

Hybrid Residues
Alissar McCreary

**Hybrid Residues: Exploring experiences of
displacement through active participation in art
practice.**

Appendix II

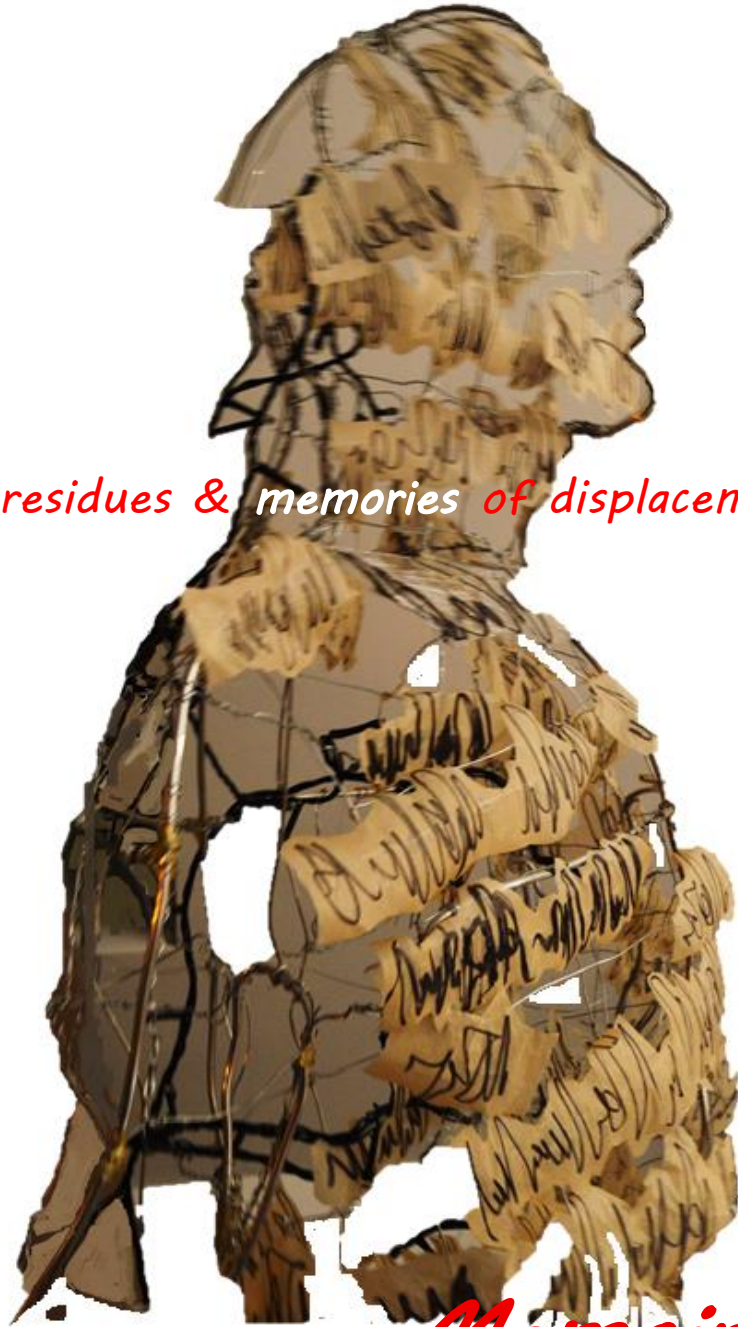
***Memoirs*: Hybrid residues and memories of
displacement – a journal**

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Oxford Brookes University

Hybrid residues & memories of displacement



Memoirs

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Hybrid Residues & Memories of Displacement

A Journal

By

Alissar H. McCreary

Hybrid Residues





To Majida

Memoirs

Winter 1970

On a winter evening, we heard a few unexpected knocks on our door. It was our neighbour from the flat below who had come up to alert my mother that something serious was happening outside. When we looked out to sea from the kitchen window, I remember pretty orange lights passing rapidly above the horizon. The sky was dark blue with grey clouds sweeping over my home town of Tyre, in Lebanon. I remember this particular night as being the first time I really felt awareness of an impending threat that was new to my perception and understanding. I was both fascinated with the lights and puzzled by the worried expression on my mother's face. The orange lights were missiles sent from Israel to target Palestinian militant positions in southern Lebanon, a situation beyond my comprehension at the age of three. My mother's anxious expression, on the other hand, I understood instantly, which increased my anxiety.

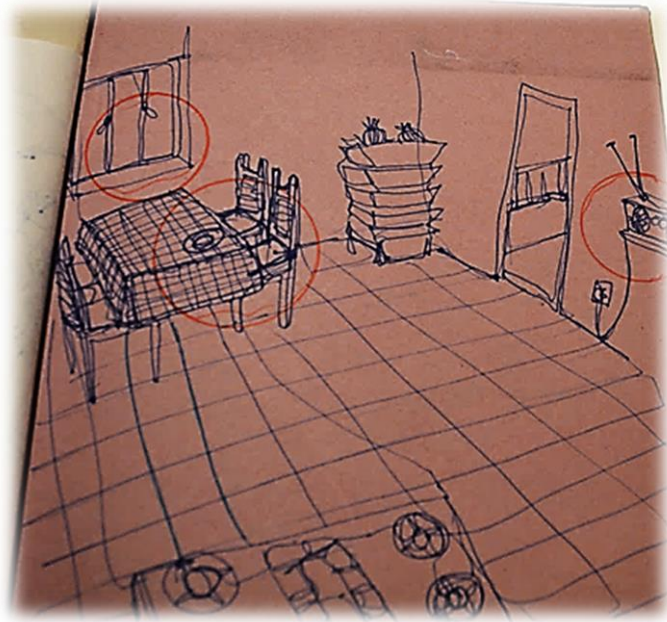


Fig. 1- Our Kitchen

I intuitively sensed her fear and felt a great empathy for her situation. That night marked the beginning of my awareness of the terror and dread of war; which was for me, a relentless stream of memories of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (which in turn instigated the Lebanese civil war). Following the 1948 Palestine-Israel war, the expulsion of the Palestinian's from their homes and land resulted in the mass exodus known as the "Nakba" or Disaster. The displaced population began settling in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In the 1960's and 70's, many Palestinian refugees settled in the south of Lebanon including the PLO, Fatah and other guerrilla factions. Some settled in Tyre (Sour in Arabic), my home town, a small city known for its Phoenician merchants, ancient Purple Dye industries and archaeological sites of ancient Roman and Greek ruins. The city is almost surrounded by the sea, with most of the buildings being modern, but part of it still retaining sections of ancient walls.

Palestinian militias eventually constructed their own settlements in southern Lebanon, and strengthened these positions in preparation to attack Israel. By the mid-seventies, the disputes over the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and the imminent possibility of a 'state within a state' escalated the situation to a secular civil war. Destruction, massacres and invasions followed.



Fig. 2- Tyre

In September 1977, the Israeli forces began their invasion of southern Lebanon after intense clashes with the Syrian backed PLO and Fatah. In 1982 Israel launched a full invasion of Lebanon reaching from the south all the way to the west of the capital Beirut.

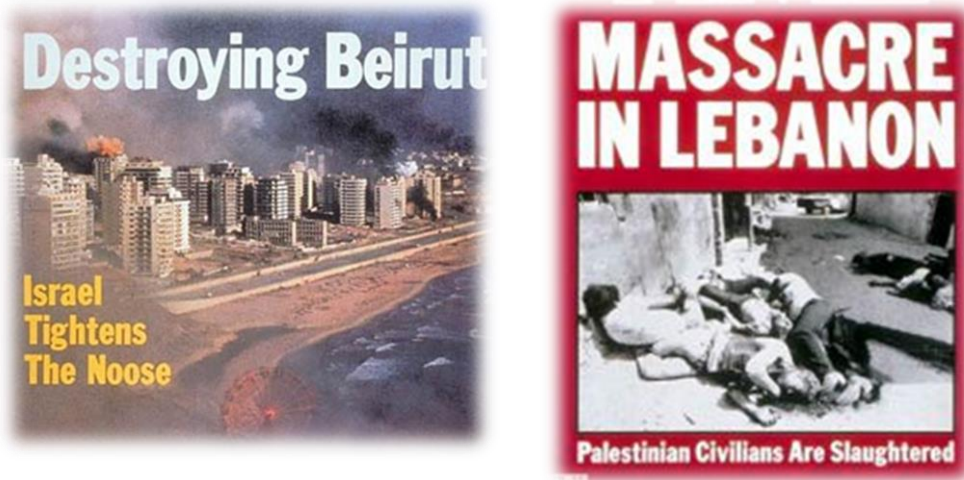


Fig. 3- Beirut during the war

At that time the horrifying massacre of Sabra and Shatila camp was committed by the Phalangists, a Lebanese group allied to, and backed by, Israel.

The PLO was pushed out of Lebanon into Tunisia in 1982, from where Yasser Arafat continued to pursue a political solution for Palestine, but the trouble in Lebanon continued. With the absence of the PLO, Hezbollah assumed prominence particularly in the southern regions of Lebanon. Clashes continued between Hezbollah and Israel culminating in the 2006 conflict in which Hezbollah countered the last Israeli invasion. During these complex and prolonged Lebanese conflicts, around 90,000 civilians were killed, two thirds of the population became displaced and about 20,000 persons were kidnapped or disappeared. Lebanon's reputation as the prime example of a complex cross-sectarian coexistence in the Middle East was crushed along with much of its

infrastructure and a history of co-habitual trust. Violence, massacres, torture and car bombings became a routine part of daily life. One act of violence that terrorised both civilians and fighters more than any other was the revenge killings carried out by the different factions in the civil war and implemented, in road blockades and Kidnappings, entirely on the basis of sectarian identity. Subsequent attempts to produce a coherent national history from Post-war testimonials and cultural memories have proved difficult due to the divisiveness of opinions and beliefs.



Fig. 4- Martyrs Square, Beirut, Lebanon, 1982

Wild cats roamed

After my family had been displaced within Lebanon many times because of the shelling and violence, my parents sent me, in 1994, to live with my uncle in the United States. On revisiting Lebanon after a year my first devastating sight of home was the half destroyed Beirut airport. As we entered the airport we were greeted with a site of ruination with many of the walls having fallen in. Wild cats roamed freely within, a mountain of uncollected suitcases piled up in the entrance way being ruined by their faeces. The stench was overwhelming and haunting. My father collected me from the airport and we set out to join the family in Sidon, in the south of Lebanon.

The roads, buildings and bridges were mostly destroyed, many full of holes and littered with debris. The journey was painfully long. The beautiful cypress trees that once lined the entrances to many towns were cut down and birdsong seemed absent. Above all, the people, including my father, seemed tired and silent. Having spent a year outside my war torn country, it felt as though I had come to perceive it differently than before I left. Home, land and people became landmarks in my memories of the past, which I found I needed to hold on to strongly in order to feel that I belonged and that I existed. These landmarks live in my mind like a pile of scattered artefacts, or like the suitcases lying in the airport, divided and disconnected from their owners and their past. My visit to Lebanon in that year, 1985, although only lasting ten days, had a huge impact on me psychologically. In those ten days I witnessed the enormous changes that had occurred while I was out of the country. These included new borders to the Israeli occupied territories, curfews, a continuous flux of Israeli tanks and arms, regular ambush incidents by the PLO, constant power cuts, contaminated drinking water due to the destruction of sewage systems, and a shortage of food. On the day I was returning to the States, my father gave me a little memento, a small bronze soldier.



Fig. 5- Sypris Trees, Tyre

He had found it in the sea years ago when he was scuba diving in the shallow waters of Tyre, in a pool which the locals call the 'sunken city'. Tyre, as a port city, had endured numerous earthquakes, wars and invasions which caused its almost continuous destruction and rebuilding, ultimately leading to many sites containing ruins and artefacts dating back through many centuries. The city still contains ruins left by a number of colonising powers such as the Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and Babylonians, often overlaying the original Phoenician city.

On successive visits, my father would show me his collection of mementos and artefacts retrieved from the pool of the 'sunken city', many dating from these earlier civilisations. They included miniature terracotta Amphora and oil lamps, pieces of statuettes, beads and simple jewellery, often broken but many of which were exquisitely worked and all of which fitted comfortably in the palm of my hand.



Fig. 6- Soldier

Loss

As a child, I was greatly affected by the upheaval inflicted upon my family by the war. Whilst I was inevitably aware of the physical destruction around us, it is the psychological effects of fear, emptiness, disorientation, alienation, lack of freedom and displacement that have left a more lasting impression on me. Above all, the feeling of loss and disconnection as the result of the conflict and the war has always burned fiercely within me.

My artwork became the embodiment of these experiences of conflict and displacement.



Fig. 7- September 1984

The suitcase that I carried with me, when I left home in 1984 at the age of sixteen, was a sea blue one made by Samsonite. I also carried a cream colour fabric shoulder bag and my mother's old brown handbag. These, became my companions on my journey to Beirut, and then on to the USA. The bags contained the only few possessions that I had brought with me from home.

It was a Sunday afternoon in September 1984 when my father telephoned from Beirut to inform me that my plane flight to America would be either on Tuesday or Thursday. I had to leave promptly on Monday morning. My mother scrambled to pack a few belongings for me. She tried to persuade me to stay but I

was determined not to disappoint my father, who wanted me to go to America to continue my education under the care of his brother. The war was intense in the south of Lebanon, and we were continuously missing school because of being displaced. My mother had frantically attempted to run away with us between bombardments and often managed to relocate us to safer places. We were three siblings; I was the eldest, my brother was eight and my sister just two years old. My mother's nerves were deteriorating and my father, who was an art teacher, tried his best to send us to safety, which placed a huge financial pressure on him. The morning after my father's phone call, I said good bye to my mum and my siblings, and was driven by a neighbour to a nearby town to catch the bus to Beirut.



Fig. 8- September 1984

When I got on the bus and sat down I felt very lonely and found myself hanging on tight to my mother's handbag which I held close to my heart. The bus stopped half way between my home and Beirut. There were hundreds of people waiting stranded at that spot because of the intense fighting in the capital which had prevented them from entering the city. It was an extremely hot day, the sky was beautifully clear in the morning but later turned very hazy; the ground was white with dust and the wind swirled restlessly around us. There I stood with my blue suitcase and my two bags watching the chaotic scene of the Israeli army on one side, pilgrimage buses from Mecca on the other side, and crowds of people, many being women and children trying to shelter from the sun. Sounds and noise were muffled because of the wind, and the day felt quite surreal. I was supposed to meet my father at this point but there was no sign of him. It was dusk when the cars started moving towards Beirut and eventually I was offered a ride which I bravely accepted and for which I was very thankful. A few hours later I arrived in Beirut to be reunited firstly with my uncle, who was a General in the Lebanese army, and then with my father.



Fig. 9- On the Other Side

My trip to America was long and very emotional but my mother's bags offered me solace and consolation. For a long time after my departure from Lebanon, I continued to use my mother's bags and made sure that my blue suitcase was always in sight in my bedroom. These three objects were my only physical connection to my mother and family; touching them and keeping them close brought me comfort and kept alive the hope that one day I would be back home with my family again.

Recently I was reading an article on exile which made me think back to the time when I left home. The article reminded me that at that time I was thinking mostly of the geographical

obstacles that I was going to face, and the distance between myself and my mother, rather than the idea of exile itself. My trip felt temporary and unreal.



Fig. 10- Golden Words

January 2013

*Today, as I sat in the Garage waiting for my car to be repaired, I thought of a new idea for my sculpture which I labelled *Written Scaffolding*. I visualized it as being an installation consisting of a body of written work, (descriptions, events, poems, reflections, or scribbling), physically piled up together to form a structure, or scaffolding. I envisaged it being a large book with the pages being separated and the words scattered on both the inside and the outside. I wanted to use clay for the structure to give it a warm, solid and earth like quality, sheets of gold leaf to reflect the precious value of the written material, and a layer of varnish or lacquer to protect and preserve it. The book would communicate my belief that imminent shifts and changes are beginning to take place in the world that I believe it is important we should observe and pay attention to. The information within will be my predictions of future wars and losses based on presently unfolding events and historical cycles of war. Scattered words that have fallen out of the book, will embody loss, instability and uncertainty. The use of wax paper will accentuate the delicate and fragile parts of the structure as against the strong and dark clay, whilst the lacquer will be a protective clear layer.*

I am dreaming about my art projects again, but all I end up doing every day is worrying about the people in my life, particularly my

family. The fear of loss that is constantly in my mind makes the future unpredictable and unforeseen, regardless of my predictions.



Fig. 11- Silence 1

The losses that I encountered during my childhood because of the war in Lebanon remain present and alive in my mind. Living through a war, being displaced on numerous occasions, and then being sent away by my parents to live in America instilled in me a feeling of alienation. I feel that I spend most of my time alone, even when I teach, mentor, chat to my colleagues, talk to my family on the phone or see my husband at weekends. I feel alone and distant from all the people around me even as I talk to them. This feeling of being alone affects my behaviour and the

way I relate to the outside world and other individuals. I believe it causes in me a kind of existential, perceptual or social decomposition. When my colleagues are laughing and joking at work I can seldom find the reason for their laughing. Of course it is sometimes simply a problem of translation but at other times I just can't find the funny side of their jokes. I often feel that I live in a different dimension from those around me. I've tried to analyse my feelings of being in a different dimension from others but the only explanation I can think of is a feeling of guilt. I have a constant feeling of guilt because I am safe in another country, outside of the war zone in my homeland, whilst my parents are not.



Fig. 12- Silence

When I was sent to America at the age of sixteen, my whole family was still living under a state of siege with violent bombardment and indiscriminate shelling and shooting. Why should I be safe and happy when they are not? Why can I walk to the shop, or go to school, return home to eat a meal and go to bed without jumping from fright or running to safety from bullets or fighter planes flying over my head? Now I have a normal life, I don't seem to know how to live it. It seems upside down.

*From this sense of alienation and living in a different dimension came a series of sketches and sculptures which I named *Silence*. I first produced a series of sketches for *Silence* (Fig. 11, 12), from which I developed *Silence* 3D wire maquettes (Fig. 13) of a person carrying an umbrella, a cat watching and looking down on the other side of a see-through floor, and a bird standing near the cat. When viewers look down on the maquette, will they feel the silence? Is it because they are under the surface? Is it because they are on the other side? I am in bed now, tired at the end of the day, but before I fall asleep I want to mention that I have been reading 'Nausea' by Sartre. I am on page 28 so far and I feel that the novel strongly describes me!*



Fig. 13- *Silence 3D*

Past blending into present

I'm in bed and ready to sleep but I need to reflect on today's events first. I had to have a scan this morning at the John Radcliffe Hospital. I walked through the same wards, corridors, and staircases that I've been to many times over the past seven years. As I walked through these places I felt quite unsettled and queasy. I was remembering everything again, but today I felt that I was a different person from the one that walked through these places over the past seven years. I don't even see myself as the same person in the mirror. The clock seems to have stopped somehow or somewhere over the past year or so. I can't find myself. The world seems empty and still.

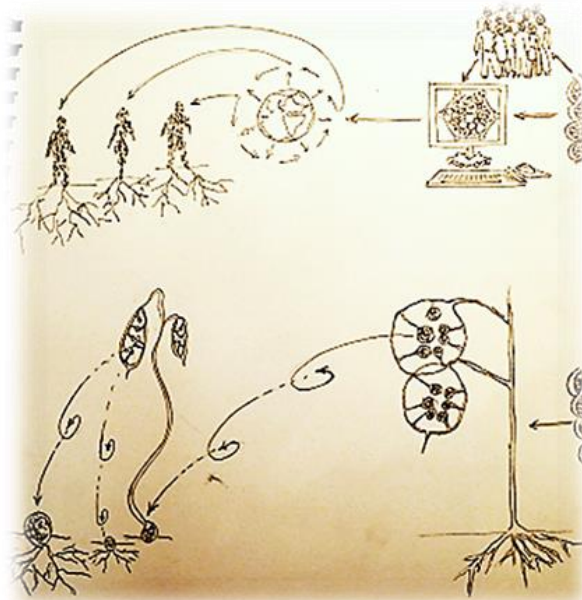


Fig.14- The Hybrid

I feel that past events have occupied my body and I've become just a biological entity lacking its spirit.

Reflecting on certain events, thoughts and feelings has become crucial for my PhD project, and gives me a comprehension of the connection between my memories and my artwork. Everyday events, whether mine or others, feed and help build the details of my Hybrid residues series (my memories). The invisible web of communication between all creatures marks existence. If we all existed but did not communicate, would life be the same? Would people still feel that they existed if they didn't talk to each other or do things together? What if our vocabulary was limited

to only ten words which we used continually to communicate with each other?

Would that stop us from achieving as much? Would it make us communicate less? If I recorded messages to myself, listening to them at different times without contacting others, would I feel content with my existence? I am still building on an earlier idea, that of communication becoming overwhelming and causing an individual to swell up with all the thoughts, words, news and feelings he is bombarded with, eventually exploding and becoming an entity of pure communication, shedding the skin it no longer needs. This idea led to another chain of ideas, that of Seed Pods carrying their DNA data and spreading it far and wide from its initial roots. These seed pods contain communication DNA, traces of words and thoughts. As small sculptures or objects, can these pods promote/prompt active participation of the viewer?



Fig. 15- Sensorial

A grain of sand

I am reading 'Nausea' again in bed, very tired. My mind keeps thinking about the PhD meeting I had earlier this evening, even as my eyes are still reading the words. My eye caught a word which made me go back and read the same sentence again to make sense of it, a sentence that fits with the thinking of my PhD project. I have also just noticed that my hand writing points to the right as I begin a sentence, then points back to the left as I finish the sentence. I need to talk about my project which I've been working on at the end of each week and thinking about every day. It is all around me, in my head, in my eyes, ears, veins, in my heart. It is all around me like the sand on the beach, but like the sand on the beach when I try to hold it in my hand it falls through my fingers. I need to be able to grab it and hold it. I liked some of the ideas in tonight's seminar, the sound of our heart through our bones (amplified heartbeats from a stethoscope), and a video of someone building a box in silence in a beautiful garden, in black and white. Nature, just watching it, the way the leaves and the trees sway gently from side to side with the wind. Watching it makes me feel like I am back in the cradle, secure, content, belonging, excited, happy, hopeful and at home. I want more of it. Even when I watched it in black and white, in silence, I felt good. Nature is poetry and rhythm. I read it, I feel it, and I belong to it. It is my teacher; it is my parent and my hero. I wish I could see how our human energy (talk, thoughts, mood, and noise), the invisible things about us

*that we can't see with our eyes, are affecting nature. But
maybe I don't really want to see that.*



Fig. 16 Silence

November 2015

Mountains of bread

I'm always a few minutes late to staff development days, only because I think they should start a little bit later in the morning than regular teaching time. I suppose my lateness is a form of rebellion! However, as usual I went into the cafeteria to get a drink and something to eat. The Principal had started her speech, so I got a cup of tea and a pastry and sat down at the back. One of my colleagues came in all happy and full of hugs and kisses, then informed me that she would be running one of the workshops for us; I remember thinking that's not great!! But it went really well. The reason I'm writing this recollection is because of something that happened at lunch time which reminded me of times when my family and I were displaced because of Israeli bombardment. After running around from one workshop to another every 45 minutes, lunch time came and we were so tired and hungry. As we walked to the cafeteria to stand in a very long queue, someone leaving the cafeteria mentioned that lunch consisted of just soup and bread. I laughed in disbelief; I thought, we've never had only that before, so why would we now? As we got to the food area, the loud noise of everyone chatting and laughing became subdued, almost to the point of silence.

Everyone started whispering. There were mountains of bread and huge pots of very hot soup and on the side there were muffins. Reality hit! We really were going to have just bread and soup. I felt depressed, not only because we didn't have a variety of food (as we usually did), but because this reminded me of the war time at home in Lebanon. When electricity was cut off for days because of the bombing, we were not able to use the refrigerator. We had to eat hard bread and a dried out type of cheddar cheese when we were not able to go to the shop for fresh food.

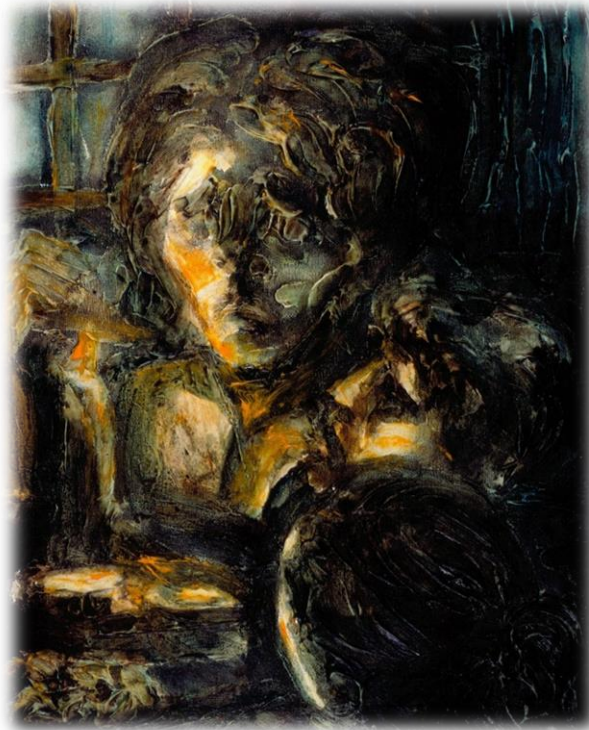


Fig. 17- Dinner

I remember one night we were so hungry that my mother was determined to cook something for us despite the fact that there was no electricity or gas to use for cooking. To the amusement and astonishment of my brother and me, mama poured alcohol on a piece of cotton wool then placed it in a little pot and lit it with a match. She cracked an egg into a frying pan and held it over the flames for a few minutes. And there it was! The wonderful aroma of hot fried eggs for dinner. We were so happy and thought that she would be our hero forever. I never thought about her anxieties, trying to protect and feed two children on her own whilst having to run away all the time. We seemed to adapt quickly and do what we were supposed to do.

Going back to the staff day, I looked at the silent people around me. They were holding their paper cup of soup with both hands near their mouth and just staring. The activity felt out of context! Some people were trying to eat so fast, dipping their bread in the soup and putting it in their mouths then scraping the soup cup with their spoon in the hope of getting every last drop. I was reminded of scenes in war documentaries where people sat eating quietly in a sad and hopeless situation. Although the college setting and the lecturer's clothing were nothing like those of war time, the café, and the mood and the atmosphere were chillingly similar!!



Fig. 18- Tea - Don't let's Play Pretend

Reminded her of 'wood shavings'

Lecturers from the art department decided that they wanted to spend their second day of the staff development learning new drawing techniques. At first, I wasn't going to join in but then decided that maybe I should! I have never really talked about my art with my colleagues. On the few occasions when we have talked about art it seemed that they were mostly concerned with the techniques and processes rather than the essence of the

artwork. To me, techniques and processes were the vehicle to the essence, or the structure/skeleton of the essence. Anyway, I suppose I didn't want to seem to be this isolated person again. I didn't know what to take with me to the session, whether I should take sketchbooks, drawings, paintings, 3D pieces? So I didn't take anything except my sketchbook. When the time came to talk about ourselves and our artwork, I asked to make my presentation at the end. While others were presenting, I was still thinking and worrying about what to introduce. The night before, I was working on my PhD project and had made a hand full of wax paper scrolls with writing and markings on them. These little scrolls were still in my pencil bag. When my turn came, I started by introducing my background and explaining how I ended up in England, and then explained my PHD project. While I was doing this, I remembered the scrolls, so I got them out of my pencil bag. Momentarily interrupting my presentation, I put the scrolls in the hand of the person next to me and asked them to try to remember the first thing that came to mind when they felt and heard the scrolls.



Fig. 19- Scrolls

The scrolls were passed from one person to the next whilst I continued my presentation. Everyone seemed quite genuine when they explained how they felt when they held the scrolls. My initial anxiety was soon replaced by relief and surprise at the sincerity of the feedback I got. I was pleasantly shocked at the level of empathy my audience felt for the little artefacts I had shared with them. The person who held the scrolls first was the person I thought most likely to make fun of what I was introducing. To my surprise she was quite serious when asking if the scrolls had religious writings inside, or if they had any religious connotations. People held the scrolls as if they were very precious and apologized when a scroll fell on the floor. One person became particularly emotional when she held the scrolls and had to leave the room. Later she told me that the feeling of the scrolls and the noise they made reminded her of when she was little and used to help her dad in his workshop. The scrolls

reminded her of wood shavings. So how did the reaction of my colleagues to the scrolls develop so quickly, and why? Later, I created much larger size scrolls to see if size has something to do with the intrigue. I wanted to see if an increase in the size of the scrolls would produce a corresponding increase in their impact on an audience. When I showed the two different sizes of scroll to my PhD colleagues, they were actually more intrigued with the small scrolls and paid much less attention to the larger size. My husband thought that the larger scrolls had a very different feel being more like structural objects. To most people, this larger size of scroll still conveyed some religious connotation.

People were more interested in the smaller scrolls because they could hold them in their hands, making the relationship of the viewer and the artefacts closer and more intimate, as if they became a part of each other, or became as one. By touching, feeling and seeing they come to know each other, they come to both exist together in close proximity.



Fig. 20- Overwhelmed

I must be dysfunctional..!

It was amazing talking to my second supervisor. I've come up with so many ideas since my meeting with her, but I need to write them down. When I left our meeting and was walking back to my car, I was still thinking about her words, and the questions our conversation raised. Life seemed very serious and complicated, and I could even feel my facial expressions becoming very tense!

Before I reached my car, I noticed a man on his bike. He was waiting at the barrier to get out of the car park with a big smile on his face! Even as he cycled away, with cars careering all around him, he was still wearing a broad smile! How could he do that? I would have been so terrified riding a bike with all this traffic

coming at me. I remember thinking to myself: *I must be missing something in life.* I thought that perhaps I must be dysfunctional in some way! Anyway, I kept walking but I stopped thinking about my life, my art, my project, where I was, and where I was going, and started to notice my surroundings. Because of the bike man I started noticing what other people were doing, how they were walking, cycling, driving, talking and so on. Then, as I approached my car, I walked past a set of traffic lights. The lights turned red and the cars stopped. Between the cars was another cyclist, a girl, who sat on her bike looking very relaxed and comfortable, her long hair swaying gently in the breeze. Leaning to one side of her bike, with her bright white shirt and blue shorts, she looked like a mermaid. I envied her serene look and poetic stance amidst the chaos of rush hour traffic, a quiet beauty amidst the frenzy of modern life.

This reminded me of one night when I was in bed and heard the dogs outside running and barking. I heard footsteps, then machine guns started going off outside. I was 16, in Beirut and sleeping at my dad's friend's house because the next day I was supposed to fly to the US. I was feeling very sad as I had left my mum, my baby sister and my little brother three days earlier, and at that moment I was also feeling frightened as I heard the men in the house preparing their guns. I could see their silhouettes on the wall in front of me; they were looking out of the window with the moonlight shining outside, clothing the room in blue and silver light. The blood in my veins froze, I couldn't move. My limbs were cold and painful; they felt stiff as if they would break if I moved. This lasted for a few minutes until someone came over

and talked to me. They hurriedly explained the situation and asked me not to move and to get down on the floor if they had to fire from the windows. I felt sick in my stomach. I didn't have my family with me anymore but I was still in Lebanon, my home. At that moment I felt that I had travelled so far and been away for so long.

December 2016

Not a good day, not a successful day. I feel like I am walking in the shadows where no one can see me. I'm deafened by the loud noise of the wrong in the world around me. This feels like a situation that keeps happening to me, like in 'Ground Hog Day'. I can't get rid of it, and I don't see it coming. I feel like I'm always living behind clear walls, I'm on one side and everyone else is on the other. Just when I think I've got through to the other side of the wall and I'm being seen and heard by others, I disappear behind the clear walls again. How long will this continue to happen? Even so, isolated on my own side of the wall, I'm still thinking about my ideas, my art, my PhD.

My PhD seminars, which take place every Monday evening, have started to take on the sense of a game or a puzzle in which I attempt to organize and make sense of these feeling of isolation and displacement which have had such a pervasive impact on my life ever since I became a refugee in Lebanon. Displacement has represented itself in my art in so many ways and forms of late. I'm drawn to the idea of a sculpture that consists of fragments of objects with drawings within those fragments.



Fig. 21- Shedding skin

The first time I saw missiles flying in the sky I was about three years old. The neighbours came up to our house and were talking to my mum in the kitchen. The conversation sounded serious. Then one of them shouted "look, there's another one". It was dark outside, but we were able to see a reddish orange light shooting across the horizon in the sky. I thought it was fireworks and ran to the window to see if there were more. The missiles were fired from Israel at the next city along from us in the south of Lebanon. We couldn't hear them explode, but we could always hear when they were fired.

Childhood

We lived on the third floor of a six story apartment building. My best friend lived on the sixth floor. We used to play with his matchbox cars when we were at his house, and play cowboys and Indians when he came to my apartment. I was also very close to my cousins, my mum's sister's children, who lived about a block away from us. My second cousin was my best friend, and she lived about three blocks from us. During the holidays, we used to put on new clothes and shoes, and then my mum would take us to visit my cousins. My aunts and uncles gave us money during the holidays. My cousins and I used to go to the fair to buy ice cream and go on the swings. My best friend and cousin (Souha) was not allowed to go to the fair; her family were wealthy upper class and wouldn't go to just any public celebration. My dad was

an artist, and an art teacher at a public girl's school in Sidon. He was also a part time lecturer in art at a university in Beirut.

During the early part of my childhood I remember sitting quietly watching him paint for many hours in silence, and the same with my mum as she was an artist too. She taught art history at a school in Tyre where we lived, but stopped teaching when she had her first child, me.



Fig. 22- Don't Let's Play pretend

Yellowy orange light

I was about four years old and sleeping in my bed when, in the middle of the night, my mum picked me up and started walking nervously back and forth in the corridor between our bedrooms. I thought I was dreaming at first but when my mum kept telling me not to be scared I realized that something was wrong. I asked her what was wrong but she was not making sense. The only thing I understood was when she pointed to the orange lights outside. There was no loud noise, no shooting, no bombing, only the orange lights in the black sky and a sort of muted humming

noise. My dad didn't know what was going on either. My mum decided to put me in the bathtub with my pillow and blanket so that I could sleep there. The thought of sleeping in the bathtub was not nice, I just wanted to go back to bed, but during the war bathrooms and bathtubs were considered the safest places in the house during bombings.

When the fighting escalated, we all went down to the lower level apartments and hid in the corridors and bathrooms there.

Many times when the situation worsened still further, we had to pick up just a few essentials items, put them in plastic bags and run.

I felt really bad for my mum when my brother was born as the fighting was intensifying at that time and we had to run away and come back continuously. I remember that on one occasion she was changing his nappy when the Israeli fighter planes started an attack. She quickly picked up my brother, took my hand and started running down stairs to the neighbour's house, but I had to stop her on the way down because I realized that in her panic she was carrying my brother upside down. I remember the air raids being very intense and frightening, knocking us off balance so we would fall down. Some of the missiles hit next to the building where we lived and the pressure wave would throw us a few feet against each other or against the wall. I remember once being thrown against the wall then on the floor where the rest of the children piled up on top of me. I thought then, that they might have been badly injured, but they only had shattered glass hit them. Sometimes the pressure of the missiles exploding close by

used to affect our hearing for a while. I also remember, when I was seven, a nice summer with warm sweet air, beautiful music, dancing and laughter. My family all went around visiting each other, talking, laughing, enjoying good food, and even

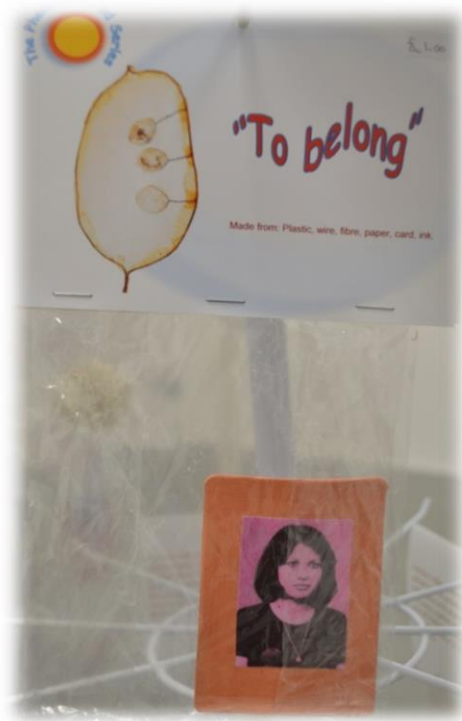


Fig. 23- Aunt Huda

teaching me how to cross stich and knit. One night I heard my mum talking to her younger sister trying to convince her not to go to Beirut as the civil war was intensifying there. My aunt Huda was studying for her university degree in English literature

as well as teaching English. She was like an older sister to me. When she had her university breaks, she used to come and stay with us and give me lessons in English and Maths.

Disregarding my mum's advice, my aunt Huda and her sister in law ended up going back to Beirut despite knowing how dangerous the situation was. Later that week, my mum asked me to put on the radio while she was cooking in the kitchen. There was news of renewed bombing in Beirut, followed by Red Cross messages giving the names of those who had been injured in the bombing and calling on their families to come and donate blood. They called parents and families from all over Lebanon. Then I heard my aunt and her sister in law's names, and the Red Cross calling on my uncles to come to donate blood to save their lives. I alerted my mum about the announcement of my aunt's name, but she didn't believe me until the Red Cross repeated their calls. My mum was shocked and stunned; she didn't believe what she heard. Then neighbours came and confirmed the news. My uncle contacted my mum and said that they were going to Beirut to help. This was a very long day. My mum took my brother and me to one of her friends and left us there because she didn't want us to see what was going on with the family. But I couldn't stay away, and decided to pick up my brother and walk home. My aunt and my uncle were not back from Beirut yet, and my mum was not at all happy with me coming back home. She was too upset to take care of us that day, so she decided to put my brother with our next door neighbours and told me to stay either in the kitchen or the bed room. The house filled up with people, all upset and anxious. Most of them stood on the



Fig. 24- Purge

balcony waiting for my uncle's car to come back, bringing my aunt and her sister in law home alive and well. At about 6pm they arrived and everyone looked down quietly to see who would get out of the car. My uncles got out with their heads bowed and hands over their eyes. My aunt Feryal, who had gone with them to help, also got out of the car, crying, but no one else appeared.

My mum yelled down "where is Huda", "where did you leave her"... but there was no reply from down stairs. While all this was happening, I sneaked between all these people and looked down from the balcony. I was trying not to let my mum see me there as I was not supposed to witness all this. I ran back to the kitchen. The bell rang and the front door opened; there was some talking but I couldn't really hear what was being said but

then the crying started. I felt cold and alone. I realised that my aunt had died. I cried on my own in the kitchen. I wanted to be with my mum, to hug her and comfort her, but I was not allowed. About an hour later every one left except for my mum and my two aunts, Feryal and May. My aunt Feryal found me crying in the kitchen. She talked to me for a bit then took me where my mum and her sister were sitting in the formal living room. My mum could not speak to me; she just went to bed that day and stayed there without eating or drinking for a several days.

My mum is the eldest out of all her siblings. When she was seven or eight years of age, her father suffered a ruptured appendix and died. Her mother had to leave, and went to her parents house taking the youngest child with her, but was not allowed to take the rest of her children. She had six children, four girls and two boys. When she left, my mum, the eldest daughter, was 7 or 8, and her sister Huda, the youngest, was not even a year old. They were brought up by one of their aunts for a couple of years, but were split up between different uncles and aunts after that. Because of this, my mum always felt that she had to keep an eye on all her siblings even though she was not able to keep them together.

My aunt's death hit my mum very hard and she changed noticeably afterwards.



Fig. 25- Disconnect/Displace

I blame the war

Another unfortunate incident was to occur later in that same year. My mum decided to go north to see my grandparents, her in-laws. She invited her sister Feryal to travel with her. I still remember that day as my mum seemed more herself. We were traveling in a car driven by my dad's uncle, stopping to buy fresh fruit and water on the way. One of the fruits we ate was fresh figs and I still remember their smell, colour and taste. My aunt couldn't stop saying how good they were, and as we went on in the car everyone seemed to actually be happy for a change. I sat in the back next to my aunt who had my brother on her lap. My mum was in the front passenger seat with my uncle driving. We were very close to Baalbek, our destination, when my uncle

pointed out where the Syrian army was (at that time, in the seventies, Syria was fighting Israel on Lebanese land). As my uncle was pointing a car stopped ahead of us and started reversing. My uncle was too busy talking. I saw what was happening but did not have time to say anything before we collided with the back of that car. My mum's head went into the dashboard, into the radio and her seat collapsed onto her. My aunt was thrown from the back of the car, over the top of my mum's seat and out through the wind screen. She was not moving. My uncle's chest hit the steering wheel, I hit my face on the back of his seat, and when I looked down I found my brother, unharmed on the floor of the car. I picked him up; he was nearly two years old.

People gathered and my uncle took my brother from me, then an ambulance came, taking my aunt first as she had a head injury and was unconscious.

Paramedics tried carefully to remove my mum's head from the dashboard. She was awake, her eye lid was hanging over her eye and her upper lip was split to her nose. She was bleeding badly. Someone offered to take my brother and I, with my mum, to hospital and so that's what happened. All the while she was asking me about her face and I was trying to describe to her what I could see. We got to the hospital where a team of paramedics received her and took her to the operating room. They checked my uncle and released him after a few minutes. My brother and I were taken to my grandparents' house in Baalbek where we stayed for a few weeks. We visited my mum in the hospital a few days

after the accident. I remember being shocked when I saw her. Her face and head were wrapped in white bandages like a mummy. I was able to see one of her eyes and her bottom lip. She couldn't talk and could only drink from a straw with difficulty.

I had almost lost my mum and her sister, it was one sad thing after another, and I blamed it on the war!

I don't remember my dad being with us much at this time. In my mind I remember him in glimpses. He was teaching and painting all the time; that was his life. It was my mum who had to move from one place to another, with two children at first, and later with three. Both of my siblings were born during the war. Even so, I remember some good times with our family before the war got really bad. My sister was born during the bombardments when East Beirut was fighting West Beirut during the civil war in Lebanon. The Lebanese people, having differences of opinion over the Palestinian situation, started killing each other and destroying our county. Of course this is putting it very simply, but one can complicate issues to the point of being beyond comprehension, or, simply state the bare facts.

Whenever we ran off with my mum our world seemed was very small; it consisted of only me, my mum and my siblings. We didn't know the towns we moved to, we didn't know the people, they were often of different religions (that made it more interesting, it didn't bother me or my mum), but they sometimes spoke with a different dialect which made communication a little difficult. But moving away from home because of the bombing and ending up living in the mountains

didn't seem as hard as moving to another country. It was as if somehow your body knew you were still on your own soil, in your own land. More immediate difficulties were coping without food, medicine and clothes. We lived in a rented house, the rent being discounted because we were refugees, but my father was still in the south living in our own house and trying to go to work whenever he could. He was an art teacher, and teachers were still being paid by the government so that was a plus for us but of course my father now had to pay two lots of rent, so money was short to say the least. School was hard for my brother and I because we spoke differently and we were new. Because we moved so much we were behind in our schooling and ended up not doing well. We struggled to fit in at first but after a few months we were able to make friends. The climate was another struggle for us. It was bitterly cold in the mountains, always snowing and freezing and we didn't have the appropriate clothes at first. Even when we got the right clothes we seemed to feel the cold more than everyone else because we were from the southern coastal area, which has a warmer climate. Somehow, even after three years of living there, a village in the mountains still didn't feel like home. All our family were scattered in the mid-northern region of the country. There was always a sense of living a temporary existence, a sense that we would soon move again. But in a way even what had once been home, remained home only in the mind because after being away for a few years everything had changed; the town, the people, the situation, even we had changed. We never went back to our old home again. My dad

cancelled the lease and moved closer to where his work was, in Sidon.

The fighting and bombing finally caught up with us in the mountains. I was older then, about 13. My perception and understanding of the war had become more serious. I was going through changes in my body, extra hormones bringing a different outlook on the meaning of life and everything around me, just like any other teenage girl. The war can't stop biology from taking its normal course. Of course I fell in love with the boy from next door, or the next building I should say. The war was just a side show which created an inconvenience whenever we had to hide or run away. It meant that I won't see that boy! I remember one summer before we had to run away again. It was a summer like no other. The air was sweet, full of scents of all kind of flowers. The beauty of the mountains around us was vibrant with so many colours and textures. The moon was so big and pink. Some nights, life seemed quit unreal; everyone went out in the evening for a stroll around the village, the cafés were open and food and drink were served.



Fig. 26- Smell of Love

Love

The air was filled with the smell of good food, sweet scented flowers and pine trees, and the sound of laughter. I remember one night standing on the balcony watching life going on when a gardenia flower fell on my head. I looked up and it was him. He threw another flower down to me which I caught. The smell of the gardenia was divine. I think I smelt it till there was no scent left in it. That moment I felt that life was beautiful, that life was not the war. Somehow the meaning of life and the war had been muddled up together in my mind. Before the moment of the gardenia I thought life was all about the war, but when I felt love, life suddenly had nothing to do with war. It was beautiful, precious and peaceful.

A short while later the war became more intense and different factions of people became ever more vicious towards each other. We were told not to go into the streets. War planes started coming and dropping what they called "grape bombs". The "grape bombs" were quite small but many of them were dropped at once, causing fire at first and then explosions. The village became silent, the air smelt of gun powder and fire, and I could no longer see the moon after that. A tunnel was dug from inside our building to the hotel next door so we could get to where everyone had assembled without going outside. We brought food and water. My mum had to bring milk, bottles and diapers for my baby sister who was less than one year old. When we went through the small tunnel and down a few steps that were formed from bricks piled up, we entered a very large basement room. The room was completely open with no partitions or walls. It had columns in the middle and a low wall on one side with bushes and trees, this side being open onto the street. There were small rooms on the other side of the basement, all bare concrete with no furnishings. When villagers brought mattresses we realised we would be sleeping in the basement. By night fall armed men from the village said that there might be an attack at night so it was best to stay awake and be ready. From midnight until the break of dawn we didn't sleep. Our blood froze in our veins once or twice when we heard footsteps coming from the street above us. The room we were sitting in had a small window which was high above us but level with the street and the pavement. It was from that window we saw the shadow of boots and heard the footsteps of someone trying to sneak around. The armed men

spoke of massacres that had happened in the neighbourhood villages. The newspapers confirmed their stories, so we felt lucky that we didn't suffer that fate. At my age, I didn't understand the politics behind the war around us. I was able to understand who was killing who but not why. After a few nights of this kind of fear, and bombardment in the day time, my mum decided to take us to the north east where my grandparents lived. After a long hard trip trying to reach Baalbek, taking an extra-long route to avoid any clashes, we finally arrived. I felt sad, dusty, tired and thirsty but a lovely thing happened as it always had since I first started visiting my grandparents' house. My grandma opened the tall, green, heavy metal door, which squeaked deeply, and adjusting her white head scarf she threw her arms out and said with a gentle warmth "ahlan, ahlan", a welcoming phrase coming from the bottom of her heart. I could sense the depth of feeling in her words as she welcomed us with a love so truthful and pure. It was as if her heart was calling to us. Her welcome always made me feel so happy and peaceful. I felt better just hearing her voice, seeing her smile and burying myself in her arms. I wanted to stay there forever. Of course she had a large brass tray laid out with all kinds of food ready for us.



Fig. 27- Mezza

The smell of the food was exquisite. Different aromas rose up in the room combining with the smell of slightly damp air coming from the river outside in the court yard. The sensation of an ancient roman city; aromas of fig jam, pickled eggplants with garlic and walnuts, soured milk and wheat dip, cheeses, and stone baked bread, not to mention the smell of the Arabian tea, very strong and slightly bitter but delicious. Whenever we sat down to eat like this, I remember the polished black concrete floor being unbearably cold underneath our feet in the summer. It was July, the sun was out, birds were singing and the leaves were fluttering gently on the trees. There were no sounds of bombs or gun fire. The smell of fresh grape leaves, which my grandma had planted around the court yard entrance, pervaded the air. We didn't have much with us, just one suitcase and a few plastic bags. I didn't have any toys this time; normally I would bring my Barbies and

set up a house for them under the chair in the bedroom that we slept in. Setting up a house for my dolls, and designing and making clothes for them had always been one of the joys of visiting my grandma. But this time I had to leave my dolls in Faluga, the village we had just left, as well as my favourite cat Zarzur and, worst of all, the boy I loved.

So there I was at my grandparent's house, the house that had always represented joy, love and family. It still represented all that for me but this time I felt differently. I was very conscious of our losses and my own emotional instability. We had not seen my dad in a couple of months.

December 2017

How did we cope?

It's the beginning of December now, the sky has a silvery soft grey tint and there is a chill in the air. I can see the sky from where I am sitting, here in my conservatory, warm and cozy with my cup of tea. The birds are still singing outside and my cats are playing around me, all happy. My mother has just sent me a voice message on Whatsapp to tell me about a new remedy she has heard about which can help with her tooth ache.

I am thinking back to the days when we were scrambling for safety during the war in Lebanon, trying to contrast events in my life now with events during the conflict. I ask myself how were we able to cope with problems and difficulties that are an everyday part of the biological and physiological cycle of children growing up in normal times, but which must surely have presented much greater hardships during the war... I'm trying to remember...did I ever have a tooth ache or stomach ache or did any of us, perhaps, have a cold when we were running for safety from the bullets and the missiles? Did I have upset stomach or need to use the toilet during the bombardment? How did we cope? We were lucky to have our neighbours take us with them in their car when we had to evacuate, but I can't imagine the suffering of present day Syrian families with children walking in the freezing cold or even living in tents in the icy and snowy conditions. When we had to escape to live in the mountains during the Israeli invasion of the south, we were not able to see much of my father as he had to stay in our house in the south and, whenever possible, go to work. The mountains were much cooler than the south and during the winter months we didn't have radiators or running hot water. The only form of heat in the house was what we called the "Soobia" which was a kerosene burner that looked like a narrow rubbish bin with a huge flue pipe that extended through a hole in the ceiling to the outside. We used to sit around it all day in the winter with all the doors shut. Sometimes if there was a big freeze and the temperatures were in minus figures, we slept in that same room, which was normally the sitting room. We stayed in the mountains for nearly three and a half years, between 1979 and 83. It was only my mum, my brother and I, and later my new born sister. We were constantly worried about my father living under the Israeli

occupation. Many times he wasn't able to get to us and so we ran out of money. My brother and I continued to go to school, but soon fell behind in our education as we missed so many lessons because of the constant evacuations. I made friends but my brother hated school and was not doing well. Choosing our schools was hard for my mum because in Lebanon placing children in schools depended on their chosen second language. Both my brother and I started our schooling in the south with English as a second language. Being older I was able to travel to a school where I could continue to learn English even after we fled to the mountains. However, because Yehya (my brother) was very young, and constantly ill, my mum wanted him to go to the nearest school in the same village we lived in. Unfortunately, this school's second language was French and this change seriously affected Yehya's learning and liking for schooling. After leaving the south, but before my mum decided to settle in the mountains away from the clashes, we lived for a few months in the capital Beirut and attended another school there. I hated it; I felt so alien and didn't have my friends or cousins as I did in Sour, my home town in the south. I also fell far behind in my level of education, to such an extent that I felt embarrassed during English reading sessions and I failed both Mathematics and Physics. The bus trip home from school was very long and I often got confused, forgetting the addresses of the hotels that we were living in when the driver asked. This again caused me great embarrassment and made journeys on the bus a nightmare. Of course, compared to living under a hail of bullets it was a good life until the conflict expanded again from other parts of Beirut to the area we were living in.

At one time, as the civil war intensified, the fighters decided to split Beirut into east and west along an imaginary 'green line'. It

was a brutal time when snipers targeted anyone who tried to cross this line and the dead often stayed in the streets for weeks before anyone could bring them back to be buried. There were packs of stray dogs roaming the streets at night and eating anything they could find!! I don't remember the birds singing during the war and my cats ran away after the clashes. During intermittent breaks between shelling, I remember a particular type of silence, a silence of waiting, and of listening. Everyone was quiet.

When I try to recollect this period in my life I concentrate on certain 'landmark' events which stand out in my mind and help me in mapping out my past. Thinking back to my childhood inevitably leads me to remember the war, but I always find myself trying to find a happy memory amidst the unhappy ones.

It is now January and I have just finished installing my final exhibition for my PhD. I always wonder what people think when they view art about war and conflict, especially a conflict that they have not experienced themselves. I pursued the idea of sensorial empathy which requires sensing other people's situation without the use of words if possible. I sometimes see the spoken language as a barrier when emotions are involved. My last piece was called 'Don't Lets Play Pretend', a title which came to me as I was making the last pieces of work, which were suitcases, utensils and tools all made with translucent Sellotape. While I was making these pieces, I became very caught up in the way I remember events from the war. This made normal present-day events, such as cooking and shopping, seem unreal, as if I was play pretending.



Fig. 28- A toy I lost

How to survive a war

Wouldn't it be great to have a manual for everything in life including a manual on what to do to survive a war? Such a manual would give some people, like me, more confidence and guidance on how to understand the post emotional stress and anxieties.

If I had to write a guide on how to survive during a war these would be the headings of each chapter:

- *Expect Life and people around you to become completely different.*
- *Expect to keep moving to areas of safety; this might mean moving to other cities or even to the mountains.*
- *If you see orange lights in the sky go to a hiding place.*
- *During clashes and bombardment always hide in smaller rooms like hallways and bathrooms.*
- *If you can't leave the house during clashes, place your children in the bathtub.*
- *If you can't go to the shops but have dry cheese, you can soak it with a little hot water to re-hydrate it.*
- *Always keep oil and cotton wool around you as you can use them to cook an egg if you don't have gas or electricity.*
- *Always keep a torch, candles and matches near you.*
- *When you have to run away on the spur of the moment, use plastic bags, they are lighter to carry and can hold many items.*
- *Make sure you have a bottle of water, bread, biscuits, money, medicine and cigarettes. Don't forget the matches!*
- *Always stay friendly with neighbours if they own a car, they may be able to help you run away.*
- *When you get to the city or the mountains and you are safe, buy your children a cheap doll from the local shop (fig. 28). It will make them feel better.*
- *Take a picture of all your belongings so you can remember them in the future.*
- *Write a diary every day and read it when you are older.*
- *To wash, just boil the teapot and pour it in a bucket then add cold water. Use ladles to pour water over you. Three for rinsing the soap from your hair, and four for rinsing the soap from your body.*

- *To re-hydrate dry stale bread, spray a little water on it and place it over a heater or in the sun.*
- *Don't have pets because you can never take them with you when you run away.*
- *Read books to escape reality.*
- *Don't stop telling your story even when peace returns.*



Fig. 29- disPLACED/together