International Journal of Literature Studies
ISSN: 2754-2610
DOI: 10.32996/ijts
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijls

IJLS
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transnationality, Mobile Identity, and Cultural Dislocation in Rabih Alameddine's I, the Divine (2002)

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| ABSTRACT
Inspired by diasporic philosophy, conception, and avidity, Anglophone diasporic authors—such as Rabih Alameddine, a prolific Arab American author recognized for his bold yet creative narratives—have foregrounded heterogeneity, post-nationality, and cross-pollination, as approaches to contest essentialist national identifications and reductionist ethnic ideologies. Equally, diaspora literary criticism emphasizes the importance of border crossings and transnational movements, exemplified in diasporic narratives, prompting a re-evaluation of understandings and mindsets. Drawing on this theoretical premise, this article explores themes of traveling identity and transnational belonging, by meticulously analyzing instances from Rabih Alameddine's I, the Divine (2002). It also unearths personal and cultural dislocation embodied in the protagonist's disjointed life narrative, the lack of a central plot, and the uncertainty of claiming an irrevocable belief in belonging to a fixed abode. It concludes that the approach of belonging, the novel advocates, aligns with the postmodernist diasporic view, based on revisiting outdated assumptions of cultural identity and welcoming, instead, hybridity and post-ethnicity, which complicates the fixity of home and the pre-givenness of identity.

| KEYWORDS
transnational belonging; Cultural dislocation; traveling identity

| ARTICLE INFORMATION
ACCEPTED: 01 March 2024 **PUBLISHED:** 13 March 2025 **DOI:** 10.32996/ijts.2024.5.1.2

1. Introduction

This article deals with one of the most read, controversial, daring, prolific, and creative Lebanese authors, considered the cornerstone of Arab anglophone diasporic literature. It is Rabih Alameddine, whose dazzlingly subversive fiction has been marked with fragmentation, intertextuality, transculturality, "historiographic metafiction"[1], non-linearity, and other features of postmodern

[1] See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*: *History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 105. In this book, Hutcheon shows that her study "interrogates the limits and powers of postmodernist discourse, by investigating the overlapping within a plurality of manifestations in art and theory, overlappings that point to the consistently problematized issues that I think define this poetics (or problematics) of postmodernism: historical knowledge, subjectivity, narrativity, reference, textuality, discursive context" (231). Along with the aesthetics of the postmodern literary text such as collage, pastiche, black humor, Alameddine's novel is infused with "historiographic metafiction"; it is this term that Hutcheon developed in her book to refer to certain works that fictionalize and problematizes historical contexts and knowledge, as in the case of *Koolaids: The Art of War*, and *I, the Divine*. Regarding poetics, the notion is derived from Ancient Greek "poietikos", which is attributed to poetry, and signifies "creative" and "productive". The term has heralded the growth of three artistic movements: (1) the formalist, (2) the objectivist, and (3) the Aristotelian. Aristotle's Poetics is believed to be the most alluring philosophical treatise concerned with poetry, paving the ground for literary theory. Among Aristotle's concepts that are still important to students and critics interested in Greek poetry include mimesis, plot development, and the notion of fitting size.

poetics (Kearney, 1998)[2]. Alameddine is renowned for his choice of highly experimental narratives and catchy titles of all his critically acclaimed novels, which can be chronologically stated as follows: *Koolaids:* The *Art of War* (Picador, 1998); and a series of short stories titled, *The Perv* (Picador, 1999); *I, The Divine* (W.W. Norton, 2001); *The Hakawati* (Knopf, 2008); *An Unnecessary Woman* (Grove Press, 2014); *The Angel of History* (Grove Press, 2016); *The Wrong End of the Telescope* (Grove Press, 2021). Alameddine represents a generation of Lebanese authors such as Jade El-Hage, Tony Hanania, Nada Awar Jarrar, and many others who have been deeply affected and inspired by the Civil War in their country (Lebanon). Some of these authors witnessed the horror of the war and its traumatic consequences (1975-90) that made innocent civilians suffer different kinds of terror. Alameddine is no exception. The war permeated every corner of his life. Much like others of his generation whose works have been differently influenced by scenes of the Civil War[3], Alameddine's trauma memories[4] emerge in his stories, written away from home, right when he has been deprived of returning to the homeland. It is worth noting that Dispersal, be it self-chosen or imposed, has led to the development of critical hindsight transformed into narrative modes and techniques—especially parody, irony, and satire—very common in postmodern texts. Alameddine's fiction is part and parcel of a category of authors, whose works fall within the contemporary Arab American literary writings, particularly that which emerged in the 1990s, and ever since these narratives have been marked with an assertive political consciousness and complexity of centrality and fixity of conceptions around culture and the world in the era of globalism. Evelyn Shakir sees this shift as a characteristic of postmodernity, as "a new artistic maturity"[5] that has flourished since then and has resulted in demythologizing and problematizing the concept of home, which was regarded as a fixed place, as a wellspring of identity. The discussion will therefore stress the various representations of cultural (dis)location associated much with the protagonist's fractured life and the reconstruction of her hybrid, diasporic, and transnational identity, which is, as I shall explicate, reflective of a cosmopolitan and post-ethnic view, the novel advocates, about the issue of belonging. This kind of (un)belonging, being a recurrent theme in the novel, will be tackled in line with the implied instances, defying the purity of cultural identity and welcoming, instead, the hybridity and cross-pollination that reject essentialist approaches to homeland and identity, used to be perceived as fixed entities.

In *I, the Divine* (2002), Alameddine creates an alluringly fictional autobiography, a novel whose protagonist Sarah Nour el-Din, born and raised in Beirut to a Lebanese father and an American mother, epitomizes the life of a nomadic postcolonial subject who permanently crosses geographical borders, from Lebanon to the US and vice vera. Before leaving for the US and making up her mind to stay away from her family and her home country (Lebanon) and the terror of the war, she had already lived with her family at the onset of the Civil War (1975-90) in Beirut, then eloped for New York with her boyfriend, Omar, in 1980 when she was just twenty. During the war, Sarahkept shuttling between two countries, which raises awareness of discussing her uncertain feelings of belonging, whether to the home country or the host one, as she feels torn between two entirely different geographies and cultures. At the age of forty, while determinedly attempting to write a full memoir of her own, Sarah finds it hard to come up with a coherent narrative that encapsulates every little detail of her life, or at least a clear beginning and ending of her story. Her memoir thus consists of chapters, intentionally lacking a chronological order. The act of writing, for Sarah, is a challenge but a chance to fully understand and revise her fractured self, disjointed personality, her in-betweenness, and her feelings of not belonging to any piece of land—which comes as a result of a harrowing experience she has already undergone. The divorce of her parents, her rape, her mother's suicide, romantic heartbreaks, homelessness, loss, and the pain of solitude—especially when she deserts her husband Omar and her son Kamal and decides not to go back home—typify much of her sufferings. As a result, Sarah engages in writing her memoirs, as a means to make sense of her hybrid identity, her culturally divided self, to the extent that she notes it: "I have been blessed with many curses in my life, not the least of which was being born half Lebanese and half American. Throughout my life, these contradictory parts battled endlessly, clashed, never coming to a satisfactory conclusion"[6]. Because of constantly journeying between geographies, Beirut and the US, and interchangeably using three languages, French, English, and Arabic, Sarah, at the end of her story, gets to understand her transnational identity developed through travels across countries and cities. Her

[2] from *Poetics of Imagining: Modern and Postmodern* (p.95-99), by R. Kearney, 1998, Edinburgh UP. (www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrb5q). Kearney, like Plato and other thinkers before him, believes poetry to be a productive act. He argues that artwork produces the possibility of becoming something when it frees itself from its maker. This unending process of an artwork stems from imagination, as a conscious act and strong power that makes any movement possible, that is, the movement between past, present, and future and vice versa. The dynamic character of imagination is what gives a particular artwork its own life. It is also what makes it open to an endless play of interpretation. Thus, as Kearney (1998) claims, the poetic is the will-to-movement and is a dynamic act that is always producing a range of possibilities (95-99).

[3] from "An Interview with Rabih Alameddine," by K. O. Youssef, 2017, *www. pw. Org/ theatre? Tag= Kamelya% 20Omaya%20Youssef*.

[4] From "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War", by S. Haugbolle, 2005, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 25, 1, pp. 191-19, (www.academia.edu/6824636).

[5] Form "'Imaginary Homelands' – Lebanese-American Prose," by E. Shakir, 2003, Al Jadid,9.42–3, p. 23. (https//aljadid.com/content/imaginary-homelands)

[6] From *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (p.229), by R. Alameddine, 2002, New York: WW Norton.

cultural and psychological dislocation have been incarnated in fragments of her memoir. When penning down her past, she realizes she cannot come up with a comprehensive conclusion that sums it all up; her memoir is thus imbued with redundant chapters, each of which is entitled "Chapter One", which explains the difficulty Sarah encounters in constructing a coherent and smooth narrative for her own story when she decides to record twenty years of self-chosen exile**,** of solitude that began in 1980, which marks the year of departure from home (Lebanon).

With the above-said, the first section tackles the notion of transnational diaspora, traveling identity, and transcultural belonging, by focusing on the case of Sarah and her struggle to come to terms with her inner conflict, as she feels she belongs neither to her home country nor the host one. Taking this characterization into account, that is, the protagonist as a diasporic, transnational, and dislocated subject will guide us to the appropriation and deployment of the already mentioned concepts, transnational diaspora, and traveling identities, personal dislocation in its relation to the notion of home, which have been displayed in many ways in and have given the narrative an aesthetic value. My focus will be laid more on the (un)fixity of diasporic subjects and homelessness, as a representation of the era of globalism and transnational movements, to set the ground for negotiating the novel's critical perspective in refashioning the classical definitions around the stability of home and the authenticity of cultural identity. Given the role assigned to Sarah, the novel revisits stereotypical portrayals of Arab women, since the protagonist represents a divorced woman, living on her own, defying exoticism and docility attributed more to Arab women than others from different races and backgrounds. The last section deals with unbelonging and personal dislocation in Alameddine's *I, the Divine* (2002), with an emphasis on the notion of home that is not necessarily representative of nostalgia or delayed returns, because of its fluidity and its association with new understandings that influenced by transnationalism, nomadism, and constant migrancy.

2. Transnational Diaspora and the Question of Belonging

Arab American contemporary literary narratives, within which Alameddine's fiction is part and parcel, consist of voices of migrants, exiles, refugees, self-imposed exiles, and authors of Arab descent from numerous countries of the Arab world[7], which is multi-ethnic[8]. Arab American community, more specifically the new generation of immigrants and descendants of Arab pioneers in America, is heterogeneous and is made up of a blend of diasporic intellectuals and artists from all over the Arab world (Ludescher, 2006). Arab American writers and intellectuals are thus part of the mass population movement, which emerged in the early 1960s and extended to the mid-1990s. This movement, as Al-Maleh explains, has been a consequence of "the Palestinians 'Exodus' from their homeland in 1948, [and also a result of] the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel, the Lebanese civil war and its aftermaths, the two Gulf wars and the Iraq debacle, exile, whether forced or self-imposed, flight from dictatorships – domestic (familial) or political- the pursuit of self-betterment through education and descent work(...)"[9]. Arab American narrative is then a sort of literature that is "born away from the homeland" and that is unsurprisingly "haunted by the same 'hybrid', 'exilic', and 'diasporic' questions that have dogged fellow postcolonialists" (Al Maleh, 2009, p. x). The fact that Arab American literature is fraught with experiences of displacement, migration, and exile makes it bear the traits of diasporic literature resulting from transnational or deterritorialized diasporas. The latter signifies not just new identities and subjectivities but "mobile and multi-located cultures"[10]. This multilocality and mobility of diasporic subjects have been embodied in narratives and perspectives by authors from diverse parts of the Arab world, from different geographical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Works by Arab-American authors— such as Anouar Majid's *Si Youssef* (1992*)*, Diana Abu Jaber's *Fencing with the King* (2022), Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Hisham Matar's *Anatomy of Disappearance* (2011), Laila Lalami's *the Other Americans (2019)*, to name but a few—typify the notion of diversity and difference in terms of themes and perspectives such works involve. These works by Arab American authors, along with other writing genres, have been characterized by eschewing patterns of ethnic belonging and discourses of homogeneity and by involving, instead, a global outlook that tolerates differences, hybridity, and transculturality— as characteristics of the present diasporic communities.

With a multiplicity of themes, visions, and approaches, the bulk of Arab-American fiction, which has appeared in the last three decades, corresponds much with the recently revised versions of the notion of diaspora. By involving varied narratives of dispersal

[7]Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007),9.

[8] In his book, Salaita points to the makeup of the Arab-American community that is a blend of Muslims "(Shia and Sunni and Alawi and Isma'ili), Christian (Catholic and Orthodox, Anglican and Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant), Jewish (Orthodox and Conservative and Haredi and Reform), Druze, Bahai, dual citizens of Israel and twenty-two Arab nations, multi- and monolingual, progressives and conservatives, assimilationists and nationalists, cosmopolitanists and pluralists, immigrants and fifth-generation Americans, wealthy and working-class, rural and urban, modern and traditional, religious and secular(...)" (1).

[9] Layla Al Maleh, *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (Amsterdam - New York, NY 2009), 12.

[10] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 124.

and stories of the displaced, migrants, and even the self-chosen exiles, the word diaspora has become more inclusive than ever. Robin Cohen, in this vein, also notes that in the modern era of global diasporas, the notion has come to distance itself from the outmoded definitions and classical usages in which the word is "usually capitalized as Diaspora and used only in singular" and "confined to the study of the Jewish experience" of dispersion (2008, 1). With the emergence of global diasporas, the term has been used as "a metaphoric designation" (Safran, 1991, p. 1) and has thereby evolved to include different categories of people, "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court"[11]. In the recent intellectual debates, diaspora(s), as one word, turns out to be suggestive of "the exemplary condition of late modernity"[12], which is similar to what Tölölyan calls "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment"[13]. Transnational movements have, nowadays, played a key role as carriers of "capital, labour, ideas, information cultural commodities"[14]. Transnational subjects, as agents of this transnational mobility, are no longer unique and thus do not belong to a specific ethnic community with the same concerns, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Transnationals are segments of diasporic subjects, characterized by multiple belongings. The term transnationals[15] or segmented diasporas[16] both can be applied to a range of authors and intellectuals, of the Arab American community as being ever so hybrid and heterogenous, known by their not belonging to any plot of land. Arab Americans, today, are depicted by their multiple belongingness as transnational subjects. The relevance of the notion of 'transnational diaspora' to the issue I am arguing for is to demonstrate its connection with Rabih Alameddine's fiction, to show how the latter destabilizes rigid and traditional understandings of belonging, home, and identity. The case of multiple belongings, as it exists in Alameddine's *I, the Divine,* might run parallel to the needs of the transnational era. Tölölyan, in this, observes that "the stateless power of diasporas lies in their heightened awareness of both the perils and rewards of multiple belonging, and in their sometimes-exemplary grappling with the paradoxes of such belonging" (Tölölyan, 2008, p. 7-8).

Heterogeneity and diversity are central qualities, strongly associated with the Arab-American diasporic community. Immigrants' stories and their experiences taken with them to new homes and host lands shape the formation of their community while living away from their mother country. 'Diasporic subjects', whether as collective or as individuals, reflect what James Clifford calls "traveling Cultures"[17], for they interact with other societies in the host lands by the act of sharing their own cultures with the inhabitants of the adopted countries. For Clifford, "diasporic subjects are distinct versions of modern transnational, intercultural experience"[18]. Diaspora theoreticians link diasporans and diasporic communities with heterogeneity and hybridity as being formed by first, second, third, and, sometimes, fourth generations that have completely different backgrounds, as in the case of Arab Americans in the US, Arab British in the UK, Arab Canadians, and Arab Australians. Diasporas serve as an alternative to the "stern discipline of kinship and rooted belonging" (Gilroy, 2000, p.123). Heterogeneity and multiplicity that have turned out to be the hallmarks of diasporic communities over the last few decades have manifested themselves in the literature of Arab Americans, whose community is considered to be typical of multi-ethnicity, for involving segments of diasporas (Werbner, 2000). This amalgam of diasporas, as Salaita already mentioned, reflects multiple ethnicities that exist in the Arab world, whether these groups are Arabs or non-Arabs. They geographically belong to the Arab World, such as "Berbers, Kurds, Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Circassians"[19]. No wonder, this diversity has been an important descriptive label that defines the make-up of the Arab American community and has consequently been revealed in a variety of themes and creative works by a range of innovative authors of Arab descent, whose narratives cannot be packed into a prescriptive category of literature but into a descriptive one. Apart from the shared styles and aesthetics or what Steven Salaita calls "motifs and dynamics" (2011,7), found in American literary tradition and detected in Arab American novels, it has been argued that Arab American fiction is wide-ranging and diverse, to the extent that it is most likely to be polarized into sub-themes, though recurrent topics share some affinity, manifested, for instance, in "the Israel-Palestine conflict; the Lebanese Civil War of 1975–90; the representation and practice of Islam in the United States; anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia; the politics and histories of the Arab world; social issues such as gender and national identity in Arab cultures; and the various identities that come with being Arab American."[20]

Different segments of diaspora within the Arab American community, much like Rabih Alameddine's writings, generate a kind of fiction that fits in with transnational literature. Consider Alameddine's protagonist in *I, The Divine* (2002) as an example, one

[11] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, Toronto UP, 1991, p.1. DOI: 10.1353/dsp. 1991.0004.
[12] Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora." *In Textual Practice* 10 (1996), 421–47
[13] Khachig Tölölyan, "The Nation-State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface." *Diaspora* 1 (1991), 3–7.
[14] Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s) : Stateless Power in the Transnational moment"(the University of Toronto Press, 1996), 4.
[15] See Tölölyan, " Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment", 19.
[16] See Werbner, "Introduction: The Materiality of Diaspora," 16.
[17] James Clifford, "Travelling Cultures", *Cultural Studies*, edited and with an introduction by Lawrence Grossberg, Nelsson and Treicher (London: Routledge, 1992)
[18] See Clifford, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, *Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future*, Aug.1994: 319.
[19] Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics (*London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.
[20] Steven Salaita, *Modern Arab American Fiction* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), pp. 7-8

would say, at first glance, that the story tackles the life of a woman between two nation-states; it is the life of Sarah Nour el-Din, the protagonist of the novel, who palpably engages in a critical negotiation, not only of her hybrid identity but of her not belonging to either a piece of land. By presenting how she switches between geographies, and identities in an attempt to understand her unsettled self, her two contradictory halves of identity that "battled endlessly, clashed, never coming to a satisfactory conclusion"[21], the novel complicates the issue of ethnicity and authentic identity, that is, the destabilization of preconceived thoughts on Arab Americans that used to be viewed as a 'block of diaspora' rather than 'segments', encompassing people, like Sarah, who belong neither to their adopted country where they used to live nor to the host land, where they exist. This category of diasporans, either because of unbelonging or mobility, have proved to be transnationals by embracing a fluid sense of self amidst the hyper-mobilities that they are experiencing in their lives. The presence of a transnational character—like Alameddine's protagonist, Sarah, in *I, the Divine*— is a characteristic of anglophone fiction, which proves that transnationals usually improve the ability to shift between cultures, most often between the ones of their host lands and those of their ethnic roots, together with their avid search for imaginary homelands.

Diasporic fiction is, by and large, replete with instances of characters with transnational identities. Meera Syal's semi-autobiographical novel *Anita and Me* (1996) is a more relevant example. Syal, as a postcolonial author, involves, through the voice of her protagonist, her living experience within a white community in London that never tolerates Syal's dual identity. Equipped with a diasporic background, the author sheds light on acculturation and assimilation while featuring the experiences of the first and the second generation, through Meena the protagonist, whose role is of high importance as it underscores the encounter between Eastern and Western cultures, resulting in hybridization. Meena, the protagonist, shows to be different from her parents, by sweeping into the community through her friend, Anita Rutter. She creates a space for herself when she feels she is alien among her friends. Having such a feeling drives her to reinvent a new identity that is neither British nor Indian. Albeit feeling nostalgic and having a strong desire for the homeland, she realizes she does not fit in either side. There is yet another example that is rather similar to Alameddine's protagonist Sarah in *I, the Divine,* and Meena in Syal's work. Zadie Smith's *The Autograph Man* (2002) spotlights a character called Alex -Li Tandem, who never cares about the label of identity thrown on his shoulders, which leads him to write his memoir so that he can understand his complex identity as being half Chinese and half Jewish.

Dealing with a piece of fiction, such as *I, the Divine*, that could be framed within transnational literature; reading transnational subjects seems necessary to discuss the word transnationalism and ponder its connections with the novel at hand. Transnationalism incorporates a movement of bodies across political, geographical, and cultural boundaries. Aihwa Ong defines "trans" as "both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something". Transnationality "alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary human behavior and imagination"[22]. More importantly, transnationalism opens up a discussion on migration by taking into account different settings and "renegotiation of concepts of identity, space, community and 'home' where the focus is not on the act of movement itself but rather on the actions that permit the maintenance of cross-border links traversing societies and nation-states"[23].

Notably, the way bodies move between nations and the effect of such transnational mobility on one's identity runs deep in Alameddine's *I, the Divine* which, at the same time, revises the fixedness of the notion of home as it complicates the stability of belonging to a place. Part of what is revised in the novel is the notion of diasporic subjectivity[24] and a diasporic subject[25] that Sarah represents for her ability to negotiate the dual identity she develops through a diasporic vantage point that home is unfixed. The role Sarah performs in the novel goes beyond the dichotomy of "here" and "there", because of her typically transnational diasporic state of mind and her identity that challenges the traditional paradigm, which is either being assimilated into the mainstream culture or living within the bounds of the ethnic community**.** Employing the concept of transnational diaspora to claim that Alameddine's female protagonist is nothing but an epitome of a mobile character with multiple national allegiances illuminates the transnational and post-ethnic perspectives of the novel's plot as a whole text. This has been made explicit in Sarah's viewpoint, influenced by mobility and travel, which seems different from the other characters' choices, as in the case of her ex-husband, Omar, and her sisters, whose mindsets have not been shaped by transgressing geographical borders, whose perception involves home

[21] Rabih Alameddine, *I, the, Divine*, 229.

[22] For further reading the issue of flexible belonging, Aihwa Ong provides an interesting book germane to transnational identities, entitled *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 4.

[23] Christopher Mc Dowell et al., "Understanding Transnational Diaspora Politics: A Conceptual Discussion", *From the Diasporisation to the Transnationalisation of Exile Politics- the Case of Sri Lanka,* 1983-2016, *Thematic Report One*. In *Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats,* June 2018, pp.12-13.

[24] See Mala Pandurang, especially chapter 28, "Diasporic Subjectivity", *Routledge Handbook of the Indian Diaspora,* edited by Radha Hegde and Ajaya Sahoo (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.1-2. Doi: Org/10. 4324/9781315672571. Pandurang, in a chapter, investigates the idea of diasporic subjectivity in relation to the period of transnationalism that engenders fluid diasporic subjectivities that contest the established classical paradigms and definitions in the field of diaspora studies.

[25] The diasporic subject, as Collin Davis demonstrates, is out of bounds. The diasporic, male or female, has no certain location or language of his/her own, no promise of belonging to a location that may secure oneself.

as a place of belonging and identity, rather than 'the lived experience of a locality' (Brah, 2005, p.188). The travel of the protagonist reflects a state of physical and emotional dislocation, which implies her worldview as a migrant who has developed a transnational sense of belonging based on her constant journeys and mobility across multiple spaces, a fact of the diasporic dislocation (Russell 2006; Gardner, 2013; Mc Dowell et al. 2018). Transnational diaspora, mobility, and 'traveling identity' are then befitting concepts that disclose not just the scope and vision of Alameddine's *I, the Divine* but problematizes the notion of home as a location and highlights, instead, dislocation through Sarah's migratory experience. Borders seem to be "arbitrary constructions"; Sarah shows, throughout her travels and struggles to survive despite rape, displacement, her mother's divorce, abandonment by her mother, solitude, and failed marriages, that borders are merely metaphors and constructions, part of what Brah (2005) calls "the discursive materiality of power relations" (195).

Alameddine's narratives, notably his debut novels *Koolaids* (1998), *The Perv* (1999), and the one that is under analysis *I, the Divine* (2002), share many things in common. Like *I, the Divine (*2002), Koolaids, as a non-linear, polyphonic, and "multi-generic collage of 244 fragments, throws light on Lebanese Civil War and THE AIDS epidemic in the US, whereas the notion of home is no longer determined by a spatial reality but by an affective reality. The notion of home goes beyond the confines of the nation-state Thereby, Alameddine's fiction represents a critical stance that breaks not merely with the previous forms of nostalgia and yearning for the homeland but also with national allegiances to the host land. This has been manifested neither in belonging to the motherland nor assimilation into the US society has been suggested; rather, what is proposed, not necessarily as the best solution for the dilemma of belonging, can be considered as the transnational affiliation that the protagonist embodies in the story. This means Sarah might seem to be both a transnational and trans-local character, able to give a new conception of home in the age of globalization and global citizenship. Taken together, the novel features transnationalism through its main protagonist as an approach that illustrates the construction of a de-territorialized identity (Saleh,2020) through mobility and traveling across nation-states. Trans-localism, conversely, encapsulates "the local and how the locales transform as people become more mobile"[26]. Transnationalism could be defined as a process of interaction that underlines "the dynamic connection between people and spaces to 'understand the (re)construction of places through the movements of people, material objects and ideas"[27] (see Greiner 2010; Levitt 2009; Verne 2012).

Similarly, Verne uses the concept of the rhizome to explain not only the relationality that characterizes trans-locality but also "the complexity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of trans-local connections that are constantly in the making"[28]. Trans-locality can be understood as one way of accounting for the interconnectedness of "mobility and situatedness" (Verne, 2012, p.19). However, Alameddine, by inserting the case of the protagonist who endures a state of not belonging to any land, stresses the permeability of borders because of the endured movements between multiple geographical locations. Sarah is known for her ability to move across borders. The more she travels across, Beirut, New York, and San Francisco, the more blurred and undetermined lines of demarcation between geographies turn out to be. The novel shows Sarah's migration from one place to another, an example of multi-locality that renders the question of national belonging more malleable in the era of globalism. The novel's protagonist exemplifies in-betweenness and dual identity that is, in essence, the identity of the nomadic, mobile, and transnational diasporic subject. Sarah serves as a case in point of an Arab-American diasporic woman, capable of looking at herself, at her multiple national and cultural backgrounds with a sense of criticism, due, of course, to her transnational viewpoint.

I, the Divine (2002) is a postmodern fictional autobiography that displays the life story of a Lebanese woman, whose identity has been constructed across multiple locations and through open-ended ways. The bodies' movement across nation-states is a testimony of how experiences migrate and crisscross. The moving body, Sarah represents in her memoir, serves as an agent of transgression and liberation from clinging to a centre, be it a nation, a family, or a religion. The novel foregrounds the connection to a complex web of places, by emphasizing Sarah's journeys across different places. Her permanent travels illustrate how her physical dislocation leads to high awareness, as she becomes able not only to assess critically her cultural background but to tolerate the idea that "home is never where she is, but where she is not"[29]; that is, home is no longer a fixed point that means firmly belonging to a specific land. Rather, home is, as Sarah perceives it, a space where she does not exist, an uncharted space that makes Sarah construct a post-national identity and transnational worldview. While the protagonist never feels she belongs to a particular place, the kind of identity that plays out, as a result of migrancy, is no longer stable, but is provisional, inconclusive, shifting, and molten. This is reflected in the whole story, which does not have an ending, nor does it provide a clearer portrait of

[26] See Christopher Mc Dowell et al., Understanding transnational diaspora politics: A conceptual discussion, 21

[27] From "Understanding Transnational Diaspora Politics: A Conceptual Discussion," by Christopher Mc Dowell et al., 2018, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, p. 22. (https://crestresearch.ac.uk/ projects extremism-to- moderate-politics/

[28] For more information on trans-localism and transnationalism, see Julia Verne, *Living Translocality: Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade*, Franz Steiner Verlag (Stuttgart, 2012), 10.

[29] Alameddine, *I, the Divine*, 99.

Sarah's selfhood. Alameddine's fictional memoir embodies, at first, a woman's struggle to write her fragmented story that seeks to piece all that happened together. Sarah herself fails to come up with an uninterrupted line for her life story.

Yet despite being narrated in fragments, the memoir sums up all the segments that complete the portrait of Sarah's life—as a determined woman who survives the Lebanese Civil War, never accepts failed marriages, constantly goes through personal traumas, and always searches for a dwelling, since she challenges solitude and belonging. At the time of writing her memoir, Sarah tries to incorporate her travels between the US (her mother's country) and Lebanon (her father's country) in the story, which makes it bear the traces of transnational literature. Her text transcends the local by blending genres, texts, and languages (French, English, and Arabic words), which are all suggestive of the protagonist's migrancy, transculturality, hybridity, and unbelonging. By doing so, Alameddine's novel neither mirrors Lebanese nor American national literary tradition, but embodies transnational and global perspectives of home and belonging. This has been manifested in Sarha's negotiation of her multilayered and transcultural identity, which is a result not only of her being Lebanese American, bearing two cultural backgrounds at once, but of being a transnational subject. It is because Sarah's transnational identity comes from one place to another and, more importantly, from not fitting in with either of the two cultures. Sarah's unbelonging space could be read as an extension of living in an interstice, where Sarah feels that her home is neither here (the US) nor there (Lebanon). In this, Sarah's memoir is forcefully associated with transcultural narratives that cannot be related to one particular 'national literary space' (Dagnino, 2013, p. 2), partly because such narratives lack a fixed abode and involve, instead, multiple trajectories of transnational and neo-nomadic movements.

While fictional autobiography exhibits writing as an unfinished process, the author fashions a character who strives to blend scattered events of her life story into a coherent text, despite its false starts, ends, and nonlinearity. Sarha's identity, which is affected by mobility and travel across multiple cultures, is as much a portrayal of a multifaceted transnational Arab-American woman as it is emblematic of fluidity and in-betweenness that is principally characteristic of almost all hybrid and transnational diasporic subjects. In this respect, in this portrait, the author parodies a nuanced in-betweenness and breaks with stereotypical, stagnant, racial, and monolith descriptions of Arabs or Lebanese Americans. Sarah's search for a home, while switching "temporally between the past and the present, geographically between Lebanon and the US, and formally between autobiographical 'I's to craft her autobiography"[30], is but a yearning for a space for negotiating homelessness, self-imposed exile and the construction of her fragmented trans-cultural identity, so far from strictly reductionist ethnic perspectives. Alameddine's *I, the Divine* casts the trauma of exile through the memory of the protagonist who narrates her experience from multilayered perspectives and discusses her own identity that, like any other cultural identity whether Lebanese, Druze, or American, is open and fluid and is often in transit. Sarah's constant movement and the quest for a new home are both facets of transnational belonging and contemporary diasporic identity**.**

3. Moving Bodies, "Traveling Identities"

Sarah's memoir is not cyclic, as is the case with the *Bildungsroman,* but is fragmented and incomplete. It is narrated from different perspectives and combines different genres — epistolary, fable, memoir, etc — which reflects textual hybridity[31]. Alameddine's use of the first-person narrating 'I', as the narrator-protagonist, and the third-person voice "she" that is deployed to help Sarah articulate her past experiences, problematizes the conventions of the autobiographical narration and lays bare his intentional revision to canonical narrative strategies. By distorting subject positions and perspectives of narration, the protagonist/ narrator indulges in negotiating her in-betweenness and reflecting on her past traumas from various angles. Sarah's shift between perspectives to tell her story demonstrates some kind of heteroglossia associated with "multiple and mobile subject positions, because the narrating "I", which refers to the narrator herself, is neither unified nor stable. The narrating "I" is split, fragmented, provisional, and multiple and is always "in the process of coming together and of dispersing"[32]. The 45 chapters beginning with "Chapter One" are redundant but original with a mixture of narrative perspectives and introductions. Shifting between two languages, French and English, between genres of memoirs and novels, as well as between varied narrative voices, have spotlighted Sarah's "outsider status"[33] as an exiled subject that represents W.E.B. Du Bois "double-consciousness"[34] and the influence of

[30] For further information, see Leila Moayeri Pazargadi, (2018). Unfixing the autobiographical subject: Fragmentation as aesthetics and identity in Rabih Alameddine's I, *the Divine. In Pickens. T (Ed.), Arab American Aesthetics*(pp.42-59). Routledge.

[31] See Cristina Garrigos, "The Dynamics of Intercultural Dislocation: Hybridity in Rabih Alameddine's I, the Divine". *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (New York, NY, 2009), p.190.

[32] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 74.

[33] Pickens Therí, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014),65.

[34] William Edward Burghard Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903). The term is used, at first, by W.E.B. Du Bois in his pathbreaking autoethnographic, titled as *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches,* published in 1903. The concept used in social philosophy is connected to the experience of the black people in the US. By this term, Du Bois suggests that African Americans need to develop a double vision of looking at the self, that is, African American have to be aware of how they see themselves through the eyes of the

transnational context and transnational movement. This influence proves how Sarah's identity has evolved through travel. As Sarah's story is narrated from different points of view, this textual hybridity might be read as a reflection of her transnational diasporic identity that is acquired from different cultures and that is infused into the text; this fusion is shown evidently in multilayered narrative voices and subject pronouns "I" (s), as in the narrating and the narrated 'I'(s) that are discussed by Smith and Watson in their analyses of the autobiographical "I" (s) (2010), and that unearth the multi-vocality of the text as well as the protagonist's/narrator's racial mixing. Unlike the traditional memoirs based merely on the first-person point of view, both voices and personas (namely the first personal subject pronoun 'I' and the third person singular 'she') used in narrating Sarah's story illustrate her ability to look at her life from various viewpoints as well as at her evolution as a character and as a storyteller. Redundant starts, together with the use of English and French, display a confused self and the impact of traveling across cultures, nations, and cities. This can no longer be read aside from the protagonist's movement across borders, which parallels as much that shift in her identity, shaped by transcending cultural and ethnic frames of reference. The movement between San Francisco, New York, and Beirut—in other words, 'traveling across borders'[35]—plays a key role. Sarah feels that she is of a more transnational than hybrid identity, because of her not belonging and living between unparalleled cultures. Sarah's life story, as a woman raped by men of her society and ironically compelled to face their gazes and harassment, defies the myth of the silent woman linked to women of the Arab world. Her ability to deal with solitude and loneliness after unsuccessful marital relationships might be yet another counterargument embedded in Alameddine's fictional memoir in general, which works against clichés and stereotypical images of Arab women in some media outlets that present them as submissive and passive.

The concept of transnational identity could be applied to Sarah's character. Contrary to other hyphenated characters in contemporary Arab American fiction, as in the case of Sirine, in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) who is defined by her in-betweenness. She looks American outwardly, and yet she shows her pride in being Arab from within. She is thus presented as being torn between two separate identities, half Iraqi and half American. However, Alameddine's autobiographical protagonist is more special because her identity comes not only from in-betweenness but from traveling across cosmopolitan cities—like Beirut, San Francisco, and New York—and between two countries, Lebanon and the US, while simultaneously battling with two cultural identities:

I have been blessed with many curses in my life, not the least of which was being born half Lebanese and half American. Throughout my life, these contradictory parts battled endlessly, clashed, never coming to a satisfactory conclusion[36].

Sarah's consciousness that cultural identities do travel has been articulated in her statement that "Home is never where she is, but where she is not." This metaphorical mobility of home is embodied in cultural particularities that accompany migrants wherever they go and try to make a new homing experience. Home, as a range of conventions and traditions, is not at a standstill since it is portable and mobile, and so too is cultural identity, which is considerably controlled by transnational movements and travels, as argued earlier.

Sarah's life at different stages even before her rape in Beirut reveals the complexities she has encountered within her family. Her choices and the kind of identity she has developed through flexible travels make her seem to be different from her sisters, Lamia, Amal, and Rana. Her unstable relations with men she married and divorced, besides her escape with her boyfriend whom her family strongly rejected, unveil her independence and passion for freedom. Challenging the family that felt ashamed of rape and that refused her marriage to Omar Farouk— simply because of his being Orthodox—never forces her to give up, nor does this change her mind, but rather encourages her to sneak away from the people she knows, from the gazes of the community. Her choices have been interpreted, on the part of her family as a rebellion against their Druzi dogma. As a member of a family whose father is known for his severe decisions, Sarah stands out as a rebellious girl, with a thorough revolutionary spirit, open-mindedness, and independence, among other things, that help make her way, especially after the divorce and the displacement of her mother, Janet. The latter has been obliged to leave her daughters because of not giving birth to a male baby, which is out of her control. In hopes of getting a male heir, Sarah's father marries a young woman. Such an event leads her to find a way around the family. What makes Sarah different from her sisters (Lamia, Amal, and Rana) is her being the one whose destiny seems like her mother's. She abandons her husband, Omar, and her son, Kamal. She goes through failed marriages, at first with Omar, second with the

white racist American society in which they live. Du Bois' term laid the ground for theorizing the oppressed people and oppression in a discriminatory society.

[35] The notion of travelling identity, by which I mean how movement across borders shapes transnational belonging, is based on E. Said's inspiring and pathbreaking essay "Travelling Theory" (1983), in which Said argues how theories do migrate when they move from one cultural context to another. The concept echoes much with James Clifford's essay: "Travelling Cultures", published in 1991 within *Cultural Studies*. For Clifford, the term travel, whether within colonial, postcolonial, or neocolonial circumstances, refers to a set of practices that "produce knowledge, stories, traditions, compartments, music, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions" (108).

[36] Rabih Alameddine, I, the Divine, 229.

Jewish Joseph Adams, and the last one with David Troubridge, which deepens her sufferings but empowers her, at the same time, to cope with dislocation and unbelonging.

As Sarah travels back and forth, between Beirut and New York, and later, between Beirut and San Francisco, she begins to realize the differences between the US and Lebanon. After her second divorce, she travels to San Francisco where she tries to comfort herself by looking at "the sunset in water"[37], to console herself as much as she did when she was in Beirut. She, however, finds it different. The sunset in San Francisco is not as authentic as that in Lebanon: "It was wrong. The sun disappeared into oblivion at strange angles and with the Wrong colors" (Alameddine, 2002, p.57). The contrast appears much clearer when she compares sitting on San Francisco beach enjoying the sunset with the same thing she used to do back home, on Beirut's beach. What Sarah wants to get in the US out of her experience is to find a sense of authenticity, to sit "under real sun", for example. But despite lacking those romantic moments of her past, she continues living away from her family that did not want her to come back to Lebanon because of shame. For Sarah, being away from home does not mean oblivion or abandonment of all she loves. Regardless of being forced to leave her country, she pays regular visits to her family, whenever there is an urgent issue. Throughout the chapters that Sarah has written herself randomly, she is presented as a person who cannot easily forget her origins, although her family and her community made her suffer a lot. And yet, regular visits, for Sarah, never mean belonging because she cannot forget horrible images of rape that are ingrained in her memory. She thus feels she cannot circumvent traumatic memories, fearful scenes of war, violence, militias, rape, gender bias, parental separation, etc. It is because these affect Sarah in a myriad of ways. The mother's separation, when Sarah was just two years old, caused her a great loss and emotional dislocation, especially with Saniya, her stepmother. Sarah's stories, albeit fragmentarily narrated, provide an overview of the life of the whole family, including that of her mother, Janet, and how the latter has eventually been entrapped in a psychological crisis that she decides not to connect with any of her daughters and commit suicide. Sarah's predicament does not only impact her identity but also contributes to her dislocation.

4. Dislocation as Awareness of the Post-colonial Diasporic Individual

The narrator contemplates themes of alienation and homelessness by using the third person singular to offer a closer perspective on Sarah's life: "Can there be any here? No. She understands there. Whenever she is in Beirut, home is New York. Whenever she is in New York, home is Beirut" (Alameddine, 2002, p. 99). This sense of dislocation becomes increasingly evident as Sarah's feelings reflect her status of being caught between two worlds. She no longer feels comfortable in either place because she is unsettled. As a fractured individual, Sarah's psychological dislocation reveals the conflicts she faces: "I shuffled ad nauseam between the need to assert my individuality [represented by the USA] and the need to belong to my clan [located in Lebanon], being terrified of loneliness and terrified of losing myself in relationships" (Alameddine, 2002, p. 229). Although Sarah navigates easily between the Arab and Western world, she has never felt a true sense of identity tied to her Americanness, Lebanese-ness, or any particular geographic affiliation. Sarah's dislocation, which seems to permeate the novel at various levels, might be a primary reason behind her journey of meditation, negotiation, and the revision of socially established notions of belonging. This awareness of not rigidly identifying with either of her geographies derives from Sarah's mixed parentage and her experience of constant travel across nations. These factors contribute to the development of a transnational identity that does not exclude either of the cultures but rather embraces two seemingly conflicting cultures inherited from her parents. Neither identity is neglected. On the one hand, Sarah physically inherits her mother's "exotic looks, her artistic tendencies" (Alameddine, 2002, p. 149), while, on the other, she adopts her father's behaviors. She can't deny that: "I take on the roles of Mustapha and Janet simultaneously. Like Mustapha, I fell out of love with my husband, and like Janet, I am no longer with my child" (Alameddine, 2002, p.49). Therefore, Sarah's transcultural identity arises from hybridity, which is manifested in her ability to embrace both Lebanese and American cultural backgrounds. This enables her to develop a diasporic identity that transcends the previous diasporic identities caught up in nostalgia and a longing for home. Sarah's transnational identity then complicates the sense of belonging and revises the notion of home, as a given place with immobile and stagnant characteristics. As a distinct protagonist, Sarah's perspective reflects the author's view of the notion of home, which has been manifested as a portable and mobile, rather than a fixed entity. The author's view is more obvious when he states that home is always where his protagonist is not. She misses Lebanon when she is in the US, and vice versa. this duality of belonging enables her to forge an autonomous identity that transcends national and cultural boundaries, allowing her "to float between two worlds"[38]. Like many individuals in the diaspora, home, for Sarah, is not a bounded territory but a state of mind that can be carried elsewhere. In this regard, Brah clarifies that home is firmly linked to

> the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day… all this, as mediated by the historically specific every day of social relations (1996, 188-189).

[37] Rabih Alameddine, *I, the Divine*, 57.

[38] Rabih Alameddine*, I, the Divine*, 226.

To better grasp what is meant by the fact that 'home' is an experience of locality, one would pause over Salman Rushdie's conception of Imaginary Homelands (1991) when he draws on his memories to narrate his version of India, struggling "to make it as imaginatively true as [he] could" (1991, p. 10). For Sarah, home is not something that cannot be achieved elsewhere. Rather, it is incorporated into memories. That is, it is part of the memory of one's past. Blunt considers "images of the land itself as home" (2005, p.48) that are normally carried anywhere. Home, then, is a more fluid concept that can be reimagined and recreated anew. And therefore, the act of shifting between places of belonging transforms the protagonist into an individual who is very much aware of her dislocation and transnational identity.

This identity that comes out of effortless switching between two major geographies and cultures foregrounds, first of all, the difference between Sarah and her husband, which makes her seem a unique transnational diasporic individual. While living in New York with Omar, Sarah has seamlessly integrated herself into American society and culture; whereas Omar finds it hard to fit in. Omar and Sarah do not share the same attitude towards life away from home, or towards the American lifestyle, which diverges significantly. She writes: "I Love the city, he hates it. I felt at home while he felt like a foreigner" (Alameddine, 2002, p.212). The more she hopes to stay away from her society's blame and, most of all, her family's suspicious looks, the more Omar longs for his clan in Beirut, for the places where he feels "human" (Alameddine 2002, p.212), where he feels a true sense of belonging. Instead, Sarah carves a sense of 'no-return'. Unlike Omar's nostalgic feelings, she does not feel the need to go back home. She finds New York not as dreadful and vicious as Beirut. The difference between Omar and Sarah appears in Sarah's preference for individuality over collectivity. This distinction becomes even more conspicuous in her ability to navigate between geographical locations, while Omar is on his nerves, counting the days to come back to the old homeland. This, of course, is the case of many diasporic people entangled in a homing desire and nostalgia. The notion of home, for Omar, is both, "a real and symbolic place that is synonymous with intimacy, security, familiarly cultural identity against the vast anonymity of unfamiliar categories and relations" (Mandal 2021, p.157). Home, for Sarah, is not a fixed abode or even "the lived experience of a locality"[39], which signifies rootedness and belonging to a specific place. Sarah offers an example of multiple roots and pluralistic homes illustrated in her transnational belonging and an awareness of her status of dislocation. Sarah's flexible movements across borders contribute to her transnational diasporic unbelonging, which allows her to establish an identity that goes beyond the borders of the two nation-states. She settles herself between two geographies and cultures. That said, she goes through a profound sense of alienation and dislocation in the US, after her divorce that makes her look at things differently. As a result, she realizes she cannot integrate into the US society, nor can she embrace again the American lifestyle she once admired. This feeling leads her to construct a space between two diametrically opposed worlds. She expresses her anxiety about how the individual is benignly neglected and given less attention by the community. The cool-heartedness of people and lack of sympathy are reasons behind Sarah's alienation: "She does not feel part of this cool world" (Alameddine 2002, p.99). As much as she is "sick of home", she does not want to come back to live again with her family. All she wants is to create an 'imaginary space', or "a liminal space"[40], as Bhabha describes it, which exists between asymmetrical worlds. This space is similar to "a temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility for cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994, p.4).

In her quest to find an interstice to distance herself from the narrating 'I', she wonders: "How can she tell the difference between freedom and unburdening? Is freedom anything more than ignoring responsibilities, than denying duty?"[41]. Sarah attempts to escape both worlds and sets a space of unbelonging that 'transnational diasporic subjects' most often experience. Unlike Omar, who chooses to return to Lebanon instead of staying in New York, Sarah refuses to go back to her homeland so as not to remember some of her worst memories. She has shown her ability to navigate between two worlds, by positioning herself between them. Whenever there is a problem, she flies to Beirut to maintain her connection with her sisters, son, and stepmother. This connection to her homeland defies the idea of dismemberment and disconnection that transnational diasporic individuals are accused of. Much like other diasporic subjects immersed in nostalgia, Sarah never denies the influence of the homeland, although she chooses the US over Lebanon. She repeatedly states: "There will always be there", which reveals the complexity of unbelonging that drives Sarah to live between here (the US) and there (Lebanon). Yet, the statement underlines the powerful presence of the homeland, Lebanon, in her life, intertwining her memories and contact with family members as presented in her fragmented story.

5. Conclusion

The condition, Sarah endures, is undoubtedly similar to that of the unhomely (Bhabha 9-10). Sarah, as a transnational subject, occupies a space of unbelonging between two major worlds, the Middle East and the West. Like few diasporic subjects that go hybrid, Sarah estranges the "sense of relocation of home and world" in that the "borders between home and the world become

[39] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 188-189.
[40] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.
[41] Rabih Alameddine, *I, the Divine*, 99

confused"[42]; and uncannily the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us [diaspora people] a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting". Sarah's in-betweenness and hybridity are well manifested in the situation of being neither in Lebanon nor in the US. She never feels at home even if she is at what she claims to be home for her. In his pathbreaking theoretical work, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha expounds that the notion of unhomeliness displays hybridity that many subjects, whether at home or elsewhere, might go through. In *I, the Divine*, Sarah's transnational identity and the sense of unbelonging she has felt results in a condition that is the same as that of unhomeliness. The latter, for Bhabha, is "the extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (9). As "to be unhomed is not to be homeless", the protagonist's experience more clearly shows the transnational aspect of her own identity that she develops while zigzagging between her father's and her mother's land. The constant movement and self-imposed exile are but a consequence of feeling unhomely, which destabilizes the meaning of location. Sarah's cultural identity crisis has made her, to borrow Lois Tyson's words, "a psychological refugee" (421). In this respect, the definition that is put forward by Tyson clarifies what it means to be unhomed and sheds more light on Sarah's psychological condition of unbelonging:

> This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives, is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as unhomeliness. Being "unhomed" is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak.[43]

Sarah's transnational identity, as a result of a movement back and forth and of a self-implemented exile, is chiefly connected to hybridity and unhomeliness. As Bhabha theorizes it, unhomeliness brings about hybridity. Unhomeliness is not a state of being homeless but of feeling not at home, 'even in your own home' (Tyson 421). As understood by Bhabha, to be unhomed is "inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (1991, 9). The protagonist is an example of a diasporic subject experiencing unhomely feelings, that is,not belonging to either side of the country. Neither of the countries is home for Sarah. Thus, being a transnational subject leads Sarah not merely to a physical state of dislocation but also to an emotional state of unbelonging.. The notion of dislocation is often referred to as a state of homelessness that Alameddine best discusses in his novel, by presenting the life of a transcultural/ transnational character, Sarah. What is increasingly important in Alameddine's fiction is how the protagonist easily crosses borders, which is not accessible to all Lebanese citizens. Hence, traversing borders, be they linguistic, cultural, or geographical, no longer challenges rigid mindsets and ideologies but continues to question conventional political agendas that are still widening the gap between the global North and global South. The question remains open is : to what extent could contemporary fiction and World Literature, in particularhallenge the political?

Funding: This research did not receive any external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: I declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments: I am eternally grateful to my dear supervisor, Dr. Khalid El Aref, Professor of Cultural Studies Khalid El Aref at the University of Mohammed the 5th in Rabat, for his unconditional support and generosity throughout my PhD research journey. His increasingly insightful and pertinent feedback has honestly been valuable to the development of this lengthy article.

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[42] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 9.

[43] See Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, especially chapter16, 421.

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