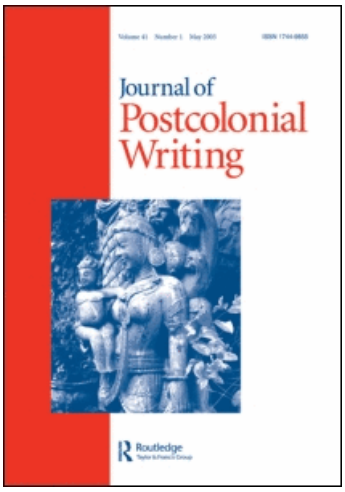

Journal of Postcolonial Writing
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713735330

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Online Publication Date: 01 December 2007

To cite this Article Hout, Syrine(2007)'THE LAST MIGRATION',Journal of Postcolonial Writing,43:3,286 — 296
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/17449850701669625
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449850701669625

Syrine Hout

THE LAST MIGRATION
The first contemporary example of Lebanese diasporic literature

This article is a comparative study of post-war anglophone Lebanese novels produced outside of Lebanon. It distinguishes between exilic and diasporic fictions. The former are characterized by the characters' radical sentiments towards the homeland which whether nostalgic or critical are equally debilitating and thus foster a mental condition of exile. By contrast, Jad el Hage's The Last Migration *(2002) charts a new path in this corpus by portraying the Lebanese as inhabiting a diasporic state of mind, characterized by a balanced perspective on the effects that living abroad has on their identities. Therefore, I argue that this novel is a prototype of Lebanese diasporic literature.*

Keywords post-war anglophone Lebanese novel; Lebanese civil war; exile; diaspora; identity

> I have an ache to be home, except that I don't know where home is.
> Maybe somewhere between dream and nothingness, somewhere in the geography of my soul. (Turki 77)

> Nostalgia […] is a terminal disease […]. There is more to life than shadows of the past. (*Last Migration* 82)

In discussing new anglophone literatures—also Commonwealth literature, postcolonial literature, new literatures in English, and world literature in English—John Skinner states that it is preferable to be "*pre*-this" than "*post*-that", and ideally to belong to an autonomous category in one's own right (5). While he refers specifically to postcolonial literatures, his view is also relevant to post-war or post-1990 Lebanese fiction written in English, most of which pertains to the larger body of exilic/diasporic literature. Although English is not Lebanon's "stepmother tongue" in the politico-historical sense, as Lebanon was colonized by France,[1] a significant number of Lebanese authors living in anglophone nations today have "*adopted* and then *adapted*" (11) English as their medium of literary expression. Skinner further argues that exilic and/or diasporic writings are "privileged" by postcolonial theory because they exemplify "New Literatures in New Worlds" and thus correspond to the co-ordinates of "their" land/"their" language (18).

Although exilic and diasporic writings both involve a "rhetoric of displacement" which displays the "struggle to assert identity out of place", they can be differentiated (Israel ix). Exile, associated with early 20th-century literary modernism, presupposes a coherent subject and well-defined realities of "here" and "now" (country of current

Journal of Postcolonial Writing Vol. 43, No. 3 December 2007, pp. 286–296
ISSN 1744-9855 print/ISSN 1744-9863 online

http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals DOI: 10.1080/17449850701669625

residence) vs "there" and "then" (original homeland); diaspora—connected to postcolonial, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories—accounts for hybridity and performativity which complicate notions of nation, location, and identity in an age of globalization (3). The *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1972) distinguishes between diaspora as voluntary and exile as forced dispersion on the grounds that, since Israel was created a state in 1948, Jews who voluntarily remained abroad turned their exile (*galut*) into a diasporic existence. Many Lebanese left their country during its 15-year civil war (1975–90), but others remained; of those who left, some returned while others stayed away. Interestingly, databases yield titles with "diaspora" and "literature" as matching keywords predominantly in post-1990 critical works.[2]

The phenomenon of the Lebanese diaspora has received its share of attention, being designated as "modern" (recent) rather than "historical" (established in antiquity) or "incipient" (in the making) (Sheffer 75). The ratio of Lebanese abroad—in Egypt, Syria, the Persian Gulf States, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Australia, Canada, France and Western Africa (105)—to those in Lebanon (about four million) is five or six to one (Cooke 269). Michael Humphrey asserts that the term "diaspora" moves between the particularity of an historical experience and the existential condition which metaphorizes postmodernity in its characteristics of "uncertainty, displacement and fragmented identity" ("Lebanese" par. 4); contemporary use of the phrase "Lebanese diaspora", stemming from the displacement of over 274,000 citizens (par. 16) during the Lebanese civil war, is therefore the by-product of national disintegration and subsequent resettlement (par. 5). Humphrey contends that homogenizing the Lebanese diaspora as a cultural, political, or national community (par. 43) is impossible because these immigrants "are the product of quite different migrations with their own very distinct relationships […] to contemporary Lebanon" (par. 6). Differences in religious denomination, socio-economic status, political ideology, reasons for departure, timing and the type of host societies into which they integrated cannot make them conceive of the "imagined present" or "past" in the same way (par. 6). Since the significance of the war remains politically unresolved, and Lebanon is yet to be constructed as promised in the Ta'if agreement (1989), diasporic identification remains primarily sectarian or communal (par. 44). Although the July–August 2006 Lebanon–Israeli war precipitated national unity, sharp political divisions at home and abroad have resurfaced. In the Lebanese diaspora, Humphrey concludes, "recovery of the imaginary homeland […] resembles the broader predicament of our times: social transience, fluid identities, and individual uncertainty" (par. 54) rather than what Benedict Anderson calls "long-distance nationalism", i.e. "a nationalism that no longer depends as it once did on territorial location in a home country" (42).

The senseless brutality of the Lebanese civil war stirred a generation of writers, "tinged with the heavy burden of the war years" (Manganaro 378), who dealt with "internal exile" as a psycho-social phenomenon without addressing the themes of actual exilic or diasporic lives. Subsequently, a group of mostly younger anglophone Lebanese writers—Rabih Alameddine, Tony Hanania, Patricia Sarrafian Ward, Nada Awar Jarrar, and Jad el Hage—has "broadened and complicated the notion of Lebanon" (Salem 771), although since they had the option of repatriation they are not strictly speaking exilic writers.

El Hage's first English-language novel, *The Last Migration: A Novel of Diaspora and Love*, published in Australia in 2002, is here considered as an example of post-war Lebanese fiction. It won the presentation prize at the Writers' Festival in Sydney, and

has been translated into Italian and French. In discussing the attitudes and sentiments that El Hage's uprooted characters maintain or develop vis-à-vis Lebanon, I define unresolved feelings towards one's homeland, both positive (nostalgic) and negative (critical), as equally debilitating, and therefore as fostering a mental condition of exile. Further, as it offers a balanced perspective on the effects of living abroad on personal and collective identities, by contrast to other novels permeated by unsettled responses towards one's origin, I argue that it is a prototype of Lebanese diasporic literature, and may usher in a new brand of post-war fiction.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1946, el Hage was from 1967 a reporter for Lebanese newspapers and later a broadcaster in Paris and Athens. In London from 1979 to 1981, he was with the BBC World Service. From 1982 to 1985 he was an editor for the London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat*, after which he relocated to Sydney, Australia, with his family. Currently, he divides his time between the North Lebanese village of Sereel and his family home in Melbourne. In addition to his debut novel in English, he has published another novel, seven collections of poetry, one of short stories, a radio play and four for theatre, all in Arabic. His second anglophone novel, *The Myrtle Tree: A Novel of Love and Dreams in Post-war Lebanon*, was published in 2007.

By contrast to other anglophone authors—whose departure from Lebanon in the mid-1970s at a younger age[3] made them choose expatriation as their major theme—and by contrast to Arabic-language writers residing in Lebanon—for example, Elias Khoury, Rashid al-Daif, and Hassan Daoud—in whose writings geographical exile is secondary to civil strife, 61-year-old el Hage seems to cover both expatriation and civil strife, but in reverse order. *The Last Migration*, an anglophone diasporic novel, was followed by the Arabic-language, war-centred play *Bint Asl*; four years later came the "post-war" anglophone novel about the war years, *The Myrtle Tree*, illustrating his claim that the "only certainty is that we killed each other for more than fifteen years" (qtd in www.inpressbooks.co.uk).

In discussing *The Last Migration* I differentiate it from Lebanese anglophone post-war narratives, an ever-growing genre, of which the most recent is Nada Awar Jarrar's *Dreams of Water* (2007). Its subtitle, *A Novel of Diaspora and Love*, clearly identifies the novel as diasporic and not exilic. "Diaspora" derives from the Greek word for being scattered, in Arabic *al-shatat*, whereas "exile" is Latinate and means to be banned from one's place of origin. "Diaspora" is "less inclined towards suffering and longing" than exile (Hammer 185); the "homing desire" produced by migration leads to physical and/or symbolic acts which establish sites promising a certain existential security away from one's "foundation". So the concept of diaspora "places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*" (Brah 192–93, emphasis in original). Instead of pining for Lebanon, the homing desire of El Hage's protagonist in *The Last Migration*, the 40-something Lebanese journalist Ashraf, activates his longing to belong to a self-devised, portable "home" and he performs affective as well as intellectual work which make possible a more meaningful future. Home, therefore, is continuously "produced [and reconfigured] through the movement of desire" (Fortier 129). Ashraf's dynamic diasporic identity contrasts with that of other Lebanese exilic characters, who illustrate in different garbs the almost transhistorical figure of the exile as "quintessential[ly] 'alien,' solitary and melancholy, out of place" (McClennen par. 5).

Other anglophone Lebanese novels stress the exclusions of exile rather than the adaptations of diaspora. Rabih Alameddine's *Koolaids* (1998), subtitled *The Art of War*, shows fighting, like the AIDS virus, causing privation and death. Alameddine's homosexual characters, painfully trapped, whether in their original or adopted homelands, eventually die; as the narrator says: "In America, I fit, but I do not belong. In Lebanon, I belong, but I do not fit" (40). The same in-betweenness applies to Sarah in Alameddine's *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001) who "[w]henever she is in Beirut, home is New York. Whenever she is in New York, home is Beirut" (99). Attempting to make sense of her "divided" life, Sarah never gets beyond preliminary sketches of her memoirs. Tony Hanania's *Unreal City* (1999), referring to war-torn Beirut, features a young, privileged Lebanese man driven by guilt to Islamic political fanaticism in the form of a suicide mission undertaken in London. In Patricia Ward's *The Bullet Collection* (2003), young Marianna tells her and her older sister's stories of growing up in the horrors of civil strife revealing a pathology of "the disintegration of personality" (Review, *Kirkus* 179) in a "tableau […] familiar to *exiles* [my emphasis] everywhere" (Zaleski np). Nada Awar Jarrar's Aida in the second story of her tri-partite novella *Somewhere, Home* (2003) is so crippled by nostalgia when abroad as to find psychological balance and maturity impossible. In short, despite different manifestations of their "suffering and longing" (Hammer 185), these characters all "converge in the common loneliness of physical or psychological displacement" which is typical of exilic literatures and even "reaches beyond nationality and time itself" (Ilie 227).

Unlike these Lebanese anglophone post-war narratives which it superficially resembles, *The Last Migration* is a "moving account of the *interactions* [my emphasis] between East and West" (www.encompassculture.com). Many are initiated by Ashraf Saad in his pursuit of true love with a woman, which could replace his love for his southern Lebanese village Cana. The book's jacket (by Dunia A. Beydoun) features a shoeless, ghost-like male figure passing through the village in search of an alternative ideal and its epigraph is a four-line verse by the Australian poet A.D. Hope, in which the birds' migratory life is forever linked to self-renewal. The narrative is framed by a Prologue, dated November 1995, and an Epilogue, dated a year later, November 1996. The 19 chapters are identified by 19 letters from the Arabic alphabet (out of 28).

The novel defines "love [as] the end of waiting" (*Last Migration* 15). Diaspora is "[b]eing away from loved ones", but also "a way of life" for Ashraf, whose "family and friends [are] scattered around the globe" (9) because diasporans relate to people living in other nation states as well as in their host nation state (Shuval 45). Ashraf's mother (68), his only relative left in Cana, uses "diaspora" as an alternative for those with relatives abroad, to remaining in the village. For Ashraf, who left Lebanon with his wife and daughter at the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 and has resided abroad for 20 years (the novel opens in 1995), repatriation is never an option. Most of Alameddine's, Hanania's, and Jarrar's characters also leave in 1975, when in their teens, many remaining trapped psychologically between war-ravaged Lebanon and the West. In contrast, because Ashraf had worked as a journalist in Paris in 1968, departure from Lebanon with his family seven years later was less traumatic than for the younger generation of teenagers and pre-teens which Alameddine, Hanania, Jarrar, and Ward depict.

Initially refused entry visas to France, luckily for Ashraf "halfway around the world Australia took [him] and [his] family when [they] had nowhere to go".[4] Unlike characters in other post-war narratives who leave for countries of their choice where they have

relatives (mostly the United States and Western Europe), Ashraf's lack of options forces him to adapt to an entirely foreign culture whose official language he already masters, and whose "generosity" allowed his daughters (his second child is born in Australia) to remain "unscathed by war" (*Last Migration* 34); home remains a "tenuous memory" (138). By contrast, Lebanese immigrants in France—a nation historically tied and geographically close to Lebanon—have felt in transit or at "home away from home" because they could return; unlike those who emigrated to the distant continents of North America and Australia to find "an alternative home" (Kemp 685–86). Ashraf's 18 years in Australia, then two in London, lead him to contrast Australia's "vastness" and natural scenery which "unleashed the wild in [him] with the 'narrowness' of Europe" (*Last Migration* 35) where "Copenhagen had the colours of Prague which had the colours of Paris which had the colours of Rome" (101). European cities become in his emigrant's eyes what André Aciman calls "mnemonic correlates", or mirrors of one another (29). This "grafting" or process of uncovering parallels is for some expatriates like Aciman and Ashraf more exciting than locating a permanent home. For both, certain places become surrogate or analogue variations "from which [they] can begin to be elsewhere" (Aciman 30). Whereas "elsewhere" for these two resembles a chain of endless signifiers, for other characters in post-war Lebanese fiction this "elsewhere" which forever allures or haunts them is restricted to the native soil as a signified, however tangible or abstract, in the binary opposition of exile and homeland.

Furthermore, like other immigrants who decorate their homes with objects from their native cultures, Ashraf acts in ways which reinforce the crucial components of his personal identity, providing spatial, temporal and social integration (Grinberg and Grinberg 131–33). Not only does he listen to Lebanese folkloric music "with the power of awakening cultural genes" (*Last Migration* 34), cook Lebanese food, and prepare Arabic coffee, but he also invites his western friends to partake of these delights. He surrounds himself with photos and paintings of natural scenery from his village. What signifies home is not fixed to walls but rather is an experience of sharing part of one's heritage with interested others.

Ashraf's successful career exemplifies the paradox of the higher socio-economic diasporan: of either maintaining relations with the homeland or instead facilitating integration with the host country and reducing relations with the homeland (Riggs par. 38). Although he is comfortably settled in London, his work requires and pays for travelling, allowing him to revisit Lebanon. His multiple roots are thus connected by familiar routes. To compensate for his occasionally surfacing nostalgia, in which "home" is never a physical entity, Ashraf visits his daughters in Australia and his mother in Lebanon. Marwan, his childhood friend now working in London, believes that Ashraf's "homing desire"—for intellectual, emotional and sexual involvement with a suitable woman—has become his substitute for home. Such relationships are what make Ashraf "stop […] feeling a fugitive" (*Last Migration* 159). In his desperate attempt to preserve his relationship with Jenny, he calls her a "refuge island" (135) for his "amputated soul" (110). Home is mobile, portable, circumstantial, and transferable from person to person. Accordingly, the question of whether he would prefer to be buried in Lebanon or in any country where he "had the best of [his] life" elicits the response: "[w]hen we're dead we don't know where the hell we are anyway" (3). This differs radically from the typical exile's fear of "double death": of dying abroad, thus making the return home and spiritual reunion with one's ancestors impossible (Grinberg and Grinberg 161). In comparison, in *Koolaids*

many of Alameddine's AIDS-afflicted characters encounter double death, away from home and loved ones, while in *Somewhere, Home* Jarrar's old female protagonist Salwa dies in Australia surrounded by family members but holding onto a photograph of an ancestral home in the Lebanese mountains. The double death of Hanania's suicide bomber in *Unreal City* is voluntary and thus conducive to what he (mistakenly) believes will redeem him in the eyes of his "brethren" back home.

Ashraf's association with individuals of multiple western and Arab nationalities further distinguishes *The Last Migration*. Refusing to fall into the "dissociative mechanism[s]" by which many immigrants idealize either the old or the new place to the detriment of the other (Grinberg and Grinberg 8–9), Ashraf remains critical of both. Unlike the persona of the "professional exile" who is "forever homesick, forever misunderstood" (Simic 129), his ability to "read" one culture's space and time from that of another, and thus conduct a transcultural critique, manifests "diasporic double consciousness", i.e. a state of mind alert to contradictions and incongruities (Dayal 57). Equally, as the consummate expatriate whose attitude and behaviour strike a balance between total rejection of and full immersion in the host society, Ashraf eludes the mould of the classic immigrant who goes "the full nine yards of transformation" (Mukherjee 71). Only expatriates like him achieve Edward Said's "contrapuntal consciousness": the inevitable double or plural visions due to awareness of two or more cultures (366). That is, Ashraf is neither "ocnophilic" (holding onto familiar people and locales) nor "philobatic" (seeking out new relationships and places).[5] Jarrar's, Hanania's, and Ward's characters, by contrast, exhibit ocnophilia, which they pay for in emotional stagnation, suicide or homicide and mental disturbance. Most of Alameddine's characters trying to find middle ground are cut short by war and disease. Although he refers to himself as an "unidentifiable alien" (*Last Migration* 76), Ashraf has strong links to westerners and Middle Easterners alike, and experiments with bringing them together: he takes Scottish Jenny to meet a long-time British resident of Yemeni descent because of their shared interest in pottery, and wants her "to *feel* the experience" (122, my emphasis) of the Najis' typical Arab hospitality. In this respect he exemplifies Eva Hoffman's claim that the emigrant gains both retrospective and prospective perspectives which turn him or her into an "anthropologist and relativist" (51).

As Rayyan al-Shawaf maintains, el Hage's Arabs "emerge as islands of stability, largely unruffled by their [western] neighbors' depravity" (par. 10). Abdo Naji, for example, listed in *The Sunday Morning Herald* as among the ten best potters in the UK, is not the only "rags-to-riches" (*Last Migration* 117) story of Arab immigrants in the diaspora. Another is Fehmy, a long-time Lebanese immigrant in Glenory, Australia, who has "stayed away from the skirmishes of the Lebanese community in Sydney" (47). Success lies partly in the ability to reinvent oneself. Fehmy transforms himself from an actor in pre-war Beirut to a tomato farmer in Australia, exemplifying that "model immigrant success stories […] remind us […] that the author [is] an 'other,' while simultaneously celebrating the supposedly complete transformation of that identity" (Buell 148).

Being an "other" yet also an assimilated and industrious member of the host society distinguishes a diasporan from an exile, for whom any professional achievement or lack thereof is related to the loss of the native place. Producing artefacts and fruits, respectively, illustrates these two Arab characters' creativity, adaptability and attachment to a literally new soil as a new source of revenue. Both possess James Clifford's criteria for a diasporic life: "the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction,

discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal" (312). By contrast, the novel's inflexible characters "feel degraded, holding a lifelong grudge against their new trade" (*Last Migration* 49), or start depending "on the dole" (47) of the host country, scenarios which nurture dependency, regret, rage and apathy.

Fehmy's two sons do not plan to return to Lebanon, but will move to Singapore as computer specialists. He and his wife Asma "daydream about globetrotting" (*Last Migration* 49). So the novel shows immigrants both in their new homes and also dispersing in pursuit of money and happiness, as members of an "opportunity-seeking" diaspora in the context of globalization (Reis 49–50). None of the other post-war novels portray the Lebanese in the centrifugal or radial motion typical of diasporic life; instead, their exilic movements resemble a pendulum, forever suspended between opposite poles. In *Koolaids*, Mohammad's success as a painter in the USA hinges on his portrayal of an untainted pre-war Lebanon and is cut short by his being tainted by AIDS. After completing his confessional manuscript and spilling out his guilt towards his compatriots, Hanania's brilliant but drug-addicted writer in *Unreal City* consumes himself in a suicide mission targeting a "renegade" Muslim author in London. Jarrar's psychologically stagnant Aida in *Somewhere, Home* returns to Lebanon at 32 but then leaves so that she may continue her imaginary conversations with the ghost of a man who had cared for her as a child before she fled in 1975.

Ashraf's longing for individuals rather than places illustrates Norman Nikro's statement that "in the Diaspora one must continually accept oneself as irremediably incomplete" (qtd in Tayah 10). Although marriage to a Lebanese wife, Sabina, ends in divorce, Ashraf attaches himself to new girlfriends. At first, he tries to recover from the shock of Claire's sudden death. With her, he had felt "at home", teaching her how to write her name in Arabic, learn Arabic songs and enjoy Lebanese food. He tries to cope with his grief by looking for a new "love-as-home" in Jenny; a "perfect Londoner" (*Last Migration* 2), living at ease in the ethnic mix of Shepherd's Bush, Ashraf is kept rooted by people, not sites: "What would I do in London without my lifelong friend [Marwan]?" (158). In exilic fictions, by contrast, those who leave never supersede memories of childhood friends, despite occasionally forming relationships in foreign countries. Several minor characters, however, usually siblings of protagonists in the stories by Alameddine, Jarrar and Ward, make the transition with relative success, leaving the others to struggle with AIDS, nostalgia, rage, guilt, depression, self-mutilation, attempted suicide and political and religious radicalism.

Unlike these narratives, *The Last Migration* portrays Lebanon not as a polar opposite to the (temporary) host country but as a "stopover" (63) while travelling between cities lying to its East and West. While in Lebanon for nine hours to visit his mother after a two-year absence, Ashraf refuses to succumb to nostalgia by underscoring the difference between pre- and post-war Lebanon. The trip to his hometown evokes joyful memories, now remote, "like they never really happened" (65). His once picturesque village is now "a lost Paradise" (156), and "Beirut's Golden Age" (157) is forever gone, despite post-war reconstruction. His visit only confirms his initial decision to leave, showing him as neither a "patriate" (a citizen outside the home state who supports the ruling power) nor an "activist" diasporan (one who opposes the regime at home) (Riggs par. 18). Instead, his sentiments are closer to the fragmentary "ironic nostalgia" which "accepts […] the paradoxes of exile and displacement" (Boym 241). Ashraf deflates the romanticized view of home

by emphasizing the irreparable damage done to the country and reaffirming his diasporic life.

Ashraf's relationships create a string of "dwelling places", substituting for his original hometown. But excessive alcohol consumption, casual sex and sporadic outbursts of "bottled-up violence" (*Last Migration* 132) are short-term remedies for his lingering sorrow and frustration, symbolized by his aching shoulder, symptomatic of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Notwithstanding heavy drinking, Ashraf's narration remains reliable, in contrast to Hanania's first-person narrator whose dependence on sleeping tablets and opium compromises his veracity. Almost all the exilic texts contain first-person testimonies of progressively debilitating physical and psycho-social ailments, but *The Last Migration* depicts triumph over cancer and the loss of loved ones. Furthermore, it avoids the lengthy rendering of the physical and mental crises of exilic characters in post-war fiction. It passes over those years prior to Ashraf's new life in Australia (where he had emigrated 21 years earlier), as a "reformed exile", his exilic sentiments diminishing after years of cautious integration, yet engaging in sporadic "compulsive retrospection" and living in "permanent transience" (Aciman, "Foreword" 13). It opens 20 years after Ashraf's departure from Lebanon; apart from a few flashbacks, his and his family's initial period of psycho-social "disorganization" in Australia is omitted; only one year (1995–96) of his subsequent "reorganization" (Grinberg and Grinberg 14–15) is recounted. The second, equally significant time period compressed by the narrative corresponds to the seven months following the bombing of Cana, which ends the main narrative. Ashraf's diagnosis of cancer, his chemotherapy, and later remission are mentioned in the Epilogue (dated November 1996).

As Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur explain, the diasporic person's hybridity "opens subjectivity to a liminal, dialogic space wherein identity is negotiated" (5) and renegotiated upon relocation and expanded to include others through marriage and parenthood. Accompanying Ashraf during his recovery is British Anna, now pregnant with his child. During one year, Ashraf metamorphoses from an idealist in search of eternal love as a substitute for his geographically fixed home, to a realist who finally pieces his life together. Past, present, and future are intertwined and embodied by his mother, daughters, new wife and their unborn child, respectively. His mother, the oldest yet newest member in this endo-diasporic[6] family, sums up: "This is my first and my last migration" (184). En route from the UK to Australia, bypassing Lebanon, Ashraf comes to emblematize all Lebanese living contentedly in the diaspora.

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin argue that diasporic cultural identity is superior to exilic identity, because the former demonstrates how "cultures are not preserved by being protected from 'mixing' but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such mixing" (721). By entering into a "mixed" (international) marriage with Anna, who nurses him back to health, Ashraf has literally preserved himself and "procreated". As Amin Maalouf explains, no individual possesses more than one identity; instead, each comprises "many components combined together in a mixture that is unique" (3), as "a meeting ground for many different allegiances" which may conflict (5). Unlike other major characters whose national identity as Lebanese remains tied to Lebanon, Ashraf surpasses his national identity by fostering non-conflictual allegiances to multiple "centres", making it "rarer" and "more particular" (Maalouf 15) than others. If, as John Peters claims, "[d]iaspora teaches the perpetual postponement of homecoming and the necessity […] of living among strange lands and peoples" (39), then Ashraf has done just that.

The homeland-as-place in exilic literature is gravid with meanings which condition memory and attitude. In diasporic literature, however, modified memories, a critical stance and personal desires condition and refashion the homeland. In other words, "home" undergoes a semantic extension from exilic to diasporic writings. Compared to the corpus of post-war anglophone Lebanese fiction, *The Last Migration* goes further in complicating the notion of home by relocating it in what Palestinian author Fawaz Turki calls "the geography of [the] soul" (77). By reconceptualizing home as an internal map of love and desire, this novel may indeed be read as the prototype of contemporary literature of the Lebanese diaspora. As long as this nation's history continues to be marked by inner political turmoil, intermittent violence, and millions of Lebanese living abroad under a myriad of conditions, it seems only natural that its fictional output, whether written in Arabic or in a western language, continues to bear witness to both exilic and diasporic situations and states of mind.

Notes

1 Lebanon was under French colonial rule between 1918 and 1943, the year of its national independence.

2 In addition to Israel's *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora* (2000), see, for example, Amy K. Kaminsky's *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999), Zohreh T. Sullivan's *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001), and Juliane Hammer's *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2005).

3 Alameddine was born in 1959, Hanania in 1964, Ward in 1969, and Jarrar in 1958.

4 Between 1976 and 1978 some 17,289 Lebanese arrived in Australia under a relaxed humanitarian immigration program, increasing the Lebanese-born population by 34% (Humphrey, "Sectarianism" 458). The total Lebanese-born community in Australia was approximately 100,000 in the early 1980s (Batrouney 431).

5 Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint coined these Greek terms, meaning "to grab hold of" and "to walk on one's hands", respectively.

6 An endo-diasporan leaves the homeland at any age; an ecto-diasporan is born in the diaspora (as a second-generation member) and has never lived in the homeland (Riggs par. 31).

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