

# War Memories and the Refusal of Male Dominance in Shakir's "Oh, Lebanon"

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## Abstract

This study investigates the role of the war memories in the construction of the female gender identity in Evelyn Shakir's "Oh, Lebanon," in which the female protagonist refuses to belong to her Arab identity when she lives in the United States because of the brutal war memories she witnesses in Lebanon. Such memories make the protagonist unable to accept her submissive gender role in the Arab culture. In other words, these memories of war motivate the protagonist to revolt against her father's will and to choose her own way of building her identity away from the influence of her Arab culture and traditions. The methodology of this paper is based on a close reading analysis of some quotations from Shakir's short story which will be analyzed to see how the war memories in Lebanon have influenced the construction of the protagonist's gender identity. The study concludes that the trauma of war motivates Arab female gender to react against the male dominance and traditions because war, with its dark memories, might uncover that hidden desire in female's subconscious mind to feel unlimited or constrained with the male dominance.

**Keywords:** War memories, male dominance, gender identity, cultural identity, Arab culture

## 1. Introduction

One of the themes raised in Arab American women writers is violence against female protagonists by their parents. Ammar (2000) discusses that violence against women in the Arab American community. She argues that the new immigrants from Arab countries to America brought with them oppressive tendencies against women. Ammar believes that it is not Arab culture which is only responsible for oppression against Arab American women, but also the "US patriarchal values and of the perceived looseness of American women (relative to Arab women) on Arab-American immigrants" (63). She adds that the American culture "condones violence against women" (63), in which the efforts made in the United States to lessen the number of violence cases against women are not enough, and the proof is that "every three seconds a woman is battered in the US...[and] more than half of all women living in the United States will be victims of battering" (63). Furthermore, Ammar asserts that one of the reasons behind the violence against Arab American women is due to the belief that "violence against women [is] a mechanism of reinforcing social distance from mainstream society" (63). In other words, Ammar believes that Arab Americans always "view the status of women as one of the major distancing norms between their native culture and their new home culture" (63). Arabs often tell their daughters that they do not them to appear and act like the American girls because of their cultural norms that restrict the behaviors of women (63).

Al Qutami (2009) investigates how two contemporary American women writers resist and dismantle the hegemonic discourse that "represents Third World women as a monolithic and homogeneous category" (iii). The writer explains that the monolithic image of U.S. Third World women depicts the cultural imagery of the "veil and the house" (iii). The writer selects both the Arab -American woman writer Mohja Kahf and the Latin American writer Sandra Cisneros to study their resistance for these images, in which they demonstrate "the ways those constructions are oppressive distortions that entrap and disempower women" (iii).

In his distinguished study entitled "Nostalgia and Beyond: The treatment of the past in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* and Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*," Azizi (2008) compares the first Arab American novel *The Book of Khalid* and the second generation Arab American novel *Arabian Jazz* in terms of their dealing with the ethnic past of Arab Americans. The writer notes that Rihani's novel fails to represent America's ethnic complexity, in which "the main character of the novel considers his homeland the essential source of identity and America is purely the Other" (iii). In other words, the character's attachment to his native ethnic past makes him unable to understand his ethnicity in America. On the contrary, Abu Jaber's novel is different in dealing with the ethnic past from that of Rihani's, in which the "ethnic identity is continuously renegotiated in terms of conflicts within the two cultures: mainstream and ethnic. Therefore, the concept of ethnicity is re-constructed not as a reality but as a social reality" (ii). Thus, what the writer wants to point out here is Rihani's novel represents the failure of integration and assimilation in American society, whereas Abu Jaber's novel highlights the importance of diversity and "in-betweenness" of Arab community in America. The importance of this study lies in its contrast between the literatures of the first and second generations of Arab Americans, in which the first generation writers reflect the nostalgic nature in dealing with their problems in

America, whereas the second generation writers focus on how to coexist with both Arab and American cultural values and how to overcome their ethnic past.

Basarudin (2002) highlights the marginalization of Arab women in the sphere of Western feminism by portraying them as “passive victims.” (62). The writer states that “there is an urgent need for a cross-cultural dialogue between Western and Arab feminisms in order to create space that allows differences to be recognized and examined, and crafting a meeting point for women to relate across their differences”(62). Due to the different Western feminists agendas which are related to the Western values, environment, and history from Arab women’s experiences and values, Basarudin finds that Western feminism cannot be effective for Arab women and states that “For feminism(s) to be accepted in the Middle East, Arab women need new liberation movements that are based on their experiences and values with some acceptable feminist ideas and practices” (62).

The writer thinks that Western feminists should focus on women’s struggle instead of generalizing that all women in the world experience the same kinds of patriarchal oppression and domination. According to Basarudin, the patriarchal domination differs among cultures, nations, and histories. The writer adds that “There is a wide gap between Western feminist discourses and the actual lives and practical needs of women from various ethnic groups, cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial for the survival of feminism(s) to devise new approaches that acknowledge individualities and particularities of each woman and feminist movement” (63). The writer calls for a sense of solidarity between Western and Arab feminists, in which “Western feminists should utilize the vast resources and knowledge available in dismantling global oppressions, which include not only gender apartheid, but also social, economic and political components to understand how Arab women have continued to be victims of racism, colonialism, and imperialism” (63).

Boza (1998) notes that the adolescent issues in these multicultural novels were “sexual relationships, parent-adolescent relationships, peer pressure, and self-identification” (Abstract), and the cultural issues included “racism/discrimination, struggle of living between two cultures, acceptance, and stereotypical beliefs” (Abstract). The researcher also notes “adolescent issues were more visible than cultural issues in multicultural adolescent novels” (Abstract) and the parent-adolescent issues were the major problem in these novels. “African-American and Hispanic novels tended to emphasize self-identification issues, while Asian-American novels focused on parent-adolescent relationships. When analyzing cultural issues, stereotypical beliefs were found to not be a key issue in multicultural adolescent literature. African-American novels tended to deal with acceptance, while the Asian-American and Hispanic novels tended to deal with a struggle of living between two cultures” (Abstract).

In an interview of Arab-American adolescent writer Naomi Shihab Nye by Castro (2002), Nye emphasizes the importance of writing to young adults in America about Arab people in order to erase the general media stereotyping of Arabs in America and to correct the false belief that Arabs are terrorists (228, 229). She adds that “My goals have always been to make wonderful voices available to more readers, to promote poems of humanity and intelligence that extend and connect us all as human beings, to enlarge readers' horizons-including my own, as I work on the bookstand to help connect people” (233).

In general, most critics such as Shalal-Esa (2003) and Fadda-Conrey (2006) point out that Arab Americans have been subject to decades of racism, discrimination, negative stereotyping, and hostility in the United States. These problems motivate Arab American cultural leaders and creative writers to put forward the challenges they face in the States. These problems have motivated Arab American writers to try to find their place and identity in the American community.

Lampert (2008) explores the kinds of homes which exist in the Middle Eastern diasporic imagination as a reflection of the conflict between the host and original cultures. The writer relies on Arab American women’s writings, such as Diana Abu Jaber, Mohja Kahf, and Nahid Rachlin. The writer notes that “home-making, at least as mandated by the host society and resented by the country of origin, weighs upon and fragments the psyche of the *diasporic* individual by producing feelings of guilt and shame, and imposing a sense of double consciousness... *home* in the *diasporic* imagination is interior rather than exterior, invented individually rather than constructed communally. *In* these texts, *home* is imagined; geographically, it exists nowhere.”(Abstract).

Mango (2008) examines Arab American women’s reaction for the negative stereotypes related to their Arab ethnicity. The writer notes that Arab American women are very aware of the negative stereotypes related to their group (iii). They formed identities which “ranged from the least confrontational (being silent) to the most confrontational (speaking up and challenging); their internal coping ranged from extreme inner struggle and discomfort to very little or no discomfort at all” (iii). The writer notes that in their struggle to these stereotypes, Arab American women were trying to “create a new space for themselves as *Arab American women*. While their enacted *identities* were characterized by solidarity and affiliation, they were also characterized by the ambivalence and uncertainty of their hyphenated *identities*” (iii).

Saliba (1993) examines how the western constructions of third world women including Arab women limit their subjectivity and expose the complexities of their gender and political relations. The writer claims that Arab American women’s writing “construct generational and racial female subjectivities grounded in the bonds of family and community...[their text] operates as a curative story against colonial and patriarchal systems, which have fragmented women's struggle across class lines ” (Abstract). These women highlight the unnecessary of the nationalist and religious issues to their liberation.

Hartman (2006) claims that there are some Arab American adolescent writers like Diana Abu-Jaber in *Arabian Jazz* who “use a strategy of identity building as Arabs/Arab Americans which affiliates and aligns the authors with African Americans” (145). The writer argues that all these three texts “invoke African American music as metonym for black America and propose that this is a location for potential solidarity in the construction of Arab American identities” (146). In short, what the writer wants to highlight that Arab American writer make connections with African American writers because of the shared racial experience between Arab Americans and African Americans. Arab American writers build relationships with other groups of color based on the shared experience of oppression both Arab Americans and African American shared (146).

In light of the previous studies, this article will investigate how war memories in the homeland might play an effective role in constructing the female gender role in opposition with the male dominance because of the traditions that requires women to be submissive to the male. Additionally, many quotations from Shakir's short story will be analyzed to reflect the theme of the study.

## 2. The analysis of "Oh, Lebanon"

In Shakir's "Oh, Lebanon," the third person narrator narrates the story of a girl who encounters with the brutal memories of the Lebanese Civil war and her father's dominance which influence her construction of her identity. The protagonist in this story seems uncaring for being at school in Beirut: "This school or that, to her it didn't matter. She moved stealthily through the days, from clearing to clearing, from terror to terror" (17). In other words, the protagonist does not find any hope in living in Beirut because of the war and her loss of her mother. Thus, the young Muslim Lebanese girl has a hard childhood in Lebanon because of Lebanon's civil war, in which she witnesses the brutality of war. She goes to America to complete her college trying to distance herself from her past, origin, and culture.

In the beginning, the protagonist's description of her father reveals that there is no tension between them, in which he is progressive and open-minded to accept her study in America: "'My father is brave,' she thought. It was her comfort. He was also progressive and very rich. So when, at seventeen—ten years into the fighting—she showed him catalogues from American universities, he saw no problem. Felt, in fact, a tinge of pride. Just never noticed she was desperate to escape" (17). However, the turning point in her relationship with her father starts when she meets a junior black Jamaican in her first semester at MIT and writes to her father about him. "From that day, her father—not that progressive, after all—refused her phone calls and burned her letters without opening them. The hurt she felt became defiance, then resignation. 'He'll change his mind some day,' she thought" (18). The father's refusal of his daughter's relationship is due to his adherence to Arab culture in which the relationship between boys and girls out of marriage is shameful and prohibited and to the cultural and racial differences between his daughter and the Jamaican boy. The protagonist defies her father because of her sense of independency and her freedom of choice; she wants to liberate herself from the native traditions and to adapt to the new environment and culture. Her aspiration and desire are opposed by her father's old traditions. She defies her father's will by spending the summer in Kingston with her Jamaican boyfriend, in which "at first, she was tentative, but soon she fell in with the rhythms of the place—calypso, reggae, the spirit of his parents' teasing" (18). She wants to prove her personality and that her will is over her father's will, she also tries to escape her tragic memories of the Lebanese war.

When her boyfriend asks her if she is bored in staying with him, she replies "I could live here forever" (18). However, she changes her mind about what she says to her boyfriend when she hears the news of crimes in Kingston: "She knew it wasn't true. Each day, news circulated of shoot-out on the street and gangland executions; the murder rate, the papers said, was third highest in the world" (18). The images of these crimes make her remember the crimes and the war in Beirut from which she escapes:

"in bed, she tossed and dreamed of Beirut, rockets turning night to day, a teenage sniper ogling her from the roof across the street. Nearby, what had been an apartment building. Now just a grid of tattered cubicles, naked, taken by surprise. Then taken over—rats scurrying, squatters camping behind plastic sheeting, a militiaman stirring coffee over a coal brazier or hanging out wet skivvies. And yet you could emerge after laying low all morning in a shelter and know you were safe again 'til nightfall. In Kingston there was no moratorium. 'I can't live like this,' she told him" (18).

It seems clear that the protagonist's comparison between the life in Kingston and in Beirut through memorizing the tragic memories of the war reveals her confusion to find a safe place for her and for her identity which is still in progress. However, her reliance on the memory of her homeland is based on her connection to it, on her refusal to return home because of the war, and on her desire to live a liberal life.

The protagonist's boyfriend seems more connected to his country Jamaica than the protagonist, in which he refuses to be away from his country because he "would be a dull knife, an empty pod, a dry leaf" (19). He tries to compensate the protagonist's need of passion by having sex with her and by assuring her that he loves her and bewitched by her body, and the protagonist expresses her love to him when she says to him "I love you" (19).

The protagonist is fed up with her previous romantic relationships in Boston, in which all of her relationships end without success. She is desperate of having an everlasting love relationship: "her youth was gone, frittered away on men who had, each in his own way, been wrong for her" (19). She lives in a conflict between the tradition of her culture and the western one, in which she understands the wisdom behind prohibiting dating out of marriage and how marriage is a safe thing for the girl "Now she understood why her uncle had arranged marriages for her cousins Mona and Aisha. It was an act of love" (19). At the same time, she wants to live a liberal and freer life and respects her father's decision to

allow her study abroad: “She used to be proud that her father was not old-fashioned, but now she was angry at his neglect. When she remembered how easily he’d released her to drift on her own across an ocean, she was astonished” (19, 20). Thus, the protagonist is still connected to her culture and has the desire to live an untraditional life. Her failure in her love relationships makes her understand and respect the restriction placed on the love relationship in Arab culture.

The comparison the protagonist makes between her life in America and Lebanon represents her confusion and the conflict of building her cultural identity in America. In America, “she’d been a babe in the woods here despite watching American movies all her life” (20). She feels that she is inexperienced in love relationships unlike the American girls who “were shrewd; they knew how to play the game” (20). In other words, her description here is based on her cultural shock in America and on her inability to adapt to the life in America. After her departure of Lebanon, the protagonist’s ambition is to get her degree from America and return to Lebanon without a war: “For the first times since she’d left Lebanon, she thought of returning, a college degree in her suitcase and no war now to scare her away” (20). She keeps herself connected with her homeland by eating the Lebanese traditional food and reading a Lebanese Web site that presents the news of war, but she insists on not going back to Lebanon: “I’ll never go back...It’s too late anyway” (20).

The protagonist depicts her problem with her father which is related to the culture of honor and shame in Arab culture, in which she imagines that he “would not let her enter his house” (20) because of the shame she brings to her family in her relationship with the Jamaican boy. She considers her behavior a correct one and does not view it as a shameful thing: “‘But what have I done?’ she argued with him in her head. ‘What will I do with my life?’ she asked herself” (20). All these questions reflect her conflict with her father over her unacceptance of the native tradition and her desire to live a freer life.

The protagonist depicts her life in the United States as difficult one, in which she works in “temp jobs, gigs teaching Arabic calligraphy, and a bequest from her English grandmother. But that was no life” (20). She finds the information and description about the United States in books are inaccurate. Thus, the protagonist seems uncomfortable in the United States because of her inability to achieve her goals and expectations.

Her use of the pronoun “we” in “We Lebanese are too sentimental” (20) reflects her sense of belonging to her people and to her Arab Lebanese culture and identity, and the belief that Arabs are more emotional than the westerners, and that they are not realistic. She identifies her future plans in life, in which she wants to compensate for her failure in love relationship and her bad relationship with her father by insisting on getting her education and working hard to forget her miserable life: “‘I’ll enroll full time, and in two years or maybe less—if I go summers---I’ll have my MBA’...True, the work was boring, but that’s how she knew it would cure what ailed her” (21). She keeps thinking about men and marriage which indicates to her attachment to her native culture which favors the marriage relationship: “In bed at night, after masturbating, she thought about men and marriage” (21). This reflects her awareness of her native culture and reflects her interest in her sexuality in which she considers finding the right match a way to complement her identity.

Her search for her match in the Sunday paper and her meeting with the dating agency reflects her need of a guidance and of the emotional support in which she needs to find a man who is acceptable by her family, and who has ties with her native culture: “A man my family would approve of” (21). The man referred to her by the agent is described as “three parts Lebanese, the great-grandson of immigrants from Tripoli in the north” (21, 22). Here it should be emphasized that the protagonist’s preference to have a man from her ethnicity is related to the influence of her traditions and culture on her, in which she wants a person whom she can share her culture and tradition.

The protagonist’s decision to try this relationship although she is confused whether she is glad or sorry for this choice reflects her confusion of belonging to her culture or to the American one. In other words, she wants to be in-between in her relationship and decides to try it: “She didn’t know whether to be glad or sorry but thought, ‘I’ll chance it.’” (22). Her description of his physical appearance reminds her of her family and of her Middle Eastern origin: “He turned out to be dark, slight, and with features that reminded her of her cousins” (22). He seems more adhered to Arab Lebanese culture than her, in which when she asks him “you look happy” (22), he replies her “I’m happy you’re Lebanese” (22). However, she seems uncaring for her origin and cultural identity when she replies him “What difference does that make?” (22).

The new boyfriend seems more interested in his native culture and origin than the protagonist: “It makes a lot of difference...In my family, we’ve lost our Arab culture, and I’m the only one who cares” (23). He asserts his family assimilation into the American culture and searches for his Arab identity by having a friend from the same culture. The protagonist sympathizes with her boyfriend by saying “Poor you” (23), but he tells her that he feels sympathetic for his parents who lost ties with their Arab culture: “Poor them” (23). The protagonist likes that he belongs to his Arab origin and culture and refers to an important fact that the early Arab immigrants who were Christians assimilated in the American society and labeled themselves as “Christians,” not “Arab” because they wanted to assimilate easily with the American society: “Some Christians in Lebanon—and he was Christian, she knew—refused that label” (23). In other words, the protagonist realizes that her new boyfriend is attached to his Arab culture.

The protagonist seems implicitly attached to her Arab culture and identity. She is a Muslim but not a devout one, her father is not a devout Muslim although he knows a lot of religious hadith (Prophet Muhammad’s speeches), and her mother is Christian. However, the protagonist “could never spend her life with someone who looked down on Islam or thought that ‘Arab’ was a slur” (23). Thus, the protagonist is indirectly adhered to her Arab culture, in which she

remembers her former boyfriend who was a professor and who “had instructed her always to introduce herself as *Phoenician* or, if she must, as simply *Lebanese*. A warning finger raised. ‘Don’t say *Arab*.’ ‘Why not?’ she’d asked. ‘It doesn’t sound very nice,’ he had explained” (23). Here there is an indication that this professor’s vision represents how Arabs are misunderstood in the American educational system. He wants her to avoid discrimination and the negative stereotypes attached to the label “Arab” in the United States, and replaces this label with the historical label “Phoenician” which is related to the origin of Lebanese. The protagonist seems aware of the Orientals’ negative view of Arabs and tries to defend her culture from the negative media stereotypes when she asks the professor “Have you ever been to Lebanon?...Or to the Middle East”(23). He replies her “No, I’m way overdue” (23). In other words, she tells him that his negative vision of Arabs is based on what he hears from media and what he reads about the Orientals’ viewpoints.

The protagonist’s imagination of returning to Beirut with her Lebanese American husband, how her father will be pleased because she chooses the right partner from the same ethnicity, and how he will tell her commenting on her relationship with the Jamaican boy that “you were sick with a fever...but, praise Allah, you were well” (23) represents her awareness of her tradition, culture, and ethnicity. She depicts how her father would “throw a party, the whole family would come, three generations of uncles and aunts and cousins. There would be long tables laden with food—everything from hummus and baba ghannuj to ice cream flavored with orchid extract, gum mastic, and rose water” (23, 24). This depiction is a mental image of the traditions of marriage ceremony that is stored in her mind and to the importance of family in her culture, in which an individual’s acts are observed by the whole family members.

The protagonist highlights the importance of family in her culture in her description of the traditional marriage party in which “The round of relatives (taking their cue from her father) would come up to her husband with an embrace and kiss him on both cheeks. They’d want to know in what town or village his family had its roots and inquire about his great grandmother’s family name. ‘You are one of us,’ they would say, reclaiming her at the same time” (24). Here it should be noted that the protagonist focuses on the significance of marrying a man from the same ethnicity in Arab culture in which the guests in the marriage ceremony tells the groom “you are one of us” (24) which indicates to the shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the shared collective ideology.

Although the protagonist’s lack of knowledge in Arabic in which he knows three words, he has an imagination of life in Lebanon that connects him with his native tradition: “About three words. But I have this fantasy, I guess you’d call it” (24). He presents his imagination of the life in Lebanon, in which he imagines that he is walking with his kid in Al-Hamra Street in Beirut, then they get lost their way and asks a man with fez (traditional wear in Syria and Lebanon), then they find a man and his kid asks him about the direction because his kid is fluent in Arabic, the man invites them to have lunch with his family and tells them “My house is your house” (24), then they become like a part of the family. Then he says “when my kid grows up, he marries the prettiest granddaughter” (24). It is noted that the protagonist’s boyfriend is eager to the Arab traditions, like hospitality, generosity, and sociability. He wants his kid to be fluent in Arabic and to be more connected with his native culture in which he wants him to marry his granddaughter.

The protagonist’s boyfriend wants to find a woman who connects him with his native culture, who makes his kids be fluent in Arabic so they do not suffer from bicultural identity crisis: “I have to find a wife to teach my kids-to-be the *abc’s* of Arabic...’Listen’... ‘Don’t think I’m trying to rush things. I just want you to understand where I’m coming from, and’—‘I want to know all about you’” (25). In other words, the boyfriend here tries to explain to the protagonist his purpose which is to find his Arab identity by having her as his wife. He wants her as a bridge to connect him with his culture and does not want his kids to suffer from the disconnection with their native culture.

When the protagonist and her boyfriend are teased by the pedestrians, she says “Americans have no dignity” (25) which reflects the ideological difference between her and Americans. She opposes and understands why Arabs are teased and hated in America. The boyfriend shows her the South End neighborhood “where the early Lebanese families—people like his ancestors—had moved in almost a century ago and then moved out in the forties and fifties to lose themselves in the suburbs” (25). In other words, he tries to outline his ancestors’ problem which is that they lost their Arab identity when they assimilated into the American society and moved to live in different parts in America losing their collective identity.

The protagonist and her boyfriend’s knowledge about Khalil Gibran’s funeral and book from reading about him in books is an explicit indication that they both know about their Lebanese heritage and literature. He shows her the place where Gibran’s funeral starts: When the funeral cortege went by, people all along here...they fell to their knees” (26). His memory and knowledge depict how he tries to celebrate his Arab American heritage by memorizing Gibran. When the protagonist asks him “how do you know these things?” (26), he replies “I told you, I’m interested. I read I talk to people” (26). Even he knows that Gibran’s body “had been shipped to Lebanon and carried high up the mountains for burial in his native village of Bsharri. Because that’s the way he had wanted it. He’d wanted to go home” (26). This reflects how Gibran represents an example for the protagonist who wants to return to his origin and culture. However, when the protagonist tells him “I know Bsharri” (26) and that she passes this village, he asks her if she passes the village to visit Gibran’s grave, she replies him “No, not that” (26). It is noted here that the boyfriend knows about Gibran more than her, but he needs her to show him and his kids the village in which Gibran lives: “Some day you’ll show me” (26). Thus, he wants her to connect him with his heritage and culture.

The relationship between the protagonist and her boyfriend follows their Lebanese style and tradition, in which they do not have sex, and they do not stay inside the apartments: “By unspoken agreement, they avoided close quarters and stayed out of each other’s apartments. Making a point of not getting physical, no more than an arm offered and taken or

triple kisses when they said hello or good-bye. Right cheek, left, right—Lebanese style” (27). In other words, they are both adhered to the Lebanese friendship rules and are aware of the norms and values of their native culture.

It seems clear that the protagonist’s boyfriend is more interested in the Lebanese ethnic identity of his girlfriend. This is clear when she asks him “It doesn’t bother you my family is Muslim?” (28). She presupposes that her religious identity might be a conflicting point in her relationship with him. However, her boyfriend seems happy that she is a Muslim because he wants to explore his native ethnic and cultural identity regardless of the religious one: “I love it your family is Muslim” (28). Even he wants to explore her Islamic identity and thinks that it is a sign of her authenticity: “Because it makes you that much more authentic. A card-carrying Arab. I want you to take me to a mosque, I want you to teach me” (28). Here we note that his reply reveals that he is interested in the Arab ethnic identity and that he thinks that the Islamic and Christian religious beliefs are parts of this identity.

The tension in the protagonist’s relationship with her boyfriend starts when she tells him that she does not think that she will take him to the mosque and to teach him Islam because she is not strongly adhered to her religious identity. The tension intensifies when her boyfriend asks her if she ever thinks about wearing a scarf: “Nothing. Just...well, let me put it this way. Did you ever think of wearing a scarf” (28). To her, scarf means “hijab” which has a negative stereotype in the American culture, so she tells him “A rag on my head? No, thank you” (28). Here it should be noted that in her refusal to wear hijab and of her replacement of “hijab” word with “rag,” she considers it as a stigma to her and a limit for her freedom and of her eagerness to live the American life. It also indicates that her religious identity is not stable. She changes her appearance and wants to be American.

In her apartment, she has an internal conflict and unacceptance of her boyfriend’s proposal to her to wear the scarf, even she blames herself for making relationship with him and yearns for her relationship with the Jamaican boyfriend with whom she feels freer:

When she got home, she kicked off her shoes and paced from one small room to another. What a fool she’d been, and just when she thought she was growing smart. He was using her, like the others had, except for her sweet Jamaican boy, the only one who’d ever loved her, loved home more, though. Her mind was racing. The others, why had they wanted her? Not for herself, she decided, but smitten by some one thing about her, just as she might love the shimmer of silk in a certain light or the texture of a ripe avocado...But, oh—she started pacing again—Mr Sheik-of-Araby was the worst. Trying to wrest her into something she wasn’t (28, 29).

Thus, the protagonist starts to change her attitude toward her boyfriend “Mr Sheik-of-Araby” (29), in which in the next day, she addresses him with a mocking tone of her native country’s traditional clothes when she says “I was going to show up in a chador...I was going to walk into this café like a black shadow out of the desert” (29). It seems clear that the protagonist does not want to be tied with her traditional clothes.

The protagonist’s thinking of ending her relationship with her boyfriend reveals the ideological difference between them and her refusal to be tied to her traditions: “I think we’re a mismatch. That’s all I came to tell you. We look good on paper...But I’m not the woman you want” (29). Her boyfriend’s insistence on her reveals his will to be connected with his ethnic identity: “What can I do to change your mind?” (29). The scarf is now the point of conflict between them, and it is a symbol of suppressing her freedom and a way to return to her tradition, so she asks him to assure her that he hates her in a scarf in order to change her mind: “Tell me you’d hate me in a scarf” (29).

From this point on, the protagonist tries to test her boyfriend’s treatment of her in the future by outlining her conditions and her refusal to wear a scarf and to be traditional. Even when he tells her “I’d hate you in a scarf” (29), she does not believe him because she wants him to be convinced in his view: “Don’t say it like that...Say it like you mean it” (29). He assures her that he means that “I do mean it...scarf, no scarf, it’s up to you” (30). This reveals that he is not conservative and is liberal like her. Her conditions of her relationship with her boyfriend reflects her opposition to the native tradition and her insistence on her freedom:

You won’t expect me to roll grape leaves or pickle turnips?...Listen...Don’t think I’m going to recite the Koran five times a day. Or whisper Arabic in your ear at night...Or join the Ladies’ Aid...Of course, I want children... But...it doesn’t follow that I have to tell them the folk tales my father told me about Jeha the fool, or teach them how to dance three kinds of dabka, or how to pickle turnips and eggplant...Because...if there’s one thing I’m not, it’s pious. Or sentimental. I’m not going to fill the house with the music of Fairuz and Umm Kalthum...And you might as well know...I don’t carry around photos of our stone house in the village. And you won’t hear me carrying on over the terraced garden that got blown up in the fighting or the olive trees

uprooted, or the mulberry and quince...Or my gorgeous cousin...My cousin Fawzi. He got himself killed trying to cross the green line. And do you know Why he was crossing?...It was love. He had a girlfriend on the other side... Another thing...This. I will not teach you Arabic” (30, 31).

From the above quotation, it is clear that the protagonist is not adhered to her native traditions, to her country, and that she does want her children to be attached to these traditions. She does not want to remember her past life which is full of agony and the memories of war that influence her belonging to the traditions and generate a reaction inside herself against her country's tradition and culture. In all her conditions to him, her boyfriend accepts and understands all of them. He understands her desire to live a freer life: “Understood...I can live with that...No? Well, if you can't, you can't” (30, 31). However, she thinks that all his answers are lies: “Your lies show you have a good heart” (31).

At the end of the story, the protagonist does not promise her boyfriend of continuing their relationship, but she gives him another chance: “No promises, but let's give this thing another chance” (32). When he thanks her using the Arabic thanking expression “Shookran,” she mocks of him by saying “You're most welcome, habibi” (32). When he asks her about the meaning of “habibi,” she returns to mock of him that he claims that he is an Arab and does not know this simple word: “And you call yourself Arab! Don't you know anything? *Habibi*, my dear” (32). When he addresses her as a male by saying “Habibi,” she teaches him the difference between how to address a male and female in Arabic: “No, if you mean me, it's *habibti* with a *t*. Because I'm a girl. Do you see?...Now pay attention...Gender is easy”. Here it should be emphasized that the protagonist uses this mocking tone as way to convince him not to be interested in his Arabic language and as a way to show him that as long as you do not know Arabic, how do you claim that you are tied to your ethnicity? She focuses on the language as a way to tell him that you are not tied to your ethnicity. The protagonist's cultural identity seems in-between because she does not want to be attached to her traditions when she tells him that she will not teach him Arabic, and at the same time she gives her boyfriend another chance and teaches him a lesson of Arabic.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the female protagonist in Shakir's "Oh, Lebanon" is highly influenced by the dark and the brutal memories of the Lebanese War she witnesses. Such memories make her deny her Arab gender role as submissive to men. The protagonist reacts against all bad memories in the past that reminds her of her status in Arab culture; she wants to construct her identity without being adhered to her Arab traditions and cultural norms that limit her freedom and her selfhood. She relates the war memories with her feeling of not being satisfied with her gender role in the Arab culture.

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