"The Piano in the Middle of the Room: Jean Makdisi's Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir"

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Abstract

Jean Said Makdisi's Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir (1990) recalls the 1975-1976 war, the 1982 occupation, and the 1989 conflict (Makdisi 1990). This analysis places the memoir in the context of the experimental fiction of Lebanon's civil war, Edward Said's letters to the Los Angeles Times newspaper, and international documentation regardong weapons transfers into Lebanon. Makdisi introduces predominantly North Americans to the personal experience of a U.S.-educated woman in Beirut. Her memoir touched Anglophone readers: the Los Angeles Times book review described it as "profound, heartbreaking"; the Detroit Free Press described her chapters as "smooth," the New York Times described the author as "perceptive" and "compassionate."

Keywords : personal experience, personal experience, War Memoir, documentation, the context

For Makdisi, the disorder she finds when she enters her apartment represents the greater challenge of describing fragmentation of public authority in Lebanon. Random violence left Makdisi unable to take shelter in the symmetry of placed furniture, the clarity of what is "serious" from what is not a threat.

> Front door doesn't open. Wrong keys? After a little struggle, lock gives way. I have an impression of total whiteness. Strange, I think to myself, when did Samir have time to cover everything with white sheets? Funny: Why did he move the piano to the middle of the room before covering it, and why did he push the great heavy chest that decorates the entrance hall into the corridor?

> I look into the dining room. Good God! One of L's paintings has fallen from upstairs into my dining room. How can that be? Another look. That's no painting from upstairs. That is a hole, a great, gaping hole. I am looking at policemen, who are looking at me through the hole in the wall. They are standing on the roof of the police station next door, staring in my direction.

> Realization dawns. Those are not white sheets, but dust. The place is a shambles. Everything is white and broken. Real fear now. This is death. Not something to be read about in the newspapers, but something that has come into my house, that has violated my life, my territory, my being. I walk into the bedrooms, hardly able to keep my balance, as the floor is covered unevenly

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> with inches of rubble. Pick up a few things, a teddy bear off the floor, a blanket draped over a lamp, someone's dusty pajamas. There is no logic to what I collect.
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> On the way out I pick up a piece of shrapnel from the rubble. Shrapnel. So this is shrapnel, I think. I never took it seriously before. Somehow when I had heard that someone had died of shrapnel wounds, it hadn't sounded as serious as dying from a bullet or in a fire. But this jagged, heavy, twisted, hot piece of iron—this is shrapnel. Shrapnel is serious. (pp. 24-25)

Following Monika Fludernik's concept "narratology," with its acknowlegement of "the rise of New Historicism… [which] led to an increased focus on text-context relations" (2009, p. 13), Makdisi's war memoir represents something of a puzzle. An Anglophone work, written by an Arab woman, this war memoir presents something of a contradiction—if a text is written in Arabic, it is Arab prose; if it is written in English by an author who has experienced imperialism, it is "postcolonial" (to note that modern literature's genres must be reconceived in order to incorporate the experience of the colonized).

Makdisi considers the nineteenth-century imperialist antecedents of global English: "Having been raised in the English church specifically calls to mind the realities of the imperial past, with all its vestiges, including, above all others, language, that priceless instrument of power" (p. 96; see also Amiry 2005). She explains the fragmentary form she chose for this war memoir. Makdisi plays tourists' prose in Beirut's main market (*souq*), mingling the euphemistic with the direct (Khalaf 2002, Khalidi 1979). Mimicking guide books, Makdisi describes glass-enclosed cases (jewelers' windows, visual joke, and the Virgin at the Karatina crossing as metaphors for the breakdown of state authority:

> The gold *souq* was lined with small shops, one right next to the other, the alley covered with a white canvas awning. In the shop windows hung, dazzling, hundreds of gold bracelets and bangles on lines, jingling as they turned when someone touched them; filigreed necklaces and earrings that caught the sun as they turned, yards and yards of gold chains, rings, cufflinks, coins; everything glittered and glistened in the hot sun, turning, and glistening some more. Sometimes, when it got very hot, the merchants would shade the gold by drawing white cotton curtains across the windows, but you could see the sparkle even through the cloth (p. 71; see also Fawaz 1983, Markham 1976).

Makdisi turns from peacetime window-shopping to boutique's wartime display. With the breakdown of public order, experiences of combat entered every conceivable public space. While the window-shopper and shopowner retain their separate identities, a surreal display brings them together in a momentary political community when her:

> attention was caught by what seemed, at first glance, to be a collection of bizarre jewelry in the window. When I stopped to get a closer look, I saw that it was a collection of shrapnel. The shop owner seemed delighted by my surprise and by the success of his joke, and we laughed heartily. We exchanged pleasant greetings as if we were old friends, although I do not remember ever having seen him before (Makdisi, pp. 237-238; Rabinovich 1984, pp. 13-14; Squiers 1987, pp. 369-422).

Satisfied with her playful use of prose from tourist guidebooks, the third glass-enclosed case in Makdisi's memoir contains a cheap plaster statue and some practically worthless plastic blossoms:

> As one crosses the new and shining bridge over the Beirut river, one's eye is caught by a small glass box standing on the pavement of the side overlooking the city. In the box is a plaster statue of the Virgin Mary and her Child. At their feet lie plastic flowers, pinks and blues and whites matching the dress worn by the Holy Mother. The veil that covers her head and body is royal blue, piped with gold thread. Her face is blank; whatever suggestion of sanctity there in the roadside altar with its white tallow candles is brought by the worshipper's faith, not by any artistic effect. There is a long tradition of these boxes: anyone who has traveled in Lebanon knows them well. They suddenly appear on the mountain roads, just before a nasty curve, the pastel shades clothing the saint striking against the rich brownish-red soil, the strong greens of the pine trees, and the gray rocks (pp. 200-201).

Her description of the Virgin in Karantina introduces reference to a mixed-nationality shantytown that was "cleansed" without pointing fingers at Lebanese right wing militias' organized, sustained violence against Palestinians in Lebanon. Makdisi found no one prose genre—autobiography, diary, essay, guidebook, or lexicon—sufficient to express personal security after the collapse of public authority. As Makdisi wrote, "I wanted something uniform to hold it all, for I am one person—am I not?—and my need for unity and exactness grew in proportion as the country about me fell further and further apart" (p. 22).
Even as she acknowledged the influence modernist writers exerted over her English prose, her experiments with prose forms are far from unique during Beirut's civil war (Tabbara 1979). This war memoir also serves as a *vitrine* for Lebanese authors' use of narrative fragment and irony. Makdisi wrote:

> The days pass. The glass is back in my windows, though it is dirty and still marked with the window maker's codes and the smudged finger marks left by his laborers. Through the dirty windows lined by unmended torn curtains I look out on the impassive sea. Outside, for the moment at least, the sound of building has replaced the sound of guns: hammering, scraping, sweeping, cement pouring. The rubble has been swept into neat piles here and there, and every day some of the piles get carried away in beaten and battered trucks. The burned cars have disappeared. The buildings are being patched up (p. 48).

Makdisi used irony as one means to point to language's instability. Struggling to express the war experience, Lebanese novelists experimented with form in Arabic prose (Sakkut 2000). Claire Gebeyli, like Huda Barakat, Rashid al-Da'if, Mahmoud Darwish, and Elias Khoury—Makdisi's contemporaries, also Arab writers resident in Lebanon--noted the civil war rendered previous concepts of literature obsolete (Cooke 1996, p. 218; see also Cooke 2007, p. 54, Khoury 1990).
For Huda Barakat, conflict renders words "no longer spontaneous and self explanatory," and conversational terms lose reference to the events they describe: "The city begins to gather up its belongings and people get ready to go back to the places where, at night, they sleep… which does not necessarily mean their houses… this has made our city's dictionary hard to understand, for an expression such as 'people go back to their houses,' is no longer spontaneous and self-explanatory… the expression 'the children eat what their mother cooked for them' no longer means what the listener might logically suppose" (Barakat 1995, p. 28).
During Syria's occupation after the 1975-1976 war, all Arab news was censored from international publications; as a result, *billet*-shaped pieces (or bullet-shaped pieces) were cut from pages that told of the region's events: "The *International Herald Tribune* would appear on [Beirut's] streets with 'windows' cut in its pages almost every day. The English-language Middle East magazine would arrive on the newsstands with whole pages missing," Fisk 2002,

p. 96). With the "economy of a poem without its elusiveness, and the factuality of a newspaper article without its dry impersonality," fragments circulated through daily newspapers (such as the weekly *billet* Claire Gebeyli published in *L'Orient-Le Jour;* Makdisi p. 85; Cooke 1996, p. 60.

The *billet* serves as one example of the prose experiments which disseminated through wartime Lebanon's public space, as literary fragments reflected writers' experiences of splintered affiliations. Consisting entirely of prose fragments, Elias Khoury's 1977 novel *al-Jabal al-Saghir* uses repetition and imperfect tenses to indicate characters' frustration with unresolved conflict. "Salem goes on asking, what's the difference between war and civil war?" (Tabet 1990, p. 24, see also Layoun 2001).

In this way, Makdisi's *War Memoir* presents Arab authors' experimental works in an attractive fashion (like the jeweler displayed shrapnel fragments in his store window). Her sensitivity to the newly-acquired significance for the mundane is a characteristic Makdisi shares with others; arguing against a "democratic equality and co-presence in actuality between speaker and hearer," Edward Said insisted that not all interpretations are created equal: "All texts essentially displace, dislodge other texts, or, more frequently, … take the place of something else… texts are fundamentally facts of power, not a democratic exchange" (Said 1979, p. 14). In such an environment of prose fragments, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish used coffee to talk politics:

I know my coffee, my mother's coffee, and the coffee of my friends. I can tell them from afar and I know the differences among them. No coffee is like another and my defense of coffee is a plea for difference itself. There's no flavor we might label "the flavor of coffee" because coffee is not a concept, or even a single substance. And it's not an absolute. Everyone's coffee is special, so special that I can tell one's taste and elegance of spirit by the flavor of the coffee. Coffee with the flavor of coriander means the woman's kitchen is not organized. Coffee with the flavor of carob juice means the host is stingy. Coffee with the aroma of perfume means the lady is too concerned with appearances. Coffee that feels like moss in the mouth means its maker is an infantile leftist. Coffee that tastes stale from too much turning over in the hot water means its maker is an extreme rightist. And coffee with the overwhelming flavor of cardamom means the lady is newly rich (Darwish 1995*,* p. 19; also, Adonis. 1979).

For the *LA Times*, Edward Said wrote: "I would get through by telephone to my family in Beirut: that helped me to gather some notion of what it was like to live under bombing runs over defenseless cities, of refugee camps emptied by fierce attacks, and of Beirut stairwells and sidewalks filled with frightened refugees seeking rudimentary shelter" (20 June 1982, see Collins 1983).

The family concerns (Mahmoud Darwish's mother's coffee, Edward Said's telephone calls to Beirut) recall Huda Barakat's 1998 novel, *Harith Al-Miyah*, in which a boy protagonist's maturity into manhood is hindered by his mother (published in English translation during 2001). A 'woman of silk,' she arrived in Lebanon from Egypt, and her much-recounted bridal journey serves this novel as metaphor for the stories states tell about themselves:

I soon began listening to her stories differently, questioning myself, skeptical of my own presuppositions. After all, had there ever been a time when my mother dwelt in reality? Had anyone ever been able to claim that in her youth she had told only the truth? Who could say that her tales, as variable as they were in her old age, were not for the most part true, that they did not record events that had actually taken place? Armed with powder and cosmetic tools, she redrew the lines of her face (Booth and Barakat, 2001, p. 7).

Like overboiled coffee or a mother's discredited reminiscence, public stories drew from the diaries and journals, books and newspapers Makdisi read. A historian concurred, as when Elaine Hagopian wrote: "One can only conclude that the outer glitter of the prosperous, cosmopolitan, and sophisticated Lebanon hid the congenital defects of the Republic which failed when tested by the forces of history" (Hagopian 1978, p. 1). Barakat's *Stone of Laughter* presents two histories of Lebanon via public school teachers, "both in love with nationalistic sentiments and death" (Barakat and Bennet 1995, also Barakat 1990).

Mr. Mufid ("Mr. Convenient"), identified a primordial past for Maronite nationalism to justify Lebanese étatism, placing an ideological quest for "significance" over egalitarian claims of "universalism." The "proud blue coast" is the misplaced object of a small-town schoolteacher's veneration (Phares 1995, Picard 1996). He had been summoned to their distant village as part of a state plan to develop formal education and spread it, effectively, to all parts of the nation. He was bald and feeble, he wore gold-rimmed spectacles and smoked a brand of cigarettes called "OK."

Whenever Mr. Mufid got a little enthusiastic in class, and he usually got a little enthusiastic, the hair on our heads used to stand up and Khalil used to wait for bedtime to come so that he could cry in his bed, out of grief for the raw, fragile peace that weighs heavy on the heart of the nation. Mr. Mufid used to go into elaborate detail about the heroism of the Tyreans and our Phoenician forefathers from the coast, he would often recount the tales about the people of Carthage who defied death and their heroic, martyred leader, as he looked contemptuously at the excited little heads which forgot his hollow cheeks, drowning in the smoke of the OK which rose from the blazing temples filled with the people from the cities the length of the proud, blue coast (Barakat, pp. 109-110).

Mr. Muqbil ("Mr. Progressive"), Khaled's secondary school teacher, is dedicated to the classical register of Arabic and the Hashemite kings' frustrated ambitions. For Muqbil, Lebanon was an Arab country: he mourned that the League of Nations succeeded in Balkanized the Arab world into separate nation-state communities, denying Arabs union:

Khalil was tortured by the suffering of Muqbil, Muqbil who knew no cure save to pronounce the letter qaf as it should be pronounced, to be so serious that he seemed on the verge of despairing of life, bounded by an obstinacy that would not loosen its grip on him unless the borders of the true nation, of Greater Syria, were to suddenly burst apart… only then would we smile in bliss, then may we laugh long and loud. Khalil often used to think about what he could possibly do to alleviate Mr. Muqbil's suffering, to make the class pass quickly. He began to feel embarrassed by his friends and began to hide from them, lest Mr. Muqbil see him in the company of the rabble. He wept for joy and pride one evening, or as a protest against the dark days, when Mr. Muqbil patted him on the shoulder, frowning, with tender eyes…you're something else, Khalil, you'll be something, mark my words (Barakat, pp. 111-112).

Mufid enunciates Lebanese étatism; Muqbil, Sunni Arab nationalism. Mufid and Muqbil refer to the 1932 census's claim that Maronites were a majority among Christians, and Sunnis among Muslims. This population enumeration defined the nature of Lebanon as a state and the Lebanese as citizens. Armed with forms and identification cards, Lebanon's state redrew the lines of her political community. Religious categories served as the basis for civic inclusion. "Foreigners" were left without protection of their property and security, not even the guarantee of another state's passport (Maktabi 1999, Cooke 1987, Cooke 1996, p. 271-273, also Cooke 2002).

Barakat's two characters, Mufid and Muqbil, personify the political basis of Lebanon's postcolonial state. Through the 1943 undocumented "National Pact," Maronite Christians

renounced France's protection, and Sunni Muslims gave up their call for Arab unity. Makdisi's glossary refers to the institutionalization of religious identity as a citizenship category (Abu-Lughod 1983, pp. 358-359; Phares 1995, pp. 68-72; el Khazen 2000):

At ta'ifiyya	confessionalism
At ta'ayush at taifi	harmonious coexistence of the various faiths

Political power in Lebanon has been shared on a confessional basis, with each of the seventeen religious sects and ethnic groups represented in proportion to their weight in the total population. As the demographic proportions have changed, the demand for a change in the power structure has grown. This has been one of the factors of the war. The largest share has been that of the Maronite Christians, closely followed by the Sunnite Muslims and then the Shiite Muslims: the Muslims, in general, and the Shiites, in particular, have been challenging the role of the Maronite supremacy in Lebanese politics, as have other Christian sects. Secularists of all denominations have opposed the system in its entirety; no official census has been taken since 1932, and thus the disputes of sectarian proportion has remained unsolved (pp. 64-65).

Allocating public salaries among the two communities' members, Lebanon's presidency was designated for a Maronite, the Prime Minister's office for a Sunni. Representation in Parliament and the civil service was allocated according to a 6:5 ratio. Makdisi's references to passports, identity papers, and national currencies (p. 8, p. 36) suggest a compelling need to document civic belonging. The system excluded Shi'a—most of whom lived in the south of the country--from proportionality. At the emergence of postcolonial Lebanon, 85 percent of Shi'a were rural residents; most were sharecroppers or agricultural wage laborers. With 20 percent of the adult population, the south was off the national electric grid, did not receive running water, was deficient in telephone services and secondary education (Hagopian 1978, pp. 10-11; Sayigh 1994, p. 161).

Successive Palestinian resettlements in 1948 and 1967 distinguished *"at ta'ifiyya"* from a one-man, one-vote system. Lebanon's state consistently refused to introduce naturalization procedures and forbade UNRWA to replace registration cards, yet property-owning Palestinians (Christians and Sunni Muslims) found they could regularize their residence and employment. Like Shi'a in Lebanon, Palestinians registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) found themselves an underclass outside modernist citizenship.

As Edward Said noted, the Arab world's modern states fail to provide modernist services universally: "In some Arab countries you cannot leave your house and suppose that when and if you return it will be as you left it. For another, you can no longer take for granted that such places as hospitals, schools, and government buildings will function as they do elsewhere, or if they do for a while, that they will continue to do so next week. For a third, you cannot be certain that such recorded, certified, and registered stabilities in all societies—birth, marriage, death—will in fact be noted or in any way commemorated. Rather, most aspects of life are negotiable, not just with money and normal social intercourse, but also with guns and rocket-propelled-grenades" (Said 1989, p. xiv).

While Makdisi justifies her modernist prose by recounting her integration with an Anglophone modernism, she shares specific techniques—reuse of colonial travel prose, fragmentary forms, humor—with those Arab authors writing during Lebanon's civil war. Like other Lebanese novelists, Makdisi is concerned that the modern categories, public and private, disintegrate during civil war. While Makdisi's memoir is a *vitrine* open to Arab writers' experiments in prose form, it blocks their view of public life, concealing Lebanese writers' queries on the nature of political communities.

Just as the shell blasted a hole in Makdisi's dining-room wall and exposed a view of the outside, her war memoir traces statehood and state dissolution through references to postwar

works in English. *Beirut Fragments* returns to images (including shop windows) to display contemporary Lebanese authors' experiments with literary genres, even as some fragmented texts lie beyond this war memoir's scope of vision. Arabophone texts raise nation-states' incomplete patterns of inclusion and exclusion as a problem for residents of the East Mediterranean. Since she wrote in English, Makdisi is free to raise issues regarding Lebanon's postwar reconstruction and governance in the region; such issues enter this text, as others, through references to soccer.

Yet the domestic environment Makdisi describes is characterized by the security of state affiliation. Passports, identity papers, and the national currency are the means by which modern states offer citizens the law's protections. Within her home, Makdisi's sons' leisure is taken by soccer and athletic competition. For other authors resident in Beirut during the 1982 siege, soccer's regional popularity serves as an opportunity to discuss the crisis of governance in the region. Through soccer, Mahmoud Darwish characterizes states' conflict as internal, through displacement of sport over civil society.

Beyond the view from Makdisi's west Beirut balcony, others experienced soccer fields as killing fields. Makdisi evaded blackout from mentioning the Sabra and Shatilla massacres within Lebanese public space by publishing abroad in English (al-Hout 2005, also Kahan 1983, MacBride 1983). Fourteen years later, Bouthaina el Houry published documentation of the Sports City complex as the location for military forces' and militias' slaughter of slum residents.

The piano in Makdisi's living room serves this text as metaphor for the security of citizenship which, while natural for some, is beyond the reach of others. Arab authors, even those writing in English, remark on the piano—like nation-states in the region--as the legacies of nineteenth-century empires. That covered piano in the middle of the room is a key example. To ease communication with those who consume published books and recorded music, for whom a Canadian pianist's name is familiar, Edward Said referred to Glenn Gould. Said used a piano-based metaphor—Gould's decision to release studio recordings, given his interpretive responsiveness to concert audiences—to introduce a concept of "worldliness" to Anglophone audiences (Said 1979, pp. 161-188). Reference to Gould took advantage of the critic's and his readers' common appreciation for recorded music. Likewise, that piano in the middle of Makdisi's living room slides past Anglophone readers as a mark of a stable household, of bourgeois domesticity.

Among Arabophone readers, that piano bears marks. A young Arab man's piano lessons indicated his break with a natal cultural identity (Karmi 1999). For Arab authors writing in English, piano lessons marked upper classes' imperial lifestyles, as much as writing thank-you notes, leaving calling cards, or managing a staff of servants (Antonius 2000, p. 257). For other Arab authors, pianos served as symptoms of the absurdity, the arbitrariness of institutionalized power, deliberate distractions from the everyday tasks of political transformation. May Sayigh told Soraya Antonius that the PLO charter invokes the elevation of women, exclaiming, "Elevation! Even the word (*tarqia*) is wrong and suggests that they're going to teach her to play piano or do watercolors" (Antonious 1979, p. 30).

From its cast-metal soundboard to the wooden case bent under intense steam pressure, pianos are the products of mechanized industry--a mechanized industry foreign to mid-century Arabs. In this, pianos are like nation-states' advanced weapons systems. Lebanon's imports of pianos almost doubled in the four years preceding the civil war ("pianos, harpsichords, keyboard string instruments," $127,729 during 1970 to $332,461 during 1973, not adjusted for inflation, United Nations, Comtrade data base, S1-89141). So, too, did imports of weapons (SIPRI, 1970-1973). During the 1975-1976 civil war, a hooded Phalangist fighter posed for a photographer from the international media, her weapon displayed across the lid of a grand piano (*New York Times,* 4 November 1975; McCullin 1983, pp. 7-8, 12-13; Squiers 1987, p. 389; Karamé 1995; Cooke 2002).

Natural to Makdisi's Anglophone readers, a piano in the middle of the room signifies imperialism's heritage of statist violence to Arabophone readers. Edward Said cautioned: "far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith" (Said 2000, p. 176). In an Arab woman's Beirut memoir, some objects (blanket, pajamas, stuffed toy) are natural points of reference. Pianos are about as natural as nation-states, let us next consider this war memoir's discussion of history.

Designed as anti-tank weapons, they could also be turned against residences' walls.

Like a *billet,* the inscribed fragments of English prose Fisk and other Beirut-based journalist noted are characterized by the "economy of a poem without its elusiveness, and the factuality of a newspaper article without its dry impersonality."(this quote was already used on p. 14) (Cooke 1996, p. 60). As modernists Mencken and Baldwin, the unknown author of such prose fragments deployed a "humorous brutality" that brought down the stones of natal homes:

> MK20, MOD 3, anti-tank bomb cluster DL 2605107
> FSN 325-255-6307-E173
> Lot no 115-6-73
> Bb39824
> Drawing no 69E6389-10 (Fish, 1982).

The 155 mm shell fired by one faction of Lebanon's army on another at the beginning of Makdisi's narrative reappears at the end as the delivery vehicle for U.S.-manufactured cluster bombs. Responsibility for this particular prose fragment lies beyond this Anglophone text, lest "accusation follow accusation and bitterness multiply bitterness" for her North American readers. Let's call it a smudge on the windowpane.

Emily Nasrallah's vignette "Is This A True Story" concerns a narrator (Nasrallah 1992. Disturbed by her children's questions and her neighbors' taunts, she decides a better audience would be more passive, less inquisitive. With regard to the "worldliness" of war narratives, that "the narrator must take others into consideration and engage the expectations of collective remembrance so as to be heard" (Cooke 1988, pp. 62-63), the narrator is constrained by what her audience accepts as natural. Nasrallah's protagonist has to tell the story her way: the audience must remain as passive as the reader of a written text.

Eventually, she finds someone who she thinks may be the perfect listener for her story—a man, his head in his hands. She makes repeated attempts to attract his attention.

She finds that this man, her ideal audience, is dead.

Seeking the police—to tell them this story—she finds that the only kind of story she is permitted to tell is the one others demand: the story of the witness on the dock.

> "Stories don't end," I said to her.
> "What does end?" she asked.
> "The storyteller ends," I answered.
> "You are the storyteller," she said.
> "No. I am the story" (Khoury and Haydar 1996, p. 7).

We have noted Makdisi naturalizes Arabophone writers' experiments with prose fragments for Anglophone readers, yet aspects of the memoir respond to North American readers' expectations. In addition to the assumption that a piano is reassuring, citizenship is natural,

and that national communities are inclusive, Anglophone readers may expect a war memoir to be distant from and alien to "the nation of equal justice before the law."

Edward Said's concept of "worldliness," is an idea that any individual text exists only through the exclusion of other texts. While Makdisi devotes a few lines to discussion of the appearance in the 1982 conflict of weapons proscribed by the world community ("we listened angrily to news reports of debates in the United States about whether or not the wide use by Israel of cluster bombs was defensive and therefore legal," p. 163), such weapons' other texts remind readers that language is a "priceless instrument of power."

Recalling Said's "all texts essentially displace, dislodge other texts, or, more frequently, … take the place of something else," that "texts are fundamentally facts of power, not a democratic exchange," an Anglophone discussion of cluster weapons avoids the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" of these weapons' manufacture. Robert Fisk notes cluster bombs' smooth plastic casing was ornamented with yellow strips along its length. Such *billets* were not unfamiliar to Makdisi's dining room. "Still packed neatly in their delivery system, an ordinary 155 mm shell, they eject in separate batches of 50 each on the descending trajectory, to spread over as wide an area as possible" (Hirst, 30 June 1982).

Through *Beirut Fragments'* references to shop windows, pianos, and soccer, Makdisi's text overlaps other Anglophone and Arabophone texts. Makdisi, challenged to read certain documents as "history;" her far-from-ideal audience engages with the terms of her art.Like a plastic Virgin on the road to Karantina, this *War Memoir* stands at a crossroads between modernist works in Arabic and English.

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