transnational community specifically through deployments of affect and memory.

¹⁰ The denigration of nostalgia as uncritical continues throughout Fadda-Conrey's project. She also argues that Arab-American writers resist "being depoliticized and nostalgic" while "develop[ing] alternate, demythologized, and individualized forms of attachment to Arab homelands that extend beyond the nostalgic and the celebratory [and] mobiliz[ing] new critical understandings of these ancestral homelands" (67, 33).

Rebecca Walkowitz argues, for example, that what earlier critics labeled a personal focus or an “evasion” of war and politics in Virginia Woolf’s literary work was in fact an alternative method of witnessing the world’s political practices: “Her writing remains challenging and often disturbing because she proposes that international sympathy and national dissent are nourished in part by those evasions of syntax and plot that qualify, unsettle, and redirect enduring habits of attentiveness” (123). The “habits of attentiveness” Walkowitz notes depend upon a complex depiction of memory; Woolf uses recollection, time jumps, repetition, and fluctuating narrative time lines to encourage unexpected connections in the consciousness of her characters. Rather than being solely personal, affective memory offers alternative means of understanding and re-writing historical narrative.

In my research, I balance advances in global literary studies with an attention to the feelings and experiences scholars in those fields have rejected as less important. I argue that even in critical work on identity and belonging there is room for feelings about the past—especially those that are messy, ambivalent, and uncomfortable. As explorations of transnationalism transform the way we read texts in relation to one another, my project develops a comparative reading of literary traditions without resorting to discussions of influence or translation. Instead, I describe the ways in which authors construct similar patterns of personal, political, and familial memory to produce a feminist memory practice. The writers in this project explore the way memory brings the past—even an uncomfortable past—to bear on the present. They contextualize personal histories within cultural or collective memory. They challenge the notion of a break

between histories, even when political and cultural forces encourage that notion. At the same time, their encounters with memory do not generate a smooth transition between temporalities. Their memories emerge through expressions of nostalgia and attention to forgetting.

In my project, I demonstrate how memory and feeling can be powerful tools not only for writing, but for reading across geographic and temporal divides. To read texts as affectively resonant even when they participate in different historical and political structures involves reading in a state of discomfort and comparative dissonance. I take as guides reading methods that allow two unlike things to sit in relation to each other without sanding off the edges where they persistently refuse to connect. These reading strategies, which include Edward Said's "contrapuntal reading," Marianne Hirsch's "connective reading," and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative reading" all pay attention to the uncomfortable and pleasurable feelings produced in the reader.

My reading practices reflect the content and goals of the texts I include here. Most of these texts combine events, characters, and places rarely placed together, or, indeed, not often spoken about at all. I take "contrapuntal" reading as a starting point when navigating the diverse feelings about imperial history that Leila Ahmed or Leonard Woolf's life writings arouse. While the accounts of Ahmed's Egyptian childhood under British occupation and Woolf's colonial administration in Ceylon might seem too different to compare, Said argues that "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external

relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others” (*Culture and Imperialism* 32).¹¹ Said’s model allows me to read the British and Arab texts in my project as “discrepant” but related.

Hirsch’s connective approach allows me to read memories of different histories together while retaining their specificities. She argues that we must “turn competitive or appropriative memory into more capacious transnational memory work . . . its goal would be to incorporate these memories into an enlarged global arena” (20-1). Hirsch’s focus on the connective rather than the comparative avoids constructing a hierarchy of trauma or other experience. Connective reading can address losses or experiences of different scales at the same time, an approach I use to discuss the discrepancies in economics and historical motivators that each immigrant experiences in novels like *Brooklyn Heights* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Using Sedgwick’s reparative reading, I reject a comfortable narration of history that fixes the past and seeks to anticipate the future, as occurs with institutions rebuilding Beirut after the Civil War or officials describing Egyptian independence in the 1950’s. A single, linear historical narrative typically conforms to the perspective of the victor or expert; it is made natural by re-telling and canonization. Sedgwick suggests that when “the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from

¹¹ Said continues by saying, “If I have insisted on integration and connections between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, I have done so not to level or reduce differences, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things” (61).

the way it actually did” (*Touching Feeling* 146).¹² Sedgwick focuses on the uncertain and the uncomfortable as productive spaces for art and looks for voices that will complicate ideologically clear narrations of history.¹³

Inspired by Said, Hirsch, and Sedgwick, I view the comparative structure of my project as productively dissonant. My selection of texts also enacts the personal canon formation and reading practices I notice within the texts themselves. Many of the texts in this dissertation focus on its author’s and characters’ reading practices; writers like Woolf, Ahmed, and al-Tahawy describe what they read and how they read it, noting personal connections to disparate texts. This particular form of intertextuality, while not the subject of the dissertation—I am not focusing, for example, on Miral al-Tahawy’s interest in Ernest Hemingway or Ahmed’s reading of Hanan al-Shaykh—pushes readers to consider critically their own canons. I bring together seemingly disparate texts in the dissertation in large part because each author I study demonstrates an affective interest in transnational and diverse intertextualities—that is, they read what they like. Similarly, the canon I develop here is filled with texts I respond to strongly. In the earliest stages of research, my affective relationship to these works suggested that, for me as a particular and individual reader, they shared stylistic and thematic interests that I could then begin to theorize. My love for the books I read in this dissertation has guided my critical

¹² Sedgwick distinguishes reparative reading from paranoid reading, which is a “strong theory” that trades in reductive thinking: “To read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new” (146).

¹³ Many of these theories, in fact, understand themselves as directly related to one another; Hirsch, for example, references Sedgwick’s reparative reading as the model for her “capacious, nonessentialist approaches to memory” (24).

practice, a process that models the relationship between affect and critical thinking I see in each text. By foregrounding personal and selective reading, authors demonstrate how personal affect and memory contest communal and political rhetorics.

Memory, Mourning, and Affect

Reading comparatively dissonant texts like Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* or Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past," I identify two major subsets of memory that allow the writers in my project to re-write the linear narratives through which political discourse attempts to make history ideologically legible. The first cluster, which I define loosely as nostalgia, includes feelings of attachment, sentiment, desire, longing, melancholy, and obsession. The second includes acts of forgetting, which Daniel L. Schacter et. al suggest might contain misattribution or blocking.¹⁴ I also include experiences of disorientation and escapism in the forgetting subset. I identify forgetting as a subset of memory rather than its opposite because I see forgetting and nostalgia appearing at opposing poles of memory practice. While the former produces absence, erasure, and space for re-creation, the latter encourages return with a difference. Both disrupt the possibility of a linear memory process. I describe the constellations of forgetting and nostalgia as predominantly ambivalent experiences.

¹⁴ The other types of forgetting Schacter identifies include transience, absent-mindedness, suggestibility, bias, and persistence. Schacter et. al do not recuperate these terms, but they do argue for their critical significance. In "The Seven Sins of Memory: Implications for Self," they propose that "rather than trying to tackle memory head-on by examining the ways in which it typically blends into the fabric of our everyday lives, we try to gain insight into the self by instead looking at the imperfections, foibles, and quirks of memory" (227). I am grateful to Dr. Peter Mende-Siedlecki for this reference.

My focus on ambivalent memories and practices departs from the dominant vocabulary of contemporary memory studies, which is still rooted in the language of trauma. In the American context, the major memory studies projects of the 1990's emerged from anxieties about the waning population of Holocaust survivors and the aftereffects of the Vietnam War.¹⁵ In the twenty-first century, scholars of memory developed comparative frameworks that brought disparate moments of trauma and catastrophe into the same project. Both Marianne Hirsch (*The Generation of Postmemory*, 2011) and Michael Rothberg (*Multidirectional Memory*, 2009) emphasize the difficulties and necessities of reading memory comparatively, “connectively,” or “multidirectionally.” Hirsch credits her training in feminist theory for her ability to read connectively,¹⁶ while Rothberg gestures to a comparative postcolonialism that engages with Holocaust studies, colonial memory, and the legacy of slavery in the United States.¹⁷

I situate my project in the context of these comparative studies, although I depart from them methodologically in several significant ways. Hirsch and Rothberg work

¹⁵ See Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing, Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992).

¹⁶ Hirsch describes feminist theory's previous omissions from studies on memory: “Although feminist/queer scholarship and memory studies have shared a number of central preoccupations and political commitments, the two fields have developed along parallel and mostly nonintersecting tracts over the last two and a half decades . . . I would maintain that it has not yet resulted in a developed theoretical elaboration on memory and gender or on a sustained effort to theorize memory from feminist and queer perspectives” (16-17).

¹⁷ Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. al-Sa'di also use connective and multidirectional reading practices in their edited collection *Nakba* (2007) to engage with Palestinian memory, a field with a complex relationship to both Holocaust studies and the notion of the past as something that remains past.

primarily in Holocaust studies and remain attached to the language of trauma.¹⁸ From a comparative standpoint, they also propose relatively limited reading circuits, connecting, for example, Middle Eastern literature to African-American literature or Hebrew to Arabic. These projects, while essential, assert either tentative analogies of political oppression and difference in the first case or simultaneous though antagonistic experiences of history in the second. In contrast, the texts in my project do not address similar experiences of political oppression, nor do they share the same history. I activate the comparison among them through an attention to similar affects in the midst of radical differences.

Affective Geographies moves away from trauma as the dominant vocabulary for feelings about memory and draws from affect theory to construct a much broader comparative network. Texts like Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012) and *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (2007), Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), and Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2009) all theorize affects and experiences not often included in larger narratives of trauma or pathologies. These projects prioritize the ordinary, the bodily, and the personal as political. I argue that a feminist theory of memory shifts from vocabularies of trauma and psychoanalysis to a practice that understands and even embraces the ambiguities of history, loss, the past and

¹⁸ *The Generation of Postmemory* focuses on visual culture and what Hirsch calls "the postmemory generation," those who come after the people who experienced a traumatic event. The younger generation encounters the stories of their parents and grandparents as a past akin to lived experience.

the present. In expressions of active, ambivalent memory, a writer can still grieve an experience that was troubling—Woolf’s relationship to her father, for example—or she can mourn a past that most believe would be better abandoned, like Ahmed’s unwilling but real nostalgia for colonial Egypt after independence. Ambivalent writers experience longing with an eye toward the future and community formation.

The affect scholarship cited above has been adept at recuperating terms that have assumed negative connotations in critical conversations. In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai explains that her titular feelings might be considered “semantically negative, in the sense that they are saturated with socially stigmatizing meanings and values (such as the pettiness one traditionally associates with envy)” (11). Ngai also highlights the “meta-responses” attached to these feelings, since we so often experience additional feelings *about* our ugly feelings (10). Additional bad feelings like depression have garnered critical attention from affect studies and queer theory scholars in recent years. Cvetkovich, for example, associates “feeling bad” with experiences like depression, exhaustion, and despair.

Though Ngai and Cvetkovich concern themselves with specific emotions like envy, anxiety, and sadness, my broader constellations of nostalgia and forgetting are susceptible to the similar social stigmas and meta-responses. Nostalgia and forgetting are unsettling ways of experiencing the past that we are supposed to avoid. We say someone is too attached, too sentimental; we critique someone for being nostalgic or melancholic. On the other hand, we remind one another that “those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.” In common usage, nostalgia and forgetting function as taboos, pathologies, and

condemnations. Through my research, I depathologize these terms, in keeping with Cvetkovich's work on depression, which "depathologize[s] negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis" (*Depression* 2). Cvetkovich argues that feelings weighted with negative associations must become "sites of publicity and community formation" (2). Similarly, I demonstrate that nostalgia and forgetting offer writers in my study a means to claim and re-narrate their own histories, pushing back against dominant political narratives and becoming sources for critical reflection, protest, or community formation.

I develop a literary community of what Svetlana Boym would call "reflective" nostalgics: those who engage with the past not with an eye to return or fixity but rather with an appreciation for playfulness, storytelling, and the experience of longing itself (xviii). Reflective nostalgics use vocabularies of nostalgia, memory, and forgetting to articulate ambivalent and even uncomfortable mourning. Woolf, Ahmed, Barakat, al-Tahawy, al-Samman, and Makdisi all engage with loss but do not seek a return to the moment or place before the loss. Nor do they aim to overcome or "get over" the loss, a trope we might in fact consider another form of return, in this case to "normalcy." Instead, these writers live within extended moments of loss, allowing mourning to reshape identities, communities, histories, and futures.

By addressing the ambivalences and discomforts associated with mourning the past at a personal level, and by rejecting larger communities' prescribed modes of mourning and moving on, the authors in my project understand mourning and other expressions of affect as politically effective. Judith Butler sees mourning's political

aspects as redefining identity and community: “To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief . . . posits the ‘I’ in the mode of unknowingness” (*Precarious Life* 30). Butler describes grief as an active process but a slow and non-teleological one. Unlike the political rhetoric that equates active mourning with “moving on,” “getting back to normal,” or some form of retaliation, Butler’s active grief is sustained and uncertain. That ambivalence itself becomes a tool for renegotiating the individual’s relationship to the group.

The ambivalent, sustained mourner relies on a constellation of nostalgia and forgetting to contest linear, teleological, and ideologically clear conclusions to a mourning period. Instead, the act of expressing loss re-writes history. David Eng and David Kazanjian emphasize the power of the melancholic survivor’s voice in their 2003 edited collection *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (22). Mourning voices, they argue, are “insistently creative and deeply political”—they make as much as they lose (23). Eng and Kazanjian borrow from Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940) the idea of “historical materialism,” a version of history that contrasts with historicism and produces a more dynamic relationship between past and present. Historicism as Benjamin sees it is about freezing history, “fixing the remains”: “Benjamin isolates the historicist propensity to relive the past as inexorable fixity, a tendency he names *acedia*, whose origin is the “indolence of the heart.” This indolence not only insists upon hegemonic identification with the victor’s perspective but also preempts history’s other possible

accounts” (1-2). What interests Eng and Kazanjian specifically is “how loss is apprehended and history is named”—what they call “the politics of mourning” (6).

I argue that the writers in my study participate in “the politics of mourning” by engaging complex histories and places ambivalently, as Leila Ahmed mourns the British education of her childhood while simultaneously recognizing the value of Egypt’s independence. They leave room for history to be “named” in multiple ways at the same time through their diverse feelings and memory practices, as when Jean Said Makdisi uses the experience of surviving the Civil War to expand the definition of who counts as Lebanese. In their explorations of illness, desire, and ambivalent loss, the writers in this project allow characters to carry old homes to new places.

Lost Spaces

Because I am primarily interested in how writers express ambivalent mourning, nostalgia, and forgetting as they move through space and form new communities, I focus specifically on the loss of places. I interpret Eng and Kazanjian’s politics of mourning, especially in the context of migration, travel, and movement through a city, as a mechanism of community formation in which all members must account for individual losses and the relationships between them. The question of how migrant populations develop new communities appears in Sara Ahmed’s “Home and Away” (1999), which considers how people situate themselves geographically, communally and affectively in relation to a Home or many homes. Ahmed argues that migration patterns highlight the estrangement or “strangeness” we might feel even in places that were once home. She explains that communities can form around the experience of desire rather than the

memory of a specific past, a feeling that orients that community in the present and maps possible future routes.¹⁹ Individuals from different backgrounds can then unite in their shared desire for home. Desire becomes a community's foundation rather than the means through which one returns elsewhere.

Community formation and migration experiences are always connected to specific places. As a result, the language I use to describe memory frequently borrows from spatial theory. I reject the notion of memory as a series of returns and I articulate the way memory maps itself onto certain locations. I theorize memory as political but still open to intersections, avenues, movement, and multiple maps, actors, and narrations. Memory then becomes part of what Gaston Bachelard considers the "phenomenology of space." In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), he attempts to capture the dream-like quality of our most intimate spatial interactions. Primarily concerned with spaces of home, Bachelard explores the construction of corners, miniatures, drawers, cellars, and attics in literary examples. Phenomenology as a category does away with past and future; it is the

¹⁹ The significance of the future in this study owes its genesis to recent explorations in literary theory and anthropology. Amir Eshel's *Futurity* (2012) argues that "Contemporary literature creates the 'open, future, possible' by expanding our vocabularies, by probing the human ability to act, and by prompting reflection and debate. I call these capacities of contemporary literature 'futurity.'" Arjun Appadurai also addresses "the capacity to aspire," noting that for the global poor in particular, the rhetoric of globalization has artificially separated future oriented development and the culture and tradition of the past. Appadurai argues that culture offers language for negotiating community, policy, and the future: "We need to strengthen the capacity of the poor to exercise 'voice,' to debate, contest, and oppose vital directions for collective social life as they wish . . . it is the only way in which the poor might find locally plausible ways to alter what I am calling the terms of recognition in any particular cultural regime. Here I treat voice as a cultural capacity . . . because for voice to take effect, it must engage social, political, and economic issues in terms of ideologies, doctrines, and norms which are widely shared and credible" (66). Both cases link literature and culture with the future and modes of ethics and morality; Appadurai suggests especially that this capacity to aspire allows persons to envision a community with voice where none was previously available.

discussion of the experience of the present moment, of the way in which memory and imagination unite in that instant. Though recent scholars critique Bachelard's focus on domestic and private spaces at the expense of the public,²⁰ his work foregrounds phenomenology as an essential category for understanding space.²¹

In the chapters that follow, I allow space, memory, and narrative to intersect by focusing on the homes, streets, businesses, and modes of transportation that characters and writers inhabit. My interest in space also pushes me to consider the affective geographies of this dissertation—that is, how I map chapters, thematics, and major argumentative claims. Just as the writers in my dissertation undermine linear narrative through stylistic, structural, and thematic innovations, I also aim to juxtapose rather than to build, to move “beside” and among rather than “beyond,” in Sedgwick’s terminology. Like the aesthetics, affinities, and comparisons that populate the dissertation, the chapters exist in a non-linear relation to each other. They enact a critical collage of theoretical frameworks, close readings, and arguments that speak to one another in different ways throughout the project.

²⁰ See Snaith and Whitworth, who suggest that *The Poetics of Space* “has led to an overemphasis on interior spaces and a corresponding neglect of public spaces; moreover, it has served to confirm some critics in an ahistorical approach” (7).

²¹ Spatial theory and gender studies also intersect in useful ways. Recent work on feminist geographies considers the way space is both produced by and helps to produce gendered distinctions. Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) and Marilyn Booth’s edited collection *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (2010) are especially helpful. Booth argues that space is not “passive or neutral or natural in its familiar contours, but rather . . . humanly formed and . . . a powerful shaper of human identities” (7). Feminist geographies are especially important in considering the dynamism of rooms and domestic spaces.

Chapter One, “‘Nostalgia for We Know Not Quite What’: The Ambivalent Memoir,” describes how writers of autobiography and memoir emphasize ambivalent feelings about the past to leave their narration of complex, and particularly colonial, histories open. I develop a theorization of nostalgia and ambivalent nostalgia particularly, which allows me to move among three disparate texts with diverse relationships to colonial and domestic histories.

The chapter focuses primarily on Leila Ahmed’s *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman’s Journey* (1999), in which the current Harvard professor describes her Cairene youth during the Free Officers Revolution of 1952. The event effectively ended British occupation of Egypt, established Egyptian independence, and marked the rise of Gamal Abdul Nasser’s Pan-Arab movement, which sought political affinities with the broader Arab world and with Palestine in particular. Ahmed explores the way the revolution impacted her education, her understanding of herself as an Arab Muslim fluent in English, and her relationship to her family. I read her memoir alongside Virginia Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past.”²² Woolf wrote the essay in starts and stops from 1939 until her suicide in 1941. The account details her childhood in London and the seaside community of St. Ives as well as changes in domestic and social life as England moved into the twentieth century. Throughout the account, Woolf is interested in memory not just as a vehicle for the past but as an object of study in its own right. Like Ahmed,

²² In all cases with Woolf’s work, I follow editorial precedent in italicizing titles or placing them in quotations. Though “A Sketch of the Past” is longer than *On Being Ill*, another prominent Woolf text in this project, editors consistently place the first in quotations and the latter in italics.

she describes her understanding of how memory emerges, fluctuates, and transforms to push back against a linear, limited perspective of historical change.

In order to highlight the relationships between personal and domestic life and political development that Woolf and Ahmed articulate, I also incorporate into Chapter One Leonard Woolf's *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911* (1961). The autobiography details Woolf's seven years as a colonial administrator in Ceylon, present day Sri Lanka. I find the account notable for the way it wrestles with Woolf's conflicting feelings about the role of Empire in Ceylon. I am predominantly interested in the ways female writers use affective memory to contest gender-based distinctions in the political and domestic spheres. However, although Leonard Woolf identifies as a male writer and may appear an outlier in the project, his autobiography is a compelling interlocutor for Ahmed, who writes about the colonial experience from the colonized perspective. Leonard Woolf's work also emphasizes the global dimensions of Virginia Woolf's life and writing; though his autobiography was published after her death, the Woolfs edited, read, and researched for one another. I draw on Leonard Woolf's direct colonial experience and his intimate knowledge of his wife's writing about memory and ambivalence.

In Chapter Two, "'They Attach Themselves to Places': Woolf, al-Tahawy, and Remembering the Body," I define and describe sentimentality and attachment as subsets of the ambivalent nostalgia I theorized in Chapter One. As versions of longing for the past, sentimentality and attachment are frequently gendered feminine and considered uncritical, even within the texts themselves. I argue that Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

(1925) and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) reconfigure the negative connotations surrounding female memory, most notably sentimentality, to demonstrate memory as a practice of empathy and community formation rather than an exercise in backwards-gazing. Woolf's novel follows Clarissa Dalloway through the streets of a post-World War I London as she prepares to give a party for the city's political elite. Her day brings her into direct and indirect contact with an old friend returning from colonial administration in India, a daughter desperate for adventure, an Italian wife new to London, and her husband who suffers from shell shock. *Brooklyn Heights* describes the protagonist's life in New York after she leaves Egypt; Hend's arrival in the city with her young son corresponds to Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential election. Like Clarissa, Hend walks through her neighborhoods, encountering fellow immigrants, as well as new and familiar spaces. Despite the economic, social, and geographic discrepancies between the two protagonists, I demonstrate that the novels share an interest in the urban movement of female bodies. Both novels connect that movement to the sentimentality and attachment the women express. I argue that by activating memory and attachment to the past through walking and urban movement, these novels showcase sentiment and attachment as future-oriented and dynamic participants in community formation.

In Chapters Three and Four, I turn my attention to forgetting to examine how writers' expressions of illness and forgetfulness allow for creative narrations of space while resisting medical and political discourse. "Women of the Cloth: Touch, Obsession, and Illness" traces the political and aesthetic interventions of illness in Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* (2000) and Woolf's *On Being Ill* (1926). The protagonist of Barakat's

novel lives by himself in the downtown Beirut marketplaces sometime after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.²³ His memories of a pre-war Beirut, his family's movement from Lebanon to Egypt and back again, and his Kurdish maid and lover mark the landscape of the now destroyed market. Barakat uses the family's fabric business to trace the global markets and empires that impacted Beirut. Characters' desire for fabric turns extreme. Their longing for specific kinds of fabric suggests an alternative relationship to the histories that shaped the material and the city. Using Woolf's *On Being Ill* as a model for writing about illness, I describe the ways Barakat introduces and resists the medical discourses that seek to pathologize the experience of desire and longing.

Chapter Four, "Waves of Forgetfulness," engages with pathological approaches to forgetting and memory, ultimately rejecting pathology in favor of a model that embraces forgetting as necessary for creative narrations of the past. I read multiple texts in this chapter, which includes additional analyses of *Brooklyn Heights* and "A Sketch of the Past" as well as Ghada al-Samman's "The Ashy Danube" (1973), Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness* (1987), and Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments* (1990). These texts explore forgetting in the context of immigration, memoir writing, and travel following the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Lebanese Civil War. In all these contexts, forgetting becomes an essential tool for narration, allowing the writer to shape and renegotiate understandings of the past. In each of these chapters, I expand the contemporary politics' constricted definition of who can belong to a given place or who

²³ The invasion marked a turning point in the Lebanese Civil War, which began in 1975 and lasted until 1990. For a chronology of events, see the introduction to Jean Said Makdisi's memoir, *Beirut Fragments*.

has the right to narrate a given history. While political actors debate strengthening borders in the name of national or supranational identities, addressing nostalgia and forgetting extends affective geographies beyond the borders set by nations and literary canons.

Chapter One

“Nostalgia For We Know Not Quite What”: The Ambivalent Memoir

“Longing might be what we share as human beings, but that doesn’t prevent us from telling very different stories of belonging and nonbelonging.”

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (41)

Introduction

In this chapter, I define ambivalent nostalgia and argue for its significance in texts about lost places and pasts. Nostalgia exhibits ambivalent qualities in two ways; in the first context, the nostalgic confronts ambiguous loss and is unsure what place, object, or time she should most desire to return to. In the second, the experience of nostalgia is linked to diverse, often contradictory feelings that include guilt, anger, uncertainty, discomfort, desire, and pleasure. Ambivalently nostalgic writers use exploratory writing styles to account for these co-existing affects. They actively maintain ambivalence without trying to justify it or explain it away. By prioritizing longing’s ambivalent qualities, they restructure nostalgia; longing’s impact on the present becomes more significant than the object toward which that longing tends.

I identify ambivalent nostalgia in three life writing accounts that relay each author’s contradictory or discomfiting reactions to changes within political and domestic spheres: Leila Ahmed’s 1999 memoir, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—a Woman’s Journey*, which follows the current Harvard Divinity School professor through her adolescent and teenage years in Egypt under British occupation and

then Gamal Abdul Nasser's presidency;¹ Leonard Woolf's *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911* (1961), which relates the author's time as a colonial administrator in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka; and Virginia Woolf's memoir project "A Sketch of the Past," which she wrote sporadically from 1939 until her death in 1941. Each author explores memory's mercurial properties, considering the way perception changes over time or selects some events as worth remembering. All three express nostalgia about their pasts, which include Leonard Woolf's colonial participation, Ahmed's coming-of-age during the Free Officers Revolution of 1952, and both Ahmed and Virginia Woolf's contentious relationships to their parents' cultural and domestic legacies. At the same time, the writers remain aware that returning to those pasts is undesirable and even impossible.

A Border Passage, *Growing*, and "A Sketch of the Past" resonate with each other through their attunement to loss and precarity, their emphasis on enchanted spaces—Ahmed's family home in Ain Shams, the Ceylon of Leonard Woolf's memory, and Virginia Woolf's Kensington, Hyde Park Gate, and St. Ives—and their ultimate resistance to these spaces' temptations. As these writers examine their pasts, they allow their longing for the past to co-exist with their awareness of those same pasts' violences. In each case, the writer describes the affective tenor of these memories without collapsing their complexities. He or she resists the temptation to simplify ambivalence in the service of ideological or narrative complexity. Each writer asserts personal experience and

¹ Born to an Egyptian Muslim father and a mother of Ottoman descent in Cairo in 1940, Leila Ahmed came of age during the Free Officers Revolution of 1952. This revolution, in which a group of young military officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser deposed King Farouk, essentially concluded British occupation of the country, in place since the Arabi Uprising of 1882. The revolution also marked the beginning of Nasser's pan-Arab movement and increased anti-imperialist sentiments across the Middle East and North Africa.

cultural affinities amidst political change, even when that personal experience does not match dominant narratives about progress, victory, vilification, or conclusion.

Highlighting the affinities between texts' affective registers, a reader can create conversation between geographically and temporally distant authors like Ahmed and the Woolfs. At the same time, I retain the specificities that inform each text. Leila Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, and Leonard Woolf share the English language, an intellectual background—both Leonard Woolf and Ahmed were educated at Cambridge—and even a sense of distance from their communities.² Ahmed, however, received her educational training as a British Imperial subject. While Virginia Woolf explores colonial intervention's impact on the metropole in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Waves*, and other texts, her husband participated directly in imperial projects, first in administration and then in outspoken critique.³ Narrating his years of civil service in *Growing*, his second of five autobiographical volumes, Woolf describes himself as an “unconscious imperialist” who became a staunch opponent of the system. He explains “that I saw from the inside British imperialism at its apogee, and that I gradually became fully aware of its nature and

² Natania Rosenfeld's *Outsiders Together* (2000) in particular describes the dynamics of belonging and outsider-ness present in the Woolf marriage; questions of gender, religion, and economic background informed the Woolfs' unique sense of being slightly to the side of wealthier public school graduates in the Bloomsbury Group. Virginia Woolf's sense of her own distance from formal education is well-documented in multiple autobiographical works, as well as in *A Room of One's Own*. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Leila Ahmed was able to access formal education at Cambridge, although she attended Girton, the women's college, rather than Leonard Woolf's Trinity.

³ Rather than drawing distinctions between the two Woolfs' literary approaches, I emphasize that both writers engaged similar theoretical questions through different genres. While *Outsiders Together* encouraged scholars to reconsider Leonard's role in Virginia's life and work, most have done so through short references to his *Village in the Jungle* (1913) or later political treatises like *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), or by mining his five extensive autobiographical volumes for descriptions of Virginia's illness, the Hogarth Press, or life in Bloomsbury (see Jane Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, or Raymond Williams's “The Bloomsbury Fraction”). I take *Growing* seriously as literary content that introduces creative means of navigating imperial history.

problems” (25). Woolf’s awareness informed his post-Ceylon work. After returning from his colonial outpost in 1911, he began writing *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), a novel still celebrated in Sri Lanka for its depiction of disappearing village life and its critique of the colonial economic and judicial systems that catalyze that process. Later in life, Woolf advocated for social justice and international peace organizations through his editorial positions at the Hogarth Press, *The International Review*, and *The Nation*, and his roles in the Labour Party and Fabian Society. In 1916’s *International Government*, he was an early advocate for the League of Nations.

Much debate has surrounded the Woolfs’ complicity in or critique of empire, but the purpose of this chapter is not to adopt one of those approaches.⁴ Instead, I identify the disparities between the Woolfs’ intellectual commitments to social justice, especially anti-imperialism, and their conservative feelings. My work departs, then, from scholarship that condemns the Woolfs’ work for exhibiting nostalgia for the pasts and systems they should critique. In writing about *The Waves* and Virginia Woolf’s criticism of the imperial politics that draw characters away from England, for example, Jane Marcus says, “it is, of

⁴ Kathy J. Phillips heralded a reading of Virginia Woolf as a social commentator and critic of colonialism with 1994’s *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*: “[Woolf] pursues a serious analysis of the connections among imperialism, war, and gender relations. Her novels suggest that these three topics interrelate through economics, school training, professions, life-styles, sexual mores, religions, and so on” (ix). Notable for her sophisticated readings of the analogies and juxtapositions Woolf uses to link these categories, Phillips makes only a few, limited critiques of Woolf’s colonial engagement: “Although the Empire is a central topic in Woolf’s books, she never directly portrays any of the colonized people as characters. Perhaps unwilling to speak for an experience outside her own, she does presume, from time to time, to label people of color with all the unpleasant prejudice of her contemporaries” (xxxiv). This passage recognizes Woolf’s limits but, as others have argued, qualifies them with the language of insignificance (“from time to time”) and excuses them based on the assumption that Woolf would be “unwilling to speak for an experience outside her own.” Jed Esty pinpoints the majority of Phillips’ criticism: “Her broad thesis is certainly persuasive, though as the title suggests, Phillips tends to see the case mostly in terms of Woolf’s criticism of, rather than implication in, colonialist modes of thought and forms of appropriation” (87).

course, equally clear that Woolf acknowledges her own complicity in and sentimental attachment to Bernard's values" (78-9). From this description, to be attached, to be sentimental, makes one complicit and forces one to condone the attached object's actions and beliefs. I trouble Marcus's equivalence between sentimentality and complicity by exploring the ambivalence of attachment: what would it look like for someone to be attached while still realizing the attached object's failures and aggressions? To approach feeling as a critical category is essential when discussing empire, as Edward Said notes: "We must take stock of the nostalgia for empire, as well as the anger and resentment it provokes in those who were ruled, and we must try to look carefully and integrally at the culture that nurtured the sentiment, rationale, and above all the imagination of empire" (*Culture and Imperialism* 12). Influenced by Raymond William's work, Said identifies a structure of feeling in which the mechanisms of empire produce a wide variety of affects in both colonizer and colonized. He also advocates for "contrapuntal" reading, which he describes as a method of reading unlike texts:

In juxtaposing experiences with each other, in letting them play off each other, it is my interpretive political aim (in the broadest sense) to make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other and that attempt to distance or suppress other views and experiences. Far from seeking to reduce the significance of ideology, the exposure and dramatization of discrepancy highlights its cultural importance; this enables us to appreciate its power and understand its continuing influence. (32-3)

I employ Said's contrapuntal reading strategies while focusing on ambivalent feelings, and what I call ambivalent nostalgia particularly. In expressing longing for troublesome colonial and domestic legacies, each of these writers simultaneously references feelings

of guilt, anger, uncertainty, and discomfort. These feelings are born out of but do not minimize the strength of their desires for the past.

Acknowledging the Woolfs' positions as British citizens during the last days of the Empire, I use the similar ambivalences in their writing as the grounds for comparing nostalgia in these works, whether that nostalgia is for political systems, family structures, or places that were once home. I generate comparative readings of texts that might otherwise be "ideologically and culturally closed to each other." Critical, nostalgic, and ambivalent, the Woolfs' understanding of imperial histories must be situated alongside the experiences of colonized peoples. Past attempts to read the Woolfs in the context of colonial and postcolonial literatures, as influential as they have been, do not engage comparatively with writers on the other side of imperial systems.⁵ I introduce that comparative reading in this chapter. At the same time, I resist setting writers from either side up as mere foils, although that comparison is tempting with Leonard Woolf, the administrator who spent seven years in Ceylon, and Leila Ahmed, who grew up under the British Empire in Egypt.⁶ While describing these writers' diverse backgrounds, I assert that reading the three life writing accounts comparatively allows me to theorize a nostalgia that accommodates uneasy historical and personal memories.

⁵ Mulk Raj Anand is a major exception; the Indian author of *Untouchable* (1935) and founder of *Marg* magazine spent time in Bloomsbury and became close with E.M. Forster. In *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (1981), he records a meeting with Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Interestingly, Jane Marcus also reminds us that Said himself does not engage with Woolf's work despite his interests in modernism and colonialism, suggesting that he "turn[s] from the radical critique of colonialism in Virginia Woolf for a more comfortable recuperation of *Kim*" (68).

⁶ Reading contrapuntally allows me to place the Woolfs and Ahmed in conversation without implying that imperialism in 1904 Ceylon and Egypt in the 1940's and 50's took similar shapes. Both Woolf and Ahmed's accounts emphasize the unique educational, administrative, and cultural forms interactions between the British and their subjects took in each context.

The Past in the Present: Situating the Memoir

The life accounts in this chapter depict nostalgia's movement between the past and the present both thematically and structurally. Leila Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, and Leonard Woolf all write about events from decades-long removes. For each author, the present is a politically charged moment. Ahmed and the Woolfs have to account for the present in some way, whether through a peripheral awareness of ongoing histories or a more direct consideration of the present's relation to the past. Less fixed time frames force each writer to describe more carefully the activity of memory and what it produces. Nostalgia is a particular form of affective memory they must confront.

In *A Border Passage* and *Growing*, the two texts edited and published while their authors were still alive, the present appears most emphatically through what Gerard Genette refers to as "paratextual" materials. These materials—prefaces, afterwards, notes, front matter, and dedications, to name a few—initially make a book a book by framing texts for their audiences. Genette adds to paratexts' functional purpose an additional property; while the text remains "immutable . . . incapable of adapting to changes in its public in space and over time," its paratextual materials are "more flexible, more versatile, always transitory because transitive" (408). Woolf and Ahmed use "transitory" paratexts in their accounts to adapt the narratives in the face of new realities and to heighten the sense of lost pasts.

In Leonard Woolf's case, the autobiography's present appears in the preface, where he describes his return to Ceylon in 1960, fifty years after his last departure in 1911. At that time, the Ceylon government gave him a copy of his administrative diaries,

and the diary content was also collected and published. In his forward to *Growing*, Woolf says “I could not have remembered accurately in detail fifty per cent of the events recorded in the following pages if I had not been able to read the letters which I wrote to Lytton Strachey and the official diaries which I had to write daily from 1908 to 1911 when I was Assistant Government Agent in the Hambantota District” (9). Woolf credits the return itself with enabling the autobiography. He also highlights his dependence on archival materials, a feature unique to his text among these three projects, perhaps because he defines the work as an autobiography rather than a memoir. In autobiography, Woolf claims, the writer should “give, as far as one can, in the most simple, clear, and truthful way, a picture, first of one’s own personality and of the people whom one has known, and secondly of the society and age in which one lived” (148). Dependence on an archive reinforces his definition, although even in autobiography Woolf makes decisions about how to narrate and explore the past.

Archival materials are one option of the many elements Woolf could have used to frame his autobiography. Eighty-one years old at the time of *Growing*’s publication, Woolf also had recourse to a long career of political writing and activism. Instead, he abstained from referencing his later work, preferring to adhere to his younger perspective. His choice allows him to describe unapologetically the feelings he remembers from that era. Woolf does not qualify his experience of Empire with his later social activism. The autobiography also mentions only cursorily the Ceylon’s current political status; the country achieved full independence from Great Britain in 1948, and the period around Woolf’s return was marked by increased Sinhalese nationalist fervor, anti-Tamil riots, and

the assassination of Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike in 1959.⁷ These events situate Ceylon within a global moment of decolonization, independence, and nationalist movements that includes the Egyptian revolution and Pan-Arab movement of Ahmed's teenage years.⁸

In her memoir, Ahmed engages the political present of Leonard Woolf's autobiography as her past. Like Woolf, she also emphasizes her temporal distance from the moment she describes. The first edition of Ahmed's memoir features an epilogue describing, in 1999, a recent return to the Cairo she left in the 1960's. Ahmed also wrote a new afterword to accompany the memoir's second edition in 2011. The second edition afterword reflects her later nostalgia for the 1990's and an awareness that the world described in the 1999 text has changed irrevocably. She herself has moved from The University of Massachusetts Amherst to Harvard; the home in which she wrote is "a place I look back to now with tremendous fondness" (309). Globally, the text must transition from "the more tranquil times of the 1990s" to contend with the aftereffects of September 11th, an event that made discussion of Arab-American identity and Islam more prominent (309). Further, Ahmed can only speculate as to Egypt's future following yet another revolution in 2011. The revolutionaries in Tahrir Square opposed the military and political dictates enacted by Nasser, Anwar Sadat and later Hosni Mubarak; Ahmed

⁷ The country's name changed to the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. Woolf's awareness of Ceylon's political developments appears more prominently in his preface to his published diaries, released in 1962 as a volume of the *Ceylon Historical Journal*. In his preface, Woolf briefly summarizes his work in the Hambantota region before turning to the changes he noticed during his 1960 return: "The tempo of government and of life is quite different, it is more lively and vigorous in 1960 than it was in 1911, and that is mainly due to self-government" (lxxix).

⁸ The post-World War II period also saw independence from British rule for India, Jordan, and Ireland, while the 1960's unleashed a slew of decolonization efforts that included Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, and Uganda, among others.

allows herself a measure of hopefulness about the new direction the country could take now that one period of Egypt's history has nominally concluded.

Ahmed's afterword elegantly undoes the work of memoir, reminding readers that the story she has narrated on the previous pages is neither complete nor fixed in time. The afterword reminds readers of history's ongoingness.⁹ Already, the revolution of 2011 has seen Mohamed Morsi's removal from the presidency in 2013 through military intervention and former Armed Forces chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi replacing him, events Ahmed could not have anticipated in her 2011 afterword; nor can she reference the Islamic State (IS). The present Ahmed captures in her afterword has already become the past, yet another place and time to which both she and her readers cannot return. The value of her text, then, is not as a record of a particular moment but rather as a model of how longing and desire function to navigate changing politics in the past and to come.

Virginia Woolf contextualizes her memoir writing in the immediate present even more rigorously than Ahmed and Leonard Woolf. Each entry in "A Sketch of the Past" is dated, usually with a brief opening that clues the reader into where Woolf is and what occurs around her. Woolf understands this opening as a useful strategy:

I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time. But I cannot work this out; it had better be left to chance, as I write by fits and starts by

⁹ I borrow the term "ongoingness" from Sarah Manguso's 2015 *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary*, a meta-narration of Manguso's twenty-five-year journaling practice.

way of a holiday from Roger. I have no energy at the moment to spend upon the horrid labour that it needs to make an orderly and expressed work of art; where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole. Perhaps one day, relieved from making works of art, I will try to compose this. (75)

Woolf sees her blend of the past and present as benefitting both her writing process and the project's theme. Allowing herself to "write by fits and starts" and planning to "compose" later, she jumps from topic to topic and moment to moment as they appear in her memory.¹⁰ She contrasts this approach with the demands of order and structure imposed on her by the Roger Fry biography, calling these sketches a "holiday."¹¹ Woolf's method in "A Sketch of the Past" contrasts what she sees as the dominant impulses in memoir and biographical writing toward craftsmanship and not literature. The life writer is extensively detailed and informative, filling his or her project with the major events of a figure's life in chronological order.¹² Woolf resists the evidence-based, chronological approach, preferring instead scene-making that allows the external and the internal, the past and present, to co-exist.

¹⁰ Despite Woolf's intention to "compose" these notes at a later date, they were left unfinished at the time of her death (and in fact she asked her husband to burn them, along with her other papers). The published copy we have today is a composite of handwritten manuscripts and typescripts currently in the British Library and University of Sussex holdings. See Jeanne Schulkind's editor's note to "A Sketch of the Past" in *Moments of Being: A Collection of Autobiographical Writings* for more information.

¹¹ *Roger Fry: A Biography* was published by Hogarth Press in 1940. Fry, a painter and critic, was a member of the Bloomsbury Group and founder of the Omega workshops. Writing his biography proved a challenging task for Woolf, whose frequently describes her "head screwed up over Roger" in her diaries of the period (*A Writer's Diary* 290).

¹² For more on Woolf and life writing, see "De Quincey's Autobiography," "The Art of Biography," and "A Talk about Memoirs." In the latter, Woolf sarcastically records a conversation between two young women praising memoirs as "great swollen books" that consume only a bit of their attention, allowing them to read and perform other activities at the same time (181). The characters describe Woolf's friend Lytton Strachey as "behaving disrespectfully to the great English art of biography," when it is clear Woolf prefers his willingness to engage figures' contradictions and hypocrisies. Nevertheless, Woolf calls even Strachey a "craftsman, and not an artist" in "The Art of Biography" (196).

Woolf's description of the past as "platform" also flips the traditional image of the past as the foundation on which the present and future build. By contrast, Woolf's past emerges out of the foundation of her present. By holding the text accountable to its present time, Woolf aims to see the present's impact on her memory processes. Woolf does not describe the past as preferable to the present, but she locates a feeling of contentment in this practice: "In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present" (98). Woolf also undoes the work of memoir, defining it not as a backward-looking activity but as a means of existing consciously in the present.

Woolf's articulation of the relationship between memoir and the present is striking because "living most fully" from 1939 to 1941 also meant living with the daily reality of a second world war and the threat of German invasion, a possibility that produced intense anxiety for Woolf and her community. The contextual components of "A Sketch of the Past" are ominous; she describes German planes passing over Monk's House in Sussex or says in describing a wet day that, "We think of weather now as it affects invasion, as it affects raids, not as weather that we like or dislike privately" (126). As Woolf's thoughts tend toward the past, she is always mindful of the present state of the world. One also watches the dates of the memoir, starting with April of 1939, creep closer to March 28th, 1941, the date of Woolf's suicide. In this environment of intense anxiety and fear, Woolf's assertion that the practice of remembering is not about escapism contrasts readerly expectations that a return to the past might help the writer ignore the dangers of the present.

In Virginia Woolf's writing, the present is inseparable from her narration of the past, nor, despite the apprehension associated with the present, does she wish to separate them. Though each writer balances references to the past and present differently in these accounts, in no case does the author write about the past in order to reject or leave behind the present. These three projects help their authors explore the ongoing, constantly changing relationships between the two time periods. Ahmed and the Woolfs' expressions of nostalgia perform a different role than that of simply desiring to regain an illusory past.

The Now of Nostalgia: Reparation, Reflection, and Ambivalence

In expressing ambivalent nostalgia, authors adapt the genre of life writing and suggest possibilities for alternative reading practices. My definition of ambivalent nostalgia and its effects is informed by Svetlana Boym's seminal work on the origins and critical possibilities of nostalgia, although I complicate her distinctions between nostalgic types. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym calls the word "nostalgically Greek"; it unites the Greek roots *nostos* (homecoming) and *algia* (longing) to describe a contemporary condition (3). In other words, nostalgia's etymology is a longing for home or specifically a longing for homecoming.¹³ Boym traces the term to the seventeenth century, as Swiss soldiers stationed away from home became ill while separated from the Alps. Doctors

¹³ The *nostos* or homecoming is a powerful thing indeed, appearing prominently in Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus spends ten years after the Trojan War desperate for his return to Ithaca, where his wife and son await him. *The Odyssey* is filled with cautionary tales of men who die before reaching home—the gods "take away their homecoming"—or of men who return home without proper preparation. While the epic narrative concludes in Ithaca, Odysseus's travels are far from over; he shares with Penelope that he's fated to make yet another long, arduous journey in order to appease Poseidon. This sense of the impermanence of the homecoming is what writers like Alfred, Lord Tennyson take up as he rewrites the myth. His "Ulysses" is unable to remain in one place following his travels, delegating Ithaca's management to Telemachus before embarking on another journey. Even in the *nostos* Ur-text, homecoming becomes increasingly unstable and fixed return impossible.

treated nostalgia as a medical condition and prescribed returns home to the mountains to “cure” the afflicted.

The impossibility of return characterizes modern nostalgia, which appears in vintage shops and themed diners, in souvenir collections and photo albums. Nostalgia, we assume, paints a rosy picture of the past; we miss “the good old days” and reminisce about a time when “things were simpler.” Nostalgic refrains like “back in my day” are parodied and dismissed as unreliable narrations of a past that was more complicated than the speaker lets on. Nostalgics supposedly ignore the present and fear the future, too committed to a past they will not see again.

Boym notes that nostalgia among immigrant communities from her native Soviet Union became either a taboo or a fetish object—Soviet migrants either rejected or surrendered to nostalgia’s web of selective remembering and forgetting. Politically, immigrant populations fracture along lines carved by nostalgia; to express longing or to deny it corresponds with support for or opposition to regimes in the home country. In the Palestinian context, poet Mahmoud Darwish notes that longing is dangerous because it conflates longed for objects. The nostalgic must be clear with himself about what he misses, a process that takes on the weight of moral obligation: “It’s our duty to know what we long for. Is it for the homeland? For our picture outside the homeland? Or for the picture of our longing for the homeland to be seen inside the homeland?” (81). Darwish shows that longing for a place morphs into longing for who we were in that place or for an image of ourselves we wish others to see. Layers of desire build upon one loss.

Returning to a childhood home in Cairo, Darwish recognizes that, “I’m searching for a

boy here, not for a homeland” (89). His distinction articulates the difficulties in accepting one’s longing when its object is filtered through additional events.

Boym argues that layered experiences provide nostalgia with its creative potential; the emotion has the power to build new communities through its “superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present” (xiv). Boym’s claims about nostalgia are in conversation with Amir Eshel, who describes in *Futurity* historical narration’s creative and future-oriented potential: “The creative act of writing and re-writing historical narratives . . . can also enhance our social sensibilities, expand our political and ethical past” (x). Eshel suggests that a narrative return to the past should not aim to make sense of that past; instead, the return produces new vocabularies for navigating the future. Similarly, Boym’s nostalgics envision the past as they wish it had been and thus explore possibilities for a future that may be. Careful not to paint nostalgia as the complete opponent of nationalism or public memory, Boym suggests instead that nostalgia allows for a dynamic interaction between the memories of the individual and those of the community. Her methodology allows critics to expand the class of objects for which nostalgia could long. One could experience, for example, nostalgia for unpleasant memories or for moments of pain and loss, as becomes true in *A Border Passage*, *Growing*, and “A Sketch of the Past.”

Boym separates nostalgia into two categories. Reparative nostalgia prioritizes the *nostos*, or the return. The practitioner desires above all a repair to the former state of existence; Boym says that reparative nostalgics “believe their project is about truth . . . [and] two main narrative plots—the restoration of origins and the conspiracy

theory” (41-3). Boym equates conspiracy and truth-seeking because both practices believe something about the past can be uncovered or revealed. The reparative nostalgic’s longing is directed toward a singular, firmly defined but still illusory object.¹⁴ In reflective nostalgia, however, the *algia* or longing itself takes center stage. The practitioner lives not in a fictionalized version of his or her past but rather within the act of longing itself. She focuses on the affect instead of the object. Boym writes, “reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts” (251). Reflective nostalgia follows Rebecca Solnit’s description of desire in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005):

We treat desire as a problem to be solved, address what desire is for and focus on that something and how to acquire it rather than on the nature and the sensation of desire, though often it is the distance between us and the object of desire that fills the space in between with the blue of longing. I wonder sometimes whether with a slight adjustment of perspective it could be cherished as a sensation on its own terms, since it is as inherent to the human condition as blue is to distance? If you can look across the distance without wanting to close it up, if you can own your longing in the same way that you own the beauty of that blue that can never be possessed? (30)

In “look[ing] across the distance without wanting to close it up,” Solnit separates the object of the desire from the experience of desire itself. Existing within the feeling of longing allows us to appreciate the distance as such, not as an obstacle that must be overcome in order to achieve a particular object at the other end. Acknowledging that the past will not return, the reflective nostalgic can approach what she has lost with irony and

¹⁴ Confusingly and unfortunately for my critical framework, reparative *nostalgia* is in fact the polar opposite of Eve Sedgwick’s reparative *reading*. Sedgwick’s version of the reparative, in its emphasis on the unexpected, the playful, and the open, affiliates itself with Boym’s reflective nostalgia. Boym’s description of reparative nostalgia does echo quite strongly Sedgwick’s paranoid reading, which also focuses on the anticipatory, the need to uncover, and a version of truth.

playfulness.¹⁵ The nostalgic play inscribed in reflective texts, as Ahmed and the Woolfs' life writings demonstrate, opposes reparative, linear, and ideologically focused historical narration.

Ambivalent nostalgia departs from Boym's two nostalgic categories, the reflective and the reparative. Boym herself calls these two approaches "tendencies" rather than "absolute types," and ambivalence allows for a writer to fluctuate between reparation and reflection (41). A memoirist engaged in reflective nostalgia—the playful emphasis on longing rather than object—might still understand reparative nostalgia as a powerful force and be tempted by the seductive image of a warm homecoming or return to the past. Awake to the strong emotions attached to return, the reflective memoirist nevertheless sees the fictiveness of the desired object and the impossibility of return. This interplay between desire and resistance, discomfort and pleasure leads to ambivalent narration.

Ahmed makes use of nostalgic play and ambivalent narration in her memoir's first section. She recalls her childhood at Ain Shams, her family's residence just outside of Cairo, as a time of melody; natural sounds, the bustle of daily activity in the neighborhood, and singer Umm Kulthum on the radio all scored the events of her youth. In particular, Ahmed describes the tunes regularly played by a reed piper outside her window:

When he passed, it would feel as if something of infinite sweetness had momentarily graced one's life and then faded irretrievably away. Years later I'd discover that in Sufi poetry this music of the reed is the quintessential music of loss and I'd feel, learning this, that I'd always known it to be so. In the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, the classic master-poet of Sufism, the song of the reed is the

¹⁵ For Boym, Nabokov is the quintessential reflective nostalgic.

metaphor for our human condition, haunted as we so often are by a vague sense of longing and of nostalgia, but nostalgia for we know not quite what. (4-5)

As with many memoirists, Ahmed references nostalgia for her past. Uniquely, however, she inscribes this nostalgia into the early narrative as a sensation her younger self felt *before* she left the moment and the place Ahmed now recalls. The passage evokes nostalgia's potential to be felt within a present moment and, even more strangely, to be felt without a clear object of desire—the “vague” nostalgia for “we know not quite what.” Because Ahmed's nostalgia resists attaching itself to a particular object, emerging instead through the “something” and the “we know not quite what,” the feeling moves through the text unrestrained, flexible, creative. The passage's lyrical qualities would seem to paint Ahmed's childhood home as idyllic, enchanted, “a world alive with the music of being.” The melancholy that tinges the passage, however, suggests that this enchanted space was always lost and impossible to obtain. Ahmed describes nostalgia not as an obstacle encountered by homesick travelers or reminiscent writers but as a form of longing that actively calls into question the subject's distance from the places or moments she desires. As a result, her evocations of nostalgia demand not a reparation to the lost place but a willingness to reflect on distance, desire, discomfort, and loss.

Like Ahmed's, Virginia Woolf's earliest memories focus on the childhood bedroom, this time in St. Ives, a beach community in Cornwall and the site of the Stephen family's summer home. Her first memory, the “base that [life] stands upon,” also involves sound and rhythm and a seemingly enchanted existence:

It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two. . . of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. I could spend hours trying to write that as it should be written, in order to give the feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me. (64)

Woolf's text resonates with Ahmed's in her attempt to give voice to powerful childhood feeling, a feeling that corresponds with nostalgia or ecstasy or euphoria but resists limitation. This passage invokes a sense of nostalgia in Woolf's inability to name the feeling both in the past and now.

Woolf associates the simplicity of this memory with a typical feeling that develops during childhood:

I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy . . . Perhaps this is characteristic of all childhood memories; perhaps it accounts for their strength. Later we add to feelings much that makes them more complex; and therefore less strong; or if not less strong, less isolated, less complete. (67)

This childlike sense of containing feeling seems once again to subscribe to what Boym calls reflective nostalgia's playfulness. To equate simplicity and completeness as Woolf does is to value the feeling in and of itself rather than, in "more complex", "adult" fashion, its context or relation to an object. In allowing childhood sensations to avoid objects and to permeate chronological timelines, both Woolf and Ahmed expand the creative and ambivalent elements of reflective nostalgia.

Boym argues that reflective nostalgia impacts the individual's sense of identity: "Instead of a recreation of the lost home, reflective nostalgia can foster a creative self" (354). Reflective nostalgia moves readers, writers, and critics away from the logic of "post-" or "anti-" movements to think instead of the slightly off, the "sideways" (13). The creative self invests in what Boym terms the "off-modern," the playful, the ironic,

the critical. Boym notes importantly, however, that these “affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection” (50). In other words, the reflective nostalgic writes her narrative through the lens of literary experimentation while still mindful of the ethical implications of her work.

I expand Boym’s description of the creative and reflective nostalgic to argue that nostalgia can inform reading as well as writing practices. Just as the reflective writer depends on playfulness and irony, the reflective reader constructs a personal literary canon that accommodates “sideways” reading across canons and histories. Ahmed’s description of her childhood, for example, emphasizes reading as a method for engaging nostalgia and proposing a cross-cultural educational model that prioritizes affective reading. When Ahmed discovers Rumi’s description of loss in reed music, she realizes “I’d always known it to be so” (5). In this instance, education and reading confirm Ahmed’s feelings. The cross-cultural reader constructs an affective network of literature across regional boundaries—Rumi is, after all, Persian—rather than restricting reading to a hierarchical, regional canon. Ahmed performs affective cross-cultural reading in her

memoir by citing the breadth of literary traditions, educational systems, and friends with whom she shares cultural affinities in addition to her Islamic and Arab heritages.¹⁶

Ahmed's focus on reading throughout her memoir categorizes her as a reflectively nostalgic reader. Her reading sensibility comes from her academic background and her intense affective connections to literature. While Leila accesses some texts through educational institutions, Ahmed draws attention to moments when personal literary attachments put her at odds with teachers, thereby undermining reading as a purely academic endeavor.¹⁷ Ahmed recalls a strange protective impulse when discussing *A Room of One's Own* with a new Cambridge instructor, who has learned from Leila's sister that she just finished the book:

For some reason I found Miss Bradbrook's knowing it deeply embarrassing, feeling that my sister had given away something about me that was very private. What was it about loving that book of Woolf's that I felt it was so important to be secretive about? Its feminism, when feminism had not yet become a living idea

¹⁶ Generally, scholars write about Ahmed's memoir in relation to other Arab-American memoirs or writing by other Muslim women; see in particular Wail S. Hassan's "Arab-American Writing and the Reinvention of Identity: Two Egyptian Negotiations" and Pauline Homsy Vinson's "Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies." Ahmed's own scholarship encourages this reading; the first women studies' professor at Harvard Divinity School, Ahmed published *Women and Gender in Islam* in 1992. The monumental project traces the development of women's roles in the religion across centuries of history. The book follows the rise and expansion of Islam, demonstrating that the religion came into contact with pre-existing social frameworks. Ahmed also conducts her own comparative work in *Women and Gender in Islam*, drawing analogies between Virginia Woolf and Mai Ziyada, the Lebanese-Palestinian writer who ran a literary salon in Cairo, exchanged extensive correspondence with Gibran Khalil Gibran, and, like Woolf, committed suicide in 1941 following a long struggle with depression. Ahmed writes, "Mental breakdown and suicide naturally have many causes. Among them doubtless are the punishing social and psychological effects visited by society on women who—breaking the bounds of femininity—become writers and thinkers and take their stand against the reigning dogmas of the culture, including a male dominance that trails in its wake emotional, psychological, and material brutality to women and children as religiously sanctioned law and accepted social practice and demands that such abuses be covered up in the name of loyalty to the culture" (188).

¹⁷ Both memoir and autobiography present challenges in distinguishing the writer from his or her younger self, the protagonist of the text. In an effort to do so more clearly, I will refer to the writer by last name (Woolf or Ahmed) and the protagonist by first (Leonard, Virginia, and Leila).

again? Certainly I wasn't consciously a feminist in those days. I think it must have been something to do with that that made me both love the book—whereas I thought then that what I liked about it was the way she wrote—and feel that I had to be secretive about it. (180)

While Leila's sister shares her reading thinking it will be an impressive measure of the work the student might accomplish at Cambridge, Ahmed rejects this mode of progressive intellectual development in favor of an affective networking that is "very private." Leila responds strongly to the text even without knowing where her feeling comes from. The privacy and secretiveness she associates with this response corresponds with the personal nature of a reading practice that locates affinities between diverse but sympathetic texts and readers. Conversely, Ahmed recalls reading Egyptian writers whose sentiments feel more distant from her. Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairene Trilogy*, three novels that also trace Cairene family life during British occupation into the revolution, feels to her "both familiar and profoundly alien. For it is a portrait of that same world—but through the eyes and ethos of its men" (101).

Though gender provides one framework through which Ahmed assesses connectivity, she also pays attention to a variety of affective resonances. In reading Thomas Hardy, she notices, "the way Hardy wrote of nature, the earth, the trees, as if they were living beings, gave voice to a sense I'd had of them growing up, a rather lonely child in a house encircled by a garden whose variety of folding trees had given me nurturance, companionship, and solace" (14). Although the house is in Cairo and the child Egyptian, Ahmed's childhood memories of nature correspond with the tone she

hears in Hardy's descriptions of the British countryside.¹⁸ Without conflating the two places, she identifies a shared sentiment.

Ahmed extends her connective reading still further as she draws brief analogies between disparate literary traditions. She remembers, for example, "longing for wings to fly away":

Perhaps such searching is just another version of our human restlessness.
"Through winter-time we call on spring," writes Yeats, "And through the spring
on summer call . . . Nor know that what disturbs our blood / Is but its longing for
the tomb." Or, as the poet Rumi puts it: *I'm like a bird from another continent,
sitting in this aviary. / The day is coming when I fly off.* (154-5)

By juxtaposing the twentieth-century Irish poet and the Persian, Sufi mystic poet of the thirteenth, Ahmed suggests that a particular kind of longing resonates across time and geography. In both citations, the longing's object, as in Ahmed's memoir itself, is unclear. Yeats suggests that we think we desire a change in seasons when in reality our longing is for death or ending, while Rumi's speaker never reveals a destination—will the "bird" fly back to its continent or somewhere new?

Even as Leila locates affective connections in literature, she approaches another kind of reading carefully. Discussing her exposure to critical theory, she expresses unease about approaches like Marxism that seemed to her to reduce life's complexities. She describes becoming fluent in criticism as "having, first to learn the facts and realities of other people's lives, the lives of those in whose history and experience the current

¹⁸ Though Ahmed does not reference Hardy texts by name, his *Poems of 1912-1913* also seem to be a useful interlocutor for this memoir. As Ahmed elegizes the complex history of her youth, Hardy elegizes his estranged wife, Emma, in what Jahan Ramazani considers one of the earlier collections of secular elegies. These poems emphasize the difficulty and necessity of mourning someone with whom we had an ambivalent relationship. For more, see Ramazani's *The Poetry of Mourning* (1994).

academic theories were ground, and . . . second to master theories that explained their experience but that needed considerable refining and transforming to have meaning for my own life” (211). Unlike the novels and poetry that lend themselves to transformation in her reading, theory for Ahmed was too steeped in its own specificities.

Given Ahmed’s wary interaction with criticism, we might consider *A Border Passage* as proposing an alternative model of theorization. While theory purports to be universal even as it is always rooted in the subjectivities of those who write it—typically white European men during Ahmed’s education—memoir openly takes the unique context of the author’s life as its starting point. The genre begins with the assumption that the writer’s perspective is biased and then seeks from that place to draw connections. Memoir is an adaptive form, narrating historical development, texts, and interactions through the perspective of a single individual. Memoir is a well positioned genre for inscribing nostalgia’s ambivalent longing. According to Carolyn Steedman, “Personal interpretations of past time—the stories that people tell themselves in order to explain how they got to the place they currently inhabit—are often in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretive devices of a culture” (6). Steedman explains how memoirists offer “personal interpretation”—and Steedman is herself writing memoir—that challenges “interpretive devices” like historical narrative, political rhetoric and even critical theory frameworks. Writers provide their own interpretations that open space for these “ambiguous conflicts.”

The memoir form is useful for the reflectively nostalgic reader because it allows her to read and respond through comparative dissonance. A reader might recognize the

affects, rhythms, and desires presented in a memoir without finding them identical to her own situation. A memoir designed for less than easy consumption or equivalence emphasizes again deferral, distance, and a longing that cannot be completed. The text is not an object one can reach and possess, but instead a space through which the reader moves for a short time. Ahmed describes this space in a conversation with her mother:

She seemed to be speaking from that space where one is who one is in oneself, that space where one is not, for that moment, daughter, mother, or wife but only a consciousness traversing life . . . It is a space perhaps that one enters in reading or that reading somehow opens up, for she had again been reading when I came in.
(75)

Just as reading allows Ahmed to connect British, Persian, and Arabic traditions, books temporarily remove the reader's external identity. In reading, Ahmed's mother becomes "a consciousness traversing life" who can communicate with her daughter with unusual directness. Direct communication occurs because books invite readers into connection with one another, not because one has reached the end of a book or attained a certain level of knowledge. Through reading, we begin to recognize the conditions of our longing in others even if the things they desire are different.

The comparatively dissonant readings in this chapter—engagements with texts that share affective qualities even while rooted in different histories—depend on acknowledging the ambivalence in each writer's longing. Memoir accommodates extensive exploration of these ambivalences, as Ahmed and Virginia Woolf return to their complicated families of origin, and as Ahmed and Leonard Woolf address the guilt and uncertainty attached to their imperial encounters.

Ambivalent Genealogies: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Domestic

Ambivalence appears directly in “A Sketch of the Past.” In the memoir, Woolf describes family life through vignettes set in their various homes. Woolf calls her childhood “a complete model of Victorian society,” and she paints a scathing picture of her father’s damaging impositions and her mother’s deferral to him (147). At the same time, her feelings do not always correspond with that image: “in me, though not in [Vanessa Bell, Woolf’s older sister], rage alternated with love. It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence” (108). Though Woolf has a complicated relationship to Freudian psychoanalysis and I approach her references to his theories carefully, the naming of her “violent” feelings seems to allow that love and hate to co-exist and inform each other.¹⁹

While Julia Stephen’s early death “made her unreal” to her young daughter, the very real figure of Leslie Stephen both terrorizes and attracts Virginia (95). She describes him as “The exacting, the violent, the histrionic, the demonstrative, the self-centred, the self pitying, the deaf, the appealing, the alternately loved and hated father” (116). She also recognizes her father’s gravitational pull, which is bound up for her in the intellectual pursuits he shares with the cerebral child:

Yes, certainly I felt his presence; and had many a shock of acute pleasure when he fixed his very small, very blue eyes upon me and somehow made me feel that we

¹⁹ Julia Briggs says, “Both Joyce and Woolf resisted reading Freud—or claimed they did, but the influence of his ideas remained inescapable” (*Canvas*). This influence was especially powerful for Woolf, whose compatriots in Bloomsbury, James and Alix Strachey in particular, were early readers and practitioners of Freud’s work. Woolf and Freud did meet for the first time on January 29th, 1939, after which Woolf records her readings of him in her diary. The assertion that she is “reading him for the first time” in 1939 may, in fact, be true, though hard to believe (Briggs).

two were in league together . . . How proud, priggishly, I was, if he gave his little amused surprised snort, when he found me reading some book that no child of my age could understand. (111)

Virginia feels connected to her father in a way the older writer still cannot quite explain, relying on the vague “somehow” to describe the interaction. Her memories of her father are tied to personal feelings of pride and pleasure bordering on the snobbish and are, most importantly, filtered through both individuals’ love of and facility with reading. As Virginia develops the reading processes that will remain a permanent part of her life, her father’s influence and encouragement is palpable.

Virginia’s youth and interest in books exempt her from many demanding household responsibilities. Her distance from her father’s domestic expectations, however, does not lessen the young girl’s feelings of fury and powerlessness. When Vanessa, in charge of the household after her mother and half-sister’s deaths, shares the house accounts with her father each week, he lambastes her for her poor management and lack of pity before conversing casually with Virginia: “I was speechless. Never have I felt such rage and such frustration. For not a word of what I felt—that unbounded contempt for him and of pity for Nessa—could be expressed” (144). Woolf describes her father’s presence as stifling, unjust, and even abusive. He demands time, attention, and sympathy from his daughters.

As Woolf maps out these ambivalences, even attempting to understand and explain Stephen’s violent behavior through his anxieties about his failed work, she refrains from drawing an ultimate conclusion about her father. Instead, her description of him gives rise to other stories about St. Ives or her brother Thoby. The fluid structure that

she allows her memoir draft resists any urge to analyze or to reach an ending, as she acknowledges anytime she complicates her father's picture: "And thus as I dribble on, purposely letting my mind flow, I am introducing a picturesque element into the steel engraving; something that one cannot analyse." (111)

Woolf's construction of these scenes and her willingness to allow her ambivalence to remain contrast the style she sees when she returns to her father's work. Reading him from time to time as a writer in her own right, she describes how his "strong mind" reflected the unambivalent world in which he lived:

[He] shows a very simply constructed view of the world; and the world was, I suppose, more simple then. It was a black and white world compared with ours; . . . I admire (laughingly) that Leslie Stephen; and sometimes lately have envied him. Yet he is not a writer for whom I have a natural taste. (115)

Reading Stephen's writing produces ambivalence in his daughter. Not feeling a "natural" affinity for his style and reading him "laughingly," Woolf nevertheless "admire[s]" and "envie[s]" her father. In her reading of the Victorian writer, the realities of 1940 creep back in, and Woolf expresses a brief envy of those who found "obvious things to be destroyed." At the same time, her move away from her father's style marks her as a doggedly ambivalent writer and thinker, someone who prefers to chart the less obvious even as she mourns this illusory, simple past.

Of course, some of the inconclusiveness in Woolf's portrayal of her father could be attributed to the unfinished nature of "A Sketch of the Past." In the preserved manuscripts, Woolf suggests that she may return to these disparate entries: "Perhaps if I should revise and rewrite as I intend, I will make the question more exact; and worry out

something by way of answer” (142). “A Sketch of the Past” is not a polished document, then, but in its draft state it demonstrates the way a writer might begin exploring the implications of her past. Nor does it stand to reason that revisions would erase the complexities of this account; while Woolf suggests rewriting would involve the inclusion of “something by way of answer,” but her chief interest lies in “mak[ing] the question more exact”—that is, clearly defining the grounds on which her explorations begin.

Ambivalence is not only the purview of first drafts. Although *A Border Passage* is a fully realized and revised project, Leila Ahmed describes her parents in a similarly ambivalent way. Like Leslie and Julia Stephen, Ahmed’s two radically different parents reflect ingrained social and political structures. Ahmed’s father, the English speaking, ecologically committed scientist, encourages his children to study and travel, while her affluent, Arabic and French speaking mother loves Um Kalthoum and embarrasses her anglicized daughter. Leila worships her father and avoids her mother’s interests, although Ahmed looks back on this division with regret: “The fact that Mother loved Arabic music and sang in Arabic, and even the fact that we nearly always spoke to her in Arabic, undoubtedly marked her, too, in some way silently, silently in my child’s mind, as inferior . . . It is probably for this reason that I do not now remember any, not a single one, of the songs my mother sang” (24-5). Ahmed has to explore deep rooted evaluations from her “child’s mind” in order to unpack the her relation to her parents and her mother specifically. She notes that her distaste for Arabic language and culture prevented her from returning to her mother’s singing, a memory lost through a more complicated mechanism than merely the passage of time.

Ahmed's divisions between her parents and her preference for her father's English education and language ultimately loses her both parents' memories. Over the course of her memoir, she describes her parents' efforts to record their own lives. Ahmed's father jots his memoirs on yellow legal paper from his sickbed. This document, however, becomes one of the only texts Ahmed is unable to read. The memoirs "are almost indecipherable to me, for I do not have the easy mastery of the cursive Arabic script that my father had." (23). Ahmed notes with irony that her father's emphasis on his children's English language education precluded them from reading his memoirs. Even as reading provides cross-cultural affinities, educational and linguistic practices can either enable or prevent these affinities.

In another instance a teenage Leila refuses to help her mother transcribe her memories:

How would I have known then that those who bring into their lives and into the shaping of the consciousness of others their own deepest thoughts and feelings and moral imagination, create out of their own lives texts, oral, evanescent texts that are every bit as rich and sustaining as the most celebrated written texts? I did not know, I did not know, I did not know. What wouldn't I give now for the gift of my mother's passing on to me, in her own voice, her own and her people's story. And so of course I wasn't at all taken with her idea. Rather, anxious to distance my own desires from hers, I thought to myself that what she dreamed of doing, writing a memoir, telling the story of her life, was not at all what I wanted to do. (74-5).

Regret and penitence overwhelm this passage; Ahmed's repeated and rhythmic "I did not know" attempts to atone for her earlier ignorance. She also engages in intense self-reflexivity. In the process of writing her memoir, she recalls a moment when she found the practice unnecessary, connecting it to the mother she did not want to emulate. She

recognizes now that the “interesting” thing “about writing the story of your life” is “bring[ing] into their lives and into the shaping of the consciousness of others their own deepest thoughts and feelings and moral imagination.” Though her decision not to help her mother write is irreversible, Ahmed moves closer to her mother by engaging in the practice herself and by rehearsing their earlier debate.

As Ahmed uses the genre she once disparaged to explore imperialism’s impact on her life, she realizes that the divide she built between her parents is no longer useful; it does not accommodate each parent’s complex relationship to history. In particular, she must reconsider her understanding of the father who once appeared a paragon of Western intellectualism:

It was excruciatingly hard to find myself having to conclude that my father, whom I had admired for his integrity, clarity of vision, and open-mindedness, had after all, and in spite of himself, had a colonized consciousness, cherishing things European and undervaluing the very heritage that had shaped him. Now I no longer struggle with this. I have been through many revolutions in my understanding of my father, my mother, and my own consciousness—understanding them now this way, now that, convinced at one moment that they are this and at another they are that. For the truth is, I think that we are always plural. Not either this *or* that, but this *and* that. And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousness a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through us. (25)

While Ahmed once understood her parents as polar opposites—the father progressive and intellectual, the mother backwards and traditional, or the father a colonized consciousness and the mother a paragon of local culture and identity—she learns that no one definition encapsulates the people her parents were. Rather than making it harder for her to remember, this emphasis on multiplicity opens up Ahmed’s memory: “Once I had arrived at this point I began to be able to reflect on, and for the first time to see, events in the past

with clarity and even to remember things that I had forgotten” (26). Her decision not to evaluate, categorize, or designate leads to an organic connection to her memories. She recalls details that did not contribute to past narratives.

While Ahmed and Woolf are both able to describe their parents more fully thanks to temporal distance, their recent understandings do not erase the impact of old feelings. Nor does the present “fix” either woman’s relationship to those feelings, in either the sense of repairing or making permanent. Ahmed describes the “ghost of an old thought that I once harbored intensely and angrily as an adolescent” that reappears when she thinks of her mother’s non-professional existence (24). Woolf refers to the “old frustrated fury” and the “old grievance” that return when she and Vanessa talk about house accounts or when she thinks of St. Ives (108, 133). The potency of these old feelings lingers beyond both women’s constantly changing perspectives on their parents’ legacies.

Explorations of domestic pasts help both Ahmed and Woolf articulate and frame their experiences of ambivalent longing; descriptions of their parents evoke pleasure, terror, pride, regret, and uncertainty. In their writing, these changing feelings are never teleological and neither woman reaches a final verdict on any parent’s legacy. These family narratives are also tied to broader historical developments. The ambivalences articulated in domestic narratives carry into life writing’s political discussions.

Nostalgia and ambivalence in imperial life writing

Virginia Woolf references similar feelings of ambivalence when describing both her father and her relationship to broader “society.” While feeling excluded from her half-brother’s unquestioning patriotism because of her economic status and femininity, Woolf

notes that, “[Society] impresses even the outsider by the sweep of its current. Sometimes when I hear God Save the King I too feel a current belief but almost directly I consider my own splits asunder and one side of me criticises the other” (153). Woolf describes the unexpected rise of patriotic feeling when confronted by national trappings designed to inspire fervor, even though the feeling quickly gives way to criticism. The anthem provides a fantasy of belonging even to a writer committed to questioning structures of belonging.

The ambivalent “current belief” that Woolf experiences above appears frequently in Ahmed’s *A Border Passage* and Leonard Woolf’s *Growing*. Both writers know that they engage a tumultuous history marked by imperial politics. Describing these histories, they express feelings of loss and nostalgia even as they also acknowledge the guilt these feelings produce. In these accounts, imperialism creates distance between the writer and past spaces. That distance, whether through travel or the imposition of changing political structures, encourages life writing accounts to focus on ambivalent nostalgia—longing for an unclear object with diverse accompanying feelings.

Leonard Woolf’s interaction with the British Empire is marked by his extreme separation from home. Woolf’s removal from London and Cambridge informs the contained nature of this text; while Ahmed’s memoir includes multiple decades of her life, Woolf focuses on just his administrative life. One in a series of five autobiographical volumes Woolf completed before his death in 1969, *Growing* focuses, as its subtitle

informs readers, on “the Years 1904 to 1911.”²⁰ Its narration begins at the moment Leonard leaves England for Ceylon and concludes with his resignation from the civil service. While other volumes in the autobiography are more likely to embark on tangents that move the reader twenty years in the future,²¹ this volume’s narrative remains in Ceylon. It digresses briefly and by only a few years to describe reunions with colleagues as they rise and fall through the civil service. The only volume that does not take place in England, *Growing* introduces Leonard and his readers to a new setting, cast of characters, and plot which are not easily integrated to the central players and places of his early life and later years in London.²² Arriving in Ceylon, he feels his old life becoming less real: “As I walked out of the Secretariat into the Colombo sun . . . the whole of my past life in London and Cambridge seemed suddenly to have vanished, to have faded away into unreality” (23). Woolf emphasizes the period’s distance from his past and future, although his work in Ceylon will inform his later career and social interactions: “If one lives where one was born and bred, the continuity of one’s existence gives it and oneself and one’s environment, which of course includes human beings, a subdued, flat, accepted reality. But if, as I did, one suddenly uproots oneself into a strange land and a strange life,

²⁰ The other four volumes are *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904* (1960); *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918* (1964); *Downhill all the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (1967); and *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939-1969* (1969).

²¹ As in *Beginning Again*, when Woolf’s discussion of his various Sussex homes leads to a long interlude on the houses’ histories that forces him to “ignore chronology for a moment” (62).

²² Woolf describes the return to his Cambridge social circle as more or less erasing the years of his absence, although he notices a slight difference: “I was received by them all as one of themselves and slipped without much difficulty into the kind of place which I had occupied in 1904 when I sailed for Ceylon. And yet perhaps not entirely the same, for I think the seven years in Ceylon left a mark upon my mind and even character which has proved indelible, a kind of reserve or withdrawal into myself which makes me inclined always to stand just a little to one side of my environment” (246-7).

one feels as if one were acting in a play or living in a dream” (21). Woolf credits the unreality of imperialism to a separation from home and to the isolation of this particular moment in his life.

Unlike *Growing*, much of Ahmed’s memoir takes place in her Cairo home; however, even this domestic space is not “continuous.” As with Woolf, imperialism changes Ahmed’s landscapes. Her memoir stretches the parameters of travel narrative accounts like Woolf’s, considering the way space transforms under an individual’s feet even without a physical journey. While *A Border Passage*’s subtitle, “From Cairo to America—A Woman’s Journey,” suggests travel across wide distances, and Leila later travels to Cambridge, Abu Dhabi, and Massachusetts, the text emphasizes the extreme changes that occur in local geography as a result of politics and urban development. At the beginning of her memoir, she describes her childhood home, Ain Shams, as edenic in nature, far enough outside Cairo that her father can create a beautiful, rambling garden. As Cairo continues to expand, the city swallows the rural paradise until it demolishes Ahmed’s former home and the garden. In addition to the home’s urban transformation, the multiple overlays of imperial intervention and revolution, and political appropriations of what is Cairene, what is Egyptian, and what is Arab unsettle the world around Leila. Even before she departs on a physical voyage, she is uncertain as to what past or place she should desire to return. Ahmed claims that Nasser asked Egyptians to identify as Arab for the first time, a difficult identity to assume for a cosmopolitan Cairene teenager educated on Hardy. She argues that assigning one name to Egyptian identity ignores all the names the place has accumulated:

Egyptians, for instance, might, with equal accuracy, define themselves as African, Nilotic, Mediterranean, Islamic, or Coptic. Or as all, or any combination of, the above. Or, of course, as Egyptian: pertaining to the land of Egypt. Pertaining to the land of Egypt. Pertaining—to use the indigenous ancient Egyptian word for this land—to Kemi. ‘Mizraim,’ as it is called in the Bible. ‘Musur’ to the Assyrians. ‘Aigyptos’ (from Hikuptah, one of the names of Memphis), as the Greeks called it, when Egypt became a province of their Hellenic Empire. ‘Aegyptus’ to the Romans, when we became part of their empire. ‘Misr’ to the Arabs, when they, too, conquered Egypt. ‘Masr,’ as we Egyptians call it. ‘Masr,’ as we call our capital too. ‘Cairo’ to English speakers, ‘al-Qahira’ to Arabs. A city founded, in fact, by the Arabs a little over a thousand years ago, soon after they conquered the country. (11)

Ahmed catalogues in exhaustive detail the place names created by different religious, linguistic, and regional traditions. Even her selected words—Egypt and Cairo—are subject to multiple translations, inheritances, and constructions. Through these etymologies, Ahmed contemplates the implications of selecting one term for a place and people over another. She also reminds readers that the Arabs also were “conquerers” of Egypt; they do not hold the original claim to the land and Egypt’s identity. In this long list, Ahmed does not evaluate the histories she references. The Roman, Arab, Greek, and Egyptian versions are all particular moments in time, just as the British occupation of the country defines the twentieth century. This newest imperial encounter remains part of Egypt’s narrative.

Ahmed sees Nasser’s revolution and later pan-Arab movement as attempts to reclaim Egypt’s narrative from its imperial history. The newer political structures transform the country once again. In detailing the constructed nature of the term “Arab,” Ahmed notes its appearance in colonial discourse and its later resignification under independent governments. Geographical language saturates Ahmed’s analysis, connoting

identity as a terrain outsiders can invade and transform. Europeans selected “Arab” to refer to all those in the region, regardless of religion or ethnicity; Ahmed explains that the word “comes, in European tongues, internally loaded in the negative. Such words carry within them entire landscapes, entire histories” (266). Nasser’s encounter with the word “Arab” emerged out of European interventions: “He, as I discovered to my surprise, fully grasped that he was Arab only a few years before I got slapped for not knowing that I was Arab. For Nasser seems to have understood that he was Arab precisely by intently studying the marks and runes the imperialists had made upon the landscape” (269). To be Arab is not to be separated from the space in which one lives. Rather, Nasser’s version of Arab identity reinterpreted imperialist “marks and runes” that have changed Egypt forever. The issue is not that Nasser advanced an Arab identity; it is that this identity erased the other terminology Ahmed outlines above.

As location and identity become less stable in Ahmed’s account, desire and nostalgia provide a useful vocabulary for registering that complexity. The political changes Ahmed experiences from within Cairo call into question the mechanics of longing—how can one desire a space in which one still lives, to which there can be no return? In addition, for much of the memoir’s beginning, Leila’s longing is for England, where she has completed undergraduate work and hopes to return, not Cairo. The Egyptian government refuses her a visa because of her father’s outspoken ecological arguments against Nasser’s Aswan Dam. Leila’s father provokes Nasser’s government by publishing papers abroad that predict water loss and illness after construction, and they retaliate by withholding visas. Trapped within the country, Leila visits her now ailing

father daily: “I thought of . . . his heroic attempt to avert catastrophe and preserve for future generations the riches that Egyptians had enjoyed, and depended on, for their lives and their civilization since the beginning of time. And I thought about England and of how I longed to return there and take up my own life” (20). In appreciating her father’s commitment to the Nile’s health and Egypt’s future generations, Ahmed still distances herself from that commitment. Her “own life” takes place in England and she will not be part of the “future generations” her father serves. Leila’s later nostalgia for Egypt is colored by the difficulties she faces in trying to leave it. Life away from home means Leila is absent for the deaths of her parents and unable to continue the family’s residence in Ain Shams. It also means she can embark on an independent academic career. Her losses and liberties comprise the same ambivalent nostalgic narrative.

Ahmed and Woolf’s descriptions of nostalgia incorporate ambivalence in both nostalgia’s object and its feeling. Object-oriented ambivalence occurs when longing fluctuates among different places and times and never quite settles on one particular desired object. Woolf also longs for a not easily defined past. While appearing to miss elements of his tenure in Ceylon, he becomes especially nostalgic about the paternal and feudal societies that existed before his arrival in the country under imperial auspices. His preference suggests that, for him, imperialism’s problems have to do with its reliance on the impersonal, the mechanized, the imposing. Feudalism retains a similar hierarchical structure. However, in Woolf’s romanticized version of the system, the people at the top of that structure are familiar and familiarized, understanding the traditions and needs of the people below. It operates— at least superficially—as a family rather than as a

business. Observing a feudal community in Kandy, Woolf highlights the “harmony” and “satisfaction” apparent in daily interactions:

I do not think that anyone who has got close to a feudal society like this one in Urugala and all the other Kandyan villages, who to some extent has lived within it and has observed it passionately, sympathetically, and at the same time critically, can truthfully deny that on the surface it has socially a satisfying depth, harmony, beauty. . . I felt that there was some depth of happiness rather than pleasure, of satisfaction, which is a good thing and which the western world is losing or has lost. (158)

Woolf describes this feudal society through the prism of nostalgia. The social structures and unity he believes characterize Kandy no longer exist in the “western world,” and so his description is tinged with a desire to return to those structures.

Even as Woolf approves of feudal governance, he remains clear-sighted about its disappearance. Toward the end of the autobiography, as Leonard debates continuing his career in Ceylon, he decides he would most prefer to govern a remote province, removed from the empire’s infrastructure in larger cities and subscribing instead to a paternal society: “At the back of my mind I think I knew that this last solution was fantasy. The days of paternalism under a Dyke or Twynam²³ were over; I had been born in an age of imperialism and I disapproved of imperialism and felt sure that its days were already numbered” (247). Woolf assesses clearly for the reader the enticements and fantasies civil administration held for him. He also demonstrates his awareness of those fantasies—in this case, that imperial governance should ever resemble paternalism. However, his assessment needs to move one step further. This vision of friendly paternal governance is

²³ P.A. Dyke, the “Rajah of the North, for he ruled his province as a paternal despot,” who spent forty years administering the Jaffna province in Ceylon, and Sir William Twynam, who lived in Ceylon for fifty years (104).

not merely a fantasy because it cannot coexist with imperialism; it is a fantasy because such a mode of government never really existed in the first place.

Through his own imperial activities, Woolf attempts to maintain much of that fantasized paternal sensibility, although he says his increasing anti-imperialism provoked ambivalence:

I certainly, all through my time in Ceylon, enjoyed my position and the flattery of being the great man and the father of the people. That was why, as time went on, I became more and more ambivalent, politically schizophrenic, an anti-imperialist who enjoyed the fleshpots of imperialism, loved the subject peoples and their way of life, and knew from the inside how evil the system was beneath the surface for ordinary men and women. (158-9)

In this passage, Leonard's ambivalence develops precisely through his earlier strength of feeling; observing his enjoyment of imperialism's benefits leads him into "political schizophrenia." Woolf faces difficulties reconciling his concerns about the political structure with his interest in the people he encounters through that same system. His imperialist critique raises its own ambiguities, seeming to target a particular governance structure instead of the underlying relations between people in that structure.

Because Leonard's transition from unsettled administrator to staunch anti-imperialist takes place gradually during his tenure in Ceylon, the volume describes feelings of doubt, discomfort, and guilt. Ambivalence about the object of longing corresponds to ambivalent feeling: "For a long time," Woolf writes, "I was uneasily ambivalent, exaggerating . . . my imperialist, stern Sahib attitude to compensate for or soothe a kind of social conscience which began to condemn and dislike the whole system" (157). Woolf describes one potential response to ambivalence; a push back

against the feeling that results in “exaggeration,” and renewed vehemence is the response of someone who would rather not feel that uncomfortable shift in consciousness. And yet by detailing the extent of imperial performance, Woolf narrates his “stern Sahib attitude” as one step in his coming to consciousness. That Woolf describes his imperial participation so clearly is one of the merits of a troubling account; his self-described ruthlessness and fanaticism are an essential part of his narrative.

Likewise, Ahmed’s memoir describes a teenager’s ambivalent coming to consciousness as she contends with various circulating historical narratives. Ambivalence about place and the past keeps her from narrating in a linear, cause-and-effect fashion. Ahmed frames her memoir as the practice of sifting through and understanding memories, not just collecting them into story form. By analyzing her memories, she observes the gaps and the pressure she has placed on certain memories as sites of singular change. The memoir’s focus on a newly conscious Arab identity developed as she reminisced: “It was only when my own discordant memories failed to make sense that I was compelled to look more carefully into the history of our Arab identity” (10). As Ahmed writes from America, the trajectory of her memories dictates the memoir. Writing contextualizes her memories, mapping them alongside a history of upheaval. The need to contextualize occurs when she describes her frequent run-ins with her formal Arabic teacher:

I have always thought that those moments between me and Miss Nabih were in large part responsible for the feelings of confusion, anger, and guilt that I’ve felt all my life in connection with the issues of Arabness, identity, the Arabic language, and the like. In reality, though, these incidents were the only tangible

things I could fasten onto in the enormous turbulence and upheaval we were then living through. (148)

In recollecting this period of Arabic's introduction to the classroom, and of high tensions surrounding Palestinian displacement, Ahmed's memories centered the turmoil in one easy to narrate interaction: An Arabic teacher doesn't like her student because she finds the teenager too Anglicized, not sympathetic enough to Palestinians. Once she uses physical force, thus producing in the student guilt and difficulty connecting to an Arab identity. The story told in this fashion follows a tidy cause and effect structure, but as Ahmed points out above, the story also obscures the myriad of abstract influences that impacted her during the same time.

Similarly, Woolf connects his uncertainty about imperial participation to a few events, but the feeling emerges more specifically through the same abstract influences that inform Ahmed's narrative. The comparison between the two writers, however, breaks down in moments where Woolf attempts to distance himself from fantasies and sentiment. Concerned about appearing sentimental, Woolf asserts his pragmatism even when adopting sentimental language. When describing the residents of Jaffna and Hambantota, he begins with "I do not think that I sentimentalize or romanticize them":

It is not their primitiveness that really appeals to me. It is partly their earthiness, their strange mixture of torturousness and directness, of cunning and stupidity, of cruelty and kindness. They live so close to the jungle that they retain something of the liveness and beauty of jungle animals . . . When you get to know them, you find beneath the surface in almost everyone a profound melancholy and fatalism which I find beautiful and sympathetic—just as something like it permeates the scenery and characters of a Hardy novel. (54)

Without a clear alternative definition of “romanticizing,” the description in this passage adheres to romantic narration. Using animalistic, affective, and literary language to explain the people he encounters, Woolf draws from a variety of sentimental and primitivist tropes. His description contributes to imperial legacies not only through its troubling content but through a denial of sentiment that lends the passage the weight of fact. The description is an unsettling one in any context, but acknowledging it as sentiment would recognize its subjectivity.

Ahmed becomes an essential interlocutor for Woolf’s text because she allows readers to understand sentiment as a useful political category that forces writers to confront their own acculturated affinities. Sentiment and ambivalence also push back against the clear-eyed, pragmatic narratives that demand identification of concrete events, heroes, and villains. Persuasive narrative and ideological clarity appears in most media and political outlets. During the Suez Crisis of 1956, the teenage Leila is inundated with BBC reports, talk at school, Nasser’s speeches, and her parents’ commentary. Initially, she rides “the exhilaration of feeling that here we were, a small nation unjustly and immorally beleaguered by two of the world’s mightiest powers and greatest bullies, heroically fighting on to the support and applause, as we learned from the radio, of the entire world” (169). This language is superlative and unqualified; it echoes the David and Goliath narrative and leaves no doubt as to what all Egyptians’ feelings should be. Yet Leila’s personal response did not match Egyptian political narratives: “My sense of having been betrayed was deeply personal. I was hurt the way one is when one has trusted and been betrayed by a friend” (170). While she outwardly denounces the British,

the “betrayal” Leila feels suggests more complex attachments. She credits her initial feelings about Nasser’s response to her parents’ distrust of his rhetoric: “It was well known at home that, if something or other went wrong in the country . . . Nasser would immediately deliver one of his long diatribes blaming everything on ‘the imperialists,’ ‘the feudalists,’ ‘the Zionists,’ ‘the forces of regression’” (171). Ahmed recalls her mother, whose family fell under Nasser’s ‘feudalist’ category, cursing at the television.

Ahmed attributes her ultimate ambivalence about Nasser’s rhetoric not to solidarity with her mother but rather to her early education in the British school system and, most importantly, a passion for British literature. Given this background, she sees imperialism not just as a political system to be overthrown but as a mode of cultural engagement and exchange, albeit one tied to dynamics of power and control. In this way, she echoes and challenges Fanon’s description of the colonized intellectual in “On National Culture.” Fanon writes that the intellectual trained in Western literature and culture is pressured by independence to distance herself quickly from that education (156). For Fanon, an artificial construction of a national culture reflects “a burning, desperate return to anything” following independence (155). As individuals and governments seek a return to a cultural and self-governed past, they express a “glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national, and singularly racialized” (154). Ahmed sees “racialized,” “continental” culture and politics developing under Nasser’s Pan-Arab policies, which construct affinities among the Arab region and marginalize Ahmed’s Jewish and Coptic Egyptian friends.

Ahmed's description of her continued reading practices resists simplifying the "contradictions which risk becoming insurmountable" as a Western educated, newly independent Egyptian (Fanon 155). Her cultural affinities do not redeem British occupation, but they do contest what she calls a "cardboard caricature" of this moment in Egyptian history:

I knew 'the enemy'—the imperialists—all too intimately. I was at home in English books, English ideas, Jane Austen, Dickens, Winnie the Pooh, George Eliot, Adam Bede. There was no way that I could reduce what I knew to some cardboard caricature called imperialism and come to hate and reject everything English, as the rhetoric around us enjoined us to do. Besides, even with what we had just lived through, what had been reinforced for me—in a way that of course I would not have known how to say then—was how multilayered and complicated everything was and how even the evil imperialist British were not all just one thing or another. (171-172)

Placing the "enemy" in quotation marks, Ahmed critiques the antagonistic narrative that a Pan-Arab national consciousness seeks to solidify. She juxtaposes "the rhetoric around us" with her education in British literature, where she feels "at home." A "cardboard caricature" would label everything she encounters "just one thing or another." Ahmed refuses to become a national intellectual who ignores her previous education and makes an artificial return to an earlier cultural tradition. Instead, she maintains contradictions, painful as they may be.²⁴

²⁴ In her 1990 memoir, *Beirut Fragments*, Jean Said Makdisi references similar feelings about British imperialism, Egyptian independence, and reverberations of these conflicts. Ahmed's former classmate writes that her position was especially complicated given her family's Protestant religious background: "Rejection of Western imperialism is coming to mean rejection of the West and everything in it, including Christianity; it means the acceptance of a purely Islamic past. How, if you are not a Muslim? How, even if you are and want to embrace not the past but the future? How, if you refuse the idea of Christianity as exclusively a Western imperial phenomenon?" (141)

Ahmed uses her memoir to understand that imperialism not only appeared in her consciousness but produced that consciousness irreversibly. She does not seek a rejection of any past or a return to a different one. She illustrates the complicated relationship between political independence and cultural connection or investment. The text also voices ideas her younger self could not articulate. Describing the multilayered history above “in a way that of course I would not have known how to say then,” Ahmed allows her younger impressions and her older vocabulary to coexist. She sees the rationale for nationalism while still holding on to her personal connections to British culture. Her introspection corresponds to Woolf’s efforts to narrate his shifting position within an imperial framework. Ahmed’s sophisticated use of ambivalent nostalgia pushes her readers to recognize longing in other imperial and colonial accounts. Understanding longing’s complex affinities, we can address that affect as part of a political narrative, rather than a counterintuitive sentiment.

Conclusion: The ambivalent memoir

In both familial and imperial contexts, life writers focus on ambivalent nostalgia to express longing for the past while also articulating feelings of regret, guilt, and anger. Feeling nostalgia without being confined to a narrow or evaluative definition—a feeling that fantasizes about the past and is overly attached—the writer explores the broad range of emotions that accompanied complex political and domestic experiences.

Stylistically, life writing’s subjectivity encourages experimental chronologies and narratives that accommodate layers of feeling and discovery. The genre attracts thinkers like Ahmed and the Woolfs because it offers a range of narration styles and strategies for

engaging complex histories. If empire interrupts the history of a place, introducing new actors, power structures, conflicts, and culture, memory and subsequent narrations of memory must find ways to address that change. Both Leonard Woolf and Ahmed claim through their narration that empire cannot be erased from memory—or national narrative—just because it was an oppressive system. An individual's decision to retain or reject elements of the past while adjusting to a postcolonial moment reflects broader debates about a community's return to precolonial history or its continued incorporation of colonial educational, economic, and cultural apparatuses. Similarly, life writing draws connections between political developments and family history. As Ahmed and Virginia Woolf demonstrate, the domestic is always bound up in the sociopolitical.

All life writing accounts suggest some connection between the past and present. The writer publishes, of course, because something about the present—perhaps a particular event or the writer's current political office—makes his or her memories interesting to an audience. Many memoirs and autobiographies, however, exist to give order to the past, to explain it in such a way that makes clear how the author reached the present moment. By contrast, *A Border Passage*, *Growing*, and "A Sketch of the Past," practice self-reflection rather than justification. The authors' most intense affective moments retain an element of instability or inexplicability that does not lend itself to straightforward narration. Instead of clarifying these feelings, the authors write through the conflicting emotions of the past and their unpredictable appearances in the present.

Advancing ambivalent nostalgia through their work, the writers begin to exist in a network of texts and to recognize those relationships. I have demonstrated two such

relationships by reading these life accounts “contrapuntally” and by describing Ahmed’s attempts to engage her parents’ memoirs. This textual network extends beyond familiar written life accounts to incorporate the narratives of strangers. In a return to Cairo in the early 1990’s, described in *A Border Passage*’s epilogue, Ahmed attempts to make amends for not recording her mother’s memories. During her visit, she interviews Cairene women of different ages, professions, and economic statuses. She writes that she began the project “almost accidentally, and certainly without having originally planned it”:

I’d brought a video camera with me to Cairo, intending to interview my aunts and the mothers of friends so as to record how life had been for that older generation. But once I began interviewing people I found myself completely riveted by the process: by the unexpectedly intimate atmosphere that comes into being as people reflect on their lives in response to the questions of a stranger, and, even more, by the revelations of the profoundly different Cairo lives I was learning of. (303)

Ahmed originally intended the interviews to capture the past, to “record” the things she did not write down of her mother’s life—a return of sorts. What she ultimately finds more compelling is an opening up, a realization of the multiplicities within one city, and a deferred sense of closure. Her longing gives rise to a project that expands community.

In the next chapter, I explore community formation in the context of inhabitants’ ambivalent memories of lost previous homes. I continue my emphasis on ambivalent narration of place and the past and on affective networks of texts and memories.

However, I transition from life writing to city walking novels that imagine immigrants navigating new urban spaces alongside other residents. In these novels, city communities form not by erasing ambivalence, longing, or difference but by incorporating them into communal narratives.

Chapter Two

“They attach themselves to places”: Woolf, al-Tahawy, and re-memembering the body

In Chapter One, I used life writing accounts from Leila Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, and Leonard Woolf to demonstrate the way critically suspect forms of memory—nostalgia, in this case—assist those writers in their chronologically creative and ambivalent narrations of history. The chapter illustrated how Ahmed and Woolf use their memoirs to define memory and explore its mercurial properties. I argued that memory and affect allow each writer to contest hegemonic political rhetoric. I moved from Ahmed and Virginia Woolf’s navigation of their home and family lives to British imperialism in Ceylon and Egypt as described by Ahmed and Leonard Woolf. Through these readings, I claimed that in both domestic and political contexts the authors narrate their ambivalent personal feelings to challenge linear and ideologically clear versions of history.

Chapter Two retains a focus on intersections between the personal and the political. Memory and affect continue to comprise the personal, while political frameworks include imperialism and immigration policies. In this chapter, I turn from memoir projects to city-walking novels. The two novels I compare—Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Miral al-Tahawy’s *Brooklyn Heights* (2010)—supplement my readings in Chapter One by promoting the body as an essential mediator between memory and place. Whereas the texts of Chapter One demonstrated an interest in the rhythms of places, times, and desires, these novels are intensely material. They describe walkers who observe the changes in the spaces around them as well as developments in their own bodies. Characters who rely on their bodies to move through a city experience

embodied memory, another means of asserting personal experience and ambivalence in the face of dominant narratives. In embodied memory, physical action generates both remembrance of the past and the feelings that accompany memory. Embodied memory as it appears in these novels is more active practice than passive musing; it develops creative analogies and moves fluidly between the present moment and stories of the past. It demonstrates both physical and emotional attachments. Embodied memory incorporates the affective and the physical. Nostalgics, for example, frequently use somatic language to describe their experiences. Nostalgia is an “ache” or “pang;” it can be felt in the chest or the back of the throat. The materiality of longing expands in this chapter to include the felt experience of the outside. Body and space produce memory in relationship with each other, linking the individual’s mental and physical life as well as her interior and exterior experiences of the world.

My focus on the physical as constitutive of memory and feeling is in keeping with Rebecca Solnit’s analysis of scholarship on the body. Though she acknowledges that critics, particularly feminist critics, have introduced essential scholarship on diverse bodies, she notes a failing:

While dismantling this false universal by emphasizing the role of the ethnic and gendered body in consciousness, these thinkers have apparently generalized what it means to be corporeal and human from their own specific experience—or inexperience—as bodies that, apparently, lead a largely passive existence in highly insulated circumstances . . . The very term ‘the body’ so often used by postmodernists seems to speak of a passive object, and that body appears most often laid out upon the examining table or in bed. A medical and sexual phenomenon, it is a site of sensations, processes, and desires rather than a source of action and production. (*Wanderlust* 28)

Solnit notes theorists' tendency to interpret the body as a receptive object and to focus on the body's "sensations, processes, and desires." I pinpoint moments of desire, sentimentality, and other feelings about the past in these readings, but I do so with Solnit's description of the body as "action and production" in mind. I resist a passive reading of the body, even when that body is upper class or temporarily free of aches and pains. I describe walking as a mechanical activity as well as a way of learning and producing space.

All bodies participate in generating memory but I detail the gendered and class-based specificities of each body that appears in this chapter, as is necessary when examining two novels that follow female walkers in the city. Through my readings of *Brooklyn Heights* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, I expand the work of spatial theorists like Michel de Certeau by encouraging readers to contend with non-neutral bodies—that is, bodies weighed down by work, exhaustion, children, traffic, and interactions with unfamiliar spaces. I draw connections between walking bodies without erasing the social, cultural, geographic, and economic differences that separate them. Clarissa Dalloway, for example, is a wealthy, middle-aged British woman living in London after World War I. During her walk, she encounters childhood friends and well-known places. Hend, the protagonist of *Brooklyn Heights*, is a recent arrival to Brooklyn from Egypt; the single mother of a young son, she works at a Dunkin' Donuts and strolls her new neighborhood to escape her small apartment and to learn more about the diverse people and businesses around her. As with Leila Ahmed, Leonard Woolf, and Virginia Woolf in the previous chapter, I acknowledge the discrepancies in these individuals' situations while arguing

that reading their narratives together allows me to theorize intersections between memory, place, and the body that resonate across texts.

While Woolf and al-Tahawy wrote their novels almost a century apart and in different languages and locations, they both participate in a literary tradition of experimental city-walking novels. *Mrs. Dalloway*, published a few years after James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), seems connected to the unsettling experience of having read Joyce's experimental novel.¹ Written after 1922's *Jacob's Room*, and considered Woolf's first foray into formal experimentation before the genre-defying *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928) and *The Waves* (1931), *Mrs. Dalloway* constitutes an exploration in narrating time. Woolf understood the novel to have a new relationship to the past, which she explained in a diary entry on October 15th, 1923: "It took me a year's groping to discover what I call my tunnelling [sic] process, by which I tell the past by installments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far. . . But lor' love me! I've not re-read my great discovery, and it may be nothing important whatsoever" (66). In the entry, Woolf rather facetiously uses the language of discovery and invention, although

¹ In her reading notes on *Ulysses*, which later became part of the essay "Modern Fiction," Woolf acknowledges "the undoubted occasional beauty of his phrases. It is an attempt to get thinking into literature—hence the jumble." Her major concern seems to be that Joyce's experimentation negates humanist possibilities for the novel; reading *Ulysses* convinces her of "the necessity of magnanimity and generosity. Trying to see as much of other people as possible, and not oneself—almost a school for character." I am grateful to The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf for permission to cite this material.

the idea of a “tunnelling process” suggests that Woolf challenged herself to describe how the past might appear in a present narrative.²

Brooklyn Heights borrows from the same city-walking tradition with significant departures. Unlike Woolf’s Clarissa, al-Tahawy’s protagonist Hend is not a native resident of the city or even country in which she walks. Her memories travel thousands of miles to Egypt. al-Tahawy alludes to an increasing sub-genre within Arab women’s literature: semi-autobiographical immigration narratives. Like her protagonist, al-Tahawy moved to the United States from rural Egypt after a divorce. She settled first in Brooklyn Heights with her young son before moving to Arizona to accept a teaching post at Arizona State University.³ Her novel resonates with other cross-cultural Arabic or Arab Anglophone texts like Jordanian Fadia Faqir’s *My Name is Salma* (2007), Sudanese Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* (1999) and Egyptian Somaya Ramadan’s *Leaves of Narcissus* (*Awraq al-Narjis*, 2001). Often written in English for an English speaking audience or translated through several regional literary prizes, these novels allow non-Arab readers to learn about the cultures from which their authors come and offer a closer look at the

² In Woolf’s own work and life, walking became a belief system in its own right. In a later essay, “Notes of a day’s walk” (c. 1934), Woolf’s speaker considers young men praying in a church, musing upon their religious conviction: “But although various kinds and degrees of belief are possible, for the greater part of the day we believe nothing except that there is a pavement under our feet and that by lifting one foot after another we shall find ourselves in Holborn” (612-3). An avid walker herself, Woolf writes frequently of long walks along the Sussex Downs near Monk’s House, the Woolfs’ country home in Rodmell. Marie Bartholomew, the daughter of the Woolfs’ gardener and a current tour guide at Monk’s House, recalls watching Woolf walking through the Downs, lips moving as she thought through her work: “The rhythm of her walking helped with the rhythm of her sentences” (Personal Interview). For Woolf, the particular movement and rhythms of walking enabled a different kind of thinking process.

³ See *The New York Times*’ in-depth profile on al-Tahawy, “Making the Life of a Modern Nomad Into Literature,” by Abdalla Hassan.

challenges of immigrating to English-speaking countries.⁴ Al-Tahawy writes in Arabic even though her primary setting is in the United States, and her novel pushes the boundaries of what might be considered an Arabic, Global Arab, or Arab-American novel at a moment when scholars are seeking to reconfigure each of those terms.⁵ While *Brooklyn Heights* circulates in similar markets as the other novels, it offers a unique aesthetic approach to narrating immigration and cross-cultural interaction. The novel's narration moves, seemingly unbound, from past to present and from Hend's perspective to the experience of other characters. Its stylistic experiments align the novel with *Mrs. Dalloway* as both writers seek methods for inscribing overlapping places and histories within the pages of a single text.

Through their novels' formal innovations and social critiques, Woolf and al-Tahawy explore the ways in which female city walkers, in Peter Walsh's words, "attach themselves to places" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 55). Like the traditional conceptions of nostalgia in Chapter One, attachment also connotes sentimentality, a way of experiencing the past that many characters in both novels seek to avoid. Characters assume that the sentimental person or the nostalgic will remain stuck in past memories, unable to move forward or engage the present. Most importantly, male characters like Peter Walsh and Richard

⁴ *My Name is Salma* and *The Translator* were both written in English; *Brooklyn Heights* and *Leaves of Narcissus*, on the other hand were written in Arabic and translated as part of the prize package for the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, administered by the American University of Cairo every year.

⁵ As with the inaugural inclusion of the Global Arab and Arab American forum (GAAM) at the 2015 Modern Language Association meeting, where participants debated the shift in terminology from "Arabic" literature to "Arab" literature (i.e. literature that might not be composed in the Arabic language but that comes from a writer of Arab descent no matter where he or she lives). Carol Fadda-Conrey's 2014 *Contemporary Arab-American Literature* traces some of these developments, but her definition of Arab-American literature does not consider the multiple languages in which an Arab-American might write.

Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* associate sentimentality with a gendered experience of place and the past. The connections they draw between sentimentality and femininity suggests that women are more likely to be stuck in the past in a way that produces anxiety among male characters.

While sentimentality and attachment are often negatively charged in characters' descriptions, I demonstrate that both texts chart empathetic avenues for community formation precisely through a willingness to be attached. Attachment is a useful category for this chapter because it, like embodied memory, exists in physical and psychic dimensions. Attachment describes the material connection between two objects—a file and an email, a number to a runner's jersey, a child to its mother's body. At the same time, to *feel* attached suggests affection, care, awareness, and commitment; attachment does not tear easily. As the writers develop interplays between body and mind in both novels, attachment's meanings also multiply. Both Hend and Clarissa experience attachment to and, in some instances, detachment from their pasts, bodies, and the people and places around them. Instances saturated in memory, and recognitions of shared or similar memory, enable attachment. Conversely, social conditioning, external management of the body, and political structures like colonialism manipulate memory as well as physical, psychic, and emotional attachments. As each writer constructs her protagonist's walking maps of the city, sentiment and attachment emerge as essential components of memory, empathy, and community building.

Because sentiment and attachment substitute emotional intimacy for objective measurements of distance, anyone narrating feelings of desire and longing cannot

maintain a concrete binary between the nearby present and the far away past. By focusing on attachment in this chapter, I avoid a clear delineation between Clarissa's comfortable existence in a familiar city and Hend's immigrant experience of a strange, new location. In both novels, shifting memories, habits, consciousness, and feelings transform all spaces into amalgams of familiarity and strangeness. I highlight the dynamic interplay between the foreign and the domestic to track the protagonists' fluctuating experience of current homes. As walkers and readers recognize both the shared and divergent elements of their experiences, they encounter opportunities to feel attached. As I will discuss in the sections below, the affinities that al-Tahawy and Woolf draw in the novels counter the theorization of cities and spatial practice proposed by writers like Benjamin, de Certeau, and Bakhtin.

The interplay between the foreign and familiar that I identify asserts that walking through city space opens even familiar streets to new encounters and, vice versa, recognizes the familiar in new locations. Because both novels depart from their protagonists to describe other city dwellers' interactions with space, they defamiliarize the city and open the urban up to multiple experiences based on differences in class, gender, nativity, and ethnicity. On the individual level, both Hend and Clarissa experience alternating moments of intimate connections to their bodies' movement as well as extreme physical dissociation. A reader attuned to the protagonists' relationships to their bodies and memories will notice that interactions among bodies, city spaces, and history are never fixed, comfortable, or predictable.

As walking in these novels generates memory and constructs history, the physical activity counteracts external management of bodies. Each novel's formal qualities contribute to its author's political engagements with concurrent immigration policies and colonial histories, practices that move and manage large numbers of bodies across borders. Although immigration connotes a neutral relationship between body and space, this chapter emphasizes migration as still connected to colonial governance frameworks. I identify migration that supports colonial projects as well as movement made possible through colonial histories. As with Ahmed and the Woolfs in Chapter One, I argue for comparative readings of authors on opposite sides of colonial frameworks not in spite of the violent power structures that shape colonial legacies, but rather through and because of them. Walking in these novels, with its ability to defamiliarize old spaces and to recognize the familiar in the new, avoids the clear distinctions between immigrant and native, colonizer and colonized, that political frameworks seek to draw. In these novels, every walker is an adventurer, an explorer, a resident, and a homemaker.

Muscle Memory

Mrs. Dalloway and *Brooklyn Heights* use remembering and walking to situate characters within a broader urban community. At the same time, each walker experiences an intimate connection to her own body through walking and memory. Links between the cerebral and the corporeal, the affective and the physical, force each protagonist to recognize the possibilities and limits of her body as it moves through space and recalls the past. Each text focuses on its characters' walking habits in initial chapters to establish how their navigations of memory and space will inform one another.

Remembering is inherently physical; the reverse of “dismember,” it connotes the putting back together of disconnected limbs. In an older construction of the word “remember,” the verb functions reflexively. “Now I remember me,” says Shakespeare’s Falstaff (II.iv.410-1). The fat knight is both subject and object of an action that reconstitutes him, that literally re-members him, bringing his memories and body back together and allowing the “me” to exist. Remembering attaches separate pieces to one another, providing new avenues of connection and bringing subjects into being. When we re-member, we are not just surgeons repairing the body to its original form. Instead, we become inventors suturing, matching, and jigsawing something new together. For *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights*, the verb “remember” has both transitive and reflexive properties; to remember past spaces is also to re-member oneself. Clarissa and Hend reconstruct themselves through memory. By asserting remembering’s ability to impact the present and future, they undermine other characters’ assumptions about women as sentimental or easily “attached” individuals whose memories keep them stuck in the past. In actuality, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights* dismember, re-member, and construct the geographies their characters encounter. They suture together unfamiliar places, people, and traditions. As Clarissa and Hend move through old and new spaces, remembering place allows each walker to re-member herself, as well.

Re-membering in the body—or embodied memory—is different from the body’s habit, although the two are connected. If muscle memory is the body’s habitual action, the practices that a body solidifies over time, re-membering returns the body to consciousness and renews physical awareness of movements, pains, and possibilities. In

the readings below, habitual action often gives way to memory. The unconscious process of walking or brushing one's hair intimately connects the actor to similar moments in the past. When these habits come to the forefront again, they force a re-evaluation of the pasts that solidified them. As both *Hend* and *Clarissa* walk through their respective novels, their thought processes engage their bodies. Each novel uses the protagonists' bodies as channels for merging the past and present.

Mrs. Dalloway's opening lines demonstrate the interplay between what the body recalls and what the mind does. As *Clarissa* leaves her house for morning errands, she experiences a euphoria that connects her to an earlier summer:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen . . . She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durnall's van to pass. (3-4)

Clarissa's initial movement into the London streets takes her back to her girlhood in the country home that defines her as much as the city does. She "plunged at Bourton" just as she now dives into Westminster's bustle. Her much older body echoes the earlier action in such a way that she can access the sensory details of squeaky hinges and fresh air across decades. *Clarissa's* physical presence commands the passage. Her recollections halt when she "stiffened a little on the kerb;" a pause in movement also pauses memory.

Clarissa's memory activates most when she moves. Walking in particular generates reflection, but even a simple action connects her to the past. As Clarissa recalls Sally Seton's time at Bourton, she remembers exalting, "she is beneath this roof!":

The words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins, laid them on the dressing-table, began to do her hair). (34)

The echoed hair styling allows Clarissa to access "the old feeling" in a way that language or mere narration cannot. Only by beginning the same physical action does Clarissa develop something more than a shade of memory; she begins to experience the same affects. Walking, hair brushing, or even sewing are fluid activities that evince rhythmic motion. A stop in motion does not produce Clarissa's powerful feelings about the past; instead, her memory emerges through the practice of being in the body, even when her body has transformed through illness and age.

Just as movement connects Clarissa to her body, *Brooklyn Height's* Hend comes into being through walking. Readers first learn her name on a long walk with her son through her new neighborhood:

She takes him by the hand and walks. She walks and walks because today is her day off and because the apartment she lives in is stifling and because she can't sleep at night and because her buried anxiety gives the placid expression in her eyes a frightening cast. When they come home at the end of the day he will lie next to her and watch TV and she'll bury her head even deeper under the covers and dream about them; about the life that she can no longer remember, the life that is slipping through her hands. Her name is Hend but her nicknames were many. (8)

Walking gives Hend her name and helps her access memories suffocated in a claustrophobic apartment and job. Brooklyn exposes Hend's body to unpleasant sensations like exhaustion and containment, and her son often attempts to prevent her long walks. Brooklyn does not offer free movement and bodily expression; Hend experiences claustrophobia, pain, and anxiety in both Egypt and New York. Many of her Egyptian memories also feature walking—through Cairo or her rural community in Pharaoh's Hills. Walking is not uniquely part of her new life in the United States, nor does the activity depict Hend moving through a completely "free" space. Rather, the activity helps Hend connect her past and present.

In both novels, instances of physical intimacy—memory generated in and through the body—contrast other, structured uses of the body. As hostess and wife, Clarissa undergoes social conditioning that incorporates her body into London's upper class. Stiffness, an artificial pausing of and rigidity in the body, brings her out of memory and into society, as when she "stiffened a little on the kerb" amidst traffic. Imagining Clarissa's role at the party, the narrator echoes the first pause: "She stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs" (17). Even on morning errands, Clarissa trains her body to uphold social conventions, a structure that opposes the kinds of free-floating memory the novel's first sections display. Stiffness prevents Clarissa from connecting to her body or her past, a detachment she notes at the party's beginning: "Oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself" (170-1). Clarissa experiences a social forgetting quite different from the small

slips that plague her earlier in the day as she struggles to remember words like “thimble” or even Peter’s name (37, 40). Social forgetting produces disembodiment as the subject sacrifices a sense of self to performative public interaction. Peter himself notes Clarissa’s stiffness when he comes to visit her: “Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected . . . Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame” (49). Peter’s critique advances a constellation of rigidity, sentimentality, and fixity—the polar opposite of the conscious, fluid memory Clarissa evinces in her walk.

While Clarissa dissociates from her body when she trains it to partake in social rituals, Hend feels her body to be “a stranger to her. Ever since the day of her first period, her body has been an obscure question mark” (71). Physical estrangement accompanies Hend’s maturation. In *Brooklyn Heights*, memory and the body unite through Hend’s repeated encounters with the female body’s objectification. Her childhood friend leaves school after her curves receive unwanted attention from a teacher. Mothers engage in the latest waxing and perfuming techniques to keep husbands interested. A cook shuts Hend in a small rabbit hutch as punishment, an event that causes the young girl to lose control of her bladder in the enclosure and for nights afterward. Her physical response to fear reappears at the end of the novel, when the adult Hend wets the bed amidst her anxieties about forgetting and aging. Consistently, Hend’s memories of the past involve women altering, isolating, or detaching from their bodies. The narrator parallels these physical management practices with those in Brooklyn. There, Hend notices how many people jog

or do yoga. She herself acknowledges that she walks in part to lose weight. The body undergoes all these activities as management regimes.

While instances of the body's management provoke in Hend physical responses of fear and anxiety and cut Clarissa off from her recollections, both women locate in self-generated movement an opportunity to construct their own narrations of history and space. A tool for memory and for engaging the body, walking situates Hnd in Brooklyn and helps her build new attachments, memories, intimacies, and empathies. Her movement through Brooklyn's diverse neighborhoods creates a city map just as Clarissa's morning walk maps London. Hnd's awareness of other immigrant experiences and Woolf's incorporation of additional characters traveling into London also emphasize communal and empathetic mapping opportunities, especially when it comes to shared experiences of nostalgia for an older home.⁶ In both *Brooklyn Heights* and *Mrs. Dalloway* the body's movement through city space produces a geography for and of memory. The novels then demonstrate attachment's perils and possibilities.

Communal Flâneurie

My understanding of the individual body's engagement with the city and the walker's ability to "re-member" adapts the critical tradition of city space studies I outline in this section. Memory is grounded in the body's physical rhythms, echoes, and developments; it also attaches itself to particular landscapes and geographies. The city

⁶ My understanding of immigrant nostalgia and community formation benefits from Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* (1996). Lowe defines the acts of her title as "the *agency* of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans: the *acts* of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification" (9). While the immigrants in this chapter come to the United States and England from Egypt and Italy, respectively, they are similarly engaged in much of this "politicized cultural work."

walker faces specific obstacles and possibilities with respect to new technologies and crowds. Urban memory reflects those specificities. Clarissa's memory reaches her in starts and stops, interrupted by traffic, curbs, shops, and encounters with acquaintances. The curb appears a threatening place, the small boundary between safe walking and catastrophic collision. When Peter witnesses an ambulance speeding past, he assumes it might carry someone "knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself" (151). Unpredictable curbside encounters promise physical danger.

The city's new technologies and unique disorientations and dangers make it a fruitful site for artists and critics. The section that follows articulates a theoretical history of city walking and describes the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights* expand those theoretical models. These novels claim literary maps of space and memory as linked methods through which characters come into contact and recognize one another.

The novels' focus on communal attachment contrasts most city walking scholarship, which tends to follow individual walkers like the flâneur of the wide, nineteenth-century Parisian boulevards. Charles Baudelaire exemplified the flâneur in his poetry, describing the character moving through Paris's public spaces observing and being observed. Later, the poetic figure became foundational for Walter Benjamin, who ascribed the character's appearance to processes of modernization and commercialization. The German-born theorist articulated the flâneur's uncanniness. In his formulation, flânerie always carries an element of foreignness: "This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather, the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the

alienated man . . . The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd” (40). Benjamin’s view of the city’s walkers raises estrangement’s creative potential.

In recent decades, feminist scholarship has questioned whether a female character could access urban movement and artistic production as a flâneuse. Janet Wolff claims that because the ‘modernity’ of the nineteenth century occurred in the public sphere, its literature reflects the male experience of the city and the new “fleeting, anonymous, ephemeral encounters” it enabled. As the protagonist of these encounters, the flâneur benefitted from anonymous public movement impossible for middle class women of the same period.⁷ Wolff argues that the women of Baudelaire’s poems are always subjects of a gaze, never observers in their own right, and the women who do exist publicly tend to appear outside normative family structures, like the prostitute or the widow. She concludes with an emphatic statement: “There is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century” (45). Rooting flânerie in nineteenth century social structures, Wolff locates no arena for female participation.

Moving from Wolff’s socio-historical account, Deborah L. Parsons’s *Streetwalking the Metropolis* extends the aesthetic limits of the flâneur to incorporate the female walker’s experience. She claims that Benjamin’s flâneur became an all-encompassing figure that provides students of the modern city with multiple points of

⁷ Wolff does describe how industries like factory work brought some lower class women into the public sphere.

access. As a result, the flâneur need not be exclusive to the male, bourgeois, white, or native experience. In fact, she suggests, “The concept of the flâneur itself contains gender ambiguities that suggest the figure to be a site for the contestation of male authority rather than the epitome of it” (5). Parsons also explains that expanding the flâneur changes the relationship between individual and city beyond Benjamin’s formulation: “Benjamin’s geography of the city is indeed marked by an obsessive attempt to know the city in its entirety” (7). Contrasting Benjamin’s all-encompassing perspective, Parsons quotes Gillian Rose, who “understand[s] the contemporary city not as the increasing fragmentation of a still-coherent whole, but rather in terms of a challenge to that omniscient vision and its exclusions” (7). The city walker, then, does not gather up disparate pieces of the city; rather, he or she contributes to proliferating maps, narratives, and histories.

Hend and the walkers of *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrate Parsons’s expansion of Benjamin’s flâneur. The characters offer a spectrum of class, gender, and ethnic distinctions and highlight the multiplicities and constructed nature of urban space.⁸ Though evoking the flâneur raises concerns about the limits to which one definition can stretch, flânerie remains a useful category for *Brooklyn Heights*. Hend might not fit the gendered and economic expectations of the traditional flâneur, but her walking corresponds with two of the figure’s major characteristics: slower paced movement with

⁸ Parsons also addresses cosmopolitanism in her study; she notes that modernist assessment of women’s literature often portrays women as ungrounded, as citizens of the world rather than of a particular place, and her work grounds them in specific locations. Though her point is well-taken, it leaves little room for women who are strangers to the city, like Hend or *Mrs. Dalloway’s* Rezia, unless those women are participating in well-established expatriate communities like Paris in the 1920s.

no specific destination in mind.⁹ For the flâneur, walking is an event in and of itself, regardless of where the body stops.¹⁰ Demands on time or requests for punctuality do not confine the walk. Similarly, though Hend begins walking to “get rid of those extra pounds” like many modern, fast-paced walkers, she eventually traverses streets while her son is in school solely to experience them (17). Though she stops at flea market tables, coffee shops, and park benches, she does not prioritize her pauses. Hend usually takes public transportation only when she boards the bus to reach her job at a local Dunkin’ Donuts. The shift in her regular routine occurs because she has a destination. Menial work separates her from her preferred mode of travel and therefore from her body and memories. Hend, then, hearkens back to the flâneur even as she complicates the figure’s socioeconomic situation and introduces the foreignness of emigration to the flâneur’s urban encounters.

Like Hend, Clarissa retains some of the flâneur’s features. An observer of city life, she walks for the emotional effects just as much as to buy flowers. And though buying flowers is the pretext for Clarissa’s stroll, the errand is in fact an unnecessary expedition. Clarissa could just as easily send a maid to do the purchasing, although she suggests her servants are too busy. Other walkers in *Mrs. Dalloway* engage in similar, semi-purposeful movement: Peter Walsh follows a young woman through the streets, Richard meanders to and from Lady Bruton’s house, Elizabeth elongates her route home

⁹ Solnit points to Benjamin’s fictional description of flâneurs who took turtles on their strolls, matching the creatures’ speed (*Wanderlust* 199-200).

¹⁰ Flâneurie is only one mode of walking, of course. Solnit’s *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* notes additional forms like the Romantic hike through the woods (exhibited by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt), the pilgrimage, the march, and the mountain climb, among others.

to explore the Strand, Rezia and Septimus pause in the park on their way to Sir Bradshaw's. These walks, whether to keep appointments or to participate in grand mythical narratives—as is true for Peter, who envisions himself a “romantic buccaneer” while walking, and Elizabeth, a “pioneer” among the Dalloways—blur the line between walking as necessary task and as self-discovery (53,137).

Critics have noted that continued interest in the flâneur, despite the historical and cultural specificities of Benjamin's term, correlates with critics' desires to see the walker as reading and engaging the city.¹¹ As a result, recent scholarship on walking in the city champions de Certeau's work on the practice of space.¹² De Certeau approaches the walker's impact on city space creatively. Both novels expand his spatial theories by addressing the lived experience of specific bodies. Woolf and al-Tahawy also focus on longing and forgetting in ways that complicate de Certeau's description of pedestrian maps' “un-readability.”

De Certeau contrasts the bird's eye view of a city—the perspective one gets from looking down on the streets from a tall building—with walking. If the bird's eye view contains the point of view of the map, walking “writes” fluid movement onto the grid of a city. Because walkers cannot read their “writing” as a unified text, walking transforms the city into a dynamic, non-static environment. De Certeau writes, “a *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city” (93). The individual's map departs from official representations that prioritize easy navigation.

¹¹ See Graeme Gilloch's “The Return of the Flâneur.”

¹² See especially Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth's compelling introduction to their 2007 collection, *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*.

Instead, the walker's map is personal, always changing, always building new relationships and routes.

De Certeau's approach to mapping corresponds to the first pages of *Brooklyn Heights*. As a walking document, Hend's map counteracts the other mapping processes the novel depicts. The narrator describes Hend's search for a particular address upon her immediate arrival from Egypt:

She finds it on a Google map of Brooklyn as she hunts for an apartment, a narrow strip winding its way up to the long arching bridge that connects the two islands She turns her back on Manhattan and chooses Flatbush Avenue from among all those myriad streets because it becomes¹³ her: a woman shouldering her solitude, a couple of suitcases, and a child who leans into her whenever he grows tired of walking. (1)

Hend first has access to the Google map, a method of locating that situates her narrative as contemporary and technologically saturated. The electronic map offers Hend a bird's eye view that contextualizes her position within the boroughs and avenues. Rather than following Google's prescribed route, however, Hend chooses the avenue that "becomes" her, that reflects somehow her "solitude." This passage also impresses on readers the physical nature of Hend's movement through the city streets. Literally and figuratively weighed down by the tug of a child's hand, Hend's body mediates her urban navigation.

As Hend and her son settle into their new home, where he attends an American school, Hend walks long distances alone. While the Google map does not reappear in later chapters, Hend feels a Brooklyn map in her feet. Her body exists within the matrix of streets, not underground in the subway or above in a skyscraper. Like Benjamin's

¹³ al-Tahawy uses here the Arabic word "*yuslah*." The root, in addition to connoting matching or fitting, also connotes health, peace, and repair.

flâneur, she imagines her walking gathering people and locations: “She often takes long walks along Flatbush Avenue. She studies the places where others have lived and tries to chart a map with which to replace the memories she has fled, the memories that have left a blank space in their wake” (5). Ill at ease with memories of her Egyptian childhood, Hend realizes the price for rejecting her past is a memory vacuum that she attempts to fill through her walks. Drawn to the “places where others have lived,” her body connects disparate experiences (5). Moving from Lefferts Historic House, an eighteenth-century Dutch property, to Fort Greene, “home to the largest community of African-Americans in Brooklyn,” Hend draws a direct line between the two cultures and time periods in a way she could not on a bus or in a taxi (5). Walking between the two locations situates them as part of the same community.

De Certeau would claim that mapping like Hend’s results in a different kind of city writing or mapping, but he approaches practices of city space as an epistemological project.¹⁴ That is, he identifies the different operations or practices through which we come to know, read, or understand a space, however ephemerally. In contrast, *Brooklyn Heights* and *Mrs. Dalloway* promote a phenomenology of space, focusing on how it feels to move through a geography. The body of De Certeau’s walker is not gendered. Without specific or limiting physical characteristics, it walks unaccompanied and unimpeded. Hend’s walking, however, always implicates her femininity, her role as mother, and the exhaustion of her working, anxious body. She notices, as she ages, that, “her walk has

¹⁴ I am grateful to Sudipta Kaviraj, Muhsin al-Musawi, and the organizers of the 2014 MESAAS Conference at Columbia University for conversations that refined my critique of de Certeau.

also taken on the same listless gait that her mother had at the end of a long day” (7).

Hend’s ability not just to walk but to describe the character and inheritance of that walk separates her from De Certeau’s non-specific walker. Similarly, Clarissa experiences her morning in London with a solemnity that she suspects results from “her heart, affected, they said, by influenza” (4). The recent illness tints Clarissa’s walk, coloring it with fragility and mortality. Illness emphasizes the body’s limitations and painfully alerts Clarissa to the temporariness of her walk.

For De Certeau, all walks are temporary, erased by completion and never “read” again by the walker herself or another. His walker moves through space to contest planned routes and to write alternatives. De Certeau’s formulation, however, does not consider the ways individuals attach themselves affectively to place. In affective attachment, memory takes the place of reading. That which is not legible can still be reconstructed. Walkers’ attachments encourage others to attempt a reading of their maps, or at least to notice where the maps intersect. *Brooklyn Heights* privileges affective response to space. Hend’s experience reflects and constructs the city’s identity. Though no two residents share their maps of Brooklyn, their maps do intersect with each other. The narrator leaves Hend on occasion to follow Emilia, Hend’s older Russian friend and a flea market vendor; Abd al-Karim, a divorced Kurd who still lives in Brighton Beach with his Mexican ex-wife and who frequents Hend’s favorite coffeehouse; and Nazahat, a Bosnian doctor, among others. These characters, all immigrants, have lived in Brooklyn for various amounts of time with fluctuating levels of success with learning English and finding work. They share some of Hend’s geographic anchors—the library, the

coffeehouse, the park, the Refugee Assistance Agency—while living in different neighborhoods. Their diverse Brooklyn maps produce a form of “readability” through analogous affect and memory. Hend’s walks take her through multiple ethnic neighborhoods in just a few blocks. The novel emphasizes Brooklyn as a space where all immigrants share the experience of having left some place behind. In her walks, English lessons, and coffee shop visits, Hend encounters immigrants from across the globe and learns to read small slices of their maps. Immigrants’ overlapping maps result in an empathetic awareness of others’ nostalgia and loss.

Clarissa does not entirely share Hend’s ability to connect with disparate city inhabitants. Though she proclaims to love “life; London; this moment of June” in a way that connects her to others, her attachments elide others’ economic disadvantage and suffering. Misreading other characters’ movements through the city, she assumes that even “the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) . . . love life” and “can’t be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason” (4). Her proclaimed attachments, a utopian view of life in which the poor and pets receive similar kinds of affectionate attention, insulate her against the discomfort, pain, and fear that accompany real connection. It’s no surprise that she seeks heroes like Lady Bexborough, who receives news of her soldier son’s death and “opened a bazaar” (5). Yet instances of failure do not mean that Clarissa fails entirely when it comes to empathetic attachment. When she recalls girlhood walks with Peter Walsh, she realizes that he remains with her even in the present:

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, If he were with me now what would he say?—some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning. (7)

Clarissa's attachment to Peter allows her to recall what walking with him feels like, what he might say and do. Even as she circles the past, re-engages it sometimes bitterly and sometimes not, debating and processing and re-confirming, Clarissa recognizes its shape. She does not read her past with Peter clearly, like a narrative. Instead, her memories move her closer and further away from it, noting impressions, new facts, and forgotten encounters. Her attachment is significant not because it always brings her pleasure but precisely because it so frequently unsettles her.

City space allows for various forms of movement, overlap, and memory. In both Hend's opportunities for connection across a broad immigrant population and Clarissa's uncertain, stratified engagement with the people around her, attachments to a city, its past, and its people reflect a constantly alive and changing space. As Woolf suggests with Clarissa's misreadings, memory and attachment still need to be rooted in the particulars of place, politics, and social structures. Both novels demonstrate that empathetic attachment in urban spaces does not erase historical interactions like segregation, military conflict, or colonialism. However, efforts to forge connection draw attention to the people and institutions that develop and maintain these oppressive systems.

Gendered Emigration, Attachment, and Empire

Embodied memory contradicts other methods of engaging space that are rigid, hierarchical, and invested in health and proportion, like the colonial, imperial, and martial histories that appear in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights*. In the first chapter of my study, colonialism and imperialism functioned as lived histories that forced writers to account for diverse feelings about these legacies. For *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights*, colonialism is a distant, less direct experience. Imperialism and its kin—in this case, repressive medical treatment and migration schemes—are imposed on characters as rigid, impersonal structures. The protagonists and other peripatetic characters resist the rigidity that accompanies those histories through their walking, memory, and reconstruction of city space. The novels also identify women's complex roles in political pasts, as a population at once excluded from yet perpetuating power structures.

Hend's walking map of Brooklyn contrasts earlier mapping projects that aspired to objectivity and truth making. By positioning themselves as authoritative and factual, earlier mapmakers claimed power over the spaces represented. According to Bill Ashcroft, "There has been no more profound effect on people's understanding of the nature of the world than in its representation in maps . . . they represent an ability to *see* the world as a whole, an ability which amounted to an ability to *know* the world" (128-9). He establishes the map as a tool for learning about other environments. The map's rise, Ashcroft argues, coincides with the rise of colonial activity. Hatim El Hibri calls maps left behind in Beirut after colonial withdrawal, for example, "evidence of the complexity of the violence of the translation of space, which leaves its trace in the shape of the social

formations and relations created within and beyond the city” (133). For El Hibri, the “trace” of maps reflects their haunting production conditions, the sense that each represents just one of many possibilities for a would-be city center. Even city plans that never took effect suggest political understandings of the city and the hegemonic discourses present at a certain moment. El Hibri asserts, “Maps are a sign that, somewhere, debate has temporarily ended over what is sayable, common sense, or inevitable about the life of a city” (131). Maps become essential tools for establishing hegemony in a nation, a colony, or an empire.

Ashcroft and El Hibri bleakly describe maps’ violent capabilities, but Ashcroft also claims that the lived experiences of a place’s inhabitants can complicate a map’s dominant narrative. As a result, while a generally accepted map of a place or region might exist, alternative maps emerge alongside it. Novels like *Brooklyn Heights* create those maps, both in the way Hend walks the city and in the novel’s attention to neighborhood and street names. Most *Brooklyn Heights* chapters take their names from a street, neighborhood, landmark, or business in the borough. Though “Atlantic Avenue,” for example, appears as a title, the words are transliterated into Arabic; English and Arabic encounter one another through transliteration. al-Tahawy employs a similar strategy to describe Hend’s son’s growing familiarity with English. Expressions like “bagel with cream cheese,” “dating,” and “go green” appear in transliterated Arabic. These linguistic moves defamiliarize both Arabic and English for the reader. The English words sound strange in the Arab pronunciation, while the structure of the words on the page mark them as not-Arabic upon first glance. Language-based maps and Hend’s

movement through the city undermine a map designed to “know” or oversee. Just as Hend designates certain Brooklyn coffee shops and streets as “the Arab world in microcosm,” the city she walks does not subscribe to planned borders or nationalities (24). It cannot be categorized as national maps demand. Attachment to place and Hend’s affective responses to her walk destabilize hegemonic models of mapmaking that promote bounded communities with specific political and national identities.

The colonial is also an area of critique in *Mrs. Dalloway*, building on the novel’s related theorization of attachment and sentiment, and exists most clearly in the physical form of Lady Bruton. A staunch proponent of empire, Lady Bruton invites Richard Dalloway to lunch for help composing a letter to the *Times* in support of emigration to Canada. Clarissa feels the slight of the lunch invitation physically: “The shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered” (30). Faced with Lady Bruton’s presence, “a dial cut in impassive stone,” Clarissa feels “the dwindling of life” (30). Though Lady Bruton is older than Clarissa, she does not seem to age. Instead, she marks the way people around her change and fail to meet expectations. While Clarissa’s body is frail, Lady Bruton is stone, firm and heavy.

Lady Bruton’s dislike of Clarissa is a poorly kept social secret. Though Richard tries to assuage Clarissa’s concerns, he is among the many husbands who “were secretly doubtful themselves, of [Lady Bruton’s] interest in women who often got in their husbands’ way, prevented them from accepting posts abroad, and had to be taken to the seaside in the middle of the session to recover from influenza” (105). Clarissa’s

femininity, from Lady Bruton's perspective, is too subject to bodily whims. Women who experience illness "prevent [husbands] from accepting posts abroad;" that is, they keep their promising husbands from participating in colonial administration.

While Lady Bruton disapproves of most political wives, she has additional qualms about Clarissa. She claims that she "had never seen the sense of cutting people up, as Clarissa Dalloway did—cutting them up and sticking them together again" (104). Lady Bruton's mysterious criticism paints Clarissa as performing autopsies of sorts—in-depth analyses that gather information about a body by dis-membering and then re-membering them. To "stick them together again" repairs bodies uncannily; "sticking" implies an arbitrariness to the process that might mix up limbs and characteristics. Clarissa's desire to know what makes people tick, how they affect her life, finds no equivalent in Lady Bruton, who "had the reputation of being more interested in politics than people" (105). Lady Bruton's interest suggests, chillingly, that politics is not comprised of people but rather of something akin to impersonal chess moves on a board.

Claiming the political as impersonal and strategic has troubling implications for Lady Bruton's intervention in colonial systems. While she gestures to a long line of martial ancestors, as a woman, she herself participates indirectly in colonial histories. The narrator nods to her influence by acknowledging her "finger in some notorious intrigue of the eighties," wherein a General composed "in Lady Bruton's presence, with her cognisance, perhaps advice, a telegram ordering the British troops to advance upon an historical occasion. (She kept the pen and told the story)" (105). The narrator advances only vague details about this "intrigue." Lady Bruton's influence and the event itself

remain unclear, although a British invasion in the 1880's calls to mind the Arabi Uprising of 1881 in Egypt.¹⁵ The event consumed literary imaginations of the period; E.M. Forster later composed a history of the "Bombardment of Alexandria" while Yeats's associate Lady Gregory wrote for the *London Times* supporting Arabi during his trial (Harlow and Carter 711, 736). Leonard Woolf also cites the "mutiny of Arabi" in 1920's *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, a text Virginia helped research and read at least twice (Phillips 163, viii). Whether or not the Arabi Uprising is the specific event on the narrator's mind, it exemplifies the British occupations that established the Empire. The ambiguous language of the passage above highlights how Lady Bruton perceives herself to impact colonial politics. Even without commanding troops directly, her presence seems to instigate major military decisions.

In the 1920s, Lady Bruton's pet project has shifted from invasion to emigration schemes. In both scenarios, British bodies—and often the bodies of economically disadvantaged soldiers or emigrants—claim space in the British Dominion. As a specific form of movement, emigration overlaps with colonial travel. What remains unclear is the extent to which emigration deviates from colonial systems: whether bodies participate voluntarily in their own movement, what economic and social distinctions separate participants, and what individuals' relations to their new homes look like. *Mrs. Dalloway*

¹⁵ On September 9th, 1881, Ahmed Arabi Pasha led what various parties have called a mutiny, a rebellion, or nationalist movement invigorated by Britain's growing presence in the country following the Suez Canal opening. Arabi and his compatriots demanded changes to ministry positions and additional numbers in the military. The British responded in 1882—coincidentally the year of Woolf's birth—by bombing Alexandria, fighting the battle of Tel-el-Kebir on September 13th, and ultimately occupying Cairo, assuming control from the Turks (Harlow and Carter 681-3). Barbara Harlow notes that at this moment "Egypt—representing for some the 'key to India,' for others 'the Gate of the East'—had for the time being become British Egypt" (683).

and *Brooklyn Heights* introduce two compelling emigrants in Lucrezia Warren Smith and Hend, respectively. An Italian who met her husband at the end of World War I, Lucrezia has left home to travel back to England with Septimus. Rezia comes from not a British colony but rather from an allied country still reeling from the war. In a 1920 document, American Ambassador Thomas Page Nelson reports on his tenure in Italy, narrating the country's challenges during the war, as it chose to join the Allied Powers, and in the immediate aftermath, when debates about the Treaty of Versailles led to Italy's abstention:

Italy claims officially that she lost in the war a half-million men killed; that she had, besides, nearly a million and a half more wounded, of whom some two hundred thousand are permanently disabled; and that she spent more of her wealth in proportion to her property values than any other of the Allies. That after efforts so heroic, losses so great, and sacrifices so immeasurable, she should be left with so profound a feeling of injustice to her on the part of her former allies is, indeed, a malign fortune. (Chpt. 23)

Nelson's report praises the Italians for their sacrifices while suggesting that post-war agreements undervalued their contributions. The tensions between Italy, England, and France concerned, among other things, distribution of land after the war and led to Fascism's rise in Italy. Though not colonial in nature, the international relationships reflect twentieth century management of land and power. Rezia arrives in England neither colonial subject nor comfortable ally; her home country contributed to military victory only to refuse the lopsided terms of continued partnership. In traveling to victorious England, Rezia also leaves behind her family, support system, and language. Septimus's doctors cite her foreignness as one reason Septimus must make himself healthy. Dr. Holmes notes that, "He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a

foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands?" (92).

And yet despite her unfamiliarity with English and London, Rezia is able to see through structures of power that others miss, most notably when visiting doctors. As I will detail below, Rezia draws the novel's first connections between stringent health regulations and oppressive political practices.

In *Brooklyn Heights*, Hend shares Rezia's ability to see connections, overlaps, and analogies from an outsider's perspective. Although Hend settles in a global economic and cultural capital, which suggests a move from the center to periphery, al-Tahawy foregrounds Brooklyn's Dutch colonial history. Hend notices these vestiges in long-standing farmers' markets, antique shops, maps, and buildings. Historical landmarks remind the reader that New York was itself once a colonial outpost for the Dutch and British. In fact, the borough in which Hend lives only became part of Greater New York in 1898 ("Exploring Pre-Revolutionary New York" 20).¹⁶ Brooklyn changed hands and identities multiple times throughout the centuries before becoming part of a major twenty-first-century imperial power.¹⁷ Hend's route echoes those traversed by Dutch famers, African slaves, British artisans and officers and a host of other bodies, imported

¹⁶ For more information on the founding of Brooklyn and New York, see the Brooklyn Historical Society or Steven Jaffe's *New York at War*. Henry Hudson, the British explorer who discovered the region in 1609, had been employed by the Dutch East India Company. His discovery generated a new economic arm, the Dutch West India Company, which managed settlers, agricultural production, and development in the region (Jaffe 4).

¹⁷ Of course, these movements are also contingent on the dispossession of pre-existing Native American communities. Jaffe traces the transactions, legal and otherwise, through which the Dutch obtained land from the Lenape tribe specifically and that tribe's subsequent exposure to alcohol, firearms, and taxations. Additional communities of Mahicans, Tappans, Wecquaesgeeks, Tankitekes, Mohawks, and Iroquois.

willingly or otherwise.¹⁸ Her own move to the United States, ironically, is made possible by the husband who leaves her. The narrator mentions in passing that, “from her husband she inherited a visa for the US, a child, and two suitcases” (11). The novel contributes Hend’s migration to a version of Brooklyn that contains sometimes marked and radically different experiences of travel and migration. The fabric al-Tahawy constructs between these different experiences relies on a shared sense of nostalgia and loss without erasing the violence and injustices that resulted in some inhabitants’ travel.

Travels and attachments like Hend’s and Rezia’s depart drastically from the emigration schemes Lady Bruton has in mind. The bodies involved in Lady Bruton’s emigration scheming seem much less important than the body of Lady Bruton herself. In fact, the narrator describes Lady Bruton’s commitment to emigration projects as a version of ejaculation:¹⁹

That fibre which was the ramrod of her soul . . . [emigration was] the liberator of the pent egotism, which a strong martial woman . . . feels rise within her, once youth is past, and must eject upon some object—it may be Emigration, it may be Emancipation; but whatever it be, this object round which the essence of her soul is daily secreted, becomes inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone . . . Emigration had become, in short, largely Lady Bruton. (109)

Unlike Clarissa, who “cuts” people up, including herself, attaching them to one another and to various places and moments, Lady Bruton restricts her attachment to a philosophy that consumes her identity. Her attachment is fixed, stiff, unwavering. It leaves no room

¹⁸ The Brooklyn Historical Society estimates that the slave population reached forty percent at the end of the 1600’s (20).

¹⁹ In another move that emphasizes the overlap between these two seemingly different women, Clarissa also envisions herself “feel[ing] what men felt” when taking pity on younger women (32). Both Lady Bruton and Clarissa assume intersexual identities in these passages.

for the “essence of her soul” to connect to those who do not share her politics or social position.

The narrator suggests that rabidity can emerge from any political commitment, but Lady Bruton’s particular vehemence echoes the Empire Settlement Act of 1922, which encouraged emigration to Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand following World War I. These countries needed more bodies for labor, and Britain was concerned about overpopulation. The act allowed the Secretary of State “to formulate and co-operate in carrying out agreed schemes for affording joint assistance to suitable persons in the United Kingdom who intend to settle in any part of His Majesty’s Oversea Dominions.” Whether providing passage, land grants, or other forms of funding, the act enabled British citizens to travel outside their country of origin to make homes elsewhere. Keith Williams calls the scheme “perhaps the most far-reaching achievement of the social imperialist politics of the United Kingdom during the early twentieth century,” noting that the Act impacted both domestic and international policy.²⁰

While political precedent exists for Lady Bruton’s position, the narrator suggests that she has somehow adopted the scheme beyond rationale: “She exaggerated. She had perhaps lost her sense of proportion” (109). The narrator’s critique echoes the language Dr. Bradshaw employs when diagnosing Septimus Warren Smith: “Sir William said he never spoke of ‘madness’; he called it not having a sense of proportion. . . . Health we

²⁰ For more on the Empire Settlement Act’s reverberations and historical precedents, see Stephen Constantine’s 1990 edited collection *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement and the Dominions Between the Wars*. Contributors trace the influence of earlier migration frameworks, like 1919’s Oversea Settlement Committee, as well as the effects of the Act in Dominion lands like South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Additional essays follow the Act’s targeted populations, most notably single women and ex-servicemen.

must have, and health is proportion” (96, 99). Cures include regimented exercise, rest, eating, and avoiding strong emotions like love and attachment. Proportion is another way of “cutting people up,” although much different than Clarissa’s version. Proportion requires the body’s management; one weighs and schedules it. Physical management leads to colonial analogies:

Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable . . . Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace . . . This lady too (Rezia Warren Smith divined it) had her dwelling in Sir William’s heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice. (100)

The narrator compares Sir William’s love of proportion with his contributions to the Empire, attributing this insight to Rezia Warren Smith. Septimus’s Italian wife assesses Sir William’s character more accurately than even Clarissa, who only knows “one wouldn’t like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man” (182). Rezia also perceives the way “conversion” masks itself through affective language, in much the same way that Shaden Tageldin illustrates colonialism’s dependency on intimacy, desire, and love as it replicated itself to travel through the British Empire (10). The emotions Sir William prohibits from the sick room become co-opted into power. They serve at the whim of “proportion.”

Although Lady Bruton positions herself as an advocate of emigration in the British Dominion, the narrator’s suggestion that she, too, has “lost proportion” excludes her from the structures she helps to perpetuate. Lady Bruton herself credits her exclusion to her gender. Despite her efforts to present herself as masculine, she faults her femininity

for her shortcomings. Her inability to express her opinions for *Times* readers, for example, makes her “feel the futility of her own womanhood as she felt it on no other occasion” (109). She defers to Richard and Hugh Whitbread’s skill, admiring the way they articulate her ideas for an audience they understand effortlessly.

In a novel filled with complex characters, Lady Bruton evokes ambiguity from the characters around her. This ambiguity often roots itself in gendered dichotomies. The narrator treats her with intense sarcasm, describing her at Clarissa’s party as looking “very stalwart in her lace” (172). Lady Bruton’s bearing contrasts social functions that expect her to appear in delicate evening wear. Male characters treat her with a deference they do not afford government figures like Hugh Whitbread. Richard “ha[s] the greatest respect for her; he cherished these romantic views about well-set-up old women of pedigree” (105). Even Peter, who criticizes Hugh Whitbread and other government officials, decides that Lady Bruton “derived from the eighteenth century. She was all right” (173). In their approval of her, Peter and Richard both elide Millicent Bruton’s actual, powerful, and dangerous influence in a romantic version of her role in tradition and British history. The slippage between Lady Bruton’s philosophies of domination and her perceived impact make it difficult to situate her firmly in the power structures that govern *Mrs. Dalloway*, even as her role in those structures seems essential for understanding how gender, affect, sentimentality, and colonial power intersect. The difficulty of pinning Lady Bruton down demonstrates gender’s role in undoing clear frameworks of power and control while still helping to replicate and reinforce those frameworks.

The questions of proportionality, health, and relationship to place that *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights* complicate serve to critique modes like colonialism that profess to know and own space and time. Both novels advance, instead, different options for participating in space and time that depend on flexible timelines and a willingness to look beyond traditional borders. Feelings of attachment and affinity facilitate these connections.

Attachment: Women, Place, and the Past

Mrs. Dalloway and *Brooklyn Heights* explore the way women “attach themselves to places.” Peter Walsh associates that attachment to place with gendered experiences of geography in *Mrs. Dalloway*. He conflates memory, gender, and a fixity of the past: “Odd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me—the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought. They attach themselves to places” (55). Peter understands memory as a living in the past, an “attachment” to places that no longer exist in the same way. He associates Clarissa’s sentimentality with a femininity that encourages his own recollections. Similarly, Hend feels acutely her own attachments to the past and even to language. A former Arabic teacher, she thinks “Arabic is an endangered language, a language that is slowly dying out, but she clings to it because unfortunately, she tends to get insanely attached to things and love defies forgetfulness” (13). Hend frames the experience of attachment negatively, surrounding the word with “unfortunately,” and “insanely.”²¹

²¹ “lil-asif” and “bi-shaklin januni” (in a crazy manner), respectively.

While characters demonstrate anxieties about static or stuck experiences of time that might accompany attachment, both authors reject attachment's negative connotations. Woolf and al-Tahawy reference attachment instead to critique linear, fixed, and exclusionary memory. *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts attachment as an active practice that emerges through continuous re-membering and re-configuring. The novel equates "life; London; this moment of June," connecting space and time (4). The intersection between temporality and location is significant because feminist geographer Doreen Massey sees a tendency for scholars to read time as historical and political, and thus a male gendered entity, while gendering space static, nostalgic, and feminine. In those readings, space becomes private and domestic, while time defines the public sphere. Making temporal and spatial experiences co-constitutive minimizes that binary's impact.

Just as geography positions Clarissa in the present moment, Peter's thoughts reveal that Clarissa's spatial affiliations are also future-oriented, a means of existence after death:

She said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. . . It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps—perhaps. (152-3)

Clarissa's version of "haunting certain places" is forward looking and communal, unlike the sentimental and isolated version remembering often connotes. The body is figured as

an “apparition”—vulnerable, mortal, frail. One’s identity extends past the body into others and even into space. Knowing someone requires the objects that “completed them;” Clarissa is London and Bourton and Peter. At the same time, attaching oneself to a place transforms that place. London and Bourton become themselves more fully as Clarissa walks and remembers them. Despite the body’s temporariness, the attachment Woolf describes is still physical. Even unseen, material actions like “recovering,” “attaching,” and “completing” occur. Clarissa’s invisible haunting is still rooted in the material world of place and objects.

Bakhtin describes the intersection between geography and the individual body in his work on the *bildungsroman*, a genre that places its protagonist in historical time and an active landscape. He highlights space’s ability to exist in multiple times at once. However, Bakhtin’s formulation depends on sight, which precludes the material, felt experiences of texts like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights*. While these novels demonstrate the interaction Bakhtin outlines between space, time, and character, they also complicate Bakhtin’s approach by challenging visibility’s dominance in urban life.

When the protagonist and place activate one another, Bakhtin argues, they produce a “creatively effective past . . . Thus, one achieves a *fullness of time*, and it is a graphic, visible completeness” (34). Bakhtin categorizes “a fullness of time” as the traces of history one sees in a landscape. Historical traces might include natural changes, human growth, and man-made projects like cities and organizations—time’s etchings on land and bodies. The eye notes all the developments, narrating from them a past that is “full,” “complete,” and “effective.” Unlike Clarissa’s “unseen,” Bakhtin focuses on the visible,

cautioning against the spectral. Without a feedback loop between geography, history, and individual ability, the past merely appears as “ghosts . . . [who] burst into the present like foreign bodies. They were extraneous and could not be comprehended in it. To mix the past and present mechanically, without making any real temporal connection, was profoundly offensive” (32). Although Bakhtin does not reference memory, he describes ways that an individual might engage the past. The “mechanical” version would result in artificial recollection. The individual selects and expresses a memory without understanding its relationship to the present. The memory exists out of context and in a fixed narrative. Bakhtin uses tourism as an example, referencing Goethe’s unwillingness to hear about ancient battles in Sicily because those events no longer seemed part of the place where he stood (33). Entities that isolate the past for consumption like tours, museums, and photo albums are artificially, even hyper, visible. They market the past without acknowledging its contemporary impact. Bakhtin describes these versions of the past as “ghosts” because ghosts can be visible without affecting the landscape. They are entirely visual, non-material presences. They cannot integrate.

Hend experiences something akin to “ghosts” when she arrives in Brooklyn. However, like Clarissa and departing from Bakhtin, Hend finds value in the spectral. She observes Brooklyn residents’ passions for antiques, historical walking tours, and house museums like the Lefferts Historic House, which she visits early in her move. Hend identifies remnants of Brooklyn’s Dutch colonial past, whether in old maps, abandoned buildings, or stories about the farms that once dotted the countryside. Both in real estate and flea markets, the past becomes a commodity one can buy and sell. Realtors trade on

the neighborhood's history, emphasizing its Dutch heritage and former celebrity residents. Vendors and shoppers express interest in cheap antiques. Bakhtin might identify buying and selling as "mechanical" engagements, since most participants have no personal connection to Brooklyn's colonial history. However, Hend moves beyond commodification and tourism to locate the nostalgia that permeates these activities. Realizing later that, "this vague, objectless longing was also part of the way of the world," Hend recognizes the way other residents attach their longing to specific places or times (81). She begins to see her own longing for home or sentiment as part of a communal endeavor.

Mrs. Dalloway and *Brooklyn Heights* assert their protagonists as material, affective bodies capable of impacting geography and memory. By embodying memory and allowing geography to account for the "unseen," Woolf and al-Tahawy extend Bakhtin's historical vision to temporal narratives that fragment, intersect, and move fluidly. Hend's alternative mapping project, steeped in memory and a multiplicity of experience, transforms city spaces into Bakhtin's amalgamation of places and temporalities. The space Hend's walking produces does not adhere to the same national borders that a planned city would. While Brooklyn is in the United States, the people moving to the community bring their former homes with them through their language, their food, and their routines. In her walking, Hend crosses smoothly from community to community:

She never gets tired of walking in this land, alone and anonymous. She passes through Latino and Italian neighborhoods and arrives in the Asian neighborhood where she likes to shop for fruit and vegetables. She compares prices in the

cheaper Vietnamese markets. She passes through the Turkish neighborhood and continues on to Bay Ridge. She is amazed at how the architecture, the people's faces and their skin color, the merchandise and the wafting cooking smells are all so different. By now she will have walked for more than seventy blocks. By now she will have grown weary of the cacophony of languages and loud music and she will begin to long for the sweet aroma of water pipes. She heads for a small local coffeehouse. The men inside flash curious smiles at her. Their good-natured dirty jokes remind her of home. Here is the Arab world in microcosm—the Brooklyn Gulf (24).

Though the seventy blocks challenge Hend physically, they remain a short distance to travel to reach so many neighborhoods. Hend engages with city spaces aesthetically, economically, and sensorily. Overwhelmed by the new, she can still seek out the familiar smells and sounds of her former home. Hend calls the coffee shop "*ard al-'arab*," "The land of the Arabs," as if the Brooklyn community still exists in different countries.

Visible objects such as storefronts mark the avenues as "*ard al-'arab*," but Hend also encounters Egypt in New York through memory. Current sensory details lead to concrete stories, which fluctuate among multiple timelines. For example, the feel of her own prematurely aging body recalls Hend's grandmother. As a result, Hend "remembered how she used to squirm in her grandmother's lap, an angry child with a naked bottom. She was hard to keep up with as a child, light and thin, teething and crawling and speaking well before any of her brothers did. . . . She herself is still that same restless child, she muses" (32, 37). The narrator moves from Hend's memories of her grandmother, a small woman with active hands and a penchant for storytelling, to the feelings of restlessness that connect Hend's childhood self with her New York life.

Similarly, the narrator occasionally leaves Hend to narrate a neighbor or shop owner's immigration history. In one instance, baker Naguib al-Khalili left his home in

Galilee as a refugee, served as a soldier in Lebanon, and moved to New York with his best friend. His past is now the cornerstone of his bakery business, which entices fellow immigrants: “Memory thrives on details—details that al-Khalili safeguarded and preserved: flexible, cunning details like the crispiness of a single square of sweet kunafa . . . He considered this job to be the art of shaping the nostalgia that tugged at the heartstrings of the Lebanese and Syrians and Palestinians who lived at the edges of Brooklyn” (138, 143). al-Khalili’s bakery caters to the immigrant’s need for sensory remnants of home.

Brooklyn Heights and *Mrs. Dalloway* share a commitment to multiple experiences of the city. Reading the two novels together highlights the experiences of movement, and especially international movement, appearing throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. Though Woolf’s novel wears the name of its main character, it also expresses interest in others’ trajectories through the city. Woolf extends the novel’s perspective of London beyond Clarissa’s decades-long familiarity. The Scottish Maisie Johnson, walking for the first time in Regent’s Park, thinks “everything seemed very queer . . . Why hadn’t she stayed home?” (26-7). Though Maisie does not appear in the novel again, Peter Walsh continues to see the city through the lens of his years in India’s colonial administrations:

The earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, [and] the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him. What is it? Where am I? . . . Three great emotions bowled over him; understanding; a vast philanthropy; and finally, as if the result of the others, an irrepressible, exquisite delight; as if inside his brain by another hand strings were pulled, shutters moved, and he, having nothing to do with it, yet stood at the opening of endless avenues, down which if he chose he might wander . . . He had escaped! was utterly free—as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its

holding. I haven't felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was, and feeling like a child who runs out of doors, and sees, as he runs, his old nurse waving at the wrong window. (52)

Peter's perspective highlights the strangeness of encountering a city that was once home after years away. Without familiarity and structure, Peter experiences a delight in place and observation that Clarissa denies him in her earlier memories. His disorientation feels freeing and connects him to an analogous childhood experience.

As both novels fluctuate among multiple narrative times, homes overlap. While thinking about her past,²² *Brooklyn Heights*'s Hend attempts to envision the unique home in which she grew up. Her son's demands that she stop walking and return to their Brooklyn apartment remind her of her father's estate, which also contains a combination of positive and suffocating memories. Hend recalls the various open rooms, balconies, and buildings that composed the compound. The estate's layout, the product of Hend's grandfather's Bedouin heritage, arranges outbuildings uniquely. The design offers the ideal playground. In the empty reception room, "children ate and ran around and did battle;" Hend uses the strangely tiled floors to play hopscotch, soccer, and hide-and-seek (20-22). The initial descriptions of the compound emphasize expansiveness, family connection, and community. However, Hend's later memories insinuate that brightly colored doors obscured abusive, loud fights between her parents. The idyllic playscape gives way to the compound's gates, which limit Hend's world: "She contemplates [the

²² A major contribution of the 2016 "Arab Literary Travels" class was my students' unwillingness to use the term "flashback" to describe Hend's experience of the past. Because Hend's past continuously impacts the present, students advocated for expressions like "parallel timelines" or "the past in the present" to explain what happens to Hend when the past appears in the novel.

gate] from the inside. She ponders the movement of the universe behind it . . . Her mother says to her, ‘I’ll break your legs if you cross the threshold.’ So she looks at the dividing line and swallows her want till the day when she too can step over to the other side and never come back” (23). Hend knows the world beyond the gates is filled with different lifestyles. Only when she reaches Brooklyn can she explore alternatives, even though Brooklyn has its own claustrophobic spaces and limits. The novel’s complex timeline gradually reveals that the flaws in a seemingly idyllic past while also suggesting that a past one longs to escape might still contain fond memories.

As in *Brooklyn Heights*, immigrant experience allows *Mrs. Dalloway* to access an earlier colonial history. In introducing readers to Rezia, who feels isolated in a city that pales in comparison to her own lively Milan, Woolf undertakes one of the novel’s longest temporal journeys:

I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent’s Park (staring at the Indian and his cross), as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans, saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where — such was her darkness. (24)

The analogy draws several connections at once. The narrator compares a new immigrant’s feeling of estrangement to that of imperial adventurers discovering new land. She also connects Rezia, the contemporary Italian, to her ancestral history. Finally, she links 1920’s London to the first century city of Londinium.²³ In disorientation, in

²³ Joseph Conrad begins his *Heart of Darkness* with a similar analogy between the nineteenth century British Empire and the Romans. On the Thames, protagonist Marlow notes “This also . . . has been one of the dark places on the earth,” before describing the Romans as “no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others” (4,6).

“darkness,” in absent borders, the narrator discovers affinities between travelers of different historical, political, and social positions.

Affinities among time periods, people, and locations also offer new plot points on Hend’s ever-increasing Brooklyn map. The map she creates is not a palimpsest, per se; rather, it is a constantly present space in which her Egyptian and Brooklyn lives overlap. Whereas an official map’s mono-temporal perspective captures space at a single moment, memory enables a mapping or ‘presencing’ of the past. The varied times, places, and experiences evoked by recollection create a map that registers space’s subjective, virtual, and unstable properties. *Brooklyn Heights* follows Hend’s memories back and forth, following a literary trajectory that blends past and present. Despite its name and the care with which it addresses contemporary moments, *Brooklyn Heights* exists equally in Egypt and in the seventeenth century Dutch-owned farmland that will become Brooklyn.

Alongside an attention to characters’ multiple backgrounds, both novels introduce outlets through which diverse characters can build attachments to one another. Woolf allows Richard Dalloway, Clarissa’s stiff, political husband, a compelling instance of overlapping perspectives within the city:

Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her . . . he repeated that it was a miracle that he should have married Clarissa; a miracle —his life had been a miracle, he thought; hesitating to cross. But it did make his blood boil to see little creatures of five or six crossing Piccadilly alone. The police ought to have stopped the traffic at once. He had no illusions about the London police. Indeed, he was collecting evidence of their malpractices; and those costermongers, not allowed to stand their barrows in the streets; and prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn’t in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth; all of which he considered, could be seen considering, grey, dogged, dapper, clean, as he walked across the Park to tell his wife that he loved her. (116)

On a mission to profess his feelings to his wife, Richard encounters the same treacherous curbs that made Clarissa pause earlier in the day. Unlike her, however, he notices the specific social ills unfolding around him. From his own position, Richard still witnesses the needs of parentless children and considers ways to improve the system.

The authors' willingness to allow multiple walkers' maps and experiences to co-exist generates empathetic attachment when the new and familiar intersect. As Hend walks, "She will see dark-skinned women sitting on their stoops and chatting together in shrill voices, though she won't understand a word of what they are saying in between the deep-throated laughter that sounds much like her own"(5). The image of the African-American community in Fort Greene highlights both Hend's separation from and intimacies with this scene. Though she cannot interpret the language, she too comes from a culture of stoop sitters, women who gossip and laugh. Even as language emphasizes distance, Hend recognizes the sounds and pleasure of the interaction, hearing her own laugh come from others.

Conclusion

Walking's prominence in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights* foregrounds the intersections of physical activity, memory, and engagement with space. In both instances, embodied memory facilitates attachments among disparate populations. Woolf and al-Tahawy advance empathetic maps of city space that acknowledge diverse character's experiences of loss, desire, fear, and attachment. Through their maps, they undermine the mapping and bodily management systems of colonial power structures.

While the authors approach global questions of power, history, and travel from different temporal, cultural, and social positions, this chapter illustrates the affiliations between their goals. Hend and Clarissa walk different city streets almost a century apart, but each would recognize in the other her struggles with memory, her delight in observation, and her attachment to place.

Neither Woolf nor al-Tahawy propose sentimentality and attachment as perfect models for how to remember or move through space. In Clarissa's inability to recognize London's lower classes and international populations, and in Hend's ambivalence about her new space both novels showcase the limits of community formation, empathy, and attachment. Instead, the authors offer affective, embodied memory as an alternative to historical narration that follows a linear trajectory and that includes and excludes specific populations. Even given its ambivalences and limits, affective memory expands the boundaries of who belongs in and can narrate spaces and histories. The expansiveness of al-Tahawy and Woolf's narration is precarious, however; both texts suggest serious threats to attachment and sentimentality in the form of medical discourse. In the following chapters, I detail the way languages of illness and pathology confront the experiences of nostalgia, longing, attachment, and embodied memory I have outlined above.

Chapter Three

Women of the Cloth: Touch, Obsession, and Illness

There's this hunger, which feels like a skin hunger, to handle every rough or silky twist of [life's] passing. I
understand it as
enjoining care to
the material senses,
and to making stuff.

-Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love*

In this chapter, I move from the community formation and empathetic possibilities available to walkers who “attach themselves to place” and re-member the past to the ways in which embodied memory, materiality, and connection to place become managed by medical discourse. The jump from political forms of management—like the imperialism, patriarchal family structures, and migration schemes detailed in the first two chapters—to medical and health-based restrictions is not a large one. As the narrator reminds readers in *Mrs. Dalloway*, health and political control are always connected; William Bradshaw's assertion that “health is proportion” quickly transitions to conversion, which “lov[es] to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace” (99-100). Management of the individual body and the political body aims to shape memory in the service of one hegemonic narrative about the past.

The women in Hoda Barakat's 1998 novel *The Tiller of Waters* and the speaker in Virginia Woolf's essay *On Being Ill* (1926) resist the notion of “health as proportion.” They favor intense sensory and imaginative experiences that allow them to create their own historical narratives. They share what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls in this chapter's epigraph a “skin hunger,” a desire for the material and physical and for “making stuff.” In

The Tiller of Waters, the protagonist's Egyptian mother, Athena, and the family's Kurdish maid Shamsa each develop all-encompassing desires for silk. Although male characters worry that their desires are pathological and abnormal, I argue that the women's relationships to material result in alternative methods of listening to and producing narrative about the past. *On Being Ill* traces Woolf's fascination with the body, which she argues receives too little attention in literature. She describes illness and creativity as linked because both experiences produce unexpected physical perspectives on the world.

The two texts question what counts as illness rather than desire or imagination. They also focus on the regimens, vocabularies, and other efforts put in place by male figures to contain 'excessive' female desire. By extension, the medical diagnoses and practices that appear in each text contain female storytelling, as the women in these works aim to narrate themselves and their desires. Like sentiment in *Brooklyn Heights* and *Mrs. Dalloway* and nostalgia in *A Border Passage*, "A Sketch of the Past," and *Growing*, desire and obsession function in *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill* as affective interactions with memory and place that resist ideologically clear demarcations of belonging—in this case, between who is ill and who is well. Like sentimentality, memory, and city walking in Chapter Two, desire and imaginative storytelling in this chapter result from intense physical experience. The affective emerges not through walking but from a stop in motion, as women go on bedrest or find themselves pulled into silk. Though neither Shamsa, Athena, nor the speaker in Woolf's essay explicitly demonstrate nostalgia—that is, the desire for renewed interaction with a lost place or time as described in Chapter One—their imaginings and expressions of desire reflect similar

efforts to undo linear narrative.¹ These desires resist scientific and economic discourses that would contain them. They speak back to the medical field, the marketplace, and even to academic histories.

Desire and creative narration assume gendered identities in these texts. As opposed to the male figures who diagnose, transact, and study, women in the novel and essay take “flights of fancy,” attract complex psychological diagnoses, and question historical narrative and social structures. Female expressions of desire and imagination are pathologized by family, lovers, and doctors. Barakat’s novel is also notable in that it is the only primary text in my project where the narrative’s protagonist is not a woman. Instead, Barakat keeps Shamsa and Athena on the margins of the novel, describing them through Niqula’s perspective.²

As Woolf’s speaker, Shamsa, and Athena reach the limits of male definitions of their ‘conditions,’ they turn to creative storytelling. Storytelling becomes a vehicle through which women express and re-enact their desires, not a locus for explanation or cause and effect. In both texts, female storytelling is not confined by fact or audience

¹ I avoid the word “return” in my definition of nostalgia in keeping with my discussion of the term in the previous chapter. As I demonstrate there, I identify as nostalgic writers not those who wish for a permanent return to the past but rather those who engage their pasts creatively, mindful of that desire’s imaginative properties.

² Much has been made of Barakat’s tendency to write from the perspective of male characters. Mona Amyuni calls Niqula, Khalil (from *Stone of Laughter*, 1990) and the unnamed protagonist of *Disciples of Passion* (1993) “anti-heroes . . . marginal, odd, ex-centric creatures. That a woman writer should speak through male heroes is quite new in our Letters and rare, I think, in World Literature” (217). Anton Shammas makes a similar claim in his introduction to *The Tiller of Waters* excerpts in *Banipal*; Barakat “explore[s] the masculine constructs of the Lebanese civil war” (16). In a panel at Washington D.C.’s Kennedy Center in March 2009, Barakat explained her interest in narrating male characters as the product of the war. Writing a male perspective allows her to explore how expectations of masculinity shift in wartime. Barakat also holds the distinction of introducing one of the first queer protagonists in contemporary Arabic literature in *Stone of Laughter*’s Khalil.

expectations. Instead, Woolf, Shamsa, and Athena's narrations extend beyond geographic borders. They trade in imaginative associations and transitions. Their investment in what *feels* true often leads them to reject social conventions. Their storytelling constructs their own spaces and communities.

Global Imaginaries

The Tiller of Waters and *On Being Ill* circulate in different genres and publishing avenues. However, both Woolf and Barakat push against geographic, medical, and social boundaries that contain female protagonists' expressions of desire and imagination. Though the texts are global in different ways, their authors narrate border crossings between spaces and among people. Desire and imagination, whether categorized as illness or not, enable these crossings.

The Tiller of Waters (*Harith al-Miyah*) is a Lebanese Civil War novel whose protagonist, a Greek Orthodox cloth merchant named Niqula Mitri, lives by himself in Beirut sometime after the 1982 Israeli invasion of the city. The text resists offering additional political details about the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), a particularly noticeable fact given the specificity with which Barakat addresses the city's geography and older historical narratives.³ During the novel's present, Niqula lives in the basement of his family's fabric shop and survives by foraging. He encounters no residents of the city other than a pack of wild dogs. He spends his days plotting routes through the mostly destroyed downtown area and his nights wrapped in the fabrics that survived the

³ For a more systematic literary account of the Lebanese Civil War, see Jean Said Makdisi's 1990's *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir*. Unlike *The Tiller of Waters*, the volume offers readers a comprehensive timeline as well as a clearer sense of the splintered factions, religious sects, and outside political forces that influenced the conflict's trajectory. I will address the memoir's aims in more detail in Chapter Four.

bombings. His routes take him to passageways underneath the city as well as streets and now ruined buildings he remembers from his younger life in Beirut. Niqula narrates these experiences directly to readers. His encounters with fabrics and with Beirut's radically transformed city center also prompt flashbacks of his life before the war. Barakat fluctuates between these two time periods on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

Barakat's movement between temporalities and her meticulous mapping of Beirut's downtown situate *The Tiller of Waters* among what Ken Seigneurie calls the "memory narratives" of the Lebanese Civil War (37). Scholarship on the novel particularly focuses on Niqula's "reconstruction" of Beirut through his walking and remembering.⁴ Niqula deliberates about his walking routes, which populate the downtown with the ghosts of churches, market stands, and people. Given the novel's publication date—several years after the war's conclusion in 1990 and amidst Solidere's "revitalizing" of the downtown area, which began in 1994⁵—Barakat writes Niqula into debates about what a post-war Beirut should look like and remember.

Movement through the city is essential to Niqula's recollections, and his walks correspond to the city walking tradition I detailed in Chapter Two, where characters moving through urban spaces produce those cities through their memories, routes, and interaction with other inhabitants. By contrast, Barakat introduces a walker who interacts

⁴ The tendency to focus on city space is also true for early reviews of the novel. Mona Zaki writes, "The simplest way of describing this novel is to say that it is about a city. . . . A vanished Beirut is meticulously reconstructed; one is drawn to the unraveling stories and to a narrative style that explores the sensual through the tactile" (92-3). Perhaps not coincidentally, her review makes only a passing reference to Shamsa and never refers to Athena by name.

⁵ "Solidere" is the French acronym for "The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District," a joint-stock company that has participated in the majority of downtown rebuilding following the Lebanese Civil War. The company trades in real estate and commercial development.

with a ruined city space and with no other humans. Niqula's map would seem to be the only one that exists in a new, post-apocalyptic Beirut. In the novel's present day, he shoulders the burden of acting upon city space alone.

Although Niqula shares Clarissa Dalloway and Hend's interest in city walking, for the purposes of this chapter I shift my focus from Niqula's walking and recollecting in the city to the experiences of his mother, Athena, and his lover, Shamsa, who is also the family's maid. Both appear in the novel only through Niqula's recollection of them—Athena is dead in the present, and Shamsa has mysteriously disappeared. Though the women do not walk the city like Niqula, they are still linked to this project's other protagonists. Like Leila Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, Clarissa Dalloway, and Hend, their experiences of history are informed by their gender. Their articulations of these histories employ affective language; desire helps all these figures navigate their relationships to history.

I argue that Athena and Shamsa promote touch rather than factual or linear storytelling as an alternative means for participating in place and the past. Barakat juxtaposes their extreme sensory encounters with Niqula's pre-war narrations of history, fabric, and family, in which he focuses on origin, linear progress, and "truth." Shamsa and Athena focus their desires on what Niqula considers unhealthy, extreme obsessions with silk. The two women break in to the family shop or Niqula's rooms to wrap their naked bodies entirely in the fabric. Niqula and other male characters imply that some form of sexual activity occurs during the women's time with the material. The women

lose weight and interest in other people. Their presences in the novel blur the lines between desire and obsession, and memory and illness.

My shift in attention from Niquila's "tilling of waters" to Shamsa and Athena's desires, obsessions, and possibly illnesses owes its development to Woolf's *On Being Ill*, which considers the way imaginative experiences of the world face containment through medical and social restrictions but can also be produced through them. Woolf wrote the essay while on extensive bedrest in 1925 and 1926, between the release of *Mrs. Dalloway* and her work on *To the Lighthouse*. A fainting spell in August of 1925 led to exhaustion, headaches, and even the German measles. What Hermione Lee describes as a "loose improvisation" of an essay moves quickly between topics, asserting at once illness's very real toll on the body and its potential for re-structuring community, promoting imagination, and recognizing the unspeakable grief of others (xxix). The essay was first published in January of 1926 in T.S. Eliot's *New Criterion*; it later appeared in *The Forum*, a magazine based in New York. The Woolfs' own Hogarth Press released a special hand signed run of 250 copies with a new cover illustrated by Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell in 1930 (xx-xxii).

Prone to bouts of depression and intense exertion, Woolf constantly encountered doctors and family members regimenting her life to keep her healthy, and these

experiences echo throughout her fiction and essays.⁶ In *Beginning Again*, the autobiographical sequel to *Growing*, Leonard Woolf counts four major breakdowns throughout his wife's life and two suicide attempts before her drowning in 1941.⁷ Serious health scares occurred between these major episodes, as well. Though more critical attention is devoted to Woolf's mental condition, the major depressive periods of her life included physical breakdown and bed rest. In her introduction to *On Being Ill*, Hermione Lee explains that, "All [Woolf's] life, severe physical symptoms—fevers, faints, headaches, jumping pulse, insomnia—signalled and accompanied phases of agitation or depression. In her most severe phases, she hardly ate, and she lost weight frighteningly" (xiv). Though Woolf nominally addresses physical illness throughout *On Being Ill*, referencing fever, influenza, and pneumonia, the essay does not lose sight of the mental components of these illnesses. Whether causes of physical illness or its byproducts, depression, melancholy, and mania accompany sickness. For Woolf, then, both in *On Being Ill* and throughout her life, the physical and mental experiences of illness are permanently linked.

Woolf's own experiences with illness and bedrest led to the *On Being Ill*'s central thesis: literature and imaginative work do not explore illness as a major theme because

⁶ Although I focus in this chapter on what Woolf proposes as the imaginative possibilities of illness, I do not intend to disregard the serious health threats mental illnesses posed and pose. For a more systematic description of these illnesses, see Hermione Lee's introduction to *On Being Ill* as well as her 1996 biography, *Virginia Woolf*. See also Thomas Caramagno's "neurobiography," *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic Depressive Illness*. Caramagno emphatically diagnoses Woolf with manic depressive disorder, a diagnosis he sees as essential for normalizing the role of mental illness in academia and contemporary society. Caramagno most usefully demonstrates that Woolf's mental health, whatever the diagnosis, was constantly in flux.

⁷ He writes that, "she had a minor breakdown in her childhood; she had major breakdown after her mother's death in 1895, another in 1914, and a fourth in 1940. . . she tried to commit suicide in the 1895 attack by jumping out of a window, in 1915 by taking an overdose of veronal; in 1941 she drowned herself in the river Ouse" (76-7).

each experience is intimately personal and no language exists to make one's suffering recognizable to others. She surmises that illness's absence from literature has much to do with writers' unwillingness to detail the body and "the poverty of the language" when it comes to expressing physical aches and pains. Linguistic "poverty" stems from both the highly specific nature of each body's experience—Woolf is emphatic that one can only measure another's pain by what one has felt previously—and by the continuously reinforcing lack of precedent: "The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry" (6-7). The radical discrepancy between great works of literature from which a lovelorn child can quote and the dearth of language available to those who suffer suggest that an ailment's physical specificity does not attract the same attention as a more abstract affect that can easily become metaphorical.

Though *The Tiller of Waters* is a work of fiction rather than an essay, Barakat also evokes her personal connection to the book's content, claiming that she could only write *The Tiller of Waters* after leaving Beirut permanently with her children during the Civil War, as if elegizing a city lost forever.⁸ Now living in Paris, Barakat continues to write in Arabic, a decision that makes her unique among those writing about the Lebanese Civil War. Barakat did not publish early enough to participate in what miriam cooke calls the Beirut Decentrists movement, a group of female writers narrating and reframing the war

⁸ Personal Communication, Fall 2013. Barakat emphasizes the disappearance of her Beirut in a 2002 interview with *Al Jalal*, noting that, "The Beirut I need to make peace with no longer exists" (Marie).

from within its temporal and geographical borders.⁹ Barakat's first novel, *The Stone of Laughter* (*Hajar al-dahik*) appeared in 1990, just shortly after the end of the war and well after the publication of cooke's first study.¹⁰ At that time, Barakat and her children had already left for Paris. Scholars also rarely include *The Tiller of Waters* in the category of Lebanese diaspora novels. Syrine C. Hout, for example, identifies a group of younger Lebanese writers living in exile and writing about the war and the experience of that exile, usually in English or French.¹¹

Not quite adhering to either genre, *The Tiller of Waters* perches between the two categories: it is a diasporic novel written with a profound intimacy of place and in lyrical Arabic. Marilyn Booth, Barakat's long-time translator, writes that in translating this particular novel, "I was especially preoccupied with conveying the lush, sometimes quite

⁹ cooke identifies the Decentrists as women who wrote from Beirut during wartime, specifically Ghada al-Samman, Hanan al-Shaikh, Emily Nasrallah, Daisy al-Amir, and Etel Adnan. While these women come from different religions, ethnicities, and political affiliations, and write in Arabic, the Lebanese dialect, English and French, almost all are well-educated members of the middle class. She writes, "They have been decentred in a double sense: physically, they were scattered all over a self-destructing city; intellectually, they moved in separate spheres. They wrote alone and for themselves. They would not conceive of their writings as related to those of others, yet their marginal perspective, which gave insight into the holistic aspect of the war, united them and allowed them discursively to undermine and restructure society around the image of a new center" (3).

¹⁰ cooke does address Hoda Barakat in her sequel of sorts to *War's Other Voices, Women and the War Story* (1996). She suggests Barakat belatedly participated in something like the Decentrists to advance a new form of Lebanese nationalism that is "an individual sense of belonging and then of responsibility, which radiates out from multiple centers. It is first of all personal; it *may* become collective . . . For those who are humanist nationalist, there is no single polity but multiple fragmentary projects that continually disassemble and reassemble and regenerate themselves because, above all, they foster survival" (289). While cooke connects Barakat to debates happening in Lebanon, she does not extensively address the complexities Barakat faces in writing about Lebanon from abroad.

¹¹ Hout names Rabih Alameddine, Tony Hanania, and Hani Hammoud as particularly representative of contemporary diasporic Lebanese writers. He writes, "What differentiates this new group of writers from their immediate predecessors is their preoccupation not only with the war itself as a human tragedy, but also with the complex relationship between life and exile and survival in the fatherland during the war years. In addition to geographic distance, these exilic narratives enjoy the hindsight necessary to create critical distance from the war's violence and chaos. Appearing after peace had been achieved in Lebanon, these texts exhibit a more recent consciousness, one permeated by irony, parody, and scathing critiques of self, family, and nation" (285).

formal and almost antiquated, particularity of Barakat's style, juxtaposed with the sharp concreteness of geographical and sensory memory that its narrative offers" (52). Barakat uses not just Arabic but classically sophisticated Arabic, what Booth calls a "closely woven brocade" in keeping with the novel's fabric interests.¹² *The Tiller of Waters* witnesses the rebuilding efforts in Beirut but chooses to narrate the recent past as if it were ongoing. Barakat, then, tells multiple stories about memory. She explores Niquila's preoccupation with global history and determination to bring lost spaces in Beirut back into being through movement. She follows Athena and Shamsa's narrations of desire and belonging. And she allows herself to recall and elegize the city she has left.

Barakat's transnational movements impact the publication and circulation of her novels. In 2000, *The Tiller of Waters*, received the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature from the American University of Cairo to support the novel's translation into English.¹³ Even though she writes in Arabic, extensive translations allow her novels to receive more attention from the international community than from the Arab world.¹⁴ Barakat herself notices the discrepancy between the language in which she writes and the global spaces

¹² Interestingly, Booth's description of her recent translation projects also references mental illness and pathology: "The last three novels I've translated from the Arabic propose madness—institutionalized by a society, and both accepted and resisted by a narrating voice—as a logical response to war and to rhetorics upholding the impermeability of gender and national boundaries. Their protagonists are not only alienated by at times alienating, rejecting connection as false and social participation as a charade. This is not the sort of stuff that publishers are necessarily eager to have more of from the Arab world" (49). See "On Translation and Madness" for an extensive discussion about the politics of translating and publishing Arabic language texts in North America.

¹³ Miral al-Tahawy also received the Mahfouz for *Brooklyn Heights* (2010).

¹⁴ In 2015, Barakat was short listed for the Man Booker International Prize alongside Amitav Ghosh, Ibrahim al-Koni, and the award's eventual winner, László Krasznahorkai. The Man Booker recognizes an author's entire body of work, which prior to *The Tiller of Waters* included Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter* (*Hajar al-Dahik*, 1990) and *Disciples of Passion* (*Ahl al-Hawa*, 1993). Despite the international attention, she was only longlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) after publishing *Kingdom of this Earth* (*Malakut Hadhihi al-Ard*) in 2012.

in which prizes are awarded and translations undertaken: “I write in Arabic, my books are set in the Arab world, and the readers that I have in mind are Arab, but what aggravates me slightly is that my recognition always comes from the Western world. . . . I don’t have a huge Arab following [but] whether recognition comes or not, my world is the Arab world” (Stoughton). Sensing a divide between the spaces about and to which she writes and her actual readership, Barakat remains steadfast about her connection to Arabic and Lebanon.¹⁵ I argue that the transnational circulation of Barakat’s work and *The Tiller of Waters* specifically corresponds to the novel’s interest in global border crossings. The narratives Niqula, Shamsa, and Athena tell radiate out of Beirut into wider Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and other global contexts.

Although Woolf writes from the confined territory of a sick-room, her essay also plays with intimacy, distance, and border crossings. Lee hypothesizes that the themes of “absence and distance” have something to do with Woolf’s developing relationship to Vita Sackville-West, who helped care for her during illness before leaving in January of 1926 to join her diplomat husband in Tehran (xix, xviii). As a result, Woolfs’ musings travel across the globe as Sackville-West writes to her from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Russia.¹⁶ The intersections between the global and the domestic inform a text that is deeply concerned with spatializing illness and conceptualizing the ways people can cross distances between one another, whether the distance spans national borders or the

¹⁵ Her concerns also echo those of other Arab writers popular in the West like Sinan Antoon who gesture to the implications of prize money and translation.

¹⁶ The Hogarth Press published Sackville-West’s account of her journey, *Passenger to Teheran*, that same year. Hermione Lee also notes that, “The 1926 version of *On Being Ill* made a private joke—later cut out—about how, in an imaginary heaven, we can choose to live quite different lives, ‘in Teheran and Tunbridge Wells’” (xviii).

distinctions between sickness and health. In her exploration of illness, Woolf describes sickness as revealing “undiscovered countries” to which the patient travels (3). At the same time, illness distances the sufferer from the local spaces around her. Woolf writes that ‘the whole landscape of life lies remote and fair, like the shore seen from a ship far out at sea’ (8). The ill cannot walk the “landscape of life,” nor can the well travel to the “undiscovered countries” of the sick. Firm boundaries contain them. Woolf describes the experience of illness as revealing the limits of human connection. Illness, she argues, produces an experience we cannot share with others and for which we cannot expect sympathy. When we travel into the space of illness, we cannot simultaneously travel to one another. However, the essay does seek language to narrate the experience of illness. In doing so, Woolf tests crossings that might become available. Imaginative affiliations and desire become the mechanisms through which both Woolf and Barakat narrate experiences otherwise limited by conventional medical discourse or wartime obstacles. In the next section, I demonstrate that their focus on the material conditions of these spaces—and the bodies in them—produces their affective vocabularies.

Materiality and Desire

The desire and imagination *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill* narrate correspond with Barakat and Woolf’s careful attention to the material and physical. Both writers emphasize intersections between different kinds of materiality. They draw together discussions of the body, and the female body in particular; spaces like rooms, gardens, and cities; and material objects like fabric. The examination of materiality in each text is instigated by material devastation. In *On Being Ill*, physical sickness destroys

the body. In *The Tiller of Waters*, devastation occurs through war that ravages downtown Beirut and the marketplace where the Mitri family works. Both writers cite the minimal availability of language to discuss these events and seek more creative narration to address them.

In *The Tiller of Waters*, Barakat focuses consistently on her characters' physical forms. As Niqula tries to survive on his own during the war, he grows fat by drinking olive oil, becomes sick from bad foods, urinates to mark his territory against the wild dog population, and wraps himself in fabric. These physical experiences implicate Niqula's body directly in the narration just as *On Being Ill* depends on the physical components of illness and treatment. Niqula's weight gain echoes the focus on Woolf's weight among doctors and family. Leonard Woolf writes that, "Every doctor whom we consulted told her that to eat well and drink two or three glasses of milk every day was essential" for maintaining weight and health (79).

The forced weight gain, one of many regimens to which Woolf was exposed, contrasts with Shamsa's growing body. Barakat attributes Shamsa's weightiness to a desire for belonging:

I am fat, says Shamsa, because I have no country. I eat so that my body will grow, so that I can plant its weight firmly on the ground; so that my body will sense the earth there. We walked so much when we left our land that I was almost one with the air. Now I gain weight so that I may settle, so that I can feel the presence of a homeland. (72)

Shamsa connects the physical and affective feelings of belonging. To feel in place is to occupy that space, to feel grounded and expansive rather than tenuous or marginalized. Without an immediate political or cultural connection to accomplish that goal, Shamsa

physically expands her body. The heavy body has had no need to move quickly or frequently; it evinces stability.

Fabric intervenes in the connection between body and place. Upon encountering silk, Shamsa realizes she could belong to an ephemeral object rather than to a particular place. Her body marks her change in desire with its new slenderness: “I no longer need to weigh anything. I no longer need to feel that I stand solidly on firm ground. I no longer like to eat. I have found something better. I will become as light as what I am wearing. I might even try to fly. Like a butterfly” (152). Shamsa returns to the lightness of her family’s earlier nomadic existence, this time because she belongs so emphatically to silk, the delicate fabric she wears. Her connection to the material is powerful enough to transform her body.

Through Shamsa’s “belonging” to silk and Athena’s fixation on the same material, Barakat establishes intimate and intensive ties between the human body and material objects. These women do not just prefer silk; they desire it and are drawn to it. Fabric assumes multiple characteristics and functions in both texts. The material in Woolf’s sick room soothes and comforts the patient.¹⁷ *The Tiller of Waters* presents fabric as a trade good, a site for memory, and even a text through which history can be read.¹⁸ Fabric is the way the Mitri family navigates loss, history, domestic life, and economics. Fabric is

¹⁷ The Paris Press edition of *On Being Ill* also includes *Notes from Sick Rooms*, a nursing manual written by Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen. In the piece, which recommends careful attention to the patient’s needs, Stephen exhibits an obsessive focus on straight sheets and eliminating crumbs from the bed, measures meant to comfort the patient’s heightened sensibilities.

¹⁸ In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cites Bora’s useful designation between texture and texxture: “Texxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or a metalwork pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texxture in this case” (14).

the family business and inheritance. Through it, Niqula encounters and recalls the grandfather he never met. His grandfather's teachings and precautions are rooted in the lessons of cloth and Niqula remains "bewitched by the memory of my paternal grandfather's words," which connect fabric to the history of cities, and specifically to the life of Beirut (66).

While Niqula's father Jirjis runs a shop or *souk* in the downtown Beirut markets, Niqula repeats time and again that his father is "not just a cloth merchant." That is, his interest in cloth is not merely profit-based. The successful merchant does not just sell the most cloth; instead, he matches each cloth perfectly to a body or an event. Because of each fabric's specific function and character, Jirjis is dismissive of current "fashion," saying that, "Only from the middle of the last century did 'fashion' become a matter of repetitive loss of memory, for that was when the repugnant combinations began, the mongrel blends" (40). The ease of buying and wearing these "mongrel blends" causes buyers and wearers to forget history. Instead of knowing where their clothing comes from and how the material circulated around the world, or expecting the garment they make from that fabric to last for a long time, buyers of synthetics approach clothing as temporary and impersonal. Synthetic fabrics lack history, personal connections, and fidelity to those who own them. Silk and similar materials, however, reflect long narratives of global travel and creation. For example, Niqula describes lace's dependence on Italy's particular climate and the aristocratic population that sought refuge from invading hordes: "To attain lace in its truest form, Venice had to exist" (112). Lace's

existence links it permanently to the history of Venice and the communities that populated it. Conversely, synthetic materials depend on no place or person.

Despite Jirjis and Niqula's distaste for synthetic materials, they stock them for their customers. The synthetic materials' presence in particular suggests that the Mitri men's interaction with cloth at least partially resembles Susan Stewart's description of the "collection" in *On Longing* (2003):

A final transformation of labor into exchange, nature into marketplace, is shown by the collection. Significantly, the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property . . . the creation of such narrated objects depends upon the fictions and abstractions of the bourgeois self on the one hand and the exchange economy on the other. In the final phases of late capitalism, history itself appears as a commodity. (xii)

Stewart emphasizes the tensions between history and commodification, desire and market value, that objects produce. Narrative allows the intersections between economy, history, and affect to occur more fluidly, linking an object's identity to both the labor that produced it and the market in which it now circulates. Despite the passion with which Jirjis and Niqula discuss fabric, theirs is an interest rooted in the market, in labor and economics. By contrast, the desires that Athena and Shamsa exhibit stay removed from the market. Dr. Kevork, Athena's music teacher and lover, suggests that kleptomania fuels her obsession; she must steal rather than buy the fabric she desires, an activity that absents her from the marketplace (161).

As economic objects or as sources of desire, "true" fabrics like silk and velvet allow for the narration of domestic and global histories. In *On Being Ill's* final passage, Woolf envisions a wealthy widow silently expressing her grief, leaving behind only "the

curtain, heavy, mid-Victorian, plush perhaps . . . all crushed together where she had grasped it in her agony” (28). The plush curtain materially narrates an experience of loss and pain that few people will observe. From a more global perspective, the history of silk also contains the rise and fall of world empires from Rome to Byzantium to Persia. When Niqula introduces Shamsa to silk, the culmination of lessons in fabric that have included linen, velvet, and lace, he describes its development in China and India, and the global plots to steal silk-making technology involving Justinian of the Byzantine Empire and Alexander the Great. Niqula explains Lebanon’s involvement in silk’s long story: “Before the Arabs carried silk to Spain and Sicily and taught the world how to dye it a palette of colors, it was the Syrian and Lebanese silk weavers who taught the technique of samite to the Persians and Chinese. For the weavers of the Levant had taken to fleeing to Persia, trying to avoid the harsh and restrictive surveillance of Byzantium” (147). Niqula explains that silk’s voyages depended on citizens’ decisions to escape tyrannical governments. This small section of the novel engages multiple empires, cultures, and religions, describing the way silk traveled through conquest and along political lines. Material’s production and movement connect it to its environments.

Woolf considers the natural world, the producer of fabric, a potential source for sympathy when human interaction fails. She hypothesizes that the invalid can take comfort from the environment because she has the time and ability to observe nature differently: “Lying recumbent, staring straight up, the sky is discovered to be something so different from this that really it is a little shocking. This then has been going on all the time without our knowing it!” (13). Though the invalid may be able to take comfort in a

new perspective, watching the sky also brings the realization that nature is unswayed by human suffering and will continue long after the invalid's demise. Noticing the shifting of the clouds and the intricacies of small flowers, Woolf recognizes that, "Divinely beautiful it is also divinely heartless. Immeasurable resources are used for some purpose which has nothing to do with human pleasure or human profit. If we were all laid prone, stiff, still the sky would be experimenting with its blues and its golds" (14). Ultimately, nature can only be comforting through the knowledge of its indifference and determination to continue, regardless of human suffering.

Woolf's description of nature echoes Barkat's portrayal of Beirut in *The Tiller of Waters*. In the Mitri family stories, Beirut acts as a temptress, drawing residents who live away back and then using their bodies as part of the city's continued growth. Jirjis tells Niqula that his grandfather "believed that Beirut's existence would regain its vitality only after passing through colossal destruction and massive death. Beirut's soil is composted of layer upon layer of lives that have passed on" (32). Because Beirut's history is so tumultuous, it only recovers through the corpses of its previous citizens. The Mitris moved to Egypt before Jirjis' birth, and Niqula's grandfather cautions his son never to return to Beirut: "My grandfather would end their sessions by admonishing his son not to fall into the trap of Beirut's temptations, not to one day consider it his cherished destination just because it had once been the land of his ancestors" (3). Fearing the moment when Beirut will fall again, a prophetic position that anticipates the war, Niqula's grandfather rejects and asks his son to reject the myth of the ancestral home. Safety mandates that the family stay away.

Women, fabric, and city space—Beirut particularly—all seem to offer the same kind of temptations for the men who would possess them. The grandfather’s admonitions also suggest that he sees Beirut and Athena as similar influences on his son. He assumes that of the pair, she will be the more determined to settle in Beirut: “To stand at the pinnacle of cloth is to stand within silk. Within the eye of the needle. And so my grandfather said to my father: Do not marry that woman. And do not return to that city” (134). The danger of a seductive Beirut maps on to both the women in the novel and to silk. Niqula explains how the first Muslims to encounter silk prohibited women from wearing it: “It is forbidden, they proclaimed, to fuse two such perfect temptations, the summits of desire: the body of a woman and the fabric of silk” (169). The prohibition suggests that in combination, silk and the female body would become even more tempting and dangerous.¹⁹ Niqula’s grandfather also directly connects Athena and Beirut, suggesting that “marry[ing] that woman” and “return[ing] to that city” will produce the same effects.

Barakat’s focus on silk and on the women who desire the fabric evokes Orientalist tropes about the Silk Road and equivalences between silk, the Middle East, and the

¹⁹ The edict is one of many early restrictions on fabric; the Torah prohibited Jews from combining wool and linen, for example, in keeping with Deuteronomy 22:11.

female body.²⁰ Rather than rejecting these tropes, Barakat filters them through alternative navigations of desire that focus on desire's multidirectionality. Just as the female body and silk are "the summits of desire," they demonstrate intense desires of their own, pulling other bodies and materials into their orbit. Desire operates in something other than unidirectional fashion—it branches out into relations of beside, into a network of objects, bodies, and spaces that mutually impact each other. Narration of fabric, cities, and bodies in *The Tiller of Waters* produces pleasure for its own sake, as something that should be experienced rather than named, categorized, or understood. In Orientalist narratives, the female figure is often a temptress or slave girl; she deliberately provokes male desire or reluctantly endures it. In neither case does she voice desires of her own. Barakat notes these tropes and adapts them to Athena, the adulterous wife, and Shamsa, the virginal maid. Even though the women initially fit into these categorizations, their interactions with silk and their identical desires suggest that their identities cannot be contained by them. Neither woman rejects desire; instead, each reclaims it and appropriates its pleasures for herself. They find in silk not an object to be possessed, bought, or sold, but a partner in desire and pleasure.

The women's pleasure contrasts with the obligations Niquila feels in relation to fabric and city space. Readings of *The Tiller of Waters* usually focus on the way Niquila

²⁰ The role of the female body in Orientalist discourse has a long history. Scholars note a conflation between sexual and political power in these discourses. Orientalist imaginings connect desire for the body with a desire to "penetrate" the Arab world; controlling the Arab female body and Arab communities become equatable. See in particular *The Colonial Harem*, by Malek Alloula; *Scheherazade Goes West*, by Fatema Mernissi; and Marilyn Booth's illuminating introduction to her edited collection, *Harem Histories*. Sedgwick cites Bora here, who argues, "The narrative-performative density of the other kind of texture—its ineffaceable historicity—also becomes susceptible to a kind of fetish-value. An example of the latter might occur where the question is one of exoticism, of the palpable and highly acquirable textural record of the cheap, precious work of many foreign hands in the light of many damaged foreign eyes" (15).

acts on the city and on fabric, producing narrative through his interaction with the materials. Dina Amin explains that both Niqula's interest in fabric and his walking of the city constitute a vital memorial practice for Beirut:

The act of re-telling history orally can be in and of itself a form of resistance as it is a means by which to defend and preserve memories of the metropolis from erasure. The oral transmission of history in the form of storytelling is the only hope for the harsh reality of *The Tiller of Waters* as it allows the memory of permanence to inform the volatile present of better days, thereby providing a firm tether for a traumatized psyche living through war. (111)

While Amin usefully ascribes a dynamic and political role to the narration of history, her analysis valorizes the character. Amin describes Niqula "defending" a city only he is left to protect. Her reading of Niqula as a heroic storyteller who saves a version of Beirut suggests that his ultimate goal must be to preserve the city space and to return it to stability.²¹ Failure risks continued erasure and trauma. Many of the novel's readers have adopted Amin's approach to the text. In a 2002 interview, *Al Jadid* writer Elizabeth Marie asked Barakat: "By writing this book, were you weaving the streets and places of Beirut so that they will not be forgotten?" Barakat's response resists the implication that such a practice is communally significant or demanded of the writer: "Yes, but it is not a national duty. I did it for the pleasure, the delectation of pronouncing streets that do not

²¹ Critics prioritize this reading in relation to the Solidere reconstruction of downtown Beirut, which was ongoing during the time of Barakat's writing. Sune Haugbolle writes, "Solidere's slogan: 'Beirut—ancient city for the future' ignores the present and immediate past, specifically the war and its repercussions," and cites "the difficulties of incorporating the civil war into an optimistic, forward-looking master narrative" (86, 88). Performing the kind of "selective memory" that Haugbolle describes requires the elimination of significant spaces, such as the *aswaq* and downtown homes, that once composed the city's identity (86). Haugbolle notes that the new shopping areas bear little resemblance to the demolished ones, arguing that the plan's markets might sooner be called malls than *aswaq* (93). Barakat's juxtaposition of Niqula's walking and material map with Solidere's plans, then, actively contests rebuilding efforts that would erase the uncomfortable elements of Beirut's history. For more on Solidere's role in Beirut's reconstruction and the implications for the city's identity, especially following the 2011 breakout of conflict in Syria, see Habib Battah's 2014 photojournalism project for *BeirutReport* and *Al-Jazeera Digital*, "Erasing Memory in Downtown Beirut."

exist anymore.” Barakat situates her project in the context of pleasure and desire. She gives shape and name to places for which she longs and refuses to consider that desire politically heroic or nationally necessary. The reconstruction effort in the novel is personal, intimate, and rooted in the mechanics of the body, from the feel of fabric on one’s skin to the way a particular street name fits in the mouth.

A reading that focuses only on Niqula’s storytelling capabilities or that valorizes those efforts ignores his impact on his listener and the revisions that listener might make to the story. That reading also sacrifices desire, pleasure, and other affects in favor of political and social mechanisms. A singular focus on Niqula’s memories in *The Tiller of Waters* ignores the other voices that suggest the limits of Niqula’s success as a storyteller, teacher, and rememberer. Athena and Shamsa activate the margins of Niqula’s narration. They refuse to participate in desire, pleasure, and narration of the past in the ways Niqula deems most appropriate. These women bring to readers’ attention female and nomadic histories elided by global politics. Their narration elaborates upon what Niqula considers the “truth,” and their passion for silk unsettles Niqula’s plans for a systematic handing down of narrative and history.

Teaching Fabric: Alternative Pedagogies

On Being Ill and *The Tiller of Waters* explore the materiality of bodies, objects, and spaces and describe the ways in which these entities act on one another. They note that conditions of illness, desire, and pleasure place objects in diverse relations to one another. The uniqueness of these relations make them challenging to narrate to a listener. As a result, both texts express concerns about failed transmission. In *The Tiller of Waters*,

failure occurs when Niquila attempts to share his knowledge of fabric with Shamsa but is unable to complete his instruction. In *On Being Ill*, Woolf claims that the sick person cannot satisfactorily describe the experience of being ill and thus cannot elicit sympathy from a listener.

Woolf argues that illness reveals the limits of community formation. Language breaks down and sympathy is difficult to come by. Because of the “poverty of language,” the sick man is “forced to coin words for himself” to describe his experience and can only do so clumsily (6-7). Any request for sympathy “serves but to wake memories in his friends’ minds of their influenzas” (8). Each person feels sickness so acutely without being able to describe it that we cannot bridge the gaps between ourselves and others.

Woolf’s position on sympathy culminates in an illusion-shattering passage:

That illusion of a world so shaped that it echoes every groan, of human beings so tied together by common needs and fears that a twitch at one wrist jerks another, where however strange your experience other people have had it too, where however far you travel in your own mind someone has been there before you—is all an illusion. We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way . . . But in health the genial pretense must be kept up and the effort renewed—to communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work together by day and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases. (11-12)

Illness breaks down the “pretense” of connection and, seemingly, a shared sense of empathy and vulnerability. No longer can one rely on a common vocabulary and experience. Communication breakdown seems tied to the unknowability of our own conditions; if we “do not know our own souls,” how can we understand those around us?

Similarly, Niqula's desire to narrate fabric to Shamsa conflicts with her desire for silk; the two desires cannot co-exist.

In the midst of these failed transmissions, both texts seek vocabularies to describe material experiences differently. As Woolf writes, however, "It is not only a new language that we need, more primitive, more sensual, more obscene, but a new hierarchy of the passions; love must be deposed in favour of a temperature of 104" (7). Woolf calls for both a language and a changed social perspective better able to accommodate feelings of pain. The credit she gives to her physical pain and Barakat's descriptions of Shamsa and Athena's desires illustrate the "hierarchy of the passions" Woolf has in mind. These voices challenge established languages in favor of greater attention to the material and affective.

The "sensual," "obscene" language Woolf proposes has affinities with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*, which proposes materiality, specifically regarding touch and texture, as an important category for understanding how we exist in the world.²² The book's title suggests that the affective and the material are intimately connected; we feel both emotion and objects. An attention to texture, then, offers us a way to describe our experiences of the world without asserting a level of knowledge or expertise:

If texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together, then, it is not because they share a particular delicacy of scale, such as would necessarily call for 'close reading' or 'thick description.' What they have in common is that *at*

²² *Touching Feeling* also connects materiality and illness. Sedgwick published the collection while undergoing treatment for breast cancer; in her introduction she writes explicitly about cancer therapy "aim[ing] to blot up every trace of circulating estrogen" and "decimat[ing] my blood cells" (13, 28). She passed away from the disease in 2009.

whatever scale they are attended to, both are irreducibly phenomenological. To describe them primarily in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation. Attending to psychology and materiality at the level of affect and texture is also to enter a conceptual realm that is not shaped by lack nor by commonsensical dualities of subject versus object or of means versus ends. (21)

Sedgwick explains that the “touching and feeling” of her title need not be methodologically linked. One can explore these qualities many different ways. Nevertheless, touching and feeling are always participants in the same kind of experience. Whether we gesture to affect and texture briefly or spend pages delineating these categories, the ultimate result is always phenomenological. That is, what we notice or describe requires us to speak to our own, subjective experience of objects.

Sedgwick’s definitions of texture and affect have significant implications for pedagogy, or, in the context of *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill*, any form of transmission. Because the work “is not shaped . . . by commonsensical dualities of subject versus object or of means versus ends,” it also undoes conventional notions of the relations between the thing felt and the person feeling, or of the person describing and the person receiving the description:

Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object. (14)

Experiences of touch resist the binary between feeler and felt or narrator and listener. While touching seems passive, Sedgwick argues that it is an active process; one engages the material through multiple actions and processes. The feeler does not receive the sensation of texture so much as she produces it through her actions.

Sedgwick's refusal to distinguish between passive and active participants in touch or to establish a hierarchy of experience maps on to my critique of the educational structure Niqula establishes between Shamsa and himself. When Shamsa comes to work dressed in linen, Niqula assigns himself the task of narrating to her the history of these "true fabrics." He passes to her the stories his father told him and his grandfather told his father. His stories address the histories of linen, velvet, and lace before they turn to silk. Niqula constructs a hierarchy in which pleasure of touch should be dependent on prior knowledge. He compares Shamsa's learning to that of Sufi mystics: "She ascended with me in each level of pleasure, as the disciple of a Sufi master ascends, training her bliss through knowledge and disclosure" (72). Niqula compares himself to a "master" who holds the knowledge that the disciple seeks to access. He privileges discipline, the epistemological, and a linear progress that Shamsa might make through the "level[s] of pleasure." Niqula advances an educational model in his narration that maintains a strict structure between beginning and advanced, teacher and student. Even before Shamsa encounters the silk, Niqula instructs her to approach the material in what he considers the right way. Asking her to listen and not touch, he explains that, "If you take the silk to your body now, all of this will become inaccessible to you and it will be impossible for me to tell you its story as I ought" (144). Niqula draws a clear distinction between narrative, instruction, and knowledge on the one hand and touch and sensation on the other. Touch interferes with the work of transmission.

Niqula fears that Shamsa's lessons have failed because she has taken shortcuts through the "levels of pleasure," wrapping herself in silk before truly knowing the

material. He also fears that, “Perhaps it was because I gave you what was not mine to give. Perhaps it was because I taught you without having the learned skill of a teacher” (116). Having positioned himself as Shamsa’s instructor, Niqula feels unable to continue the chain of transmission that began with his grandfather and descended through his father to him. His framing of the obsession leaves little room for other modes of knowledge. I argue, however, that a more significant reason for Niqula’s “failure” is that he does not account for the ways in which touch, sensation, and pleasure might coincide with a different kind of knowledge and narrative tradition, one that is less hierarchical and transmission-based. Narratives informed by sensory elements and overwhelming feelings of desire suggest alternative ways to learn places, histories, and other people.

One possibility for an alternative educational model comes from Sedgwick’s preferred academic preposition, “beside.” Arguing that too much scholarship relies on the “beneath,” “behind,” or “beyond,” Sedgwick prefers “beside” because it allows objects to exist in relation to one another without dictating the nature of that relation: “*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8). Exploring the “beside” allows definitions to proliferate rather than limiting interactions to a single mode of exchange, usually one that is hierarchical.

In *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill*, individuals’ relations to others’ experiences take on too much of the “beneath,” “behind,” and “beyond” that Sedgwick critiques. Doctors in *On Being Ill* search for the root cause of a medical condition, hoping

to locate the truth behind symptoms. Niqula tells Shamsa stories that exist “behind” a fabric’s history, for example, and he plans for her to advance “beyond” each fabric until she reaches silk. He sees himself as the producer of the narrative that Shamsa will receive and the provider of the cloth that she will experience. Shamsa’s reaction to the fabric, however, partakes of the “beside” Sedgwick introduces, albeit a “beside” of an extremely passionate variety, and rejects the hierarchy Niqula tries to establish.

Shamsa’s eventual obsession with silk is the culmination of her other Sedgwick-like resistances to Niqula’s pedagogical methods. In their lessons, Shamsa pushes back against the order and style of Niqula’s transmission. When he considers stopping a story because Shamsa appears sleepy, she corrects him: “my drowsiness is not a longing to sleep. It is rather how I open myself to the pleasures of words, how I follow the story” (130). Shamsa listens in a way Niqula does not expect but she claims that mode of listening as how she best experiences the “pleasures of words.”

Shamsa’s reference to pleasure and desire evoke the imaginative and associative as important components of the “beside.” These associative qualities also inform Woolf’s illnesses and creativity. In his autobiography, Leonard Woolf debates the connection between mental illness and genius, which he defines as a boundless creativity and investment in work. He cannot decide whether illness is a radically different condition from health or an extension of the genius his wife demonstrated, as in a stunning passage where he describes Virginia Woolf’s storytelling capabilities: “She might suddenly ‘leave the ground’ and give some fantastic, entrancing, amusing, dreamlike, almost lyrical description of an event, a place, or a person . . . The ordinary mental processes stopped,

and in their place the waters of creativeness and imagination welled up and, almost undirected, carried her and her listeners into another world” (31). Woolf’s imagination depends on her stopping “ordinary mental processes,” moving through the world and her own narration in a “dreamlike” way.²³ In *On Being Ill*, Woolf herself claims that the experience of illness allows one “to float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, too look up—to look, for example, at the sky” (12).²⁴ Woolf suggests that illness extends the direction and temporality of observation; like Sedgwick’s “beside,” illness moves us away from “in front of” or “behind” to notice “above,” “below,” and “around.”

Woolf’s description of illness as expansive imagination and a change in perspective pushes back against illness as something that ought to be diagnosed, regimented, and contained. As she and the women of *The Tiller of Waters* continue developing associations and desires, their behavior is increasingly categorized and pathologized by male figures.

²³ This “dreamlike” description of Virginia recurs in Leonard Woolf’s autobiography; he describes walking in the streets at moments when his wife was the center of attention: “To the crowd in the street there was something in her appearance which struck them as strange and laughable . . . It was partly, I think, because there was something strange and disquieting, and therefore to many people ridiculous, in her appearance, in the way she walked—she seemed so often to be ‘thinking of something else,’ to be moving with a slightly shuffling movement along the streets in the shadow of a dream” (29).

²⁴ This perspective is possible only because the invalid has absented herself from the community’s movement. Woolf notes that, “Pedestrians would be impeded and disconcerted by a public sky-gazer” (13). This comment seems particularly intriguing coming from the writer of *Mrs. Dalloway*; though Clarissa is observational, she does not break the rhythm of pedestrian movement. Only when all walkers stop to study the sky-writing plane do the London pedestrians gaze upwards.

Containment and exclusion

The extremity of Shamsa and Athena's responses to fabric and Woolf's expansive imagination provoke anxiety among the men in their lives. By pathologizing Woolf's condition and Shamsa and Athena's silk fixations, these men demonstrate concerns about the body's desire, pleasure, and inventiveness overwhelming the mind's ability to organize information and to proceed logically and linearly. They adopt medical terminology in an effort to contain the women's phenomenological experience in disembodied discourse. Just as Niqula narrates the genealogies of fabrics, Beirut, and his family, other figures seek an origin, explanation, and cure for Shamsa, Athena, and Woolf's "conditions" when perhaps there simply is none.

Leonard Woolf claims that doctors diagnosed Virginia with a condition called "neurasthenia," although he calls the diagnosis merely "a name . . . which covered a multitude of sins, symptoms, and miseries" (75). Because of the "superficial" diagnosis, doctors focused on ways to prevent symptoms, namely rest and a milk diet. Though Woolf spent copious time convincing Virginia to drink more milk and to rest, he notes the "absurd" nature of the regimen, especially when it came to creative work: "Though you can tell a person like Virginia not to go for a walk or to a party, you cannot tell her not to think, work, or write" (80-1). In Woolf's description of caring for his wife's physical and mental illnesses, then, the body's health and the creative process are frequently at odds. To rest properly required mandated interruptions in thinking and writing. Both the diagnoses and the prescribed "cure" were at odds with Virginia Woolf's perception of her health. Her husband writes that, "everything which I observed between 1912 and 1941

confirmed their diagnosis. But I do not think that she ever accepted it” (80). Writing from a remove of several decades, Leonard Woolf notes the discrepancy between the doctors’ prescriptions, his observations, and Virginia’s felt reality.

The male characters in *The Tiller of Waters* are equally determined to diagnose and solve Shamsa and Athena’s conditions independently of the women’s felt realities. Niqula initially describes the obsession with silk as making Shamsa inhuman; she becomes eerily intuitive to silk’s location, and she “move[s] not as a human being but rather as a sinuous viper” (152). Niqula’s simile represents Shamsa as still seductive but incredibly dangerous, an unpredictable and sleek creature. And yet he quickly moves from the language of the metaphorical and inhuman to that of the medical. He wonders if Shamsa’s obsession is “a crossing into another world that bridges the forbidden, a world that doctors call hysteria” (153). The Arabic text transliterates hysteria rather than translating it to an Arabic word, suggesting its purchase as a global, medical term. Hysteria becomes an official diagnosis for Shamsa’s condition.

Other male characters also employ psychoanalytic language to diagnose Shamsa and Athena’s conditions. Professor Kevork, Athena’s music teacher and lover, confronts Jirjis to seek a cure for what he calls Athena’s “illness” (159). Kevork has heard of “women’s pathological erotic infatuation with fabrics” because of an uncle’s encounter with the real French psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian Clérambault (160). Clérambault’s 1908 study ““Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme” (“Women’s Erotic Passion for Fabric”) analyzed four women who stole silk from Parisian department stores and masturbated with it, often in public spaces. The women, like Barakat’s characters,

preferred to steal the fabric and refused to wear or work with it. Clérambault's most intriguing finding was the non-symbolic nature of the women's interaction with silk: they "did not use fabric as a substitute for the human body . . . their passion was for the cloth itself, not for what it represented" (Shera 168).²⁵ Ultimately, he concludes that the fixation has something to do with the women's "disenchantment with heterosexual, penetrative coitus. Their interlaced circumstances of menopause, substance abuse, and, for some, hysteria were seen to have informed their psychiatric state" (167). In focusing their erotic energies on silk, Clérambault suggested, the women threatened expected relationships to husbands, lovers, and broader society.²⁶

When Shamsa and Athena present similar threats to family and economic structures, male characters endeavor to keep these threats out of public spaces. When Athena visits the family shop to wrap herself in fabric, Jirjis prevents anyone else from going down to the basement. Niqula roams the market, hoping to pre-empt his mother's visit to any other shop. These preventative measures are designed to hide Athena's growing obsession and to avoid its being talked about. And although Kevork suggests other women have exhibited the same symptoms, Niqula's narratives about fabric do not include other women who have been obsessed by silk. His stories erase the history of

²⁵ Peta Allen Shera recommends approaching Clérambault's research with a certain level of suspicion. She suggests that his own infatuation with fabrics and his reading of previous work about women and fabric "prompt the question as to whether he 'tailor-made' or exaggerated aspects of his patients' conditions in his desire to document cases of pure pathology" (166).

²⁶ Clérambault's work arrives in *The Tiller of Waters* both through the study and through Clérambault's travels; as Professor Kevork narrates, Clérambault visited North Africa to photograph fabric there. Shera also writes that Clérambault photographed in the region from 1917-1920: "A popular theory is that his photographic works betray a fabric fetishism that he caught from his fabric-obsessed patients or that he shared with them and recognized in their condition" (160).

cloth-obsessed women like Shamsa and perhaps ensure that their condition repeats in other women.

The practices of exclusion and containment outlined above rely on a distinction between male and female experience. Woolf notes that women may be excluded from being ill because they need to function as caregivers. The patient she describes in *On Being Ill*, the person who experiences illness throughout the essay, is usually male, even though Woolf writes from her own experience. She also notes that the responsibility for care-taking and sympathy generally falls on women, “in whom the obsolete exists so strangely side by side with anarchy and newness” and “who, having dropped out of the race, have time to spend upon fantastic and unprofitable excursions” (10).²⁷ The caregiver function seems to prevent a woman—unless she is quite wealthy—from being ill in her own right. Woolf herself seems exempted from caregiving on the basis of what Leonard Woolf calls her “genius”; however, the other geniuses he references in comparison to his wife are all male (31-2).

Similarly, the history of fabric, and of silk in particular, features only a few female characters. The women who do appear, Cleopatra and the Byzantine Empress Theodora, contribute to what Jirjis calls silk’s “seduction of power” and “ruses of cunning and pain” (167). These two iconic figures, like Shamsa and Athena when silk entices them, are described as both desirable and dangerous. Theodora, a former dancer and prostitute, marries Justinian and obtains silk for the Byzantine Empire. Cleopatra seduced Caesar

²⁷ Woolf’s description of female caregivers corresponds with her own experience with maternal nurses, who tended the sick even at the expense of their own health. Woolf’s mother, the notoriously self-sacrificing Julia Stephen, died when her youngest daughter was thirteen; the death is frequently attributed to over-extension. See Mark Hussey’s introduction to *Notes from Sick Rooms* in the *On Being Ill* collection.

through her “fabrics made of breeze,” which became for Rome “the hazardous prelude to decline and decadence” (168-9). Jirjis tells his son that, “In all of the stories of silk you will find betrayal, evil, and abundant covetousness,” and the women associated with those qualities appear in narration most dangerous of all (168).

Aside from these powerful political players, however, women are noticeably absent from the fabric’s production and trade. Barakat describes the Beirut marketplaces as predominantly masculine. The Beirut *aswak* are run by all male merchants. Women appear in interactions with fabric as seamstresses—revisers of material that has already been produced—or as consumers. Niqula’s description of textile history comes more from his experience than a factual account of women’s fabric production in the Middle East; in fact, Leila Ahmed writes in *Women and Gender in Islam* that during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, “women of all classes engaged in sewing, embroidery, and other forms of textile production,” including “the weaving and dying of silk” (112). In the novel, however, only some female customers visit the Mitris’ shop, and Niqula’s mother Athena receives her seamstress at home. The woman brings bolts of cloth that Jirjis has already selected for his wife and together they discuss the limited range of pattern options. Athena only begins to visit the marketplace when her desire for silk becomes overwhelming. In Niqula’s eyes, her invasion of her son and husband’s place of work becomes another sign of her boundary transgression and pathology.

Further, the pathology that Niqula, Jirjis and Doctor Kevork assign Shamsa and Athena denies them their own subject position. Shera argues that Clérambault’s diagnosis of his patients “supports the typical cultural alignment of women with their bodies, with

emotion, touch, silence, consumption, and being spoken for as the object rather than the agent of discourse. The male fetishists Clérambault described enjoy the opposite . . . speaking for themselves as the creators of artistic and intellectual production” (169). Because Clérambault describes the women as receiving pleasure from the fabric they steal, he categorizes them as passive, receptive, and largely silent. In fact, as Barakat and Sedgwick suggest when they move away from pathologizing, the experience of fabric and touch is active, a dynamic participation in history and narratives of belonging. Both texts equate politics, economy, medicine, and masculinity with a particular narrative style, one that seeks origins, causes and effects, and clear distinctions. In their articulations of desire, imagination, and the sensory, the women in these texts reject the marginalizing structures and advance their own modes of narration.

Narration and belonging

In addition to Niqla and Jirjis’ roles as economic actors in the marketplace, they are both Beirut “natives,” while Shamsa and Athena are from elsewhere. Athena grew up in Egypt; Niqla describes how his mother’s voice “fell back into the rhythms of the Egyptian dialect” when she reminisced (8). Her name also connects her with Greek culture, making her a Mediterranean figure. Shamsa’s Kurdish family lived a nomadic existence. Though citizenship is not an immediately gender-specific category, Jirjis, who like his wife was born in Egypt, inherits Lebanese citizenship from his father, just as

Niqula inherits that citizenship from Jirjis (3).²⁸ Shamsa and Athena's positions in Lebanon echo Woolf's assertion in *Three Guineas*: "as a woman, I have no country" (109). Their non-existent claim on citizenship mirrors their exclusion from economic, educational, and political structures.

As Woolf, Shamsa, and Athena face medical, economic, and political containment, their engagements with fabric, text, and narrative correspond to Stewart's description of "anti-authority":

If authority is invested in domains such as the marketplace, the university, or the state, it is necessary that exaggeration, fantasy, and fictiveness in general be socially placed within the domains of anti- and nonauthority: the feminine, the childish, the mad, and the senile, for example. (xiii)

Stewart distinguishes between the authority of economic trade, institutional education, and political rhetoric and the "anti-authority" perspective that accommodates divergent positions. Though she needs a more careful explanation of the grounds of comparison between the modes of "fictiveness" she identifies, Stewart explains that marginalized actors have access to a different relationship to "truth." Rebecca Solnit claims that the "anti-authority domain" is not a space of useless information; rather, it is a space for excluded narratives:

²⁸ Though Barakat largely avoids discussion of the war's politics in this novel, a small conversation reminds readers that these questions of who belongs in Lebanon is closely connected with the fighting. Niqula and his Muslim neighbor discuss the Maronites in power: "Abd al-Karim felt no embarrassment about alluding to the Maronites in this manner. He knew that we—the Greek Orthodox—did not like them very much either. He knew we had no part in what was happening and nothing to do with those whom he called foreign imports imposed on the native Beirutis" (13). Abd al-Karim alludes to the French preference for a Maronite government and, indirectly, to the influx of Palestinian refugees that many Lebanese blamed for exerting pressure on the country. The civil war is tied to the actions of global participants; it reverberates with colonial activity and displacement throughout the region. That this conversation should happen between a Muslim and a Greek Orthodox raises an additional question: who, exactly, are the "native Beirutis"?

Just as the purely patrilineal Old Testament genealogies leave out the mothers and even the fathers of the mothers, so these tidy stories leave out all the sources and inspirations that come from other media and other encounters, from poems, dreams, politics, doubts, a childhood experience, a sense of place, leave out the fact that history is made more of crossroads, branchings, and tangles, than straight lines. These other sources I call the grandmothers. (*Field Guide* 59)

Like Stewart, Solnit sees narrative exclusion as gendered. The erased, “branching” stories tend to come from “the grandmothers,” women who see the world differently and make use of media other than that prioritized by authoritative texts. The narratives in *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill* reflect similar “inspirations” and alternative ways of being in the world.

An example of women’s creative historical narration opens *The Tiller of Waters*, as Niqula describes his parents’ return to Beirut. Athena and Jirjis meet and marry in Egypt; Jirjis lived in Egypt because his father and grandfather, also from Beirut, left the city, convinced it was headed for ruin: “His father did not immigrate to Egypt for the sake of commerce alone, my grandfather would insist, but rather because he was calculating the likely arc of Beirut’s florescence” (31). Again, the Mitri men carefully balance economic and historical sensibilities, noting the way both contribute to travel.

Jirjis leaves Egypt for the same reason, boarding a ship with his pregnant wife to open a branch of the family business in Cyprus. As they sail from Alexandria, however, the coast of Beirut entices Athena. The story of their return to Lebanon after generations away opens the novel:

It’s an illusion. It is only an illusion that you see, said my father to my mother, who stared into the distance, her hand raised to shade her eyes from the sun. From such a distance, you cannot see what you claim to see. The sea is like the desert: it, too, has its own mirages. And we are still far from land. But—I told your father

—it was certainly Beirut . . . From a distance, it looked so lovely. It looked like a landscape of dreams. I no longer felt the cravings of pregnancy, or the nausea brought on by the furious waves. For the first time in months, I longed once again to sing. As I pressed against the deck’s metal railing, I raised my arms—so plump and white they were—to wave toward the shore, and said to your father, I want us to go ashore here. I don’t want to go to Greece. And that is exactly what happened. (1)

Athena names herself the impetus for the family’s return to the seemingly idyllic city, though she of the three has the least native claim to it. Throughout the novel, she is connected to Beirut not by birthright or nativity but through a shared seductiveness. In family lore, Athena emphasizes her immediate desire for Beirut, even without having visited before. Her desire is so powerful that it enables her to see the city from an improbable distance. Athena’s legend, through its shaping and reshaping of events, captures Beirut’s extreme attraction and attaches narrative to the family’s return there. Though the narration begins as Niqula’s, Athena’s voice assumes the first person and completes the tale. Her recounting emphasizes her youthful body and so is intricately tied to Athena’s perception of her younger self. It also substitutes for “cravings of pregnancy” a more powerful desire connected both to Beirut and to Athena’s desire to sing again, a reverse siren’s song as the city compels the woman to sing and to stay.

Athena’s story is bookended by her husband’s denial—“It is only an illusion that you see”—and her son’s disbelief. “In all of my fifty years,” he says, “not once have I believed my mother’s version of the story . . . Her many narratives, a trice different each time, left it to me to envision what scraps of truth might be behind my mother’s tales” (1-2). Niqula wonders at the logistical elements the story ignores—how could the whole ship veer off course for Beirut? Again, he seeks the truth “behind my mother’s

tales,” certain that another narration would provide a more logistically plausible explanation for his parents’ return to the city. Once again, truth, desire, and storytelling exist in tension with one another; because Athena’s version of the return is not “truthful,” it cannot be real. And yet, Athena’s insistence on the realness of her experience—“and that is exactly what happened”—refuses to discount the feelings of attachment and desire her narration produces.

For Niqula, the feminine and pathological experiences become entangled, because the differences between desire, obsession, and illness are minuscule at best. As Niqula watches his mother age, he is unable to determine where her penchant for elaborating ends and some form of elderly senility sets in:

Surely, I thought, my mother was growing feeble-minded with age. But I soon began listening to her stories differently, questioning myself, skeptical of my own presuppositions. After all, had there ever been a time when my mother dwelt in reality? Had anyone ever been able to claim that in her youth she had told only the truth? (7)

Signs that might point to dementia in fact reflect Athena’s way of being in the world. Her understanding of her life is based on something other than “truth.” Niqula, however, cannot conceive of her storytelling as anything other than fabrication and a refusal to “dwell in reality.” As a listener, he is “skeptical,” and unwilling to engage with his mother’s stories as he does his father’s and grandfather’s. However, Athena’s goals as a storyteller do not depend on a willing listener. Athena narrates in order to constitute herself. She is the most important audience for her own stories. As both Athena and Shamsa’s voices demand space in Niqula’s narrative, they unsettle Niqula’s investment in transmission-based storytelling practices.

When Shamsa appears in the Mitris' lives, she, too, offers her own narratives, forcing Niqula to account for her history even as he attempts to pass on the history of fabric. Her stories unfix the definitions of herself that appear in the history of cloth. Shamsa calls to attention the exotic and Orientalized versions of narratives about silk, arguing that these versions erase her own experience:

After you taught me the velvet and told me its story, in which I am—as the travelers and French voyagers saw me—an ignorant slave, who swaggers in the splendor of her velvet, the splendor of my skin, glistening with the ferociousness of its appetite like the savage fur of wild felines, I will tell you where my gentle force is hidden, where my fierce gentleness lies. (82)

Shamsa contests the definitions of herself as both seductive and dangerous that appear in the stories of cloth. In Niqula's narrative, she sees herself as distorted. Her narrative efforts refocus the stories of silk on her own desire and revise Niqula's history based on her family's experience.

In the midst of Niqula's narrations of material, which trace fabric's impact on leaders, warfare, the rise and fall of cities, and global travel circuits, Shamsa reminds Niqula that voices and histories of marginal populations like women and the Kurds have been excluded from that story. She narrates her own Kurdish family's wanderings before their arrival in Beirut, indirectly ascribing their nomadic life to Ottoman politics. Members of the Hakkari tribe, they leave home before Shamsa's birth to escape the governance and violence of Turkish rule. The similarities between Shamsa's parents and Niqula's underscore the major differences between them. Like Jirjis, Shamsa's father also tells her mother, "No. What you see is just an illusion. You are imagining it all, dreaming of the fogs of winter, the low clouds. The country that we will reach is always green, but

we are still outside of its merciful borders” (72-3). Despite the shared language, Shamsa’s family does not follow the routes of major trade lines or participate in the marketplace. They are herders in the country and servants in the city. Nor do they claim a particular nationality, unlike the Lebanese Jirjis and the Egyptian Athena.²⁹ And yet the family has its own traditions and narratives about fabric. When Shamsa receives her trousseau, she describes for Niqula the various components of cloth. Her wardrobe combines leather, linen, and velvet; some pieces previously belonged to her grandmother, and others were handmade by her tribe. Shamsa’s alternate explanation of the origins of fabric come from her own cultural and familial perspective.

Like Athena, Shamsa uses her stories to reconstitute herself. She even demands name changes throughout the novel to reflect her history. She reveals to Niqula that, “Shamsa” is merely an Arabic translation of her given Kurdish name: Hatawi, or “sun” (54). Later, she chooses the name Suryash for herself, which evokes “The Sun, in the language of my ancestors, the Kassites, descendants of the djinnis” (82). As Shamsa moves more deeply into the pleasures of silk, she assumes a different existence, naming herself through a connection to an older history.

Woolf also practices associative storytelling in *On Being Ill*. In keeping with what Hermione Lee calls the “apparent willful inconsequentiality and inconclusiveness of this essay,” Woolf ends her musings with a summary of Augustus Hare’s 1893 biography, *The*

²⁹ Though the novel is written in Arabic and classified as “Arab literature,” its attention to other populations in Lebanon is essential. Barakat calls the Kurds “The real strangers, the outsiders—the marginal. They were even more destitute than the poorest Lebanese, but they were tragically free, having no boundaries, no country” (Marie). Barakat also uses similar language to discuss the Phoenician influences in the novel, calling them “late people, in the process of leaving, who are not going to leave traces.”

Story of Two Noble Lives. Being Memorials of Charlotte, Countess Canning, and Louisa Marchioness of Waterford (xxxix). Woolf describes the “fat volume” narrating the lives of Charlotte and Louisa, who were “not very distinct . . . For life then was not the life of Charlotte and Louisa. It was the life of families, of groups” (25). Louisa, later Lady Waterford, moves through her own biography always overshadowed by her family, her father’s whims and her husband’s hunting. Woolf reads to locate the traces of the woman after family and society have erased her, as at the essay’s end, when the now-widowed Marchioness clutches a plush curtain and leaves behind a physical embodiment of her loss. Lee notes that the essay’s final section was cut from the 1926 *Forum* version, as it appears initially “a rather random example of desultory reading,” despite Woolf’s characteristic focus on the interior lives of women (xxxiii-xxxiv). Yet Lee reminds us that Lady Waterford’s grasp on the curtain hearkens back Woolf’s sick person searching for language to describe his experience; both are “crushing together” in “an image of fierce courage” (xxxiv). In addition to Lee’s assessment of Woolf’s conclusion, I argue that Woolf’s seemingly “random” selection is essential for the associative narration she practices. In the essay, Woolf refuses to justify her selection of particular reading materials, to organize or transition between them smoothly, or to read them as a critic. Instead, she allows these disparate experiences and narrations to exist in relation to one another through their attention to the sensory and physical.

Woolf explains that new reading and listening practices become available to the sick: “With responsibility shelved and reason in abeyance—for who is going to exact criticism from an invalid or sound sense from the bed-ridden?—other tastes assert

themselves; sudden, fitful, intense” (20).³⁰ Giving credit to the “tastes” produced by illness, Woolf situates reading not in knowledge production, criticism, or intellectual inquiry but in pleasure and the affective. She emphasizes feeling and the senses rather than meaning, although a meaning may emerge; in the sick bed, “The words give out their scent and distil their flavour, and then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils” (21-2). Sensory reading counters male resistance to Shamsa and Athena’s storytelling by focusing on pleasure, alternative histories, and imagined affiliations.

Both *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill* encourage reading responses that are associative rather than linear. Readers do not discover a cause of Athena and Shamsa’s fixations on silk nor will they be able to diagnose the illnesses Woolf references in her essay. Instead, readers move with these voices, beside them in Sedgwick’s terminology, as they encounter silk or develop obsessions and imaginative “flights” that medical discourse cannot quite explain or cure. Nor will readers leave the text understanding the trajectory of the Lebanese Civil War or the inner workings of mental health care in Britain during the 1920s. Instead, texts like *The Tiller of Waters* and *On Being Ill* ask readers to employ reading strategies that prioritize the felt and the sensory.

³⁰ Woolf suggests that this reading lends itself to poetry in particular: “It is to the poets that we turn. Illness makes us disinclined for the long campaigns that prose exacts. We cannot command all our faculties and keep our reason and our judgment and our memory at attention while chapter swings on top of chapter, and, as one settles into place, we must be on the watch for the coming of the next, until the whole structure—arches, towers, and battlements—stands firm on its foundations” (19). While *The Tiller of Waters* is a novel, I include it in Woolf’s collection of readings because it, too, rejects many of the “firm” structural elements of a novel. Barakat describes the book as “a puzzle but with various levels. It can be read horizontally and vertically” (Marie).

Conclusion

Shamsa, Athena, and Woolf experience and record illness, desire, and obsession in ways that complicate *The Tiller of Waters*'s focus on Niqula. Their imaginative narration and desire describe ways of interacting with history that extend the limits of what community and belonging are. The texts demonstrate what happens when one experiences different ways of being in that community. Illness of a physical or mental sort and conditions described as pathological by others demand that something other than knowability exist as the foundation of community. Rather than seeking sympathy or understanding, these voices seek narratives that affirm their felt reality.

While these modes of narration and desire usefully critique medical discourse, political structures, and linear historical narrative, they do so from a place of precarity. As a critical concept, desire is useful specifically because of its impermanence and instability, but it threatens those who express it with erasure. When Shamsa describes herself as a butterfly wrapped in a cocoon of silk earlier in this chapter, she relies on a troubling analogy. Niqula expresses concern about the violence and erasure that defines a butterfly's existence: "Before it flies a butterfly must rip open its silk cocoon, must cut the filament . . . When it becomes a butterfly, it must remember nothing about silk. To live the trivial, foolish, and rapidly fading life of butterflies, it must lay waste to its entire past" (152). The butterfly carries nothing with it when it flies, not even the fabric that made it what it was. Likewise, Shamsa disappears from the story mysteriously, without taking anything from Niqula. Is she a victim of the war? Did her family return to their nomadic existence? In Niqula's life, Shamsa's physical presence has simply faded away.

The violence and dangers that accompany each woman's foray into the imaginative, the desiring, the affective, and the material should remind us of the stakes of these narrative projects. They also raise, again, questions about what forms of memory and forgetting are necessitated in these efforts. In the following chapter, I theorize forgetting as a similarly unstable but essential memory category.

Chapter Four

The Waves of Forgetfulness

I have argued that creative and affective forms of memory—desire, nostalgia, sentimentality, and attachment among them—allow female voices to narrate their relationships to history and place in ways that depart from official political or familial narratives. Recourse to affective memory has also offered protagonists and memoirists alternative ways of belonging to narratives or spaces, even as political, medical, and intellectual structures attempt to contain or redirect memory's impact. For each of the texts in this study, memory is not merely a vehicle for uncovering content but rather an essential topic in its own right. In previous chapters, I have focused primarily on memory as acts of longing and nostalgia, a cognitive and affective experience that connects the past and present and rejects a linear, fixed relationship between the two. In this chapter, I shift my attention to forgetting, the second major subset of memory, which includes experiences of escapism, disorientation, misattribution, and blocking. In the examples below, I understand forgetting as a process that gives rise to more creative practices of memory, to “re-membering” rather than “not forgetting.”

Processes of remembering, forgetting, not forgetting, and not remembering exist in curious relation to each other. In a sketch manuscript describing her older half-brother, George Duckworth, Virginia Woolf narrates an evening she spent with him and his social circle: “Lady Carnavon had taken tickets for the French actors, who were then appearing in some piece whose name I cannot remember,” she writes. In edits, Woolf crossed out

“cannot remember,” substituting it with “have forgotten” (“A Description of George Duckworth,” 16).¹ The distinction she draws between failing to remember and having forgotten is an important one; not remembering suggests that she sought the name of the play as one might an important piece of information, while forgetting intimates that she casually allowed the title to slip away, registering it as unimportant just as she does the majority of her interactions with Duckworth society. Though the edit is a small one, it highlights Woolf’s understanding of forgetting and not remembering as separate processes. Similarly, remembering and not forgetting perform different tasks. As this chapter will demonstrate, not forgetting requires the participant to hold onto details and narrative structure, fixing people, places, and stories. By contrast, remembering makes possible flexible and constantly changing interactions with past and place.

As with nostalgia, sentimentality, and obsession, forgetting is frequently contained by discourses of pathology and morality; extreme displays of affective remembrances raise concerns about the health of the practitioner’s memory. The nostalgic or the obsessive is seen as stuck in the past, unable to acknowledge the present appropriately; conversely the person forgetting has not paid sufficient attention to the past or could be showing signs of a disease like Alzheimer’s or dementia. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the person forgetting might either repress past experiences or consider herself superficially “cured” of a trauma. In her preface to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth explains that “In Freud’s own early writings on trauma, the possibility of integrating the lost even into a series of associative memories, as part of the

¹ I am grateful to The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf for permission to cite this material.

cure, was seen precisely as a way to permit the event to be forgotten” (vii). Modern trauma studies, she argues, seeks to “relieve suffering . . . without eliminating the force and the truth of the reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit” (vii). Caruth’s groundbreaking work on trauma expands the experience’s geographic and temporal boundaries. She also resists the language of repression in favor of “latency,” in which the traumatic event need not be excavated or revealed but rather listened to when it returns to the sufferer (8-9). Caruth reconfigures trauma’s relationship to forgetting and a singular, bounded event. She does so by criticizing forgetting’s dangerous false presentation as a cure, one that remains too close to the language of repression and release.

The writers in this chapter do not depict forgetting as cathartic or even necessarily positive, but they do take forgetting seriously as a category of memory that produces fluid and inventive narration. Their ambivalent approach to forgetting separates them from the work of trauma theorists like Caruth, Dori Laub, and Shoshana Felman. In this chapter in particular, many of the experiences and texts I analyze appear to correspond clearly to the events described by trauma studies’ purview.² I am mindful that events in texts about the Lebanese Civil War and Arab defeat during the Six-Day War of 1967 are intensely traumatic for those who experience them. At the same time, I move my analysis away from trauma studies to incorporate a wider range of feelings about the past that include both longing and forgetting. As a literary studies scholar interested in

² Ann Cvetkovich points out, however, that the purview of trauma can and should be broad; she criticizes Caruth for “focus[ing] on trauma as catastrophic event rather than on everyday trauma” (19). Though some texts in this chapter describe catastrophic or apocalyptic-seeming events, others do address more daily challenges. I turn to affect theory instead of trauma studies in part to address this range more effectively.

ambivalence, I depart from what Caruth describes as trauma's "enigmatic core": "the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event . . . The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them" (5). If trauma studies aims to observe and address this "enigmatic core," noting the truth connected to an event even in its repetition, the writers in my study are more interested in how the truth of an event might transform through the acts of forgetting and re-membering.³ They are also interested in the political and historical structures that force shape on the "impossible history" Caruth describes; government bodies and family narratives offer palatable versions of complex events, filling the gap of an experience with a linear narrative. In the context of resisting linear narrative, forgetting and its accompanying absences, discomforts, numbnesses, and disconnections can be seen as active endeavors that keep historical narrative open, contested, and ambiguous.

The compulsions to "not forget" generated by political rhetoric, medical institutions, and psychological practices stem from a community's need for participants to remember and narrate the same events. To belong to a community means participating in a shared collective narrative of the past. Forgetting resists unified, fixed narratives by de-prioritizing certain details and events in favor of others and by introducing a more fluid, personal form of narration to the community. Forgetting also makes visible the tenuous

³ Trauma studies' investment in truth is significant given the field's particular interest in witnessing and testimony, both of which connect narrative, psychoanalytic, and legal practices. Shoshana Felman writes that "To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to *take* responsibility—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences" ("In an Era of Testimony" 103).

political structures holding a community together. If forgetting is both unpredictable and prevalent, a community needs to find elements other than a shared history around which to sustain itself.

The role of forgetting in community and narrative formation has been under-theorized because of the tendency to treat forgetting as an affliction or illness. To theorize forgetting effectively, one must navigate between two tempting but dangerous poles: on one pole, forgetting indicates medical, political, and ethical failings; on the other, descriptions of its creative potential risk fetishizing it and ignoring forgetting's very real implications for people suffering from memory loss. Critical and popular discussions of forgetting typically adhere to one of the two poles and rarely reference the other. While I do not minimize the severe impact of diseases like Alzheimer's, dementia, or amnesia, I explore what forgetting might offer someone unable or unwilling to participate in powerful collective memories. I de-pathologize forgetting by defining the experience as a necessary component of the memory process rather than a failure to remember.

I argue that nostalgia and forgetting always exist in relation to each other as symbiotic processes. In order to synthesize my descriptions of nostalgia and forgetting, I return to texts from earlier in the project while introducing new interlocutors. Virginia Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" once again provides a memoir-based theorization of memory's unpredictable nature. Her Modernist autobiographical project undermines the notion that what we remember must necessarily be the most significant events of our lives. I then turn to *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Mahmoud Darwish's 1986 prose poem, which follows a nameless, semi-autobiographical protagonist through the streets of Beirut

on August 6th, 1982, and *Beirut Fragments*, a 1990 “war memoir” penned by Jean Said Makdisi. I argue that these two texts demonstrate the demands placed on memory and forgetting by political structures like the governments and agencies that manage Palestinian refugee and exilic populations currently living in Beirut. I analyze the narrative methods Darwish and Makdisi use as Palestinian writers to resist political demands and to relate their own histories differently. I then analyze Syrian Ghada al-Samman’s short story, “The Ashy Danube” (“al-Danub al-ramadi”, 1973), which narrates another nameless protagonist’s journeys in Vienna. Attempting to escape the memory of defeat in 1967’s Six-Day War, the protagonist longs for forgetfulness and reaches the limits of a life without community and narrative. Forgetting and escapism in the story become forms of political protest that emphasize the magnitude of the history the protagonist witnesses. Finally, I revisit Miral al-Tahawy’s 2010 novel, *Brooklyn Heights*, to explore the way in which diseases like Alzheimer’s interact with an immigrant’s ability to situate herself in a new place. The disorientation Hend and other *Brooklyn Heights* characters experience makes possible the creative and flexible community formation the novel enacts.

The differences among these texts demonstrate that there is no one, ideal relation between forgetting and memory. My goal in de-pathologizing descriptions of forgetting is not to offer a single preferable alternative. Instead, I argue that forgetting performs multiple functions in each text; characters understand forgetting as a form of escape, as a political choice, as punishment or liberation. I address each of forgetting’s possible functions to emphasize the diverse tasks forgetting productively performs.

Though texts in this chapter offer different perspectives on forgetting, they share with each other and with earlier texts in this project a significant interest in space. In particular, the majority of these works come from authors living in and writing about cities other than their homes of origin. In London, New York, Vienna, or Beirut, writers question what it means to feel lost in space or to be able to locate oneself. Each city presents unique obstacles to the rememberer and inhabitant, especially when the individual originally comes from elsewhere. Faced with inhabiting a city without remembering the same things as other residents, writers focus on the style of memory particular spaces engender rather than specific objects and events. In Beirut, for example, Darwish describes a “chaotic” approach to memory:

In other cities, memory can resort to a piece of paper. You may sit waiting for something, in a white void, and a passing idea may descend on you. You catch it, lest it escape, and as days roll and you come upon it again, you recognize its source and thank the city that gave you this present. But in Beirut you flow away and scatter. The only container is water itself. Memory assumes the shape of the city’s chaos and takes up a speech that makes you forget words that went before. (90-1)

Like the walking of city streets in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Brooklyn Heights*, the memory process in Darwish’s poem demands movement from the individual. Rather than “sit waiting,” one must “flow away and scatter.” The chaotic nature of memory maps itself onto the kinds of streets where, during the Civil War, buildings lost eight stories in a matter of seconds and a walker was in constant danger. Darwish emphasizes how the relationship among city, memory, and rememberer can never be fixed. A concrete memory with a direct source and shape does not reflect the experience of living in Beirut, which necessitates constant re-writing, re-visiting, and, often, forgetting.

In addition to demonstrating interest in memory and space, most of the texts in this chapter also investigate forgetting's specific impact on women. As with nostalgia earlier in the project, forgetting and its pathologies carry a gendered component.⁴ *Brooklyn Heights*, *Beirut Fragments*, "A Sketch of the Past," and "The Ashy Danube" describe the tensions that occur at the intersection of memory and forgetting, migration, sexuality, and maternity. I suggest that a narrative engaged with forgetting could structure the past without cementing it, giving rise to re-narrations and re-writings. Finally, I claim that the female voices in this chapter experience forgetting in such a way that allows them to contest dominant political narratives about the past.

The 'Exceptionalism' of Memory and Forgetting

Like the expressions of nostalgia in Chapter One, affective memory becomes most powerful when writers shift attention from the object of memory or longing to the experience of remembering or desiring. Describing the relationship between memory and forgetting is challenging because scientists have not yet reached consensus as to what memory does. In *Bluets* Maggie Nelson explains that "neuroscientists who study memory remain unclear on the question of whether each time we remember something we are accessing a stable 'memory fragment'—often called a 'trace' or an 'engram'—or whether each time we remember something we are literally creating a new 'trace' to house the thought" (81). The first definition is more object-oriented, while the second focuses on

⁴ In addition to the sociocultural elements of gender and forgetting I point to here, neuroscientists have begun to recognize that Alzheimer's disease affects statistically more women than men. In a 2014 article, Katherine Lin and P. Murali Doraiswamy write that "While substantial progress has been made in understanding the pathological timeline and developing biomarkers [for Alzheimer's] one area remains relatively neglected: the disproportionate burden that women face. Women not only make up the majority of caregivers but also make up over two-thirds of Alzheimer's patients."

process and creation. It is unclear whether forgetting erases that “stable ‘memory fragment’” or disrupts our ability to “create a new trace.”

The writers in this chapter prefer “creat[ing] new traces” to accessing “a stable memory fragment.” A focus on the activity of remembering rather than an ultimate goal of reconstructing a particular object allows the writer to maintain an unfinished, unfixed narrative. In this critical section, I demonstrate that writers of forgetting move away from what Woolf calls the “exceptional” memory. Rather than holding on to concrete objects and “memory fragments,” writers who follow the interplay between memory and forgetting allow events, names, and facts to come and go.

Theorists who do focus on the forgetting of “memory fragments” offer a useful description of the relationship between memory and forgetting although they focus too much on the objects remembered or forgotten. In his 2004 *Oblivion*, Marc Augé suggests that “Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea” (20). He further argues that, “Oblivion is a necessity both to society and to the individual. One must know how to forget in order to taste the full flavor of the present, of the moment, and of expectation, but memory itself needs forgetfulness: one must forget the recent past in order to find the ancient past again” (3). Augé describes a structural version of forgetting and remembering. Rather than acting as oppositional forces, they give shape to one another and inform the narrative process. With his sea metaphor, Augé emphasizes a clear divide between memory and oblivion; though memory and oblivion structure each another, they maintain unique properties. Just as the sea erodes the coast

by constant movement, forgetting's role is to make room for additional or different memories. By forgetting some events, one can remember others.

Instead of an object-oriented approach to memory, I focus on texts that emphasize the experience of remembering and the way memory constantly changes and alters. In a 2013 article, "Speak, Memory," about the experience of writing his own memoirs, noted neuroscientist Oliver Sacks explains that a certain type of forgetting "may be necessary for a creative or healthy cryptomnesia, one that allows old thoughts to be reassembled, retranscribed, recategorized, given new and fresh implications." Sacks defines "cryptomnesia" as a kind of "unconscious plagiarism" that occurs when we return as if anew to ideas, texts, and events that we have already encountered. Forgetting does not merely make space for new memories to come to the forefront. Instead, it moves through memory, returning to the old with a difference. The analogy is not so much that between sea and shore as that between sea and current; forgetting exists as a current within memory, transforming its make-up, appearing in unexpected ways, and tugging the sea in different directions even as it remains a part of that entity.

Forgetting as a current is an ideal description of Woolf's memorializing. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf is curious about which childhood events her mind chooses to recall and, more broadly, how and why we remember some things and forget others:

Unfortunately, one only remembers what is exceptional. And there seems to be no reason why one thing is exceptional and another not. Why have I forgotten so many things that must have been, one would have thought, more memorable than what I do remember? Why remember the hum of bees in the garden going down to the beach and forget being thrown naked by father into the sea (Mrs Swanwick says she saw that happen). (69-70)

Woolf re-defines “exceptional” not as the most important or remarkable events, but the things that stick in one’s mind, appearing with strong sensory detail. Essentially, she suggests that one remembers what one remembers, with few guidelines structuring memory. Woolf notes that in her case, a seemingly less memorable detail like the “hum of the bees” appears in her mind more clearly than an event corroborated by an eyewitness and more immediately “memorable.”

Woolf’s thorough exploration of how and why people forget some events and remember others seems a strange topic of focus for a memoir that includes an early description of childhood molestation. In noting that looking at herself in a mirror produces feelings of shame and fear, she suggests that one reason for those feelings might be her half-brother: “Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto [a table in the house] and as I sat there he began to explore my body . . . I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling?” (69).⁵

Though Woolf ascribes powerful feelings and aftereffects to her horrific encounter with Gerald, she just as quickly undermines its impact on her later life, suggesting that a

⁵ Sexual abuse in the Stephen/Duckworth household has been the subject of much debate and analysis among Woolf scholars, with both Gerald and George Duckworth figuring as potential abusers. Hermione Lee’s 1997 biography addresses this scholarship by focusing on how Woolf interpreted this abuse rather than the specifics of what happened: “The evidence is strong enough, and yet ambiguous enough, to open the way for conflicting psychobiographical interpretations which draw quite different shapes of Virginia Woolf’s interior life. But what matters most in this story is what Virginia Woolf made of what happened. Here the commentator can only point to the gap between the available evidence and the story she drew from it. There is no way of knowing whether the teenage Virginia Stephen was fucked or forced to have oral sex or bugged. Nor is it possible to say with certainty that these events, any more than Gerald Duckworth’s interference with the child Virginia, drove her mad. But Virginia Woolf herself thought that what had been done to her was very damaging. And to an extent, her life was what she *thought* her life was. She used George as an explanation for her terrifyingly volatile and vulnerable mental states, for her inability to feel properly, for her sexual inhibition. And yet she also violently resisted simplistic Freudian explanations of a life through childhood traumas, and would have been horrified by interpretations of her *work* which reduced it to a coded expression of neurotic symptoms” (156).

childhood dream could be equally responsible for her embarrassment about looking at her face in the mirror. In describing early memories, she also writes “But of course as an account of my life they are misleading, because the things one does not remember are as important; perhaps they are more important” (69). In this passage, Woolf introduces what initially appears quite a psychoanalytical reading of childhood, replete with dreams, anxieties about mirrors, and sexual abuse. However, her immediate shift to musing on the topic of memory articulates a different method of life narration.⁶ Rather than seeking the repressed, origins, and the “true” causes for particular effects, she engages in something more exploratory.

“A Sketch of the Past” works against a binary of the remembered and forgotten, the clear and the repressed. Woolf even suggests that forgotten things may exist outside individual memory. She describes the space of forgetting:

In certain favourable moods, memories—what one has forgotten—come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? . . . Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen in to the past. I shall turn up August 1890. I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it. (67)

Woolf claims that if an event produces a powerful enough affect, it may revisit us in time without much effort on our parts. She “listen[s] in” to see which feelings and moments

⁶ As in Chapter One, the Woolfs’ relationship to Freudian analysis in particular is a slippery one. Woolf’s tone in “Sketch” is also influenced by the space in which she presented the work. S.P. Rosenbaum explains that the Memoir Club, begun by Molly McCarthy in 1920 and including most members of the Bloomsbury circle, traded in irony and performativity; because the members knew each other so well, the life writing accounts shared in the Club took on a less informative and more playful valence: “There is not much confession or apology in Memoir Club memoirs; they did not bear witness to the past or try to exorcise it. And they were not nostalgic. Sharing recollections for the amusement of intimate friends was their abiding purpose, which distinguishes them from many memoirs today” (17).

arise for her and narrates accordingly. What is forgotten is not a lack or an absence; instead, it is an invitation to think and re-construct the past. The space without concrete narratives is the space where Woolf might “fit a plug into the wall.” Memory encourages attentiveness and a willingness to allow different threads of the past to emerge at different moments. Through the interplay between remembering and forgetting, the rememberer re-interprets and transforms the past.

Though Woolf primarily describes childhood events in her memoir, readers can expand her understanding of memory into the realms of political events and historical narration. Because nostalgia and forgetting are necessarily tied to personal feeling rather than communal obligation, they resist political or social mandates to forget or remember events. Writers use personal memory and prioritize ambiguity to challenge official historical narratives that are more linear and ideologically clear.

Communal Mandates

Forgetting, not forgetting, and remembering are the subjects of multiple edicts and aphorisms. In political rhetoric, the distinctions between these terms are slight. Conflations of “remembering” and “not forgetting” make for rhetorically effective claims. George Santayana’s famous assertion, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” for example, appears on a plaque at Auschwitz and suggests a legal verdict passed upon anyone who fails the test of memory. The edict is often paraphrased as “those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it,” a reading that demonstrates how “not remembering” and “forgetting” substitute for one another in this context. Variants of “never forget” and “lest we forget” commemorated World War I, the

Holocaust, and September 11th, among other catastrophes. Americans have been similarly implored to remember the Alamo and the Maine. The phrases are ethical imperatives, implying that to forget is to erase legacies of violence, genocide, or national threat. Forgetting suggests that the thing forgotten is not important and does not deserve space in one's mind. Forgetting "condemns" us to repeat the past, to become a Prometheus or Sisyphus trapped in a cycle of recurrent punishment. Remembering spurs us to action, leading to Texan victory at the Battle of San Jacinto or American declarations of war.

Political institutions mobilize both the rhetoric of remembering and forgetting to solidify national identity after loss. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler describes how the Bush administration "consecrated" some losses after September 11th while telling Americans that "*now* it is time for resolute action to take the place of grief" to garner support for invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan (29). She claims that the impulse toward action and revenge rather than grief reflected a desire to forget the vulnerability and dependencies that the attacks revealed. Ultimately, she argues, government rhetoric asked Americans to remember only some losses and to believe that immediate and violent action was the patriotic response to those losses:

A national melancholia, understood as a disavowed mourning, follows upon the erasure from public representations of the names, images and narratives of those the US has killed. On the other hand, the US's own losses are consecrated in public obituaries that constitute so many acts of nation-building. Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (xiv-xv).

For Butler, political remembering takes on the form of “consecration,” “nation-building,” and “certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human.” On the other hand, political forgetting involves “erasure,” as the United States refuses to mourn the loss of civilian life in Iraq or even the loss of queer citizens and citizens of color who do not effectively contribute to a particular national narrative. Butler demonstrates how political demands on our memory produce immediate action and violence, both in the conflicts it instigates and its violent refusal to mark some lives as “grievable.”⁷

In addition to serving nationalistic rhetoric, forgetting is also deployed as an agent of morality. We are asked to “forgive and forget,” and people who hold on for too long are labeled obstinate, melancholic, or even pathological. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions offer war criminals amnesty in exchange for information about crimes committed. The process depends upon victims’ families’ willingness to forgive, to sacrifice their ability to press charges at a later date.⁸ From a legal perspective, the increase of digital footprints and access to private information has also led to the European Union’s adoption of “The Right to be Forgotten,” a legal practice that allows individuals to remove materials about themselves from the public record.⁹ A display of

⁷ Similarly, Woolf points readers toward the “pageantry” of commemoration in *Three Guineas*, noting that events like coronations share an “obvious effect” which is “to constrict, to stereotype and to destroy” (114).

⁸ Ariel Dorfman’s 1990 play, *Death and the Maiden*, offers a powerful artistic interpretation of the dilemma between a government’s need to rebuild and victims’ need for retribution. Gerardo Escobar has been tasked with heading a commission in an unnamed South American country following war. His wife, Paulina, was the victim of imprisonment, torture, and rape during the conflict. When confronted with the man Paulina believes to be her torturer, the Escobars must debate the merits of truth, punishment, forgiveness, and the current justice system.

⁹ “The Right to be Forgotten” is tied up in increasing concerns about the personalization and privacy invasions of the Internet (Steinberg).

power accompanies references to forgetting—authorities mandate some events worthy of “not forgetting” while others fall into the “forgive and forget” category. The writers in this chapter move discussions of memory and forgetting away from debates about importance or permanence. Because memory and forgetting are active, constantly changing practices, no event can be fixed permanently in the memory. They prioritize continued ambivalence, transformation, and adaptation while critiquing communal mandates that equate belonging with remembering a specific historical narrative.

The disparity between communal memory and an individual’s lived reality informs Darwish’s *Memory for Forgetfulness*. The prose-poem, like *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* before it, takes place during a single day, August 6th, 1982. Although the three city-walking narratives explore the tensions between the epic and the daily in similar ways, Darwish’s setting is apocalyptic in a way that Bloom’s Dublin and Clarissa’s London are not; in an unstable Beirut, rockets and car bombs could explode at any time. The date is two months after Israel Defense Forces invaded Lebanon, marking a transition from the Civil War’s localized sectarian violence to an international conflict. The narration occurs a month before the Sabra and Shatila massacres, in which Christian Lebanese militia decimated civilians in Palestinian refugee camps. August 6th is also the day an Israeli vacuum bomb was reportedly used to destroy an eight-story apartment complex in West Beirut.

Despite the poem’s effort to think globally while remaining rooted in the violence occurring in Beirut, Darwish’s protagonist locates himself outside the tragedy of Beirut to a certain extent. While he tells readers the city has been his home longer than any other

place, his identity as a Palestinian relegates him to the traumas and dispossessions of 1948 and 1967. The overlapping narratives lead him into a conversation, as the title suggests, about the importance of memory and forgetting. Darwish, who like his protagonist, spent more of his adult life in Lebanon and France than in his native Palestine, raises questions about who is allowed to mourn, remember, and claim certain geographies, especially as those geographies are destroyed or lost. Can one, he asks, be Beirut without being Lebanese?

Darwish's questions are especially complex for Palestinians. In the poem, he explores the extent to which Palestinian memory is mandated by other groups and communities with different political needs. Palestinians either have "so much amnesia . . . expected of them" or they are "denied the privilege of settling down so that [they] won't forget Palestine" (16). In political discourse, Palestinians must either exhibit "amnesia" and begin life in a new place or exist in temporariness and suspension in order to preserve a connection to their former home. Darwish sees expectations placed on memory to solve the question of belonging, an enormous pressure on those who must remember as they move between locations, specifically young Palestinians who have never seen Palestine:

She bore them, but they were born away from her. Yet they studied her constantly without fatigue or boredom; and from overpowering memory and constant pursuit, they learned what it means to belong to her. 'You're aliens here,' they say to them *there*. 'You're aliens here,' they say to them *here*. And between *here* and *there* they stretched their bodies like a vibrating bow until death celebrated itself through them. (13)

The efforts to remember a place one has never visited combined with rejection from both the home country and country of refuge creates a "vibrating bow" of bodies ready to

snap. Darwish illustrates the intense precariousness of young Palestinians' presence in Lebanon. Although the younger generation themselves do not experience "fatigue," the passage conveys exhaustion.

While the narrator does not count himself among the younger generation he, too, is refused access to Beirut by virtue of his Palestinian identity. In a particularly telling exchange with his Lebanese neighbor, who blames Palestinians for the war in her country, he resists the notion that he should have to choose one moment or one space. Their conversation takes place as the two listen to Feiruz's famous song "Bhibbak ya Lubnan" ("I love you, O Lebanon"). The shared sensory experience instigates a discussion about belonging in and loving particular spaces:

She [the neighbor] says, "By what right do you love it [Lebanon]? Don't you see how far beyond the limit you Palestinians have gone?"

I say, "It's beautiful, and Lebanon is beautiful. That's all there is to it."

She says, "You've got to love Jerusalem."

I say, "I love Jerusalem. The Israelis love Jerusalem and sing for it. You love Jerusalem. Feiruz sings for Jerusalem. And Richard the Lion-Hearted loved Jerusalem. And . . ."

Says she, "I don't love Jerusalem." (41)

From the neighbor's perspective, one should love the place in which they belong; Beirut for the Lebanese and Jerusalem for the Palestinians. Of course, the narrator is only too aware that Jerusalem has been loved by many populations with varying degrees of possessiveness, as he references both the Israelis and the troops of the Crusades. His own ability to visit Jerusalem, however, is nonexistent. The narrator gestures to a treacherous version of memory, the forced kind that emerges from geopolitical anxieties and demands, although embodied in a much more localized form by his neighbor.

The Palestinian experience of the Lebanese Civil War is also the topic of Jean Said Makdisi's 1990 "war memoir," *Beirut Fragments*. The younger sister of Edward Said and the childhood classmate of Leila Ahmed, Makdisi moved to Beirut in the early 1970's with her Lebanese husband and their young children. The family remained in Beirut throughout the fifteen years of conflict, with brief periods of time away. Unlike Darwish, Makdisi writes in English and offers a more expansive view of the war. While she references the same vacuum bomb that destroys Beirut buildings and senses of security on August 6, 1982, the day is one in a series that she narrates for her English-speaking audience. The conflict chronology and the transliterated glossary of Lebanese Arabic words that appear in the book also emphasize the anticipated audience's distance from the events. Makdisi writes to inform a non-expert audience about the experience of living through the war.

Despite the informative aims of Makdisi's memoir, she refuses to simplify the identitarian politics at play in the war or to shy away from her own position in witnessing this conflict. Makdisi is a Palestinian, a Protestant, an educated, professional woman; her life, she admits "has been largely unrepresentative of the lives of the vast majority of people here" (93). Her residence in Beirut is inextricably tied to her Palestinian roots, because, she writes, "To have been born in Palestine means to be bound to a memory and to a sense of loss" (94). Like Darwish, she confronts angry reaction from the Lebanese in Beirut: "Whenever anyone in the PLO ventured to claim that Beirut would become the Arab Stalingrad or Hanoi—and speeches to that effect were regrettably frequent—native Beirutis responded furiously. Beirut, one heard all the time, was not a Palestinian

city” (173). Makdisi explains how the PLO’s attempts to claim Beirut as a symbolic and politically strategic city met with hostility from the Lebanese. She does not side with the PLO, calling their comparisons to Stalingrad “regrettably frequent,” but she does suggest that this rhetorical back-and-forth excludes any Palestinian from feeling at home in Beirut. Tracing these continued divides, she determines that her place in the conflict becomes increasingly fixed by forces outside her control. She describes the experience as “Having history, as it were, spilled on me rather than being able to drink from its bitter cup” (169).

The distinction between history as something “spilled” or as something one can actively drink lies at the heart of Makdisi and Darwish’s memorial practices. Darwish sees memory as compelled from Palestinians by a host of political actors including outside governments and Palestinian officials themselves. As a result, he draws a distinction between “remembering” and “not forgetting.” Darwish suggests that forgetting is not necessarily a negative experience because the remembering of things forgotten has the power to produce something new and unfixed, a narrative that continues to change and expand with its participants. For Darwish, never forgetting is more dangerous than forgetting; never forgetting resigns the participant to one relationship with a place and history. Not forgetting Palestine displays an inability to escape a certain style of thought; it freezes participants in one place and mode of being. On the other hand, choosing to remember Palestine allows the rememberer to reconstruct the meaning and affect of former homes.

The idea of continued reconstruction through inventive memory depends on a writing practice that is active, creative, and invested in re-writing. Makdisi claims that the memoir is what finally made her feel she belonged in and to Beirut, despite the political definitions of citizenship that confined her to a Palestinian identity only: “Writing about Beirut, I attached myself to it—for I am not a native Beiruti, but a wandering person—and made it mine and myself part of it. Now every inch of that shattered city is mine. I have earned my place in the world” (20). Makdisi comes to see her “unrepresentativeness” as an advantage, arguing that “The very unrepresentativeness seems, oddly, to emphasize the nature of the body to which I am attached” (93). Through the act of writing, Makdisi can also define Lebanese-ness differently, expanding to include others with shared experiences. She asks her audience to “Read for Lebanese everyone in Lebanon, Palestinian as well as Lebanese, foreigners—everyone who has lived through what we have lived through in this wretched land” (187).

Makdisi enacts more expansive belonging through the collage-like nature of her memoir. Chapters exhibit radically different structures and styles as she attempts to narrate the war, as is the case with her “Glossary of Terms used in Times of Crisis,” or a chapter more specifically focused on 1982’s Israeli invasion. Like the memoirists in previous chapters, Makdisi meta-narrates her decision to adopt multiple forms: “I searched for a form to fit into, for some implement to help me impose my need for order on the chaos around me, and I found instead that the chaos imposed itself on me” (22). Makdisi demonstrates her inability to adhere to a specific form by imagining a potential diary entry for the memoir. Only after describing to readers the experience of retreating to

a building cellar with her children and returning to her apartment to find it totally demolished by rockets does she confess and disclose the text's reconstructed nature: "I could never have written that on the day it happened," she explains (26).

Similarly, Darwish understands his own memorial practice as constantly under revision, constantly demanding re-writing. A Palestinian in Beirut and Paris and Ramallah but never again in his native Galilee, he questions the uses of poetry during the war, asking "'How can traditional verse—and all verse is traditional at this moment—define the poetry now fermenting in the belly of the volcano?" (64).¹⁰ Darwish strives instead to innovate language that will allow him to "write my silence" and to keep re-writing and revising (61). He seems himself most importantly as "defending the lineages of this coast against the mix-up of meanings, that history shall not be made docile and the place a mere estate to be inherited" (51). Language is the arena in which Darwish can clarify meaning while asserting history as not docile but vibrant and ever changing.

Makdisi and Darwish's writings depend on re-writing, distance, and a willingness to forget some experiences in favor of narrating others. Most of all, they demonstrate emphatic resistance to the forms of memory that would "spill" history on the writer and force her to adhere to only the Palestinian memories with which she has been "burdened" by her ancestry (Makdisi 102). At the same time, they remind readers of the dangers of some forms of forgetting, most notably political amnesty. In a 1999 afterword, Makdisi describes the official Lebanese response to the war's aftermath:

¹⁰ Of course, Darwish produces this passage in a poetic text. In this way—using the framework of poetry to challenge what poetry can and should accommodate during war—he echoes Adorno's famous claim that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (*Prisms* 34). In neither case is the assertion a rejection of poetry entirely; rather both writers call for radical revisions of what art is and produces following atrocity.

Somewhere along the way a decision was made to forget the past and move on. The war —and its many problems—was too difficult to deal with. There was enough to worry about in the present; looking back was a waste of much needed energy. What was past was past, and what was lost was lost. A general amnesty was declared to wash away the sins of the past. A clean start, it was said, was the right course of action to take, and we were to turn a new page. But there has been no redemption; oblivion and amnesia are not redemption. (258)

Makdisi draws a distinction between different kinds of forgetting and “moving on.” On one hand lies “redemption,” “a clean start” and a future-oriented sense of the world. On the other lies “oblivion and amnesia,” and “amnesty.” Whereas imposed memory can act as a burden, forcing rememberers into one fixed narrative about their relationship to place and the past, mandated forgetting also requires an artificial relationship to the past. The amnesty Makdisi describes ignores the complex issues the war raised; general reconciliation becomes the path of least resistance, what Makdisi sees as a lazy decision to avoid a past “too difficult to deal with.”

In both Makdisi and Darwish’s work, neither acts of memory nor forgetting are prioritized. Rather, the authors recognize the two cognitive practices as intertwined and highlight moments when either can be used as an act of political resistance or transformation. Makdisi makes this assertion when she resists traditional assumptions about “carrying on”: “Carrying on has come to mean not a blind and stupid clinging to a dead and buried past but a clear statement of perceived future in which the hostilities of war have no place. It is a serious act of resistance, and a dangerous one at that. Sometimes we do not understand this ourselves” (43). An act that would seem to depict practitioners as ignoring the present is actually forward looking, even when the practitioners themselves cannot quite recognize its efficacy.

By illustrating the ways in which belonging frequently depends on a willingness to conform to dominant political narratives about place and past, Darwish and Makdisi forge for themselves new spaces of belonging. The modes of memory and belonging they advance are unstable but reflective of personal experiences and memories. Their memories are in conversation with forgetting; they reject the “not forgetting” that historical narrative often mandates, but they also caution against false, passive forms of forgetting that sidestep any obligation to account for troubling pasts.

“The Ashy Danube”

Darwish and Makdisi’s responses to the Lebanese Civil War showcase their precarious claims to belonging in Beirut. Memory and forgetting become battlegrounds on which Lebanese, Palestinian, and Beirut identities are formed. In a similar fashion, Ghada al-Samman’s short story “The Ashy Danube” traces its protagonist’s efforts to numb herself to memories of Beirut and Lebanon following the Six Day War of 1967. The story, which remains untranslated in English, is part of al-Samman’s first post-1967 story collection, *The Departure of Old Ports* (1973).¹¹ Forgetting is the means through which the nameless protagonist attempts to reject her belonging to Lebanon, her earlier home in Syria, and the after-effects of the pan-Arab army’s defeat. She tries to forget the events of the war in order to protest the rhetoric and propaganda advanced by Nasser’s Pan-Arab movement before and after the conflict.

¹¹ The timestamp at the end of “The Ashy Danube” dates its completion specifically at 12:20 p.m. on August 14th, 1972. All translations of this story are my own.

al-Samman foregrounds her protagonist's experience as a *female* rememberer and forgetter by emphasizing her sexuality and her indirect participation in the war. The character exhibits many of symptoms—hallucinations, addiction, and emotional outbursts—that afflict soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress. Though her contribution to the war involved propaganda spots she recorded for the radio rather than combat, the reminders of the conflict are also rooted in her body and voice. During the war, the protagonist reported government propaganda proclaiming that Arab troops had already arrived in Jerusalem; acting on the misinformation, additional fighters went into battle only to face superior Israeli forces and, ultimately, death. The protagonist's brother was among the young men who listened to her broadcast and died in ensuing violence. Following the reports, enraged listeners showed up at the radio station to protest. The angry eyes and faces from Beirut follow the protagonist long after the event, and she sees the same image in most glass windows she encounters.

Because the protagonist sees her body and voice as complicit in the defeat, she relies on physical experience to help her forget. Instead of navigating memories in the location of conflict, as Darwish does, the protagonist aims to exist in disconnected, foreign spaces. Her search for numbness motivates the story's cosmopolitan backdrop. Desperate to erase her connection with Beirut, the protagonist travels across Europe.¹²

¹² "The Ashy Danube" is another semi-autobiographical account in this project; like her protagonist, Ghada al-Samman was born in Damascus and worked in journalism in Lebanon. She also traveled extensively through Europe, although her travels were motivated by the threat of jail time. In 1966, she lost her job with a Lebanese newspaper. Around the same time, Syria sentenced her to prison because she left the country without government documentation. The sentence was later revoked, but al-Samman left the Middle East for Europe to avoid prison. In Europe, she "work[ed] and liv[ed] like any young man alone. These years are what formed me. During those years I confronted others as a foreigner in a foreign land without the protection of family, social status or money, and I learned what I hadn't known before" (qtd. in Vinson). She now divides her time between Beirut and Paris.

“The Ashy Danube” takes place during her time in Vienna, home of Beethoven, Strauss, and Freud. Traveling to Vienna to escape memories of her brother’s death, the criticism of the Lebanese who listened to the radio channel, and her own feelings of guilt and responsibility, the protagonist is accompanied by Georgie, her mute lover. Living in a world full of whiskey and without speech, she uses alcohol, sex, and travel to forget what has happened. Vienna desensitizes her. Just as the character moves through a haze of unreality, the reader’s experience of the text is also one of accumulated silence, detachment, numbness, and oblivion, feelings the narrator produces in the opening, repetitive lines of the story: “Another man. Another day. Another hotel. Another city. And I am on a new drug trip” (7). She describes herself as “cut off from the world looking for other drugs . . . to forget . . . forget . . . for. . . get” (17). The elongated and repeated “forget” suggests an incantatory quality. The reader imagines the narrator exhaling both smoke and memories from her body and settling into a space of oblivion. Because the narrator also describes drugs and music helping her to “travel to the Island of the Lotus Eaters . . . the island of forgetting and stupor,” she equates her journey with an Odyssey-like quest. Unlike Odysseus, however, she prefers remaining with the Lotus Eaters to homecoming.

The protagonist initially equates forgetting and the foreign; stepping away from one’s memories requires one to re-situate physically, as well. Rather than finding a new home, the character intends to remain detached from all the places she now visits. The narrator tells us that she’s come to Vienna for a practical reason: she has purposefully chosen it because “I don’t know the language of her people . . . in front of me are

morning papers in languages I don't understand." (7-8). The protagonist's experience with propaganda, lies and deceit on the part of her government pushes her to seek a silent, foreign lifestyle that will enable her to erase any memory of the past. When a Viennese waiter asks for her order, attempting to communicate in German, English, French, and Italian, the protagonist uses hand signals to convey her order, what she calls "the language of the stone age, a language before the invention of language and lying and deceit" (8). Similarly, she chooses her mute lover specifically for his silence. The foreign, the estranged, the silent, detached are the spaces the protagonist chooses to live in.

The narrator views foreign movement as both a form of escape and a punishment for her actions: "I was conscious," she says "in a cryptic way that I had been sentenced to perpetual estrangement . . . sentenced to a career of tourism" (23). al-Samman uses the word "ghorba" to describe estrangement, a word that connotes in Arabic an intense feeling of being out-of-place, of the uncanny and the detached. "Ghorba" is also a predominant keyword for Hoda Barakat, who argues that Arabic literature is moving away from an earlier category of "exile literature" into "adab al-ghorba" or "the literature of estrangement." In this genre, writers and characters who leave the Arab world do not remain in permanent exile, but their movements between America, Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa leave them feeling out of place in all locations (Personal Interview).¹³

As her multiple departures bring her to Vienna, the narrator becomes increasingly aware that the city is not the blank slate she desires. Instead, affective connections to

¹³ See also Barakat's *Rasa'il al-Ghareeba (The Stranger's Letters)*, a collection of as-yet-untranslated vignettes about the author's life.

objects and histories in the city prompt her memory even though she has made a physical departure. She notes that, “something in Vienna opened up my wounds since the moment of our arrival” (27). Referencing several times the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the narrator views Vienna as a city of loss and defeat much like her own Damascus and Beirut. Vienna’s conflicted historical life has since given way to tourist attractions, including Freud and Beethoven’s residences and the Danube River itself.

Although the narrator prefers to think of herself as “sentenced to a career in tourism,” her forays into Vienna’s sites demonstrate that even tourist interactions are not free of negotiations between memory and forgetting. At Beethoven’s house, for example, the narrator peruses what is presumably The Heiligenstadt Testament, a document the composer wrote in the early 19th century to reveal his battle with deafness to his brothers and to express his determination to avoid suicide. As she reads the document on display, she begins to cry in Arabic “I forgot to kill myself!” (26). Similarly, she laughs uncontrollably at the Schönbrunn Palace, where the Mirror Room reflects her image back and forth: “And I wondered which one was me . . . and I realized suddenly that I was all of them . . . I was more than one woman” (28). In both instances, the narrator’s outbursts of emotions startle the other tourists and force Georgie to remove her from the site. She is unable to participate as a tourist because Vienna, even as a foreign city, is still connected to her past and her past keeps appearing in unexpected, explosive ways.

The intersection between foreign location, past memories and expectations, and the need to confront loss and trauma occurs most clearly when the protagonist plans her climactic visit to the Danube. She calls Johann Strauss’s 1866 waltz, “The Blue Danube”

“the excavator of my memories,” because the melody is so attached to her former romantic encounters, the radio station, and her young life; the song is “still in her blood, in her DNA” (14). Hoping to see the blue Danube in person, she travels to the river only to realize that the water itself is no variation of blue. “It’s like a river of ashes,” she says. “As if it’s filled with the ashes of love and man and nation and bravery” (31). As she rides back to the hotel, the protagonist finds herself trying to explain to her taxi driver what visitors need from the Danube: “We stop in sadness before your river because we see through it our own deep rivers that have dried up” (31). Only as they reach the hotel does she realize that she has been speaking in Arabic, a language the driver does not understand, and that a glass partition, just like the glass at the recording studio, has separated them. The driver has not heard any of her attempt to sort through the reasons for traveling, visiting, expecting, hoping. The first time the character tries to communicate, as opposed to seeking detachment, intoxication, and forgetfulness, the foreign environment she has sought out prevents her from transmitting her meaning to her presumed audience. Her “sentence [of] perpetual estrangement” becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in the cab’s transparent glass barrier.

al-Samman undermines the protagonist’s expectations of a Vienna defined by classical music and the “Blue Danube Waltz,” confronting her with both the realities of the new city and of the past she has yet to accept. The complex dialogue between the real and unreal, a new visitor’s expectations and the introduction of the unexpected, the foreign and the familiar result in the character’s transforming relationship to her own

memory. Even in the effort to forget, memory is unstable. Numbness delays the protagonist's engagement with her own memory but does not prevent it forever.

"The Ashy Danube" comes closest to employing the language of trauma that I have otherwise attempted to avoid in this project. I argue that in the story, however, the protagonist's relationship to trauma, memory, and forgetting offers a counternarrative to political rhetoric following the Six Day War of 1967. al-Samman represents a generation of Arab writers who, after 1967, experienced disillusionment with literary commitment, engagement, and social realism. The earlier literary practices had supported Arab nationalism during the 1940's and 50's in the wake of Israel's formation and increased pan-Arab activity.¹⁴ Hanan Awwad identifies a second period in al-Samman's writing post-1967 characterized by this disillusionment and the need to create new circuits of travel, memory, and political writing. In her writings, al-Samman is critical of Arab leadership during the war of 1967. In her famous, "I Carry my Shame to London," an essay she nominally pens while on a plane west after the war, and in "The Ashy Danube", she uses the language of defeat instead of the word "Naksa" that commonly refers to the Six Day War from the Arab perspective. al-Samman considers the term, which means "setback," euphemistic; it minimizes the war's devastation. For her, "Naksa" links 1967 unnecessarily to 1948 and rescues politicians from blame for their failings during the war.

¹⁴ In a comprehensive entry for the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Verena Klemm describes how Taha Hussein developed the concept of *iltizam al-adab* (literary commitment) in conversation with Sartre's *littérature engagée* (engaged literature) and previous philosophies of socially committed literature in the Arab world. Committed or engaged literature attracted writers like Suhayl Idris, Ghassan Kanafani, and Mahmoud Darwish. Klemm writes that in 1967 "Many authors came to question their former closeness to their postcolonial regimes. Most of them outgrew the perceived limitations of literary commitment and searched for new and individual answers to the question of how literary creativity could have a significance beyond the purely externalized domain of political issues." See also her "Different notions of commitment (*iltizam*) and committed literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the literary circles of the Mashriq."

In “The Ashy Danube,” the protagonist recalls walking past newspapers with the word *hazima* (defeat) on the front page and discovering that the papers and politicians have decided to term the loss “al-Naksa” (16). The moment reminds readers of the term’s constructedness, of the way it was selected to convey a particular sensibility about the loss. The protagonist’s grief and desperation refuse to be contained within the language of a “setback”; her feelings demand recognition of her losses.

Ultimately, most of the character’s strategies for detachment are stripped away by the end of the story. Her lover Georgie leaves, having realized that his presence helps her remain numb. A friend’s injury convinces her to return to the Beirut she fled. “The Ashy Danube” does feature the beginnings of a return to Beirut—the narrator concludes by noticing the blue she sought in the Danube in the sky out of the plane window—but this return happens of the character’s own volition. Forgetting, even its most damaging forms, becomes a necessary component of her memorial process and the means through which she resists the narratives advanced by pan-Arab discourses.

Forgetting as Illness in *Brooklyn Heights*

Woolf, Darwish, and al-Samman suggest the political ramifications of forgetting and propose a form of remembering that is fluid and constantly subject to change. They also root forgetting and memory in particular spaces. Just as al-Samman’s protagonist carries memories of Beirut to Vienna, the characters of *Brooklyn Heights* bring homes from around the globe to their New York neighborhood. In the novel, the specter of illness accompanies explorations of memory and forgetting. Alzheimer’s disease appears in the novel through the character of Lilith, an older Egyptian woman who frequents the

same Brooklyn locations as the protagonist Hend. Her entry into the novel complicates earlier considerations of memory and highlights how little critical scholarship has engaged forgetting as illness. None of the texts cited above reference diseases of forgetting directly; in fact, Augé does not discuss dementia or Alzheimer's once in his long essay. Theorizing forgetting cannot erase the real medical discourses that surround the experience. To avoid fetishizing forgetting, an attentiveness to its potential for narrative and alternative community formation should be tempered with an awareness of its devastating effect on individuals, families, and larger communities.

Dementia and Alzheimer's disease continue to be among the fastest growing illnesses in the world. As the elderly live longer, their memories fade. The CDC estimates that five million Americans had Alzheimer's in 2013 and they predict that number will reach fourteen million by 2050.¹⁵ Alzheimer's affects older community members' ability to be the source of stories about the past. Rather than serving as a link to history, individuals suffering from Alzheimer's increase anxieties about the future as families debate care-taking strategies for an unpredictable disease.

Dementia haunts all the characters of *Brooklyn Heights*, but it manifests most in Lilith. Though the character does not appear until the last fourth of the novel, al-Tahawy devotes multiple pages to Lilith's life in Brooklyn and her background, more space than she gives any other character but Hend. The shift in perspective is particularly striking because Hend initially seems to have no connection to Lilith; the two women do not

¹⁵ The disease was first noticed in 1906 by Dr. Alois Alzheimer, who examined the brains of those who died with language issues and memory loss (National Institute on Aging).

interact although they visit the same people. Despite their lack of direct connection, the women share life similarities. Both are the mothers of sons with whom they have complicated relationships, and they each left husbands in Egypt to come to Brooklyn.

When al-Tahawy leaves Hend to narrate Lilith, readers see the character first through the perspective of al-Khalili, the local baker:

Al-Khalili describes her with unparalleled zeal: ‘She’s a real lady. There isn’t another woman in this whole country as sweet or as perfect.’ Every day Lilith comes to the shop and sits down opposite him wearing a spotless coat and expensive perfume and jewelry that she changes from one day to the next. She gives off an air of stately elegance and she never gets bored or interrupts his long meandering reminiscences. Her brief comments are always simple, her speech always deliberate and refined. The serious and wistful expression on her face is there thanks to the giant eraser that has wiped away most of her memory. These days she has to make a supreme effort to hold onto essential bits of information like her name, her address, and the name of her only son. She carries all her important papers with her in the pocket of her coat but she’s terrified most of the time that she’ll lose them or forget them, and every few minutes she feels her pocket nervously to make sure they’re still there. . . This is why she spends a lot of time making sure every hair on her head is in place and that her coat is always spotlessly clean, and also why she prefers to remain perfectly quiet rather than open her mouth and trip up on her words. (145-6)

The persona Lilith offers al-Khalili—poised, affluent, “wistful”—does not correspond with her internal condition, the anxiety she feels about losing papers and forgetting her son’s name. Forgetting limits her ability to engage others but paradoxically makes her pleasant company for the baker. The passage details the extensive strategies Lilith uses to hold on to even the most basic of information, specifically who she is and where she lives. Lilith makes her memories concrete by writing them down and placing them on her body. She must literally make memory physical in order to retain it.

In a novel about immigration and immigrant experience in Brooklyn, Lilith's struggle to remember where she comes from takes on a very different valence. For her, the location she tries to remember is the address where she woke up that morning, not the home in Egypt she left decades earlier. Al-Khalili hopes to discuss Egypt with her, but Lilith can express very little: "Whenever she tries to share in his reminiscences about how beautiful Cairo was, for example, she only manages to repeat a random phrase whose ring happened to please her. 'Beautiful . . . it was beautiful,' she murmurs, then lapses into a sad silence, or a happy one" (149). The narrator, al-Khalili, and the reader are unable to determine the affect behind Lilith's sadness. Her years of living in Cairo are boiled down to a few words that sound pleasing.

Though Lilith is unable to describe her past to al-Khalili, the seemingly omniscient narrator accesses her memories and describes the conditions of her arrival in America. Like Athena in *The Tiller of Waters*, Lilith offers multiple narratives about her immigration and her early New York life. The narrator does not inform us whether the narratives are the product of Lilith's forgetfulness or her determination to obscure her past. However, the narrator selects only one version: after giving birth, Lilith realizes her own, inexplicable unhappiness and longing:

She had no idea why she suddenly burst into tears or where this feeling of longing that shook her had come from. There was no other man in her life; she never even thought about love any more. Perhaps it was the ache in Sinatra's voice that moved her so . . . That night she dreamt of a train like the one in *Anna Karenina*. She had no idea where this train would take her or where its journey would end — a train that never stopped at any stations or complained of its loneliness. (152)

Though Lilith's desire seems propelled by her new role as a mother, she does not connect it to traditional forms of longing. The desire is not sexual. It is not oriented toward material objects or even a particular new place. Instead, she longs to board a train bound for an unknown destination. The narrator suggests that the longing has something to do with Lilith's femininity: "People talk a lot about the particular madness of women, but they had never seen a woman as mad as Lilith before" (151).

As people gossip about the scandal of Lilith's move, the stories surrounding her life multiply and contest the possibility of a single, true narrative, even the one the narrator offers readers. Lilith's dementia provokes this erasure still further; when she finally begins to write her memoirs, "Her memory had already begun to disintegrate and by then no one cared about the truth anymore" (153). The narrator explains that earlier emphases on the true story of Lilith's life and the reasons behind her actions disappear with the onset of dementia. Forgetting erases the need to narrate "the truth," allowing instead for stories to continue proliferating.

Navigating the medical and metaphorical uses of dementia in *Brooklyn Heights* is a delicate balance. Lilith suffers from a real disease that provokes anxiety in others, but she is also able to participate in her memories and the stories of others differently as a result. Further, references to the disease extend past Lilith to the condition of other immigrants living in the community. In her essay "Illness as Metaphor," Susan Sontag discusses the ways in which some illnesses capture a public imagination and stand in for community anxieties at particular periods. She focuses on tuberculosis and cancer as stigmatized diseases almost a century apart. In both cases, the illness was "thought to be

intractable and capricious—that is, a disease not understood—in an era in which medicine’s central premise is that all diseases can be cured” (5). Sontag outlines the multiple metaphors each illness attracts and the way metaphors promote magical thinking about disease; in a later 1979 essay, she performs the same analysis of AIDS discourse. The mystery of each disease made it vulnerable to community imagining and metaphor; the tuberculoid assumed a fragile, impoverished, and yet romantic existence, connected as it was to passion, artistic production, and travel for one’s health. “One must suppose,” Sontag writes, “that the reality of this terrible disease was no match for important new ideas, particularly about individuality” (30). Unlike the romanticized tuberculosis, cancer adopts the language of battle and of invasion: “Widely believed psychological theories of disease assign to the luckless ill the ultimate responsibility both for falling ill and for getting well. And conventions of treating cancer as no mere disease but a demonic enemy make cancer not just a lethal disease but a shameful one” (57). Sontag suggests that metaphor becomes most dangerous when ethical and moral language is attached to the evaluations.

In its incurability, mysteriousness, and stigmas, Alzheimer’s appears the most likely manifestation of metaphorical diseases for the 21st century. In Lilith’s case, family frustrations about her condition suggest that she should be able to “fix” or change her forgetting. Erica, her son’s American wife, “rushes around looking for her crazy mother-in-law and declares that she’s losing her mind from always having to follow her around. But Erica doesn’t lose her mind because she always finds Lilith looking cool and calm as a cucumber; only her hands tremble a bit” (150). Erica paints Lilith as an unpredictable

child who runs away on impulse whereas the narrator describes her as “cool and calm.” Lilith’s son, with whom she reunited in his adult life, has become a prominent figure in Brooklyn’s Islamic Center. He argues that religion will offer relief: “The remedy for forgetting, he would say to her, is forswearing sin and disobedience to God. But poor Lilith couldn’t even remember her sins” (155). Omar suggests that forgetting is punishment for sin and disobedience; because Lilith has strayed, she has been cursed with a faulty memory. However, that forgetting also makes it impossible for Lilith to atone. Forgiveness becomes conditional on the ability to remember.

Like the protagonist of “The Ashy Danube,” Hend sees her increasing tendency to forget as a punishment for her earlier desire for oblivion. “At night she thinks about how she has begun to forget so many things—addresses, events, the whereabouts of documents. She worries that her keen memory is getting moldy. She, who once believed that forgetting was a great blessing, is now hunted by oblivion, a monstrous shadow” (4). In *Brooklyn Heights*, the anxiety, guilt, and fear that forgetting produces makes the condition a clear extension of Sontag’s metaphorical illnesses.

The situation is compounded by forgetting’s complex relationship to pathology. Unlike the immediately physical symptoms cancer produces, diseases of forgetting exist on a spectrum. It is difficult to distinguish between a momentary lapse in memory and an ongoing condition. The boundaries between health and illness, normal and abnormal, disintegrate, so much so that in fact Hend is unable to get help or treatment for her memory concerns. When she visits a doctor, she expresses anxiety about her memory, which the doctor dismisses:

‘I’m always under a lot of stress, but this is the first time I’ve felt my heart racing like this. I feel it in my shoulder. I’ve begun to forget, and I don’t want to forget . . . ’ The doctor laughs. She asks Hend to put on her clothes. ‘I think you’re worrying too much. In any case I’ll look at the test results. We’ll be in touch if there’s anything to be concerned about.’ (132)

The doctor diagnoses Hend as “worrying too much,” refusing to take her symptoms seriously. Her response corresponds to other characters that tell Hend she is too young to worry about memory loss. At the end of the novel, Lilith passes away, and Hend comes into the closest contact she’s had with the woman. As Hend and her friend walk down Fourth Avenue, they encounter boxes of Lilith’s things left out for Brooklyn scavengers and the garbage man. Hend, looking through the materials, begins to feel as though Lilith’s life is hers and that they have lived through the same moments with the same items. The moment of paranoia seems to be just one more indication of Hend’s difficulties remembering, a fact emphasized by her friend, Emilia:

Such is the way of the world . . . everything gets mixed up suddenly. We believe what we want to believe, then amnesia strikes and you don’t even know who you are—or used to be—any more. We all become sorry copies of each other in the end. But you’re still too young. You’re too young to forget, my little one. (182)

Emilia claims that forgetting is only for the old, effectively excluding Hend from the experience as yet by emphasizing her youth and using diminutives like “my daughter” (*Ibnati*) and “my little one” (*sgeerati*).¹⁶ Emilia’s language attempts to relegate the experience of senility to a certain kind of body, a body that has grown old and worn.

The much younger Hend, however, also feels the effects of forgetfulness, and while acquaintances assure her she’s too young to experience dementia, Hend’s physical being

¹⁶ Similarly, Lilith’s dementia is referenced euphemistically throughout the novel as “old age,” and she herself is described as “*sha’ikha*” and “*mutaqaddimah fil ‘umr*”—“old madam,” and “advanced in age,” respectively (190).

does not correspond with her age. She begins menopause at a very early age, when she leaves Egypt; a physical condition assumes a psychosomatic quality. In much the same way, Hend's forgetfulness becomes a form of dementia despite her relatively young age.

The refusal of Hend's body and mind to exhibit the health expected of them at certain ages reflects the pervasiveness of forgetting in *Brooklyn Heights*; though characters attempt to confine the condition to the elderly, all are in danger. Lilith's memory loss inconveniences her family and makes it difficult for her to follow her old routines. Despite the problems, the novel does not place her in a nursing home or hospital. The kind of illness portrayed in *Brooklyn Heights* does not inhabit the kind of space modeled by Foucault's heterotopias of deviation, simulacra-like places that isolate pathological members of society to ensure other community members that they are sane and healthy. Instead, Lilith remains a part of the world at large, a narrative choice that forces the world to engage with and think through her "deviation." As her forgetfulness becomes a part of the narrative structure, it becomes increasingly clear that she is not the only character suffering from such a "deviation;" in fact, anxieties about forgetting become normative for a community of immigrants.

Alzheimer's in *Brooklyn Heights* provides a powerful metaphor through which we can start to characterize ways in which inhabitants of a global city interact with one another and the spaces around them. The presence of illness, and particularly illness with a neurological basis, in literature is not a new phenomenon; one need only think of the

epilepsy that plagues Othello or Caesar.¹⁷ And yet the abundance of new illnesses characterizing figures like Hend provoke questions and anxieties about the possibilities of constructing a bounded self and that self's ability to interact with the world around it. The epilepsy exemplified in Shakespeare's plays marks the character suffering from the malady as a unique outsider, one who both threatens dangers and promises greatness. Conversely, the illnesses permeating contemporary texts seem to affect everyone. Anne Basting, who studies disability and creates performance workshops for people suffering from Alzheimer's, points to the abundance of mental illnesses, including autism and multiple personality disorder that writers use "as illustrations of postmodern theories of fragmented selfhood" (80). The individual illness becomes a universal condition that pervades people's interactions with one another. With Alzheimer's and dementia in particular, it becomes unclear where nostalgia ends and a more medical condition of forgetting begins.

Basting's connection between a social condition and an illness is exactly the kind of analogy Sontag questions. She argues that, "the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to metaphorical thinking" (3). For Sontag, illness needs to be treated medically and specifically, as a condition rooted in the body that should not attract moral assessment. I follow her claim that illness should not lead to moral and ethical evaluation, but I also recognize the extent to which forgetting as illness and as metaphor raises essential

¹⁷ Seba al-Herz's 2009 novel *Al-Ahkaroon (The Others)* also engages with illness as a literary trope; the narrator suffers from epilepsy, a throwback to an ancient disease in a contemporary novel. For more on women's illnesses in narrative in particular, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

questions for communities made of diverse individuals. Without remembering the same events, how might a community form and support one another?

In *Brooklyn Heights*, the vocabulary of forgetting leads to feelings of inexplicable desire and need for connection. The connections are non-traditional in their associative affective qualities. Early in the novel as Hend fears forgetting her past, she talks extensively to a man who seems interested in her. The passage below reveals the differences in their expectations of one another:

Charlie grew tired of listening to her. His face took on a bored, knowing expression. 'I understand completely. I understand how you feel.' He said it to stem the flow of pointless memories. Charlie didn't realize that loneliness was to blame; a desperate need to connect to just about anybody, even to a person with the face of a frog and a body that gave off the odor of sweat and lust and expectancy. (83)

While Charlie evokes "lust and expectancy" and makes it clear later in the evening that he wishes to take Hend home with him, Hend is not looking for a sexual encounter. Instead, she wants someone who will listen to her and help her navigate memory.

A more effective interaction among strangers occurs at the novel's end, as the infamous *yud* wind sweeps through Brooklyn: "The scent of longing made people fan out in groups on stoops and sidewalks and lawns and exchange greetings with random strangers. The foreigners among them were suddenly seized by an urgent need to talk about their distant home countries" (177). The "longing" wind produces congregations of strangers, people who share nothing but the experience of being in the same location and feeling the same inexplicable need for interaction. The wind occurs on the day of Lilith's death; it "whispered to her soul and carried it far away" (179). This lyrical passage

suggests imaginative, phantasmagoric connections between the residents of Brooklyn.

The phantasmagoria concludes with Hend's sense that her life and Lilith's are uncannily identical.

Forgetting and Narrative Formation

In *Brooklyn Heights*, Lilith's forgetfulness allows her to accommodate stories from others; it removes the need for her own life to have a true origin story, and it makes possible Hend's feeling of connection with a woman she has never met. Al-Tahawy permits her novel to move across different immigrant narratives and across time in Hend's life. While the novel's movements are rooted in memory, they are also dependent on forgetting, on the ability to neglect some facts in favor of others. In particular, al-Tahawy asks readers to forget that each of her characters comes from a different part of the world, encouraging us to focus on the community they now form together in New York.

Ultimately, forgetting is the activity that allows stories to be told. Realizing that some of his "memories" of life during the second world war were fabricated, born out of family stories and imagining, Oliver Sacks notes that "in the absence of outside confirmation, there is no easy way of distinguishing a genuine memory or inspiration felt as such, from those that have been borrowed or suggested, between what psychoanalyst Donald Spence calls 'historical truth' and 'narrative truth.'" He concludes that, "frequently, our only truth is narrative truth, the stories we tell each other, and ourselves—the stories we continually recategorize and refine." While pointing to arenas in which narrative truth is unwelcome and even dangerous like interrogation rooms and

courtrooms, Sacks suggests we might better understand memory as creatively unreliable, better at producing narrative than retaining facts. Narrative uses forgetting to make sense of disparate events or to add confirmation details to a feeling that one experiences.

Forgetting as a fundamental experience for creating narrative is a major thematic in Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "Funes, the Memorious." After a fall grants Funes the ability to archive every detail of every day, he nevertheless finds himself unable to reconstruct or narrate daily experiences. The narrator tells us that, "Without effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details" (115). One might substitute the word "narrate" for "think" in the passage above, because both activities present difficulties for Funes. Our ability to tell stories and to think through events is linked to our ability to prioritize details and create shape.

Of course, categorizing and narration can become too permanent and fixed. Stories cement memory, even fictitious ones, giving rise to moments like Sacks's discovery that he was not really present when his house was bombed. Augé cautions, "As soon as someone risks making 'remembrances' into a tale by bringing order and clarity to what at first were merely confused and unique impressions, one risks never to remember anything but the first tale or those that followed it" (21-2). Augé suggests that narrative takes the place of memory, giving too much shape to details better left to fade and re-emerge.

The writers in this chapter build narratives out of forgetting, but their constant emphasis on re-writing, re-thinking, undoing, and resisting prevent even their own narratives from ever becoming fixed. Whereas not forgetting insistently grips one place, one past, one tradition, forgetting allows for reconstruction of memories and histories that could allow for new comparisons and analogies. Through their allusions, associations, repetitions, and travel, these writers construct global histories of loss and forgetting that places their own experiences in the context of other traditions, historical events, and geographies.

Coda

In narrating memory and place, many thinkers settle on the act of writing as the sole locus of home and belonging. George Steiner writes in his work on the Torah and Jewish diaspora, for example, that “When the text *is* the homeland, even when it is rooted only in the exact remembrance and seeking of a handful of wanderers, nomads of the world, it cannot be extinguished” (24-5). Edward Said summarizes Adorno, whose “reflections are informed by the belief that the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing” (“Reflections on Exile” 184). In *Brooklyn Heights*, Hend feels her connection to the neighborhood not through a shared nationality or immigrant experience but through a desire to write that she shares with residents “busy with some act of cosmic creation” (2). In all these examples, those who lack recourse to other modes of connection—a shared homeland, a stable and secure dwelling—see text as a space through which shared acts of community formation might occur. Both the act of writing and the written word forge communities and belonging; writers can see themselves as connected in the present by a shared commitment to critical thought and expression, while an individual writer can use text to stage acts of travel and return to imagined or lost places.

The authors throughout this project, however, approach even writing as a space for belonging cautiously, paying attention to the fragility and vulnerability Said describes above. Some authors, like Woolf, emphasize the material privileges necessarily involved in producing written work, especially for female authors. Woolf’s attention to economic and gendered limitations leads to the “room of one’s own” to which the Arab women in

this project so frequently draw comparisons. Others note that a desire to write is not enough to connect a community; Hend fancies herself a future Hemingway and dreams of participating in the artistic and literary production around her in America, but al-Tahawy never shows readers Hend's imagined collection of poetry (132, 2). Darwish, like Adorno, argues that poetry needs to take different forms following atrocity, and Woolf, Ahmed, and Barakat demonstrate throughout their fiction and essays that even publishing a narrative does not fully fix it in place.

As Ahmed's memoir afterword illustrates, the work of narrative is always ongoing; history cannot be contained by a book's parameters. Political events necessitate constant re-writing of the history the writers in this project narrate; the past is recast with each new debate, political player, and development. Ahmed's two afterwords accommodate changes instigated by September 11th and the 2011 "Arab Spring" in Cairo but cannot anticipate the rise of an Islamic State. Carol Fadda-Conrey narrates the challenges of Arab-American belonging in 2014, but her critical work cannot register the moment a U.S. presidential candidate proposed excluding all Muslims, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or need, from entering the country—and many Americans agreed with him.¹ Increased gentrification means that the characters of *Brooklyn Heights*, working their menial temp jobs, would not be able to afford rent in that neighborhood today. Instead of Hend's movements through multiple immigrant communities in a few short blocks, the Brooklyn of 2016 is increasingly segregated, with residents recently

¹ A *Washington Post* poll in December 2015 revealed that while a majority of Americans opposed any ban, approximately 36% of all Americans and 59% of registered Republicans supported some temporary action to ban Muslims from entering the United States (Clement).

protesting efforts to integrate more fully Brooklyn Heights elementary schools (Whitford).² Hend's global Brooklyn begins to look more segregated at a moment when the European Union's ability to maintain free passage through the Schengen Zone also comes into question. Britain's upcoming referendum on whether to leave the European Union on June 23rd suggests a possible disintegration of supra-national borders and increasingly tight border controls for migrants trying to travel through Europe (Wheeler). All of these political and social developments promise continued transformation of global geographies that cannot be encompassed by a single book or essay.

With definitions of nation, border, neighborhood, and migration changing so radically and quickly in both the United States and abroad, this project will become quickly outdated in some ways, just as the works above describe now lost histories. I have no way of predicting what American or European immigration policy will look like in six months, let alone what the future holds for the writers and texts I have collected here. And yet, my chapters have demonstrated that the purpose of writing and critical thinking is not always to be prescient or able to anticipate future rhetorics. These novels, memoirs, prose poems, and critical works all attempt to sit in unknowingness, ambivalence, and discomfort, recognizing those feelings as politically and socially essential. By embracing memory as the major thread throughout this work, I have traced its presence as an ongoing, dynamic, affective and cognitive activity rather than an effort to containing specific objects and narratives about the past.

² The protests occurred in September of 2015, when the New York City Public School system proposed rezoning in Brooklyn Heights that would move predominantly white, wealthy children from the overcrowded PS 8 to PS 307, whose students are predominantly African-American and from the Farrugat House NYC Housing Authority project. Brooklyn's Community Education Council voted to support the rezoning plan in January of 2016 (Wilson).

My comparative practice contributes specifically to conversations about the current migration crisis in its attention to both disparities between experiences and resonating questions about place and loss. None of the writers in my project have had the experience of total dispossession. Their accounts also focus on the individual level whereas the current crisis is occurring on a mass scale. These writers and characters are predominantly middle and upper-class travelers who move in a more voluntary way; though they may experience exile and displacement from home, they enjoy more material comforts and privileges than the 85,000 Syrians currently living in 2.5 square miles in Jordan's Za'atari camp. These writers are not able to narrate a refugee experience, nor do I aim to make that representative claim. However, they offer a way of thinking about the relationship between home, away, and boundaries that governments and border controls need to take into account.

Visa checks, border controls, and limited asylum opportunities exist for a reason. And yet, we cannot trick ourselves into believing that the narratives refugees and migrants must produce to apply for asylum or visas are the only narratives that can and should be told about their experiences. These texts push readers toward an ethics of narration and an ethics of listening that resist increasingly fixed and reactionary definitions of who belongs in which spaces.

In teaching the primary and critical materials of this dissertation, what has struck me is the haste with which even the most intelligent, careful students ascribe any uncertainty they locate in a text to their own failures as readers. My students assume they must have "missed" something when Said seems to contradict himself by calling exile

both “strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience” (“Reflections on Exile” 173). In *Brooklyn Heights*, they feel they are at fault when al-Tahawy’s movements between the past and the present are unclear. Encouraging them to see contradiction, ambivalence, and non-linear timelines as productive elements of these writers’ projects has convinced me that we have to learn how to read, write, and think in spaces of discomfort. We have to notice the range of feelings, including pleasure, longing, and uncertainty, that texts about loss, migration, and memory produce in us as readers, just as they inscribe ambivalent feelings for their writers and characters.

The ambivalence of the audience’s position in relation to a text about the complex experiences of displaced and traveling people is more immediately visible in material arts. Francis Bruno Catalano’s sculptures of “Les Voyageurs” were exhibited outdoors in Marseille during 2013 (Watson). The sculptures depict in bronze men and women of various ages, ethnicities, classes, and religious persuasions. Each figure’s specificity is clearly marked: “Charlotte” wears a blazer, skinny jeans, and flats while “Prince au Désert” is clothed in the robes and head scarf of the Arabian Gulf and stoops ever so slightly (Catalano). At the same time, every figure shares two things in common: each holds a weighty bag, suitcase, or instrument case, and each features an almost empty midsection. The bronze is gashed through with jagged lines, revealing in the place of organs and muscle whatever landscape serves as the sculpture’s backdrop. The midsection’s absence suggests a chest and head floating in space, detached from grounded feet and legs. The figures’ bags immediately suggest travel. Their strategic 2013 placement in Marseille, a city settled by the Phoenicians and made into a port by the

opening of Egypt's Suez Canal, evoke in particular the histories narrated by Hoda Barakat and Leila Ahmed as well as the movement of contemporary Middle Eastern and North African migrants into Europe ("MARSEILLES").

The physical and emotional effect of these sculptures is powerful; the figures' faces and stooped bodies suggest exhaustion and weightiness. The violence of the cut through the middle is also palpable. These sculptures could at once convey the image of immigrants as Zadie Smith's "blank people," ready to be filled by the locations and people they encounter in their arrival to a new city or country. Viewers can peer through the blank space to the port of Marseille, or now bits of the Place des Vosges in Paris, where other sculptures have been installed (Galerie de Medicis). They can even see one another if they stand on opposite sides of the figure, and several take photos of just this experience (Pavillon M). Some of the viewers carry backpacks and briefcases of their own, a similarity which allows the sculptures to blend more effectively into the scene of moving people. At the same time, the materiality of these figures transforms the landscape in which they are placed. Those interacting with the sculptures in Marseille have to walk around the figures or step back to take them in. The multiple but individually specific sculptures populating the square change movement through the space. Simultaneously profoundly painful and profoundly beautiful, the figures evoke the ambivalent "geographies of memory" I have defined throughout this project. To install them in a specific location, workers must literally re-member them, re-connecting each sculpture.

The variety of viewer reactions to the sculptures makes hyper-visible the extensive interaction visual and written texts demand from the receiver. The sculptures, like the texts in this project, resist narrative closure or clear, limited definitions of each individual's experience. While elements mark each sculpture in a particular way, we are left to imagine the motivations behind their travels, arrivals, and interactions. The spatialization of the figures also gives us permission to move through the exhibit in a variety of ways. Existing in the unsettling state of viewing the bronze in space mirrors the experience of reading the texts in this project as they map diverse affective memories. These visual and textual materials are all fragile and yet capable of re-membling, both impacted by the landscape and impacting it in turn. In both cases, the audience's responsibility is to recognize and sit with the ongoing work of nostalgia, forgetting, and historical narratives that transform one geographic location into multiple places.

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