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Conflict, Adversity, and Dislocation in Three Contemporary Children's Novels

الصّراع و المحنة و التّهجير في ثلاثة أعمال من أدب الطفل المعاصر

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Authorization

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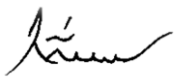

Committee Decision

This Thesis entitled, **"Conflict, Adversity, and Dislocation in Three Contemporary Children's Novels"** was successfully defended on 22 / 05 /2023

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Dedication

To my late grandparents, Jeddo Abdullatif, and my parents to whom we belonged when belonging became a challenge.

To my family in Jordan, the Gulf States, and Turkey, and to the friends we made and continue to make from all beloved countries of the Arab world- and the rest of the world.

And to Jordan; the brave, generous, ever-hospitable, and home.

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Conflict, Adversity, and Dislocation in Three Works of Contemporary Children's Literature

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Abstract

This thesis tackles the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation in three contemporary children's works by Elizabeth Laird. These works are *Oranges in No Man's Land* (2006), *Kiss the Dust* (2007), and *Welcome to Nowhere* (2017). It explores the aforementioned themes through the lens of trauma theory, and studies how the child characters in the works are affected by these themes. The thesis concludes with an analogy that compares and contrasts the way the three works depict and represent the themes, and the characters' interaction with these themes. The thesis finds that the depiction of the themes in question in the selected works, to an extent, corresponds with scientific and literary studies, as well as with reports from organizations that are concerned with refugee issues, which are mentioned in the thesis. This study recommends further research to be conducted on the representation of children refugees in refugee literature set in the Middle East, as well as more research to investigate the representation of trauma and melancholia in children's literature and the appropriate ways to integrate children's literature with solemn themes into classroom readings.

Keywords: Contemporary Children's Literature, Trauma Theory, Elizabeth Laird, *Oranges in No Man's Land, Kiss the Dust, Welcome to Nowhere*

الصراع و المحنة و التهجير في ثلاثة أعمال من أدب الطفل المعاصر

إعداد: لَميس حسّان الزّعيم

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المُلَخّص

تتناول هذه الدّراسة موضوعات الصّراع و المحنة و التّهجير في ثلاثة أعمال من أدب الطفل المعاصر للكاتبة إليزابيث لايرد؛ هذه الأعمال هي "برتقالات في الأرض الحرام" (2006)، " لثم التّراب" (2007)، و "أهلاً بكم في اللّا-مكان" (2017). تناقش الدّراسة هذه الموضوعات في إطار مفاهيم من نظرية الصّدمة النّفسية، و كيفية تأثّر شخصيات الأطفال في الأعمال بهذه الموضوعات، بالإضافة لطرق تعاملهم معها. تختتم الدّراسة بمقارنة تبيّن أوجه الشّبه و الاختلاف بين الأعمال الثّلاثة فيما يخص طريقة تمثيل الموضوعات السّابق ذكرها و بعض النواحي الكتابية الأخرى كالسّرد و غيرها فيها. تجد الدراسة أن تمثيل الموضوعات السابق ذكرها في الأعمال المتناولة يوافق نتائج و توصيات الدراسات العلمية و الأدبية، و تقارير المنظمات العالمية و الباحثين في مجال شؤون اللاجئين و أدب الطفل المعاصر المذكورة في الرسالة؛ و توصي بإجراء أبحاث أكثر في ما يخص تمثيل الأطفال في أدب اللاجئين الذي يتناول قصص من الشرق الأوسط، بالإضافة إلى التوسع في الأبحاث التي تتناول الصدمة النفسية في أدب الطفل المعاصر و كيفية توظيف أدب الطفل المعاصر الذي يتناول موضوعات مشابهة كالصراع و المحنة و التهجير في قراءات الغرف الصفية بمختلف الطرق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدب الطفل المعاصر، نظرية الصدمة النفسية، إليزابيث لايرد، "برتقالات في الأرض الحرام"، "لثم التراب"، "أهلاً بكم في اللا-مكان"

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The world of children's fiction is relatively as young as its audience, when put in the context of the history of literature. Anderson (2006) proposes two opinions on when its birth may be pinpointed. The first claims it was in the second half of the eighteenth century with John Newberry's *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes*, which was published in 1765, while the other argues that it was marked later in 1856, when Charles Dodgson released his children's classic novel entitled *Alice in Wonder Land* under the Pseudonym Lewis Carroll. In either case, it was late in the journey of fiction, when works written specifically for children to read, began to emerge for pure entertainment purposes of younger audiences. Before this point, the available material for child readership to enjoy consisted of literature based on folklore and adult novels with appealing and age-appropriate themes (Anderson 2006). Also, like its target audience, children's fiction seemed to develop and change rapidly in terms of different aspects, like its purpose, topics, themes, and the way it was received and perceived; beginning with a didactic purpose and branching into all sorts of entertainment, education, and other purposes. It took its first steps with tentative and moderate themes, then moved into the representation of all sorts of serious political, economic, social and other kinds of solemn issues (Meek 2004).

For a long time, scholars regarded children's literature as lowbrow reading material with light themes, which in turn meant it was thought unworthy of academic attention (Hunt 2002; Meek 2004). Debunking this view, in his composition *The Impossibility of Innocence: Ideology, Politics, and Children's Literature*, Sarland (2002) explains how children's

literature is not voided of the influence of major conflicts and controversies, and empathizes the inseparability of literature and ideology even in simple texts like children books. Hunt (2002), writer, and editor of more than eleven books on children's literature, argues against the marginalization of children's books, and claims that they are as complex and significant as fiction which is written for adults, having their own valid and intellectual readership, and influence. This means that despite the dreamy and dissociative feel that titles like *Alice in Wonder Land* may convey, children's literature, like all literature, is affected and shaped by the surrounding social and political states of its times (Daniels 2020). Contemporary children's fiction is no different, and it is politically and ideologically driven.

Despite the ongoing debate on whether introducing devastating and darker themes in children's fiction is age-appropriate or healthy for the psychological development of younger readers (Tribunella 2010), there is a strong movement encouraging their discussion to help children deal with, understand, and develop their awareness and perception of these themes (Tribunella 2010; Balaev 2014; Davis & Meretoja 2020). The argument in favor of the representation of darker and more solemn themes in children's literature is based on the idea that children today are more and more exposed to violence, trauma, stress, and other types of conflict and adversity in real life. They inevitably interact with these situations and process them in their day-to-day life or through peers' experience, or different media platforms. Additionally, reading about the themes of conflict and adversity in narrative form, where the characters deal with difficult and extreme situations in their journeys can serve as a form of aid in processing and overcoming such situations or experiences through what researchers call "Bibliotherapy'', which is the use of books as a way of treating and processing mental and emotional struggles and conditions (Lowe 2009).

Research seems to show that contemporary children's fiction already houses the themes in question. The research paper entitled *Trauma in Children's Literature* proves with qualitative analysis of a few children's works that the themes of childhood trauma, or extreme experiences and circumstances that damage the psyche are extensively present in this type of literature and that their representation is not constricted to didactic purposes, but is rather more true to representing the way such events and situations would be experienced in real life (Ross 2020).

Furthermore, it can be seen from different contemporary examples, and from different sorts of genres how deep serious themes can be, and have been represented in varying techniques, styles, and intensities for younger audiences. For example, dystopian teenager fiction discussing the darker ends that human neglect will lead the world into, often makes use of allegorical and symbolic representation, as is the case in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series (2011-2014), which tackles social issues such as classicism through a parallel fictional concept and plot (Svensson 2021). On the other hand, works like Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005) make use of magical realism, where supernatural elements seamlessly blend into a realistic setting and narrative, as a vehicle to communicate the horrifying experiences of war and death (Bladfors 2015). But even with a great number of literary techniques and writing methods available, some children's authors keep to the realist tradition and choose to write and represent their themes and stories in a true-to-life manner that depicts the realness as it is (Ross 2020). One of those contemporary authors that manage to entertain readers' minds with realistic stories and profound themes is Elizabeth Laird (British Council 2022; Laird 2017).

Elizabeth Laird is an award-winning English children's literature author, whose literary works were translated into fifteen different languages. She often sets her narratives in conflict zones, or conflicted settings, such as a house with domestic violence or issues with addiction, or in war zones like countries in the Middle East and Africa. She has her young characters go through tragic events like the loss of a parent, civil war, or involuntary dislocation and forced immigration and tells the story of how they navigate their gritty survival through the aftermath of such situations. Usually, these events are based on contemporary situations and conflicts in the real world. Laird tends to introduce solemn and deep themes, which she unravels in facilitated language and acrobatic expression that entertain and communicate with young readers' minds. By doing so, she provides a base for the journey of understanding the complexities and tangles of profound, on-going controversies (British Council 2022). These complexities and controversies implicitly and explicitly affect the modern world, how we perceive it, and how we live and interact with other human beings within it because of them (Lowe 2009). In the author's letter, in her novel *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), Laird also states that she attempts to humanize similar stories, and to prompt her readers to take action in regard to these issues by writing about them.

Laird sets a few of her novels in the Middle East, three of which are the narratives that this study tackles. In the introduction to her novel *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007), she states that the refugee stories from the Middle East are universal stories that represent the lack of choice for people escaping oppression and war in search of peace and safety away from home in different parts of the world. Her book, *Oranges in No Man's Land (2006*), is set during the Lebanese civil war in Beirut and told from the first-person perspective of Ayesha who has to

take a grand risk of crossing no man's land to the other end of the city, where the opposing party in the civil war reigns, to secure medications for her dying grandmother before it is too late. While *Kiss the Dust* (2007) revolves around Kurdish twelve-year-old Tara and her family's journey in escaping the terrors of the civil war in Iraq. And finally, *Welcome to Nowhere* (2017) tells the story of how Omar, a twelve-year-old Syrian boy, who is aspiring to be a successful businessman, while juggling two jobs alongside his schoolwork during his day, suddenly finds out that he has to carry his dreams from one place to another until he ends up as a refugee in Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, fleeing the civil war in his home country.

The selected works are all works of contemporary children's literature which are set in conflict zones in the Middle East, and with plots that revolve around young protagonists living through a civil war in their home country, and having to deal with the aftermath of such events, while also having to deal with other internal struggles and family issues. The depiction of these tragedies, and how the young protagonists deal with them or tell their story is realistic and true to their weight and seriousness. However, it is most subtly woven to portray the adversity, terror, and hardship that such traumatic events bring. It invokes empathy and assimilation, and helps raise questions in the reader's mind about these issues and themes, but without scarring the young reader's mind or causing damage to their emotional state and memory.

The rationale behind choosing these works by this particular author can be summed in a few points. To begin with, the narratives are rich with universal themes that make it easy for children readers, who are not familiar with such conflicts, to engage and indulge

personally with the stories. Moreover, the author experienced the conflicts in the Middle East; because she lived and travelled in the area extensively and interacted with the culture, the places, and the suffering of people there, and she chose to write about the children of the Middle East to child audiences all around the world. Finally, the author is recognized and celebrated with multiple rewards for an extensive bibliography of works that deal with key concepts and themes and presents them to young audiences (British Council 2022). Despite this fact, there seems to be a lack in research material analyzing her work as is evident in the literature review chapter in this study.

This study examines how the themes in question are addressed in contemporary children's literature, using these novels as examples for exploration. This is to contribute to the political discourse, and spread awareness and understanding amongst teachers, parents, children, and all the parties involved in consuming children's literature on the experiences of refugee and immigrant children, and perhaps stir a call to action amongst authors, publishers, and parties involved in producing children's literature to create and support more stories that help children understand, empathize with, and embrace others who might have experienced similar traumatic events around them. It is also to give children, who suffered through similar situations a way of healing their trauma, and giving them a sense of belongingness by representing them in literary works (Ross 2020).

1.2. Statement of the Study

This study explores the representation of themes such as adversity, conflict, and dislocation in the selected children's novels by Elizabeth Laird. This is done through the lens of trauma

theory, with a particular focus on how the child characters are affected by these themes. By analyzing the similarities and differences between the works, this study also explores the different ways in which these themes could be depicted in children's literature and their potential impact on young readers.

1.3. Questions of the study

The study answers the following questions:

- How are the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation represented in the selected children's novels through the lens of trauma theory?
- How are the children characters affected by conflict, adversity, and dislocation?
- How are the three works similar and different in relation to the representation of the mentioned themes?

1.4. Objectives

This study answers these questions by

- Exploring the ways in which the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation are represented through the lens of trauma theory in the selected novels.
- Exploring how the characters are affected by adversity, conflict, and dislocation.
- Contrasting and comparing the three works in terms of the representation of the mentioned themes by the author.

1.5. Significance of the study

To begin with, an extensive search through the previous literature could prove that little research is conducted on the three novels tackled in this study, and the academic papers and studies discussing them are limited to single papers, and brief teachers and parents' book reviews and study notes. The same could be noted about the author, despite having a rich bibliography consisting of forty-eight books stretching in publication over the span of more than twenty years and earning the recognition of more than ten awards. Laird's works seem to be given scarce attention from researchers and academics. This could be due to the fact that she writes for children as an audience, when research in children's literature continues to lack proper validation from scholars like children's literature itself (Hunt 2004), which makes adding to the field of children's fiction research that is as important as its adult equivalent (Meek 2004) another argument in favor of the significance of this paper. Finally, the existing research on the selected themes tackled in children's refugee and diaspora books is about narratives and events set in places and with conflicts and characters different than the conflict zones and children or refugee characters from or in the countries of the Middle East in these novels in specific, so this study brings the representation of this area and characters to academic attention.

1.6. Limitations

This piece of research is limited to the time of its writing, and to the author Elizabeth Laird, and her selected works; *Oranges in No Man's Land* (2006), *Kiss the Dust* (2007), and *Welcome to Nowhere* (2017). The conclusions of this particular study cannot be universalized or generalized to other works representing the tackled themes and topics.

1.7. Definitions

- Children's Literature

The definition of children's literature is an age-long conundrum that requires extensive philosophical, linguistic, and literary discussion of the definition of both the concept of "the child" and of "literature". Definitions of both terms are affected by the cultural, social, historical, scientific, and philosophical contexts in which they are discussed; in other words, their meaning may change across different fields of knowledge and science. This also invokes a debate on the correctness of the use of the term "children's literature" or "children's fiction" to refer to the works in question (Meek 2004). However, within the context of this study the terms "children's literature" and "children's fiction" are used interchangeably to refer to what Anderson briefly defines as "[…] literature for youth from birth through age 13 […]" (Anderson 2006, p. 3). Anderson also defines literature intended for young adults who are the age of thirteen through to eighteen as adolescent or young adult literature and states that the line between children's and young adult's literature is often arbitrary, especially as child readers make reading selections without regard to this separating line (2006). Furthermore, Anderson (2006) also states that these reading levels defined by publishing houses are approximate and flawed because they do not take into consideration the prior knowledge of the young reader. Anderson concludes that modern children's literature is defined by its pure focus entertainment purposes as a primary function and no direct focus on morals or lessons (2006).

- Civil War

Another similarly controversial concept of which definition remains a point of debate is Civil War. Girsovitz and Kriger (2013) propose the definition "a politically organized, large-scale, sustained, physically violent conflict that occurs within a country principally among large/numerically important groups of its inhabitants or citizens over the monopoly of physical force within the country" (pp. 160 – 161). For the purposes of this study, and without going into detail in terms of what features may validate an armed conflict within a country as a civil war; armed conflict with no foreign parties involved, and amongst parties within the same geo-political borders will be discussed under the term civil war; as well as any conflict referred to with the term within the context of the novels analyzed in this study.

- Contemporary literature

This paper relies on Peck and Coyle's discussion of the era in their book A *Brief History of English Literature* (2013) to define contemporary literature as the works of literature produced after the events of 9/11, or since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

- Conflict

Conflict on the other hand, within the context of this paper, and for the purposes of analyzing the concepts' presence as a theme in the novels, refers to what Prasad (2011) defines in his article "Children in Conflict Zones" as "war or political instability that disrupts essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, sanitation, water, and health care which requires the response of people outside of the community affected" (Prasad 2011, p. 1). In other words, it is an extreme situation that disturbs the flow of life and requires the

victims to adapt to and deal with difficult circumstances in which they are deprived of basic human needs and rights.

- Refugees, Immigrants, and Asylum-Seekers

In relation to the terms "refugee", "immigrant", and "asylum-seeker", each of them has a different meaning depending on the circumstances and motives of relocation or immigration (Nicholson and Kumin 2017), but because the characters' experiences in the novel are in blurry grey spaces between the circumstances detailed in these definitions, and because in two of the novels there is more than one relocation, these terms might be used interchangeably to refer to characters that experienced geographical relocation due to surrounding or near situations of conflict or war.

- Dislocation

The ambiguity of the term dislocation within the context of literature might convey a fusion of two different meanings that are related, and will both be discussed in the analysis of the depiction of the theme in the selected novels for the paper. The first of which refers to the physical movement away from home whether forced or self-inflicted, as in the case of refugees and immigrants, while the second refers to the consequential melancholic or dark emotions and discomforts that come with such a movement, such as feelings of loss, displacement and alienation among others (Warren 2016).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents an overview of the relevant previous research literature on the topics and themes that are related to this study, as well the selected novels from different angles and points of view found through extensive research.

2.1 Children as Refugees, and Children in Conflict Zones

This section provides an overview of the situation of children in the context of adversity, conflict, and dislocation in real-life in an attempt to construct a solid understanding of the argument of this study. Since literature is a reflection of life, having an idea about the source of the reflection will pave the way for a more tangible and reasoned conceptualization of the reflection.

To begin with, the United Nations' 2017 Handbook of Parliamentarians discusses how displacement in the contemporary times has developed more complicated factors due to the rise in violence, conflict, human rights violations rates, and their interrelation with ethnic and religious disputes. They state that the percentage of children refugees is half of the world's total number of refugees, and that there are still no clear-cut solutions for the continuous rise in numbers of refugees (Nicholson and Kumin 2017).

Furthermore, in terms of children in the context of taking refuge or being forced into exile, Doughty and Thompson (2011) discuss how children have no agency or choice in terms of relocating or leaving their homes, and that it is usually in the hands of adults. They discuss how children exist within a hierarchy that places them in a position inferior to adults, that they may even be perceived as colonized by adults. Furthermore, children in exile locate in

complexities in relation to place where they have to constantly question where their true home lies, and they have to adapt and compromise in terms of cultural differences.

In case of children, who fail to escape the terrors of civil wars in their countries and take refuge elsewhere, Prasad (2011) lists a few of the devastating circumstances and challenges that children in conflict zones are prone to, including psychological problems, health problems, gender based violence, land mines, and homelessness. He discusses the possibility of deficiency in brain development and cognitive functions inflicted by severe childhood trauma, the higher risks of complex psychological and emotional problems in children from conflict zones, and their higher possibility of resorting to substance abuse.

In addition to casualties and issues directly caused by armed conflict, Prasad (2011) states that millions lose their lives to the indirect brutalities of war, such as food shortage, damage to water infrastructure and health services, and destruction of systems of sanitation. In his discussion of each challenge, he lists recommendations to reduce the effects of conflict on children. In this sense, he argues that the media's coverage of conflict and attacks should be entirely restricted to children under the age of six, and highly limited to children of younger ages. Parents, educators, and guardians should make effort to ensure and assure children's safety from these conflicts. On the other hand, critics, literary theorists, and psychoanalysts argue in favor of the representation of conflict, adversity, and childhood trauma in media and literary material intended for child audiences. The researcher agrees with representing these themes in children's literature in moderation and through clever depiction based on the following arguments, and the findings of the analysis of the selected works.

2.2 The Selected Themes, and Trauma Theory in Relation to Children's Literature

In the introduction to *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature* (2010), Tribunella proposes the necessity of trauma in achieving a mature adulthood, and argues that its representation in literature prompts maturation. He narrates how childhood has become safer in modern times, and children became more and more domesticated and supervised, but the role of trauma remains essential to their growth that real-life trauma needed to be replaced with artificial stimulations in staged situations like organized sports, amusement parks, literature, and film.

Tribunella (2010) does not negate the existence of trauma in children's fiction written before the middle of the twentieth century, nor does he claim that literature before that time was void of or lacking in representations of melancholia or trauma. And Johnstone's study from 1995, republished in 2021, about children's fiction set during the Second World War is proof to this presence of such themes earlier on. Johnstone (1995) discusses the themes of evacuation, dislocation, overcoming adversity, the changes to different child's relationships, and the negative effects of social marginalization and isolation on children underwent during the war, to deem the literature written about children from a past time as sufficient to the intellectual and emotional needs of the modern child. He argues how the adversities and terrors of conflict, evacuation, and dislocation usually had no permanent or lasting effects on fictional characters in children's fiction, and how optimism and positivity were advocated for even in darker and harsher contexts. Characters would eventually adapt to their new lives and environments and overcome hardship. They usually succeed in doing so with the aid of

recurrent factors, such as close familial bonds strengthened by the war, supportive parents, making friends, and self-discovery.

However, in the coda of his book, Tribunella (2010) explains that trauma became more prevalent in children's literature during the second half of the twentieth century. He elaborates on this idea in the book's coda, suggesting a two-fold reasoning behind it. Firstly, he discusses from a historical perspective how the perception and conception of childhood changed drastically after the world wars, with factors such as the rise of interest in child psychology, the awareness of children's vulnerability to micro pathogens, and the investigation and reporting of potential dangers threatening children everywhere from the streets to their own homes. There was also the focus on the numbers of children mortalities caused by accidents, the war against child labor, and the deepening of the value of each individual child life in the eyes of society as a result of the drop in birth rates that took place around that time. All of these factors contributed in constructing a view of children as easily damaged, and sacred; and of childhood as romantic period of idyllic innocence and play. From there, literature became more invested in the themes of trauma, physical injury, and loss, to substitute real-life experiences necessary for maturation and to battle extreme overprotectiveness, parental anxieties, and severe domestication of children (Tribunella 2010).

Furthermore, Tribunella (2010) explains from a theoretical perspective, the cathartic effect of embodied experiences surrounding children’s sense of their bodies and their anxieties about them, and how reading about them induces a sense of mastery over their bodies and emotions through the aesthetic effects of melancholia and sacrifice. In other

words, children find in literature instruction about, expression of, and elevation from their anxieties communicated through protagonists' physical injuries, limitations or deformities.

In accordance with Tribunella's views, Lowe (2009) discusses how literature that tells stories of conflict, adversity, and different kinds of traumatizing and serious situations serves in helping children cope with and understand these sensitive issues. She points out that this benefit is not limited to child readers who are directly affected by these sensitive situations, but it also opens doors for their peers to form a better understanding of the world. She also argues that discussing similar literature in the classroom may help educators in forming insight on, and building safe channels of, communication with children that might be struggling with sensitive situations or their aftermath.

In this regard, in the introduction to the book entitled *Multicultural Children's Literature: A Critical Issues Approach*, Gopalakrishnan (2011) agrees with the utility of representing solemn issues in children literature, and calls for a critical literacy approach to children's literature to enable children in developing more comprehensive, empathetic, and accepting conceptualization of today's complex and conflicted world. Additionally, Tartar (2008), in her chapter in *Under Fire: Childhood in the Shadow of War*, also calls for a new literary culture that undermines the overprotectiveness of modern life and states how children encounter truths about life in books, as it helps them widen their awareness and see the world from different angles, and also helps them have compassion and have the courage to brave through the ups and downs of their life. Balaev (2014) also refers Laury Vickory's ideation of the same points in the introduction of her book *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* briefing on Vickory's chapter in the same book, and stating that literature

produces the effects of fully-rounded understanding of extreme experience and of factors that construct a survivor's personality, the social aspects of individual's cognition, and invoking compassion and understanding in the reader towards survivors.

Similarly, and with an added touch of pedagogical enthusiasm, Monobe and Son (2014) discuss the role of global literature in shaping children's multidimensional understanding about global conflicts and matters, and raising their awareness in terms of their different effects on the world. They show how global narratives enable children to accept diversity, nurture tolerance, and develop empathy. They list a bibliography of works that tackle the themes of people undergoing conflict, political war, relocation, and resettlement directed to child and young audiences filtered with a criterion that the researchers arranged for each category. They followed the lists up with a number of classroom activities to facilitate the discussion of chosen works with students and helping them understand their content and ideas. And they concluded by stating the importance of incorporating similar literature alongside drama in the process of raising a more responsible and aware generation that understands different political conflicts and topical world issues that affect others. This, they argue, will deconstruct conceptions of 'Self' and 'Otherness' and open doors for a more inclusive perspective on the citizens of the world, thus children will no longer be in a situation or position where they become refugees based on their identity.

From another perspective on the themes and more recommendations on their representation, but this time concerning its manner rather than mere practice, Gu and Catalano (2022) explore the representation of immigrant children in children books and how conceptions about immigrants are transmitted through the co-workings of text and illustration

in different children's books. They found reoccurring major themes in the books they studied including decontextualized and backgrounded homelands and compromise of identity among others. They discuss that though there are positive representations of some aspects of immigrant children, there are many negative or false underlying conceptions in these representations. In their conclusion, they encourage a more empathetic representation that comes as close to the immigrant child character as narrating from their first person perspective.

2.3 Studies Conducted on Elizabeth Laird's Selected Novels

Starting with *Oranges in No Man's Land*, in his paper Giving Voice at a Price (2016), Masud discusses how the novel succeeds in balancing the reader's view on different sides of the Lebanese civil war despite being told from the first person perspective of a child on one side of the story. However, he argues that Laird still falls into the traps of different cultural stereotypes about the Middle East in her narrative, such as religious extremism and ethnic violence. He highlights the deficiencies of the novel in providing a solid, true-to-reality cultural representation, and building its characters and plot based on a more comprehensive background on the lives and experiences of the majority of people in the area. In this sense, Masud finds that the narrative tells only parts of the whole story, which fail to provide the western reader with the tools to construct a well-developed, round view on the reality of the Middle East and its people. He juxtaposes Laird's work with prominent Arab young adult and children's literature authors' works to contrast how Arab authors weave complex, profound characters and insightful narratives that paint Arab children and youth as more than mere helpless victims of the political and religious restlessness of the area. He argues in this sense that non-Arab authors' representation of Arab children may disrupt the truth of how

Arab youth are no different or less than their western counterparts. Furthermore, he commends Laird's attempts to draw attention to important Arab causes and topics, but he calls for more diversity and variety in terms of the themes, subjects, and topics tackled in western children's literature about the Middle East.

Moving to *Kiss the Dust*, Alashqar (2022) provides a reading of the novel within the frame of Martin Luther King's three strategies of resistance; violence, acquiescence, and non-violence, to point out how the novel advocates for non-violence. He breaks down different forms of resistance present in the novel in accordance with his theoretical framework. He explains that violence, depicted through the armed resistance of the *pesh murgas* fails to end the oppression it fights against, and only breeds more violence and war. Acquiescence, on the other hand, is seen in the family's time in the refugee camp in Iran where they are prone to dehumanizing treatment and stressful circumstances, but are thankful to be together. Finally, non-violence is depicted through the characters' endurance of the circumstances of the refugee camp, in immigration, and in holding on to memories of home even in exile. Alashqar (2022) concludes that Laird succeeded in giving voice to the wishes of the Kurds for survival and peaceful coexistence.

The only presence of *Welcome to Nowhere* in Academia at the time of writing this paper is in different chapters of Grzegorczyk's *Terror and Counter-Terror in Contemporary British Children's Literature* (2020), where the novel is discussed as an example of depicting the effects of emotional and psychological effects of displacement of characters experiencing geographical and cultural marginalization, and of war and terror on non-western children.

Furthermore, the only research papers related to chosen works available at the time of writing this study are the papers listed above. The writer's other works with the Middle East as a setting received more academic attention in recent years. For example, her novel on the conflict in Palestine *A Little Piece of Ground* (2003) was tackled in research from different aspects. Three of these are in which Masud (2016) tackle the representation of Arab children and the Arab world in the novel. The narrative techniques in the novel were discussed in an article in *The International Society for Children's Literature* Journal (2008); and the novel was analysed as a bildungsroman in *"A Little Piece Of Ground" through Bildungsroman Approach* (Abdelghany n.d.).

This thesis contributes to the existing research on children's literature in several ways. Firstly, it explores the ways in which trauma theory concepts can be applied to the analysis of children's literature, in addition to analyzing different ways of integrating and representing solemn themes like conflict, adversity, and dislocation to a younger audience. Secondly, it provides an analysis of the three chosen children's novels that deal with themes of adversity, conflict, and displacement, adopting a trauma theory lens, and working to develop an understanding of how trauma affects child characters in these novels. This contributes to the scarce academic material available on both the books and the author in question. Finally, by comparing and contrasting these novels, the thesis highlights similarities and differences in the representation of trauma and its effects on child characters from the Middle East. This sheds light on the unique challenges that child refugees from the Middle East face, and the ways in which trauma affects their experiences. This is done with a focus on the character's resilience and ability to deal with their trauma and continue to live life with a positive outlook and determination.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides insight on the method and concepts used in analyzing and understanding the works in question. It also outlines the framework in which the researcher conducted the analysis. Moreover, it provides notes on the chosen theory, and brief summaries of the chosen works, which facilitate reading the analysis chapter utilizing the study's focus points in applying the theory to the novels.

3.1 Method

The three novels are analysed through the lens of trauma theory. This is because trauma theory provides a valuable lens to analyze the representation of adversity, conflict, and displacement in children's refugee literature. It also helps in understanding how trauma is portrayed in literature and how it affects the experiences and behaviors of child characters. In addition to trauma theory's lens, the novels are approached to draw an analogy between them as they are written by the same author on a similar set of themes and subsequently have a lot in common.

Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary theory which concerns itself, in the context of literature, in the effect of atrocity and catastrophe on individuals and groups that experience such extreme circumstances. It studies how literature tackles the personal and cultural narratives on traumatic experiences and how these narratives interact. In this sense, it provides a framework to understand the details of the exploration, representation, and communication of traumatic experiences through literature (Davis and Meretoja 2020). Although this theory developed in origin to resolve the challenges in understanding, communicating, and representing the trauma of the holocaust (Davis and Meretoja, 2020), it

is also applicable to survivors of other topical conflicts and those who suffer atrocity and abuse (Upstone 2017).

According to Courtois (2014), traumatic events disrupt an individual's sense of safety and result in enduring effects that affect various aspects of their functioning. This theory also emphasizes the need to understand how trauma influences cognition, emotion regulation, and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, trauma theory acknowledges the role of posttraumatic growth and maturation in the aftermath of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It recognizes that while trauma can have devastating effects, individuals also have the capacity to heal, grow, and find meaning in the face of adversity. This perspective highlights the importance of fostering resilience and providing supportive environments that facilitate individuals' recovery and growth following traumatic experiences.

There are different views on the nature of the connection between literature and trauma. However, all trauma theorists agree that literature is capable of dealing with different traumatic experiences with particularity and is able to highlight the exclusive nature of each experience in its cultural and social contexts (Davis and Meretoja 2020). Furthermore, there are concepts and fallacies in the early developmental stages of trauma theory that may prompt a victim culture or market pain, or trap survivors in a vicious cycle of repetition rather than taking active steps towards dealing with and healing their trauma, or deny them the comfort of sharing their stories (Davis and Meretoja 2020). For the purpose of this study, these concepts are overlooked in favour of a more reformative and hopeful outlook on the questions of representation of trauma in children’s literature. This stems from the interdisciplinary psychological and cultural concept of resilience which explains a characteristic, pattern of

behaviour, and process displaying survivors' strength and ability to thrive and survive after their traumatic displacements (Isaken and Vejling 2018).

Relevant Definitions and Concepts from Trauma Theory

- Latency: a term to explain how trauma is not experienced in the time of its occurrence, but rather in the time it is remembered. In other words, trauma is not found in the event that caused it, but in the effect of such an event (Upstone 2017).
- Repetition: a person with trauma will continue to search for a comprehensive and whole experience of their trauma through repetition of its not fully experienced effect in its time (Caruth 1996 cited in Isaken and Vejling 2018).
- Witnessing: repeating and processing traumatic experiences becomes an act of testimony in which the subject simultaneously narrates the experience and lives it for the first time (Felman and Laub 1992 in Isaken and Vejling 2018).
- Isaken and Vejling (2018) also discuss how trauma affects refugees within the frame of three phases. These phases are pre-displacement, displacement, and post-displacement. They state that the post-displacement phase might be as traumatizing to individuals as the displacement itself, having to go through struggles like foreign language acquisition and adaptation to a new culture among others. They also introduce the concept of resilience as a means to understanding refugees' abilities to adapt to traumatic experiences and to re-attain biological, psychological, and spiritual balance.

3.2. Summaries of the Selected Works

Oranges in No Man's Land is the story of 10-year-old Ayesha and what's left of her family in the Lebanese civil war. Narrating from first-person point of view, Ayesha tells the reader

how she lost both her home and her mother in a bombing, and had to flee with her old grandmother and two younger siblings to a safer place. They end up as refugees in the ruins of homes that belonged to rich people who fled the war. With a dead mother and an absent father, young Ayesha and her grandmother are left with the responsibility of taking care of the two younger boys. They meet a kind lady called Zeinab who aids them and provides them with a place to stay, and Ayesha and Zeinab's mute daughter, Samar, become good friends. Ayesha's grandmother begins to get severely ill due to running out of her medications, and finally goes into a coma-like state. Everyone begins to think the grandmother would die, and other women start helping Ayesha in taking care of her. Terrified for her grandmother, and of having to take care of her younger siblings alone, Ayesha makes her mind to cross no man's land into the opposing side of town to find her grandmother's doctor, Leila, and get her medications. Ayesha succeeds in crossing into the other side and finding the doctor's house after going through hesitance, fear, and more than one risky situation with militiamen and people from the opposing party in the civil war. Doctor Leila arranges for her to go home in a UN ambulance to be safe, and she brings her grandmother the medications that help her in becoming better and regaining her strength.

Ayesha's friend, Samar, leaves with her mother to her uncle's house leaving Ayesha lonely and heartbroken, and years later, Ayesha's father finds her and her siblings and takes them back to "normal'' life (Laird 2006).

Kiss the Dust begins with an incident that opens 13-year-old Tara Khan's eyes to the civil war in Iraq; a boy is shot down by soldiers in the market for distributing flyers in front of her, and a Mullah is shot for trying to calm the soldiers down in Sulaimaniya. She goes

home to hear the truth of the situation between the reigning government and the Kurds from her mother. That same night her uncle Rostam, a pesh murga fighter, breaks into their house injured. Her mother helps him out and hides him, and the next day her father and her grandmother arrive from Baghdad. The family receives a warning that the government is after Kak Soran, Tara's father, for being involved with the pesh murgas, so they all arrange to make an escape to the mountains of Kurdistan over-night. Her brother and father leave with her uncle, and Tara and her mother and younger sister escape the following day with the help of their neighbour. They live in the mountains peacefully for a while where Tara struggles to belong or make sense of what is going on, and just as she starts to adapt to the situation, the government starts shelling the mountain villages including the one where they live, and Tara and her brother Ashti who joined the pesh murgas are injured. The family then decides to make another journey to escape the war. They set off to cross the borders to Iran in a life-threatening, high-risk journey. In Iran, they find themselves in a refugee camp where Ashti decides to return home to his uncle to avoid listing in the Iranian army, and her mother falls ill. They survive in the camp, but as they lose hope in finding decent jobs to support themselves, they decide to make one last journey to Europe. They make to London, where Tara finds herself up against new struggles with trying to belong and having difficulty with the language, as well as battling homesickness and concern for her brother back home. She gets used to her new life across the years, learns English, and establishes friendships and a sense of belonging, and towards the end of the novel the family receives news of near arrival of Ashti in London (Laird 2007).

In *Welcome to Nowhere*, twelve-year-old Omar from Bosra, Syria dreams of having his own profitable business while juggling his schoolwork and his two jobs at relatives'

shops. His father who works as a civil servant in Tourism gets transferred to the ministry of agriculture and decides to move with his family to Dar'aa. They stay at Omar's Granny's house, and soon after their arrival students begin demonstrations against the government dictatorship. The government troops shoot at the students, and a civil war rages across the country. Omar witnesses shooting, bombing, death, and gets shot himself while trying to get his brother home before his family makes an escape with the help of his uncle to a distant farm of a relative where they live peacefully for a while. Soon the war finds its way to every part of the country, Omar's father leaves them to live in a quieter part of Dar'aa, away from the fighting. Omar and the rest of his family decide to make a journey to take refuge from the war in Jordan after his father gets a warning that the secret police is after him. They live in Jordan for a while, until his little sister's illness, combined with the family's lack of resources drives them to seek asylum in England to get her treated (Laird 2017).

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation in the three selected novels, explored through the lens of concepts from trauma theory. The aim is to examine how these themes caused trauma to child characters in the novels, and to find out how the three novels are similar or different in their ways of representation of such trauma. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can be used to explore the effects of trauma on child characters in times of conflict and displacement.

4.1. The Representation of the Themes of Conflict, Adversity, and Dislocation Through the Lens of Trauma Theory.

4.1.1. The Representation of the Theme of Conflict

The narration style in *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006) relates the story directly to trauma theory as the narrative unfolds before the reader as a symptom of latency, and a clear act of repetition and testimony. This is an act that victims of trauma often practice to make sense of their experiences by trying to repeat them in a comprehensive manner (Crauth 1996 as cited in Isaken and Vejling 2018). While relating the events, victims of trauma also mentally live them as Felman and Laub (1992) argue in their research (as cited in Isaken and Vejling 2018). The events of the book are presented to the reader through the first person perspective of an older Ayesha narrating what her younger self witnessed when she was ten years old. In her telling of the story she shows signs of lingering suffering from the horrors of the war at the beginning of the novel; "I pray that those years never come again! I can never forget the horror of them" (Laird 2006, p.2). In later pages, she concludes her story with another sign of repetition and trauma; "I often remember that dusty, ruined flat in old

Beirut. And I know that a little part of me will stay there forever […]" (Laird 2006, p. 104). Across the narrative, she continuously has realisations her younger self did not arrive at, trying to make sense of what she experienced; "Little brothers do have some uses, I suppose, although I often didn't think so back then" (p.5); "I never thought where our food came from. […] now I realize that Granny must have performed miracles to keep us all fed" (p. 19). Older Ayesha's lasting confusion and ongoing effort to comprehend her trauma about the conflict through repetition is also evident in her saying "Back then, I never understood who was who or what was what. I still don't really know. What were they fighting for? Religion? Politics? Was it the rich against the poor? Sometimes I wonder if the fighters themselves knew what they were doing" (Laird 2006, p. 11).

Furthermore, the author's motivation to write this story is an act of testimony and repetition of her personal experience with the Lebanese civil war as she tells in the preface to the novel (Laird 2006). The influence of the author's experience is clear in a few scenes from her narrative. For example, she lived in a flat similar to the one Ayesha stays in with her family during the war, and the author's six-month-old son had to sleep in a suitcase like Ayesha's brother Ahmad. The author also recalls a fruit stall that had been knocked over with oranges rolling across the street in the quiet before battle, which she saw as she and her husband drove home just like the one Ayesha sees in no man's land (Laird 2007). It is in the scene that mirrors this memory in the author's mind that the symbolism behind the title is clear. Ayesha describes "[…] in their hurry to get away, someone had knocked over a fruit stall. It was the very one whose owner's son had shown me the way to Dr. Leila's house. His oranges were still rolling down the street, making a bright stripe of moving color on the black tarmac" (Laird 2006, p. 79).

In contrast, *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007) portrays the armed conflict and the civil war in Iraq from a third-person limited point of view. Through this perspective the narrative takes the reader to witness the atrocities of the conflict the way the protagonist, Tara, experiences them gradually, and relates acts of latency, repetition, and testimony as part of the plot. Throughout the novel, there are multiple instances where various characters recount their experiences of the war to Tara. For instance, Tara's mother tells her about the secret police's routine arrests and executions. Additionally, other characters in the village tell stories in random conversations about raids, arrests, and executions, highlighting the different horrors of the war (Laird 2007). The telling of these stories is a clear act of repetition and testimony of trauma, and a reflection of how cultural narratives and traumatic experiences intertwine as argued by Davis and Meretoja (2020).

Tara first practices repetition when she goes home and tells her mother the story of the shooting of a young Kurdish boy in the market at the beginning of the novel over and over again (Laird 2007). With the same incident, latency is clear in the way Tara first experiences the shooting "as if it were a film" (Laird 2007, p.4), and then in the way it registers in her mind, and haunts her throughout the narrative. It reoccurs in her mind making her shiver when she hears her uncle telling stories of ambushes and raids in the mountains, and then over and over at random times leaving her shaky. Also after the incident, Tara and her friend Leila who witnessed the shooting with her are described as being startled at the slightest sound, being afraid, and having compulsive memories (Laird 2007). Additionally, Tara gets flashbacks about the same incident, and nightmares. This incident is what stands, symbolically, behind the novel's title as we see in the narration of one of those nightmares

which reads “They dropped to their knees, and kissed the dust, the dust of Kurdistan, as a stain of blood spread out from under them[…]’’ (Laird 2007, p.243).

Furthermore, Tara’s trauma is evident in the way she experiences latency with the bombing of the village when in England she almost faints because she gets frightened by the sound of the janitor dragging equipment over the floor thinking it was a nearing jet, and when she has a nightmare of people evaporating, choking to death, or getting blown up in Kurdistan (Laird 2007). This shows how trauma is found in the effect of extreme experiences rather than in the experiences themselves as proposed by Upstone (2017). In other words, Tara is traumatised by the remembrance of the bombing, rather than by the bombing itself, which reflects latency. In Iran as well, Tara gets the urge to practice repetition in order to emotionally shock her cousin by telling her all the horrible things she witnessed, when she struggles to relate to her normal interests like make-up and clothes, and she keeps repeating the events in her mind. Tara then realises that she is not the same girl that left Sulaimanieya “it was as if something in her had died over the last few months. The young, careless part of herself had withered away. Something else would grow in its place, but it wouldn’t be the same. She wasn’t a child any longer.’’(Laird 2007, p. 187).

Hero, Tara’s little sister, also goes through repetition and shows latency but by projecting the incidents on her teddy rabbit. She does so by telling the stories about him rather than herself or real people to her new friend at the refugee camp in Iran “my rabbit got blown up in a bomb […] and the house fell down, and he ran away on a horse in the middle of the night […]” (Laird 2007, p. 165). Hero also suffers from reoccurring nightmares after the

bombing, and wakes up crying and shaking which poses as another act of latency and subconcious repetition.

In *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), as is the case with *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006), the whole narrative can be seen as an act of Latency, witnessing, and repetition, since it is narrated in first person perspective of the protagonist. The detail in which Omar depicts the conflict, adversity, and dislocation while telling his story shows how these atrocities registered in his mind, and stayed with him even after their passing. This is evident in the intricate description of what the tank sounds like coming into city streets, and the damage it causes to the tarmac among other detail, and the rest of the bombings and shelling aftermath.

The protagonist, Omar also suffers from lack of sleep and of bad dreams after witnessing the shelling in Daraa (Laird 2007), and trembles of fear at remembering an incident he witnessed over a year before, with an informer threatening a man about his family and son in front of him (Laird 2017). Another character in the book that displays signs of traumatic latency and repetition is Fuad, Omar's little brother. In school in the refugee camp, he draws "a tank with a streak of yellow light coming out of the barrel and people lying in front of it in pools of red." (Laird 2017, p. 325).

Repetition can be found in the telling and spreading of the stories of the conflict in different places in the novel, such as Omar's cousin Rasoul telling him about the repression and arrests taking place in Syria. Stories of arrests, torture and killing also spread in the countryside while Omar and his family stay there (Laird 2017). Even in Jordan, in the refugee camp, stories of arrests and war arrive (Laird 2017).

4.1.2. The Representation of the Theme of Adversity

Adversities in *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006) are seen as bred by dislocation at their beginning, and then by one another. This starts with the family's poverty which was a consequence of their first dislocation fleeing invasion, robbing them of their home and livelihood as farmers, which in turn caused the absence of the father who left to find a job abroad. Next came the civil war which ended the mother's life in the bombing of the family's house, and left Ayesha, her siblings, and her grandmother in the streets. Then they were faced with more poverty and lack. This led to the grandmother getting tired, and running out of medicines with no means to replace them. The reader watches the characters lose their loved ones and their homes, suffer through hunger, extreme heat, and cold, deprived of basic needs and simple pleasures of life like fruit, soap, electricity, and medicines, depicting a reality that Prasad discusses on his paper on children in conflict zones (2011).

Similar to the representation of conflict, the ways the author represents adversity are subtle, raw, and cautious in a way that takes the reader by the hand, step by step, towards understanding its true weight and outcome. First, she uses something similar to sign language, where through Ayesha's first person narration the reader goes through experiences of adversity and subconsciously sees its signs. For example, the reader sees poverty through the way Ayesha tells of the circumstances they live through as refugees, of crowded small spaces, and ragged remains of furniture pieces they use as beds or curtains for privacy (Laird 2006). There are also the items they use as toys or playing material like cardboard packing cases, pieces of string and other random items like hairgrips and stamped envelopes (p. 26). In another scene, Ayesha runs over ruins and under the rain in flip-flops which causes her to stump her toe, and in a thin dress in which she soaks down to her skin (Laird 2006).

Second, the author uses juxtaposition across scenes or events to contrast the circumstances surrounding the rich and the poor, or those who were spared from the madness of the war, and those who suffered its worst side. For example, in both instances of involuntary dislocation for Ayesha's poor family, we see the urgency and helplessness and loss they suffer, one time losing their livelihood and home (Laird 2006), the second losing their house and their mother, and then having no hope of return or a place to return to. We also see how urgently Ayesha's mom tries to throw clothes in suitcases and pack bags, and how they end up fleeing with only one bag.

In contrast, later in the story, we see doctor Leila and her aunt voluntarily choosing to relocate to escape the war, taking their time to pack their suitcases and hard cases, and hopeful, almost certain, of a peaceful return to their home when the war ends (p. 68). Similarly, Ayesha tells of how spacious, quite, and clean doctor Leila's house is and compares it to the "[…] crowded, noisy, dusty flat, where it was impossible ever to wash properly, or keep the place clean". She also describes the fine, juicy, and delicious delicacies and food options the doctor offers her for lunch, while in previous chapters we often see her and her siblings having to do with bits and pieces that her grandmother manages to gather and get from refugee aid. The reader sees the running water in Doctor Leila's sink and her active telephone line as opposing to no electricity or water where Ayesha stays (Laird 2006) among other comparisons that Ayesha opens the reader's eyes to. This realistic representation, coming as a part of Ayesha's act of testimony and repetition, reflects Prasad's views on the circumstances that children have to endure in conflict zones such as food shortage, damage to infrastructure, and destruction of systems of sanitation (Prasad 2011).

Another clear contrast the reader witnesses as the events unfold is between the days before the war, and the situation that Ayesha experiences in the time of the narrative. We get glimpses of the time before the war (Laird 2006), of endless traffic jams, of crowds of people shopping, in contrast to looted, abandoned, and destroyed shops, deserted streets, and bombed out buildings. The last example of comparison is where the side of town where Ayesha stays is desolate, destroyed, lacks infrastructure and basic services, and has no signs of normal life, while the other side of the divide was peaceful and everyone was living a normal life, doing business and shopping (Laird 2006). These subconscious comparisons of the different stages and circumstances of adversity in Ayesha's act of witnessing might be another form repetition in an attempt to comprehend her trauma as proposed by Crauth (Crauth 1996, cited in Isaken and Vejling 2018).

While the author alludes to adversity in some scenes where the reader sees the omens, or aftermath of adversity, rather than the cause itself like in previous examples, in others he or she is told the truth of it. In intense scenes where the characters are in the heart of situations there are clear expressions of adversity. For example, after days of wandering and finding themselves in the streets, Ayesha explicitly states she was feeling hungry and hopeless (Laird 2006). She also tells how the refugee aid is never really sufficient for her family's needs, and tells Doctor Leila that she has no money at all to pay a doctor's bill (Laird 2006). This empathizes Prasad's argument again, as well as presents an act of witnessing as the concept is explained by Felman and Laub (1992 as cited in Isaken and Vejling 2018).

Adversity in *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007) comes into the picture later in the narrative, as before their forced dislocation, Tara comes from a wealthy family in Iraq. In the

mountains, even though living circumstances are not ideal, but Tara adapts to them gradually and her inconveniences are minor. Until the bombing of her village takes place and she finds herself immersed in the suffering of the people who lost family members and loved ones. Tara experiences adversity on a more personal level after the family's passage to Iran when her mother falls severely ill and she takes charge of the household and the family responsibility. What makes her burden heavier are the poor circumstances she and her family had to endure in the refugee camp, and the lack of basic needs and resources or difficulty in attaining them such as water, clothes, and food. In the camp Tara is also surrounded with different shades of adversity that other refugees suffer through, such as children going down with measles, people struggling with fevers and losing their babies to them, and new refugees arriving in poor condition, loaded with sad stories and having sever injuries (Laird 2007). Such realistic depiction also reflects the opinion of Prasad (2011), who argues that casualties and illnesses can be indirectly caused by the consequences of armed conflict, such as destruction of infrastructure and health services. In addition, it displays traumatic repetition in the way it shows how people tell stories of their displacement in the refugee camp, and resilience in Tara's sense of responsibility in the face of adversity. Both concepts were discussed by researchers such as Isaken and Vejling (2018).

Adversity travels with the family all the way to London, beginning with Tara's sister, Hero, getting ill in the airport where the family is held in custody until their asylum seeking request is processed (Laird 2007), to later on in their stay in the city where they suffer from lack of money and poor job conditions with low pay that hardly suffices for the family (Laird 2007). This shows how the post-displacement phase can bring as much trauma as the

displacement itself when the characters struggle to adapt to, and survive their new circumstances as discussed by Isaken and Vejling (2018).

A new type of adversity features in *Welcome to Nowhere* as the reader watches Musa, Omar's genius brother, getting neglected by teachers, and bullied by other boys in different stages of the narrative for having cerebral palsy, "They never even tried to understand what he said so after a while he just gave up talking" (Laird 2017, p. 14). Despite that, his teachers and friends back home could see through his disability to his brilliance (Laird 2017). Musa also gets bullied in the refugee camp later on for the same reason. Additionally, Omar himself gets bullied in school when the family moves to Daraa, and by his cousin in the countryside (Laird 2017), which shows bullying as an adversity bred by dislocation. Most of the bullying incidents take place in post-displacement, reflecting once again how this phase can hold as much trauma as the displacement itself once more as discussed by Isaken and Vejling (2018).

The reader watches as different members of Omar's family fall severely ill, and struggle to get proper care due to the circumstances they go through. Musa falls ill in Daraa, and the city was suffering from patrol shortage, so the father has to pay a fortune to finally convince a taxi to get him to the hospital (Laird 2017). Later on in the refugee camp, Omar's little sister, Nadia, also gets sick, and Omar has to carry her through the rain to get to the hospital. When they find out she has a heart dysfunction and needs an operation, the family has no money to pay a surgeon (Laird 2017).

The family also suffers through extreme cold due to poverty caused by the conflict in Daraa, which makes them unable to afford kerosene (Laird 2017). And Omar reminds the

reader in more than one instance how he and his family lost everything to the war. Later Omar loses his father as well, who dies when he goes back to Syria (p. 280), and finds his whole family starts relying on him for earning money. He soon loses the job he secures in the refugee camp, and is left wondering how to manage on nothing while not being able to find a job (Laird 2017). Laird successfully depicts another realistic portrait of adverse circumstances caused by armed conflict, affecting children's wellbeing and depriving them of basic rights and needs, reflecting Prasad's discussion viewss, despite neglecting his recommendation of not relating such events and circumstances to young audiences (2011).

4.1.3. The Representation of the Theme of Dislocation

Dislocation in *Oranges in No Man's Land* is a constant cycle, bred by conflict or by adversity. The narrative is littered with stories of dislocation, beginning with the backstory of Ayesha's parents where they flee the Israeli invasion from the countryside, south of Beirut, to take refuge in a poor part of the city (Laird 2006). Soon after, the father leaves the country looking for work. Years later, Ayesha lives to witness yet another dislocation, where she flees a bombing with her grandma and sibling. Finally, at the end of the story, the father returns and snatches the family from the ruins of the refugee flat taking them through another trial of dislocation (Laird 2006).

Other characters also experience dislocation in the story. For example, Samar, Ayesha's friend, and her mother Zainab leave the refugee flat to live with her uncle towards the end of the story (Laird 2006). Additionally, Doctor Leila, the kind doctor that helps Ayesha save her grandmother, is seen packing to depart to France with her aunt escaping the war (Laird 2006).

By applying trauma theory to the incidents and their representation in the novel, it becomes clear that each of them embodies and illustrates the different phases of displacement as discussed by Isaken and Veiling (2018). The phases of the first incident with the parents is laid down in a linear and concise narration at the beginning. This narration unfolds in an act of repetition and testimony, as the grandmother tells the story of the dislocation to Ayesha, who was not yet born when it happened.

The pre-displacement phase for this incident is shown through the imagery of beautiful, peaceful, bustling Beirut and the parents earning a living as farmers. The displacement takes place due to the Israeli invasion and the parents flee to a poor part of the city and build themselves a small home (Laird 2006). Finally, in post-displacement the father leaves the country looking for work while the house becomes "a house of women and children" (Laird 2006, p. 2).

As for the second incident of dislocation with Ayesha, its phases unfold in a non-linear fashion and take the biggest space across the narrative. The pre-displacement phase is scattered through the narrative in the form of memories that cross Ayesha's mind or occur in her narration where her grandmother used to knit, and work at Doctor Leila's house. Her mother used to receive news from her father abroad through letters, and she used to visit markets and go for walks with her (Laird 2006). Ayesha chooses to tell only parts of the displacement phase such as the bombing of their old neighbourhood, them fleeing the house, and her brother finding the flat where they stay afterwards. In post-displacement, they settle in the ruined flat with other refugee families and strive to survive.

This post-displacement phase is the pre-displacement in the third incident of dislocation, where displacement takes place when the father returns and takes the family to a flat of their own. In the beginning, they are hesitant in post-displacement, but then they go back to their normal lives; "Our life began again. Slowly, carefully, we put down new roots, afraid at first that they'd be torn up. […] Latif went back to school, and so did I. Ahmad learned to walk and talk. We all went on growing up." (Laird 2006, p. 104).

In *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007), the family's struggle with dislocation begins early in the story, and deepens and gets darker and darker with every journey they are forced to take to stay alive and safe. It is also clear that each dislocation they went through could not be helped, and they were forced to do it. Even though they made active decisions to leave every time, these decisions were clearly event-driven, and without the characters having a real choice between losing their lives and leaving their current place.

In the first dislocation, the pre-displacement phase is scattered across the novel, either with Tara in the moment and the situation itself before leaving Sulaimaniya, or through her having flashbacks later on when she is away in different stations of her journey. The family lived in a spacious, luxurious, and perfectly-run household, owned an extravagant Mercedes, and went on vacations and picnics to Baghdad, or to the mountains. Tara had a room of her own, and many toys, and friends who she would attend parties with. And she was kept oblivious to the conflict and the politics behind it to have a peaceful childhood (Laird 2007). The displacement phase is involuntary to an extent, as the family was in risk of being arrested and tortured if they stayed home. Tara and her mother experience a terrifying last-minute escape through the neighbour's garden, and a dangerous car ride escaping the

secret police to get to their means of transportation to the mountains (Laird 2007). In post-displacement, in Kurdistan, Tara struggles with life in the village being used to the city, “She wouldn’t even try to imagine what it would be like living here forever, never having a proper bath again, never watching TV, or sitting in a comfortable armchair” (Laird 2007, p, 64). However, Tara eventually adapts and feels grateful for being safe with her family until the raids take place.

Tara’s time in Kurdistan poses as the pre-displacement phase for the second dislocation. The family’s passage to Iran through the mountains represents the displacement phase, where they struggle with cold and come face to face with death before finally arriving at Iran (Laird 2007). The displacement also extends to their time in the refugee office before being sent to the refugee camp in the mountains. The camp in the mountains puts them up against difficult circumstances, and a language barrier comes up as the family doesn’t speak Persian, and struggle with getting their points through to the officers at the camp. But they adapt to their new life and keep their hope of moving on to better place in the future. This time in the camp can also be seen as an embedded pre-displacement phase in the transferring journey to the next refugee camp in the country side. The displacement phase in this part is the hurried packing and the bus journey to the camp (Laird 2007), and the post-displacement is the father attaining a pass, getting a job in a factory, and finding relatives that the family visits more than once during their stay in the second camp.

Finally, the sum of the characters’ experiences in Iran can be seen as the pre-displacement phase in the third dislocation to England. The displacement in this incident occurs in the airport while the family waits for their fate to be decided by the officials at the

asylum seekers office (Laird 2007), and the post-displacement takes place in London. In London, the characters struggle with the new language, face a cultural shock, and work in minimum wage jobs to provide for themselves in difficult financial circumstances. This is a clear depiction of the trauma of struggling with language acquisition and adaptation to a foreign culture in post-displacement as discussed by Isaken and Vejling (2018). Hero, however, the youngest in the family, seems to adapt with no difficulty and acquire the language with ease, completely forgetting her homeland as time passes (Laird 2007).

In the first instant of dislocation in *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), the father gets transferred to a different position in the government, and so the whole family has to go to Daraa (Laird 2017). Omar feels awful about losing his two jobs and worries about losing his dreams of becoming a successful businessman. Soon the family packs and they desert their apartment in Bosra leaving behind their memories. In Daraa Omar struggles with bullying and the war, and he is unable to fit in to the point he starts avoiding the mosque on Fridays in fear of coming across anyone from school (Laird 2017).

The pre-displacement phase in this incident takes place in Bosra, with Omar juggling two jobs alongside school and homework, his father working for the tourism office, his mother running the household, and his siblings going to school (Laird 2017). The displacement phase begins when his father gets transferred to the ministry of agriculture. In this phase, Omar watches an informer threaten his morning job shop owner, and his afternoon job shop owner speaks about shutting down and leaving the country with traffickers to Europe foreshadowing further displacement in the novel. His brother Musa gets anxious about being neglected and bullied in school all over again, and his sister's education is

threatened to come to an end while her father considers marrying her off. The family packs, and leaves the apartment they have many memories with behind heading to Daraa. In the post-displacement phase, the family lives in the grandmother's flat, Omar struggles to fit in at his new school, his brother gets involved in ongoing activities against the government with his friends, and the family witnesses the horrors of the civil war and lack of resources (Laird 2017).

In the second dislocation, the family's time in Daraa poses as the pre-displacement phase. The displacement phase takes the space between the destruction of their house, the mother's decision to take her kids to the countryside for safety, and their arrival at the farm in the countryside. In post-displacement in the countryside near Bosra, the family lives in the barn where the donkey was kept before (Laird 2017), the father returns to a quiet part of Daraa to continue to work and provide for the family, and Omar starts working on the farm with his uncle and cousin every day. They live peacefully for a while. However, Eman, Omar's sister, struggles against the family forcing her into an arranged marriage with a terrible man (Laird 2017).

In the third dislocation, the time in the countryside can be seen as pre-displacement, while the displacement occurs when the father comes in hurry one day and tells the family that they have to leave the country (Laird 2017). This phase extends throughout their journey before arriving to Jordan with multiple incidents on the way, including the army searching the car which took them near the borders, the shooting they witnessed near the borders, their stay near AlYarmouk River on the way to Jordan, their arrival at Jordan, and them being transferred to Zaatari refugee camp (Laird 2017).

The post-displacement phase takes place in Zaatari, where Omar gets a brilliant business idea to make money, gets a job, and starts earning a living, as well as gathering his own little gang of kids (Laird 2017). Omar's father returns to Daraa after a while, and gets killed there. Fuad, Omar's little brother goes back to school, and Eman starts spending her time there helping the teachers with what she could. Musa keeps up with the news and activities through his laptop, makes peace with the kids who bully him during his first days in the camp, and manages to charm them with storytelling. Nadia gradually falls ill until she prompts the family to go through another dislocation, seeking asylum in England, to get her proper medical care. In the third dislocation there is a minor embedded displacement where the family moves from their tent to a caravan a while after their stay in the camp (Laird 2017).

The fourth dislocation leaves the post-displacement phase as a mystery beyond the open ending of the novel. The displacement phase can be seen in the period between Nadia's report at the hospital, and the family finally getting their visas and tickets to England after a while of paper-processing and waiting (Laird 2017). The time in the camp poses as the pre-displacement phase in this final journey.

4.2. The Representation of How the Characters are affected by Conflict, Adversity, and Dislocation.

Throughout *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006), the child characters deal with conflict, adversity, and dislocation in different manners, and are affected by them in more than one way. The reader watches as they lose everything including their homes, their loved ones, and their education (Laird 2006). In the beginning, the plot is event driven, and the child characters have no hand or choice in what happens to them. They only react to the situation

passively, or follow adults' reactions to it in survival mode. This can be seen in the way Ayesha and Latif passively and urgently follow their grandmother into the street after the bombing of their house. This reflects Doughty and Thompsons ideas on the lack of agency that children suffer from in terms of decisions of relocating (2011). They are constantly struggling with fear, of militiamen and their guns at checkpoints, of losing what is left of their families, of constant fighting, fire exchange, and bombing, and of having to live through similar dark times again (Laird 2006).

Furthermore, they are often suffering from loneliness as Ayesha describes her friend, Samar, who couldn't be with her deaf friends anymore due to the war (Laird 2006), and her own feelings upon realizing her grandmother is dying "A terrible loneliness was making me shiver, as if I was being gripped by the chill of winter" (Laird 2006, p. 32). She also tells the reader about her loneliness while navigating the unfamiliar opposite end of the city without her mother, seeking Doctor Leila's help "I suddenly felt so lonely and miserable that I sat down on a step, still wet from the storm, and burst into tears." (Laird 2006, p. 53).

They also have unsettling confusion, like when Ayesha tells the reader how she never understood who was fighting who, and over what cause (Laird 2006). There is her confusion about whether or not to trust or fear the militiamen guarding the checkpoint. The reader watches her changing her mind from fearing them at first, to appreciating their protection of her and the people on her side of town, to fearing them again and lying to them when she returns from her quest on the other side. She goes through the same confusion about the militiamen on the other end, which leads to her confusion about Abu Bashir who helps her get back home in a UN ambulance. "It was too confusing. I didn't know what to think

anymore" (Laird 2006, p. 83). They also battle feelings of shock, anger, helplessness, despair, and shame that sprout from fear, confusion, and loneliness and the emotional turmoil that these feelings and situations put them through.

Sometimes the children characters in *Oranges in No Man's Land* are oblivious to the situation of conflict or adversity. This is evident in the case of baby Ahmad at the checkpoint, when he innocently reaches out to the gleam reflecting off of a militiaman's gun, and then laughs as the armed man tickles him without fear (Laird 2006). It can also be seen in the case of the tanker boys that Ayesha comes across in no man's land, racing and laughing among the rubble and ruins. Ayesha herself is not entirely aware of the situation at its time, while her older self comes to realizations and makes confessions as she narrates the story (Laird 2006).

Another way Ayesha deals with the adversities she goes through is denial. For example, while still in shock after the bombing of their house, Ayesha is aware her mother was gone forever but she expresses the realization using the words "I never saw Mama again" (Laird 2006, p.3), later when she crosses no man's land she tells the reader "Mama wasn't there" (p. 52). She never explicitly expresses her mother's departure with any word relating to death. She even believes her mother was still with her guiding her and helping her out of trouble later in the story "I felt quite sure, at that moment, that it was Mama who had sent the concrete block in my way, and made me stub my toe, so that I couldn't speak." (Laird 2006, p.44).

Still, in the face of all the melancholia that these characters face in the novel, the reader gets to watch how they also grow constructively and thrive. Ayesha builds up a sense

of responsibility, harbors courage, becomes resourceful, and hones her wits across the narrative. She is seen feeding her baby brother Ahmad, and taking him out for fresh air (Laird 2006). She also worries for her siblings and feels responsible for them, and about who would take care of them, and so she decides to save her grandmother. She feels obliged to be brave, and take action and takes the risk of crossing no man's land to save her grandmother and her siblings' future. She and Latif both make their mind to take their own responsibility and take care of themselves even after Ayesha saves her grandmother "We'd have to look after ourselves" (Laird 2006, p.99) Ayesha explains to Latif, and he nods "[…] looking serious and grown up" (Laird 2006, p.99). This aligns with the idea that experiencing adverse and melancholic incidents and circumstances prompts maturation (Tribunella 2010).

The reader also watches Ayesha cleverly getting through difficult situations, once taking her chance to cross into no man's land using the refugee truck as a distraction for watchful militiamen (Laird 2006, pp. 37, 38), then summing up her wits to pretend to be deaf and mute to cover her accent in front of the opposing checkpoints' militiamen and act dumb for them to let her through. Then managing a white lie in a matter of seconds to find her way back to the flat, where her grandmother lies sick, without getting in trouble (Laird 2006).

Between the lines of *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006), it is also seen how Ayesha grows up against the pain and darkness of her trauma to be a kind and brave person who tells stories of kindness and courage of people who the conflict thrived to "other" and antagonize in her conception, but she chooses to represent them in positive and humane light. She tells of Abu Butros, the old man in no man's land who saves her from the militiamen on the opposing checkpoint, likely a Christian, and so a member of an "enemy" party as Ayesha

is Muslim herself. She tells of Doctor Leila's kindness in giving her medicines for her grandmother and sharing a warm meal with her, and Abu Bashir's courage in helping her cross no man's land to go back home, both of which are people on the "other" side, the supposed "enemy" side of the city and the conflict as well. She also tells of the boy who gave her the orange and showed her the way, even though he explicitly expresses that he hates her people. She chooses to tell the reader of their generosity, and their kindness instead of telling stories of others' cruelty and the harm that they brought her people; and so she might have kept to Doctor Laila's advice when she told her "don't grow up to hate anybody" (Laird 2006, p. 75), and become an example of her vision in no man's land when she noticed "plants were pushing right up through the tarmac – little bushes and baby trees, breaking up the hard surface as easily as if it had been loose soil" (Laird 2006, p.50) spreading hope, and good instead of hatred and despair.

Moreover, signs of resilience in face of trauma are woven into these retellings of adverse and traumatic experiences in the book in a way that resonates with Johnstone's argument on the ability of children to overcome trauma and adapt to new lives after harsh experiences (1995). "And yet, in among all the sad things, the fear and destruction and loss, there are wonderful memories too, of kindness and courage and goodness" (Laird 2006, p.2). Following every harsh event, the characters find kindness, courage, and adapt to their new circumstances. For example, Ayesha's parents build themselves a home and beget three children after their dislocation. Ayesha and her family meet Miss Zainab and set themselves a new home with her help where they endure their harsh circumstances like other refugee families in the ruined flat. Ayesha makes friends with Samar, learns sign language, and they

play and enjoy their time with what little "treasures" they have of stamped envelopes and pieces of string (Laird 2006).

Another example is how instead of surrendering to her grandmother's illness, Ayesha sums up the courage to cross no man's land and get her help (Laird 2006). Latif also makes up for toys with broken cardboard cases and somersaults and enjoys a childhood pleasure which conflict and adversity attempted to rob him of. And both Samar and her mother, and Ayesha and her family find salvation towards the end of the narrative and move on to live normal lives (Laird 2006).

In *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007), Tara's perception of life gradually changes after she witnesses conflict, and goes through adversity and dislocation. Beginning in Sulaimanieya, she loses her interest in shopping, and her relationship with her best friend doesn't feel the same after the shooting incident (Laird 2007). She starts losing sleep thinking about the shooting in the market, and stops noticing the positive details and beautiful scenery in Kurdistan after a while in the mountains due to feeling extremely bored. In Iran, walking in the market, she sees everything, from vegetables and streets to people, in a new light, after having forgotten what normal life was like in the refugee camp, and she realises she is a changed person in both appearance and mentality in her visit to her cousin's room (Laird 2007).

The reader also watches as Tara struggles with alienation and loneliness in the mountains, in Iran, and in her new life and school in London (Laird 2007). Tara also suffers from depression, homesickness, and numbness. This starts in the refugee camp in the mountains, then continues in Tehran, as well as at realising the family was escaping again to

London. She also faces depression in the airport when her family was held in the refugee room, and finally every time she thought of Kurdistan afterwards (Laird 2007).

Additionally, Tara gets injured in a bombing in the mountains (Laird 2007), and cheats death another time in the passage between the mountains to Iran. She loses hope, and has a reoccurring feeling of despair and apprehension. Another unsettling feeling that Tara experiences is uncomfortable self-consciousness, and feeling threatened by others. She struggles with those feelings in the refugee office in Iran when the officers look at her with odd and unsettling looks more than once, and later in England when she walks in London without a chador after being used to it (Laird 2007).

She and her little sister experience violent cold throughout their journey, as well as extreme exhaustion and hunger. But Tara still manages to thrive, celebrating being alive after every time she came face to face with death, taking responsibility of herself and her family when they needed her to, and surviving all these events with determination to get herself back on track by the time she is back in school at London (Laird 2007).

Hero's, Tara's little sister's, experience with the multiple dislocations is slightly different even though she displays slight and brief signs of distress (Laird 2007). For most part before going to Kurdistan, Hero is oblivious to what was going on. Even in Kurdistan, before the bombing, she seems to be enjoying a perfect childhood, making friends and spending her time outdoors with them. When the time comes to leave to Iran, she shows some defiance, but eventually accepts the journey despite being scared in the mountain passage. In the refugee camp in Iran, Hero makes friends again, starts listening to Tara, and becomes attached to her when their mother becomes ill. When the family is transferred to the next

camp, Hero is cheerfully playful when she enjoys a proper shower, while Tara struggles with lack of hope and apprehension. In contrast to Tara's sorrow, nervousness, and fear, Hero displays excitement at going on a plane for the first time when the family escapes to London. Also, when Tara struggles with a cultural shock in the streets of London, Hero is seen happily skipping in the street, and while Tara struggles with anxiety, depression, and loneliness in their new school and life in England, Hero adapts quickly, making friends again, and becoming fluent in English (Laird 2007).

Other children characters in the novel were either not as lucky as Tara and Hero, or too lucky that they didn't experience conflict the same way the sisters did. For example, a little boy dies in the bombing in the village (Laird 2007). And the stories of the older women in the village allude to deaths of many other babies and children before him, as well as the story of the madman in the refugee camp who lost three children. On the other hand, Almaz, Tara's cousin, only witnessed distant noises of explosions in Tehran, and so she seems to be hardly as affected as Tara was by the conflict when she appears in the novel, outgoing, friendly, and enjoying her teenage interests like make-up and shopping in contrast to Tara's depressed and numb state at the time. And finally, the girls at the school in London, casually joke about war when Tara is terrified by a random noise thinking it was a war jet. When Tara tells them she actually witnessed a war, they seem careless about it and move the conversation to a video game with war in it to show that that is their idea of a war in contrast to Tara's real suffering and trauma (Laird 2007).

Despite their dark experience and its consequences, after every atrocity, and through every difficulty, and threat, the characters in *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007) display admirable

resilience. For example, Tara and Hero adapt to every new environment they move to in their journey. Tara displays courage and determination to survive her fall to the river in the mountain passage no matter what, and cheats death for the second time after surviving the raid in the mountains (Laird 2007). After surviving the fall, Tara celebrates being alive and feels powerful with her life starting all over again. She mentally keeps her composure, urging herself on in her thoughts to make it to Iran. When the family arrives to Iran, Tara feels unthreatened by the approaching armed soldiers as she reminds herself of her escape over the garden wall, her surviving the village bombing, and surviving drowning in the mountain passage (Laird 2007).

Later on in the camp, after her mother falls ill, Tara takes up responsibility for the household. She starts looking after her family's needs, tending to her mother in her illness, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her little sister on her own. This leads her family to take her more seriously, acknowledge her, and have a more mature relationship with her (Laird 2007).

In England, the reader watches as Tara refuses to be put down by the language barrier, and takes action, determined to overcome it. She learns English and goes back to school, and fixes her mind on performing well in academia. She also gets a job to support herself, and keeps her mind open to different options to build herself a career and continue her education. Despite all that she witnesses, and feeling like she was beginning to forget Kurdistan, she keeps the memory of her home close at heart, refusing to let anyone or anything take it away from her "we're Kurdistan, you and me, and baba and daya and

hero.[…] where we are, it is. Kurdistan is its people and they can't take it away from us, even if they lock us out of our homeland and throw away the key.'' (Laird 2007, p. 243).

As for Hero, she copes at both Kurdistan and the refugee camp, makes new friends and plays with them all day, utilizing chicken, stones, or anything at hand to have fun (Laird 2007). She is unaltered by the arrival to England and does not have as much of a shock as Tara. She also adapts to life in England with ease, picking up the language, becoming fluent, and making friends at school (Laird 2007).

As is the case with Ayesha, the children characters in the *Kiss the Dust* also struggle with confusion about the ongoing conflict, about the reasons why it takes place, why they constantly have to escape from one country to the next, and about the new environments and cultures they encounter in their journey (Laird 2007). They are constantly afraid, terrified by the incidents they witness and by what may happen to them as they come face to face with conflict, or when they escape it. For example, they fear arrest and torture, death, leaving their homes, or losing loved ones, alongside fear of new experiences such as going on a plane or first day at a foreign school, and fear of strangers and of the unknown. This fear sometimes generates shame, but in many other times the characters sum up courage and determination, and act in spite of it, like when Tara took action about her uncle's wound and kept his stay a secret, when she manages a lie to mislead the secret police about her father's whereabouts, keeping her composure despite being terrified, and when she decides to find herself again in academia despite being afraid on her first day in the classroom (Laird 2007).

Another reoccurring feeling is helplessness (Laird 2007), which Tara struggles with as she faces one dislocation after the other, and through her mother's illness, as well as in

trying to deal with the language barrier and cultural shock in England. Anger and fury can be seen as a natural result of constant feelings of fear and helplessness, as the characters often experience them in succession to these feelings. The reader watches Tara's fear and helplessness turn to anger as she hangs above the river in the mountain passage, when her mother is at risk of death, and in the supermarket in England (Laird 2007). This anger then turns to determination that leads her to take action and thrive in these situations.

The depiction of the characters' trauma in *Kiss the Dust* resulting from experiences with conflict, adversity, and dislocation, and then their survival and ability to adapt to every new environment and way of life show a realistic representation of how real people deal with trauma and displacement as proposed by Isaken and vejling (2018). For example, the reader witnesses the concept of trauma in post-displacement resulting from struggle with a foreign language and alien culture, then the resilience in overcoming it and adapting to a new life as is the case with Tara in England. The narrative also depicts maturation resulting from melancholia realistically, as it is proposed by Johnstone (1995), through Tara taking responsibility of her family in the refugee camp.

In *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), the two brothers, Omar and Musa, appear to have different attitudes towards politics that turned their lives upside down. Despite facing numerous consequences of the conflict stirred by politics, Omar adopts a lasting disinterest in politics, and an enthusiasm for making money and starting a business throughout the novel. Musa, on the other hand, displays a passion for politics and the people's cause with as much consistency throughout the story (Laird 2017).

Similarly to the other two works discussed in this study, the children characters in *Welcome to Nowhere* struggle with constant fear and terror due to the conflict, dislocation, and displacement (Laird 2017). This fear takes extreme forms that sometimes paralyze the characters or even make them wet their pants. They also experience anger frequently due to the circumstances they go through and the lack of control over what happens to them, which robs them of choice. They are deprived of basic needs such as food, water, rest, warmth, electricity, proper shelter, and education; causing them to struggle with hunger, thirst, tiredness, lack of hygiene, and cold, which agrees with what Prasad (2011) states. The characters also suffer from foul mood swings, depression, boredom, and homesickness (Laird 2017).

The reader watches as these extreme emotions and circumstances bring out the characters' resourcefulness and resilience. For example, Musa plays dumb to mislead a solider, while Omar plays along and they save themselves from arrest (Laird 2017), and later on they manage to save themselves again when they hide a notebook full of information about the demonstrations between school books, and hide the phone full of footage in their granny's underwear drawer when the solders come to search their house. Musa shows his resourcefulness as well when he finds Bilal's crime record and uses it to scare him away when he tries to force himself on her.

Eman also displays resourcefulness that saves the family from arrest when she uses a blue plastic sheet smelling of fertilizers she finds at the back of the truck to hide herself and her siblings from the soldiers who search their truck on their way to the borders, preventing their arrest (Laird 2017). Furthermore, Omar displays resourcefulness that enables him to

provide for his family in the refugee camp. He devises a plan to sell batteries closer to the tents to earn a living and makes a deal with Abu Radwan (Laird, 2017). Additionally, he ensures the safety of his entire family by making a deal with a group of children who pick pockets, bully others, and terrorize girls, and he reforms them and earns their loyalty (Laird, 2017).

Showcasing resilience, Omar tells the reader how Musa stuck with school, proved himself to his teachers, and even made friends despite his disability and being bullied for it (Laird 2017). He also wins the respect of the little kids later in the refugee camp for his extensive knowledge and storytelling capabilities. Musa refuses to lose his dignity or let his disability stand in the way throughout the narrative, and keeps trying to contribute with what he can in different situations, like filming the demonstrations, helping out on a picnic, and saving his sister from an arranged marriage to a criminal. He holds up a dream of becoming a professor of political science at Oxford despite everything he went through (Laird 2017).

More signs of resilience are evident in how Omar keeps himself together to save himself and Musa from danger despite his blinding pain when he gets shot in Daraa (Laird 2017). Omar also takes pride in his courage surviving a potential arrest, a civil war, and a gunshot, and builds up the strength to endure the heavy work on the farm and provides for his family in the countryside. He even wins the respect of his cousin Jaber, and makes peace with him after months of being bullied and overpowered by him. Omar also get a job in Zaatari and provides for his family later in the novel when his father disappears. And all through the novel, despite the rough journey and the struggles Omar witnesses, he holds on

to his dreams of becoming a successful businessman, making money, and finding a way out of the misery for himself and his family (Laird 2017).

Other child characters in the novel demonstrate resilience as well. For example, Riad, the boy from the refugee camp reforms himself after being used to stealing, works to provide for his family at a very young age, and dreams of going back home and opening a nice shop one day (Laird 2017). As well as Eman, who defies her family's decision of arranging a marriage for her, and takes determined control of her own decision in the end (Laird 2017). All these acts of resilience and signs of maturation appear in the narrative after the character's experiences with trauma and melancholia in alignment with Johnstone's argument on melancholia leading to maturation, and children overcoming their trauma and finding ways to deal with it (1995).

4.3. The Similarities and Differences between the Three Novels in terms of the Representation of the Mentioned Themes.

Oranges in No Man's Land (Laird 2006) and *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017) are both written in the first-person perspective. In addition to posing as a clear act of traumatic testimony, the use of first-person narration plays a role creating an intimate and personal connection between the reader and the protagonist. By allowing the reader to experience the story through the protagonist's perspective, first-person narration offers a deeper understanding of their struggles and hopes, ultimately enhancing the reader's engagement with the narrative. On the other hand, *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007) is written in the third-person limited perspective. However, the reader gets involved personally with the characters on the same level in all three works, as the protagonist's thoughts and feelings

are constantly depicted in *Kiss the Dust*, just as the narrators express their feelings in the other two works, and due to the focus that the limited third-person narration puts on the protagonist.

Feelings of fear, anger, and frustration, resulting from witnessing and experiencing conflict, adversity, and dislocation, are found across all three works despite the differences in experience that the characters go through as referenced in the analysis. This is also the case with symptoms of trauma and signs of resilience. Acts of repetition, latency, and witnessing, alongside display of resilience, and emphasis on the importance of family bonds, and people's acts of kindness and courage in the face of conflict, adversity, and dislocation, are frequent in all the novels. In this sense, all three narratives resonate with Johnstone's findings is in the way familial bonds help the main characters survive and overcome traumatic experiences (1995).

The author exhibits a mastery of writing for a young audience by consistently using techniques that evoke the senses, such as describing sounds, smells, textures, tastes, and vibrant colors in all three works. Additionally, the author effectively employs subtle humor and sarcasm, as seen in Omar's narration, and portrays peaceful and pleasant moments amid the suffering, such as Tara's time in Kurdistan and Ayesha's moment with Samar on the staircase, to provide a reprieve from the weighty events in the narratives.

However, there is a noticeable difference in the way conflict is represented in the three works. In *Oranges in No Man's Land*, conflict is depicted in a clever way that fits a young audience, where the characters leave the scene of conflict early, enter it late, or only perceive it through peripheral vision. They experience it second-hand, or indirectly, by

suffering its aftermath. The violence and gore are always around the corner, or just outside the edge of the frame. They are only hinted at without being explicitly portrayed in a way that would deliver the conflict's essence to the reader without scarring their imagination or psychology with explicit or graphic depiction.

For example, in the beginning of the story, a bombing shell wipes out Ayesha's house just as she and her siblings and grandmother reach the end of the street, and the reader does not see the incident just like the characters, who have their fleeing backs to it (Laird 2006). In another scene, Ayesha is deprived of good sleep because of a gun battle in the distance, of which she only experiences echoes of exploding bombs, the rattle of machine guns, squealing tires, and ambulance sirens. A militiaman's ill intent towards Ayesha is only seen through a masked conversation: "how do we know you're not carrying messages under that dress of yours?' I saw their looks change. Ugliness was in their eyes" (Laird 2006, p.45). Later, signs of a coming battle start appearing, like people deserting the streets, and the quiet that comes due to that, but the reader never witnesses the exchange; the gunfire and bombing start just as Ayesha leaves the scene and she only hears their sound.

On the other hand, in the other two works, the characters suffer from it directly. They get shot, injured, or witness shelling and fire exchange. For example, in *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007), the exposition takes the representation of conflict a step further and unravels the conflict before Tara, when a boy and a mullah are shot by an Iraqi officer in front of the mosque before her eyes. Tara also directly experiences a dreadful bombing of her village where she gets a head injury when trying to flee to safety (Laird 2007). The bombs nearly directly fall on her as she flees, the flying debris knocks her unconscious, and she wakes up

among the screams of the wounded. The scene grows crueller, as the attackers continue to drop shells, and Tara walks and trips over body parts and scattered blood fainting and struggling to get to safety. Similar images, alongside recurrent news of casualties and villages being razed to the ground litter the next few pages (Laird 2007).

This difference may be related to the protagonist's age, which plays a significant role in resonating with the target audience. Ayesha, Omar, and Tara, the main characters of their respective works, have varying ages that connect with different readers. Ayesha's ten-year-old character may appeal to a younger audience, while Omar's twelve to sixteen-year-old character may attract teenagers who might be able to comprehend the darker face of conflict presented through his narration. Meanwhile, Tara's twelve to fifteen-year-old character bridges the gap between younger and older readers by presenting the darker incidents with a touch of dissociation and safety provided by the third person perspective.

While all three works depict multiple dislocations, each provides a different experience of the theme. In *Oranges in No Man's Land* (Laird 2006), the characters take refuge within the same country, without experiencing cultural shock or a language barrier. Similarly, in *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), the narrative shows multiple dislocations within the same country, but then takes the characters across borders to the west. However, the reader does not witness them struggling with a language barrier or cultural shock as their first dislocation outside their country takes them to another Arab country with a similar language and somewhat similar culture, where they spend time in a refugee camp without immersion in the Jordanian culture outside of it. The experiences of their next journey to England remain unknown, veiled beyond the open ending of the novel, so the

reader does not get to witness them .In *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007), a more varied experience is depicted, where the characters experience a dislocation that puts the protagonist against a cultural shock without a language barrier in Kurdistan, then against both cultural shock and language barrier in Iran and England.

All characters in all three works experience adversity in a way or another. However, while the protagonists of *Welcome to Nowhere* and *Oranges in No Man's Land* go through the loss of a family member, the protagonist in *Kiss the Dust* is spared from this experience. Additionally, all protagonists have to deal with the illness of a family member, and take up the responsibility of taking care of their family and themselves at some point in the narrative.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter aims to provide a summary of the concluding statements and insights from the literature review and analysis of the three children's novels by Laird. The previous chapters have highlighted the representation of experiences of the characters with the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation, and the role that literature can play in promoting empathy, understanding, and resilience. This chapter will build on these insights and offer recommendations for future research in the same area of studying the representation of solemn, dark themes, and characters and conflicts from the Middle East in children's literature.

5.1. Conclusion

This study explores the themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation, through the lens of trauma theory, in three of Elizabeth Laird's novels that are set in the Middle East, and with children as lead characters. It looks at the ways in which these circumstances affect the children characters in the narratives, and how these characters deal with these circumstances and overcome them. The three works were found to have both similarities and variations in terms of the way they depict these themes, which are explained throughout this study.

Characters in all three works witness conflict and civil war, but their experiences vary in terms of intensity and detail of the depiction. Additionally, all characters go through multiple dislocations. In *Oranges in No Man's Land*, the dislocation takes place within the same country. In contrast, in *Kiss the Dust* and *Welcome to Nowhere*, the characters cross

borders, resulting in a different experience than that of the protagonist in *Oranges No Man's Land*.

In the novel *Oranges in No Man's Land* (2006), the protagonist Ayesha experiences a dislocation within her own country as she navigates through the war-torn streets of Beirut. Her harrowing journey showcases the impact of conflict on a personal level, highlighting the challenges and dangers faced by individuals caught in the midst of civil war. The first-person narration allows readers to witness Ayesha's struggles and empathize with her experiences, creating a powerful connection between the reader and the character.

On the other hand, in *Kiss the Dust* (Laird 2007) and *Welcome to Nowhere* (Laird 2017), the characters face a different kind of dislocation as they cross borders to escape the conflicts in their home countries. The narration offers a unique insight into the emotional and physical journey of the characters in these narratives as they come up against unfamiliar territories, encounter new cultures, and face the difficulties of seeking refuge. By employing first-person narration in *Welcome to Nowhere,* the author provides a personal and intimate portrayal of the characters' displacement, allowing readers to connect with their plight and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by refugees.

The three works examined in this study realistically depict themes of conflict, adversity, and dislocation, in a manner that aligns with scientific studies, trauma theory books, and official reports by organizations focused on refugee issues. The child characters in all three novels have no choice or agency in leaving their homes or relocating, as argued by Doughty and Thompson (2011). At some point in every narrative, the characters take responsibility for themselves and their families, illustrating Tribunella's (2010) argument

that trauma can lead to maturation that comes with overcoming difficulties and accumulating experience and a more rounded understanding of the world that bring with them problem solving skills and the ability to adapt to different situations. The harsh living conditions and experiences of the characters due to conflict or immigration reflect the views of Prasad (2011), which highlights how conflict and displacement can deprive children of basic needs such as shelter, education, and access to healthcare, putting them at risk of illness and death.

Furthermore, the use of first-person point of view in *Oranges in No Man's Land* and *Welcome to Nowhere* brings the reader closer to the characters, as proposed by Gu and Catalano (2022). Finally, all three works serve as acts of latency, witnessing, and repetition through which refugees may process their trauma, depicting phases of displacement, resilience, and resolution in the face of conflict, adversity, and dislocation. These are also stated by Isaken and Vejling's (2018) work on trauma theory and reflect Johnstone's (1995) ideas on the adaptation of children characters to new lives after displacement and the role of familial bonds in overcoming difficulties.

In her novels, Laird strives to give a voice to refugees and humanize their stories, stating that she wants to understand how it is for them as individuals, rather than simply seeing them as part of a long line of refugees. She also acknowledges the widespread nature of the refugee experience, noting that the fate of her characters is shared by millions of people in the Middle East and around the world who have had to flee their homes due to oppression and war in search of safety and peace. Laird even calls on readers to take action and help refugees, providing them with opportunities and a chance to see their reality (Laird 2007; Laird 2017).

While the author's intention might have been to shed light on the challenges faced by these children, the researcher finds that the narrative inadvertently perpetuates certain stereotypes. However, despite focusing in most part on the victimhood of the child characters, the author strives to capture the resilience, and diverse experiences and attributes of these children, avoiding a limited and one-dimensional perception of their lives. The researcher finds that the narratives provide a close understanding of the children's struggles and dreams, highlighting their strength and capacity for growth amidst adversity, but calls for the depiction of child characters in the Middle East outside the context of war and political conflict in future narratives.

5.2. Recommendations

1. Further studies are needed to explore the depiction and representation of children in the Middle East in both Western, and regional literature in order to expose any fallacies, stereotypes, and lack of representation.
2. More research is needed to investigate how the representation of trauma and melancholia in children’s literature affects child readers.
3. Further research is needed to explore the appropriate ways to integrate similar literature with more solemn themes into classroom readings to promote acceptance and resilience, and invite open conversation about world issues.

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