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The Dysfunctional Mother-Daughter Relationship in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*

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Abstract

The study grapples with the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine* (2002). It, equally, shows how the different cultural backgrounds and differences between the Lebanese father and the American mother affect the daughter's personality development. It deals with other associated themes as rape scene and the Lebanese Civil War that influence the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, the study delves into Sarah's life cycle and inner worlds to show how feelings of betrayal, abandonment and low self-esteem are the main symptoms of her shattered self. The study reveals how Sarah reconstructs herself during adulthood via different mediums. To shed light on the unnatural mother-daughter dyads, the study employs various psychoanalytic studies including Erik Erikson's theories on child's development.

Keywords: Rabih Alameddine, *I, the Divine*, Mother-Daughter Dyads, Psychology and Identity Formation.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Arabic literature has emerged to address different issues associated with Arabs' experiences in diaspora. Diasporic writers including Ahdef Souief, Diana Abu Jaber and others refer to "migration, belonging […] national anguish, dilemmas, disenchantments and discriminatory policies" (Gana 2008, 13) as the main issues that affect the cultural identity of immigrants. In diasporic fiction. Authors specifically focus on parent-children relationship and how such dyads are affected by certain causes like cultural clash, from one generation to another. On this basis, different diaspora writers give insight into the theme of familial relationships, but their reflections on it take different flavors: negative reflections; and, at the same times, positive ones. Nasaybah Awajan, Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi and Youcef Awad, in "Representations of Parents-Children Relations in Arabic Fiction in Diaspora" (2019), undertake the journey of identifying the differences in representing parents-children dyads in selected novels. They conclude that Naomi Shihab Nye, Diana Abu Jaber, Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf refer to

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the healthy dyads in the Arab family while Ahdef Soueif and Fadia Faqir project a dysfunctional relation within it.

It is worth noting that researchers interested in diasporic literature have explored the generational clash between fathers and sons/daughters, the grandfather-granddaughter relationship and grandmother-granddaughter dyads. They additionally explore the mother-daughter connection. As an illustration, In *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20 th Century Literature*, Elizabeth Brown Guillory shows that, in this collection of essays, the issue of the mother-daughter relationship is studied in various diasporic cultures, namely, Asian-American, Indian and Afro-American, shedding light on a love/ hate relationship. The essays further deal with how the daughter is afraid of a feeling of the mother's abandonment and separation from the daughter since the mother is the one who teaches the daughter "how to survive in a world fraught with obstacles" (Guillory 1996,16). In Arabic Diasporic fiction, the mother-daughter relation, however, has not been deeply researched even if such relation has its importance in the formation of the Arab family.

Due to the fact that there is no presently enduring recognition of the dyad between the mother and the daughter in Alameddine *I, the Divine*, the present paper examines the mother-daughter connection, underlining the causes that lead to such unnatural relation employing a psychological framework. Moreover, the dysfunctional mother-daughter bonds with all its cracks are going to be projected. The study also aims to highlight how this relation is influenced by social and patriarchal restrictions, the Lebanese Civil War and the cultural differences between the father and the mother. The study further emphasizes how the unhealthy relation with the mother, Janet, leads Sarah Nour Al Din to have problems in her social and psychological well-being. Significantly, it deals with how the daughter overcomes the impacts of such conflictive relationship during adulthood. Drawing on different psychoanalytic studies, the paper analyses the ways Alameddine portrays family relationship, offering deep insights into how the unhealthy mother-daughter dyads affect the adult daughter. In order to achieve the objectives of the paper, various questions needed to be answered. What do psychoanalysts inform us about the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship? Does the unhealthy relationship between the mother and the daughter affect the daughter's well-being? And finally, does Sarah Nour Al Din overcome the effects of the barely presence of her mother during adulthood as she becomes a mother? The paper uses psychological and analytical approaches in projecting not only how the dysfunctional mother- daughter relation works in *I, the divine*, but also how such dyad affects the daughter's identity development and behavior.

Rabih Alameddine is a Lebanese novelist who focuses, in his writings, on both Lebanese and American cultures to represent the lives and experiences of Arabs in diaspora. He published six novels and a collection of short stories, in which he has covered a wide array of themes including the theme of immigration and cross cultural mobility. He particularly grapples with the psychological effects of the Lebanese Civil War on his protagonists. To borrow Youcef Awad's words, Alameddine's works "recount the horrors of the Lebanese Civil War" (Awad 2016, 87). He also brings the portrayal of familial relationships into the foreground especially the Lebanese family dysfunctionality. This brings forth the

choice of the novel, *I, The Divine* that will be examined in the present study. In *I , the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*, the author depicts Sarah Nour Al Din's unfinished memoir of her fragmented life as she moves between Beirut, San Francisco and New York. The author also portrays that Sarah's life is full of tensions, violence, hatred and misunderstanding. She is engulfed in inner struggles that stem from her past. Alamedddine gives voice to Sarah to portray her life retrospectively, highlighting how she tries to live life in her own terms. Zuzana Tabackova asserts that Sarah's "obsession with regularity disables her to express her experience in language, which is unpredictable. Her continual attempts to tell her story prove to be a chain of constant failures" (Tabackova 2015, 120).

Since its publication in 2002, *I, the Divine* has been scrutinized differently by several authors and critics. The scholarship conducted on the novel has situated it at the vanguard of multiculturalism and identity crisis. Syrine Hout in "The Tears of Trauma: Memories of Home, War and Exile in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*" (2008) pens her view on the postwar trauma and its influence on Sarah's traumatized psyche. The researcher specifically grapples with the scenes that take place within the historical reality to make linkage between exile and illness. Cristina Garrigos, in "The Dynamics of Intercultural Dislocation: Hybridity in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*" (2009), discusses how Alameddine uses the postmodern techniques to depict the theme of intercultural dislocation. In Michelle Hartman's "Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*: A Druze Novel as World Literature" (2013), the novel is interpreted within the framework of world literature as the researcher devotes the research to Sarah as a druze individual. In "The Passive Antihero in Alameddine's *I, the Divine* and *an Unnecessary Woman*" (2021), Salma Kaouthar Letaief and Yousef Abu Amrieh shed light on how the protagonists are seen as antiheroes employing the framework of feminist psychic trauma. Mohamed Salah Eddine Madiou, in "Abject Talks Gibberish: Translating Abjection in Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman* (2021), refers to *I, the Divine* in his discussion about the feeling of nothingness using Sigmund Freud's the "Uncanny" and Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) to show that the Lebanese Civil War is not the originator of the feeling of abjection; at the same time, this feeling exists there in the human being and is activated by the civil war, its suspect entourage and aging.

The literature emerging from academic researches on *I, the Divine* does not refer to the relationship between the mother and the daughter. The authors focus more on how patriarchal codes and the Lebanese Civil War traumatize the protagonist and her family. In this respect, more research is needed here to be done particularly on the mother-daughter dyads to highlight the importance of such topic in the wellbeing of the daughter. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing criticism by throwing more light on the notion that the dysfunctional relation did not only shape the protagonist's identity and sense of self but also the foundation of the novel. It specifically probes how feelings of betrayal, abandonment and displacement contribute in affecting Sarah's life during adulthood in general and her personality development in childhood in specific.

2. The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Psychoanalysis

Broadly speaking, the issue of the mother-daughter dyads is tackled differently in psychoanalytic studies. Different theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Melaine Klein argue that the nature of the mother-daughter relationship has an important role in the daughter's social and psychological well-being. They maintain that daughters who have dysfunctional relationship with their mothers in their childhood, have psychological problems during their adulthood as attachment problems and interpersonal relationship problems. Freud mentions why the daughter is originally linked to her mother and then switches to her father. He argues that, in a pre-oedipal phase, the love and hate relation exists in an ambivalent manner. At the same time, he mentions that the daughter cannot separate herself completely from her mother. Nancy Chodorow's studies also put emphasis on the mother-daughter connection. She writes generously on the subject of motherhood in general and the mother-daughter in specific. In *Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, she uses clinical cases to shed light on the special relation between the mother and the daughter during the pre-Oedipal period. She maintains that the mother's attitudes towards the daughter contribute profoundly to the creation and the experiences of the daughter's real self (Chodorow 1999, 5). She adds that "there is a striking lack of systematic description about the mother-daughter relationship" (Chodorow 1999, 46).

Within the lexicon of such familial connection, Erik Erikson provides an analysis of the parents' role in the healthy well-being of the child. He asserts that the family context exerts an influence on the development of the child. In his first book, *Childhood and Society* (1950), the theorist develops a theory about the child's social and psychological development with regards to the family and the society. He divides the human life cycle into eight psychological stages of development. Within his theory, Erikson maintains that the first stage is basic trust vs. basic mistrust; which is highly associated with the presence of parents, particularly the mother who is the source of trust for her child. In this vein, the current study probes how the mother's absence dramatically affects the daughter's personality formation. From Erikson's perspective, in this phase, trust is an important component of the child's psychosocial development. If the child loses trust and experiences the mother's emotional and physical withdrawal, the feeling of mistrust dominates and destroys the mother-child mutual dyads, paving the way for feelings of estrangement, loneliness and mistrust in everyone. Erikson refers to the stages of psychological development, highlighting that identity crisis may manifest in the stage of identity cohesion vs. role confusion. The adolescent can overcome such crisis if he/she has succeeded in the previous stages as trust, autonomy and initiative. On this basis, the paper refers sporadically to Erikson's theory of the human's lifecycle in the analysis of *I, the Divine* with a particular focus on basic trust vs. basic mistrust phase and identity cohesion vs. role confusion.

There are different references to the mother-daughter dyads in literature including Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) that highly projects the dysfunctional mother- daughter dyads. The protagonist, Elaine, shows how her mother does not care about her feelings and needs. She instead abandons her in order to satisfy the patriarchal mores; this is why, the daughter depicts her mother as a

"shadow" (69) and "the monster" (68). Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) is another example of the problematic mother- daughter connection. The daughter, Sophie, is a rebellious character who wants to live freely while her mother, Martine, wants her to remain pure until her marriage and to become a doctor. The daughter retrospectively narrates her suffering with her mother. Edna O' Brien's *The Light of Evening* (2006) represents a manifesto of the life of the young Dilly's relationship with her mother Bridget who strives to undermine her daughter's dreams of liberty and her desire to emigrate to USA.

3. The Dysfunctional Mother- Daughter Dyads in Alameddine's I, the Divine

It is noticeable that throughout his fiction, Alameddine stresses his characters' consciousness, their sufferings, their pains, their traumas and the causes that lurk behind their traumatic life experiences. In a retrospective manner, Sarah remembers different episodes in her life. Starting with her childhood, she recalls a number of memories with her parents, narrating that she is the reason behind their divorce for being born a girl and not a boy. The author portrays Sarah's family as a dysfunctional one, and as a site of patriarchal oppression. Sarah indicates that her mother, Janet, is trapped in the male stereotypes carved by a truly patriarchal and selfish society. Before her marriage, Janet is depicted as a strong and independent girl who seeks to achieve her dreams. When Janet goes to Lebanon to continue her studies, the fortune teller informs her that she will marry a Druze man:

> The man comes from a strong family. They will swallow [you]. [You] cannot resist. [You have] to change be lighter, learn to float. [You] will no longer be able to be [Your] self; [You] will become part of a larger whole. [You] cannot move independently, [You] [have] to move with the family's river. [You] will become the family. [You] cannot change that the family swallows [You]. They do not understand family over there. [You] have to adapt. [You] must learn to accept (225).

After her marriage, Janet becomes a submissive character as her husband displays a cold and abusive attitude towards her. Within Nour Elddine's family, Janet sees herself as an outsider. In her adulthood, Sarah is informed by her mother that she suffered within such family. She informed Sarah that the grandfather was a misogynist: "your grandfather was an evil man […] He made my life miserable. Whenever no one was around, he would whisper things to me […] I tried telling your father, but he did not believe me. There was no one I could talk to" (294). The mother does not resort to the silent attitude. She instead struggles to stop the grandfather's transgressions.

Psychologically speaking, the mother figure is supposed to be a source of love and support to her daughter. From Abuli's perspective, mothers and daughters naturally share knowledge as it is "derived from their like biology and psychology" (Abuli 2011, 83). The researcher adds that daughters are naturally attached to their mothers as they have the same "interests, concerns, hopes, fears, joys and sorrows" of their mothers (Abuli 2011, 83). This idea is clearly projected in the novel as Alameddine devotes a chapter entitled "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, I am my Mother After all," in which he shows

how Sarah sees herself as her mother. She declares: "my father divorced my mother in 1962 […] I, through no fault of my own, reminded him of her. I was my mother's daughter. And I start crying. It is just the looks. I notice how my life ended up and realize I am my mother, even though I hardly knew her" (138-39). Pearlman argues: "the reality of the mother-daughter experience is that mothers are more disabled and daughters are often more detached from their mothers in ways that are disturbing and dis-hearting" (Pearlman 1989, 7). Using Pearlman's definition, one can say that Sarah's mother is a disabling mother as she cannot manage to give love to her daughter.

As a reaction to the patriarchal mores, the mother abandons her daughter. Sarah's mother does not talk to her daughter as a mother should do. The author reveals that the mother is absent in a period the daughter needs her mother in her first steps in acquiring a language. As an elaboration, Sarah instead finds her father to help her acquire the Lebanese dialect or the "delectable curses, a luscious language all its own" (7). The mother tries neither to know what bothers her daughter nor to find out problems she faces in school or other places. She rather submits to her husband's orders. To complicate things further, Janet also does not understand her daughter's character and demands at each phase in her life. The mother is submissive to the extent she neglects her daughter's emotionally. This affects the daughter's development of a positive self-image. Carolyn Dever maintains that "the mother is constructed as an emblem of the safety, unity and order" (Dever 1998, 24). The mother has to be seen as a role model to her daughter. In the novel, there is a lack of communication between the mother and Sarah. Both the mother and the daughter are victims of fear due to patriarchy. This state of fear manifests itself in Sarah's dilemma, causing her to suffer from feelings of mistrust, alienation and bewilderment. As the mother abandons her family going back to USA, Sarah unconsciously looks for another source to be attached to.

In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson refers to the second stage, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, arguing that parents should provide the child with independence and self-control in order to reach autonomy (183). As a result of her mother's abandonment and Sarah's inability to be an autonomous person, she returns to her father and grandfather as they represent the outside world. She maintains: "When I was growing up, my father was the center of my universe. I considered him the handsome man in the world" (Alameddine 2002, 126). She also maintains that she has a good relationship with her father since he considers her "his Cordelia" (Alameddine 2002, 35). In this perspective, Sarah becomes infatuated with the advantages of masculinity. She starts viewing herself as an obstacle for her family, this is why; she starts behaving like a boy. Accordingly, the author indicates that Sarah's childhood is full of contradictions. She lives a different sort of life in comparison to her generation especially that she refers to herself as a tomboy. She declares: "As a child, I was a tomboy, unaware of how girls were supposed to behave. I became a good soccer player. I excelled at mathematics in school. I wore dungarees and tennis shoes" (Alameddine 2002, 04).

In his essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" as a part of his book *Écrits* (1977), Jacque Lacan argues that each person goes through a phase called the mirror stage through which infants form their identities. In Lacan's perspective, the

mirror stage is a part of the child's search for the real self. It should be noted that Alameddine uses the mirror imagery in discussing not only Sarah's dysfunctional relation with her mother but also in reflecting the theme of self-actualization. The author uses a chapter entitled "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, I am my Mother After All." More than that, the metaphor of the mirror permeates the whole narrative. It is indicated in the novel that, during childhood, Sarah frequently checks herself in the mirror. When Sarah looks at the mirror, she sees her mother rather than herself: "I look at myself in the mirror and cannot help myself. I begin to chant: Mirror, mirror, on the wall. I am my mother after all and I start crying" (Alameddine 2002, 138-39). Thus, the sense of fear appears in the daughter's psyche as she rejects to be her mother. She wants to be her real self as an autonomous child and to have a unified foundation of herself.

This part proposes to skirt the psychological effects that the grandfather causes in cutting the bonds between the mother and her daughter. The grandfather named Sarah after the French actress, Sarah Bernhardrt, and cultivates her interests in such actress. He is also the one who tells Sarah stories about Druze history, wanting her to have a Druze identity. From the beginning, the author foregrounds the broken mother-daughter relation by showing that Sarah starts the narrative referring to her grandfather instead of her mother. From this point, one deduces that she emphasizes his presence over the mother's presence. Sarah asserts: " As a child, I spent most of the time with my grandfather in the family room […] He told me all kinds of tales, but his favorites were about the Divine Sarah, the goddess on the stage. These I came to know by heart" (Alameddine 2002, 77). The oppressive socio-cultural context, in which the novel is set, clearly shows that patriarchy is still rooted there. Sarah's sister, Amel, in her letters to her mother, refers to the transgressions of women and how her grandfather is a "Machiavellian asshole, prejudiced as hell, scenophobic and bigoted. You just do not remember him well. With you, he was all kindness and warmth; with the rest of us, he was a manipulative bastard" (Alameddine 2002, 180). Hartman argues that Sarah's grandfather "represents patriarchal, traditional mountain Druze Lebanon" (Alameddine 2002, 344). The author voices Sarah's vituperative repressed anger against her grandfather who molds her, during childhood, that she is a divine character, leading her to be a narcissistic person. In her retrospective narrative, Sarah depicts that her grandfather is a main cause for her poor relationship with her mother as he tries to silence Janet and transgress her individual self. During her adulthood, Sarah shows her anger and disapproval of what happened to her mother. She also mentions that when she goes to New York with her husband, she tries to be attached to her mother so that she can recognize what happened to her mother in Lebanon at that time. She declares that her relation with her mother is improved in USA: "we grew closer, but it was a constant strain to be in her presence for she never forgave. She had been wronged, and lived that wrong for the rest of her life" (Alameddine 2002, 49).

After the departure of the mother, Sarah keeps crying about her mother's abandonment while her father remarried again a druze woman, Saniya, who is depicted as a source of danger to the girls and as "a family intruder" (11). The narrator repetitively highlights that the mother's departure causes

> A curse on our house from which none of us escaped. Everyone misunderstood, thinking it was a curse ending my father's line […] the curse was a life of loneliness. If you took all eight of us, the parents and the six siblings, scrutinized our hearts, you would come across a loneliness so enveloping, so overwhelming, it frightens the uninitiated (121).

Sarah exemplifies that because of the mother's absence, her sister, Lamia, suffers from emotional problems. She keeps sending letters to her mother, in which she describes her feelings of loneliness and insanity.

After the father's marriage, Sarah carries the burden of being a female in her patriarchal family. She adds that she is aware of her father's desire for a son. She hated her femininity and any connection with domestic female tasks. The patriarchal practices against her are further perpetuated by her stepmother. Sarah rejects the domesticated role as a housewife which the stepmother sees it as the only role for Sarah. She grows up believing that she is Sarah the Divine. She declares: "Growing up female in Lebanon was not easy. No matter how much encouragement parents gave their daughters, pressures" (2002, 78). She adds:

> I had a fairy-tale childhood complete with the evil step-mother. She arrived at our house a young girl. Only fifteen days separated us. She decided early on she did not like me and set a course of discipline that would last until my teenage years. She was strict with my two sisters as well, but she was a Nazi with me (33).

Sarah maintains that when Saniya becomes too demanding, she declares a war on her. She states:

> I got revenge. Taking her shoes was my favorite. Once I figured which pair was her preferred, I would throw one of them on the garbage chute and listen as it clanked down the six floors and landed in the garbage containers with a tiny thud…The next night, I put them back between the sheets in the closet. My stepmother was furious. My father was the one who beat me for that, with the belt of course, in the bathroom (34-35).

From this quote, one notices that Sarah's ongoing crusade against the stepmother's patriarchal behavior reflects Sarah's task of trying to be a rebellious and an autonomous character especially as she rejects the patriarchal norms at a young age.

Erikson's fifth stage of development; identity vs. role confusion, deals with the conflicts that adolescent people face in their growing process from childhood to adolescence. From Erikson's perspective, at this stage, any disruption in the person's intimate relations would affect such healthy development. He argues: "a crucial moment when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth recovery and further differentiation" (Erikson 1950, 16). He adds that role confusion, at this stage, leads the subject to encounter overwhelming questions as who am I. As an adolescent, Sarah rebels against the social norms applied to girls at that time. More than that, the total absence of the mother at this stage causes her to experience a loss of control over her life, leading her to more negative behavioral results including: "Poor social skills, low levels of self-esteem and high levels

of depression" (Hoskins, 2014, 509). Sarah declared "I had always been a little odd, which people blamed on my mother" (5). In Understanding Mother- Adolescent Conflict Discussions: Concurrent and Across Time Prediction from Youth's Dispositions and Parenting (2008), in which Nancy Eisenberg (Et al) highlights that at the stage of adolescence, the daughter starts to have a stable ego. In this respect, the mother's interaction with her plays a major role in the social and psychological healthy development. To replace her mother's absence, Sarah develops friendship with her friend Fadi who "changed [her] life forever" (Alameddine 2002, 5).

The Lebanese Civil War is considered in the novel to be a source of conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. The author shows that the Lebanese Civil War affects Sarah's identity and her vision towards life. Bernard Alan Miller mentions: "War […] attests to a place of human experience that seems beyond the human, to this place of [the] abject, the place of death and decay where the power of horror resides, where irony itself far too weak a word" (Miller 2015, 323). From the quote, one argues that the war does not only contribute in widening the gap between the mother and the daughter especially that due to the war the daughters cannot receive their mother's letters, but it is also seen as a source of threat of Sarah's identity formation which slides towards an existentialist crisis or void as she starts seeing herself as nothing. The author shows that the protagonist directly addresses the reader to know her story. Sarah declares: "I want to tell you my story, not to show I was hurt, though I was. I simply want someone to note what happened" (2002, 115). From the above-mentioned extract, one notices that the narrator uses the past tense to show that she is stuck in the past and cannot move forward; this is why, she tries to inform the reader not only about her suffering but also to organize her shattered life and identity. In other words, the narrator provides the reader with a simultaneously gut-wrenching narration and a staunch insight into the post-Lebanese Civil War human condition which hits the reader. Thus, the novel captures the ailments of a post war age. Sarah, as being a product of this time, articulates the psychological consequences of the war on her particularly on her relationship with her mother.

From Kristeva's view, the abject is considered to be a barrier between the "Subject" and the "Object." In other words, Kristeva's abjection is associated with polluted and contaminated feelings which lead subjects to feel a sense of nothingness in the way they cannot distinguish between the self and the other. To recall Kristeva's concept, Sarah, after the rape scene, sees herself as nothing and she unconsciously wants to purify her body as she feels dispossessed from it: "she felt dispossessed of her own body. She tried to recapture a visual support, something to get a hold of, but she could only discern a frail silhouette in the distance" (197). From Kristeva's view, the abject awakens Sarah's defence mechanism that help her to protect herself against abject; at the same time, creating an obsessive preoccupation with it especially through cleaning. After the rape scene, Sarah asserts:

> She remembers trying to get clean. She scrubbed herself with the loofah, over and over, as if there was some dark stain and she Lady Macbeth. Out, damn spot. She was dirty, all of her. She wanted to rub herself raw, remove any traces of herself.

> She wanted out of her skin. She wanted to be a different person, a better person, her tears adding salt to the bath. She scrubbed her arms, her legs. (82-83)

She is also absorbed by feelings of fear, anxiety, isolation and angst. Erikson notes that trauma: "invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape" (1995, 183). Using the expression the interior landscape, one can add that Sarah's psyche is dramatically influenced after the waves of traumatic incidents during the Lebanese Civil War.

The novel manifests traumatic incidents of the civil war, which makes it revolve around psychological issues. Like Aaliya, in *An Unnecessary Woman*, Sarah, in her memoir, depicts that she experiences the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War. She describes the environment as destructive, as a sort of threat. She refers to the first days of the war as: "The first day of the war in Beirut, April 1975 […] the stairwell seemed the safest place […]. In time, the smell of cordite, of garbage, urine and decaying flesh, would become families to us, banal and clichéd" (38-39). She mentions also that in the war, her sister was murdered by a Syrian soldier. The war is considered to be another cause for the unfavorable representation of mother-daughter relationship. Alameddine depicts the total absence of the mother figure when Sarah was raped. The narrator provides the reader with a detailed description of the rape scene. She declares: "She did not want to believe this was happening to her. She wanted to wake up and realize this was nothing than a nightmare" (2002, 196). She felt "dispossessed of her own body" (196). At the end of the traumatizing incident, she mentions: "she had not noticed the men dress and leave. She found herself suddenly alone, filthy, covered in dirt and blood" (198). She adds: "One hour. In only one hour, [My] life had come to an end. In only one hour, (I) thought bitterly, [I] had become a woman. [I] was no longer a virgin" (199). Sarah narrates that when she arrives at home after being raped, she finds her father playing with other men and her stepmother abuses her to do domestic tasks.

4. Sarah's Identity Reconstruction during Adulthood

The paper foremost deals with how the clash of the two cultures (America and Lebanon) influences the relationship between the mother and the daughter. The two cultures complicate the notion of motherhood in a way Sarah is caught in a conflicting pressure to conform to both her mother's American tradition and her Father's Druze mores. To exemplify Sarah's situation, she firmly clings to her childhood memories in Lebanon even if she adapts to her American culture. Sarah remains suspended between the two worlds and the two cultures. She is traumatized because of her shattered identity between the two cultures. She declares: "I was always told time is the great healer, obliterates memory, and sublimates passion. Not true, I was never a plaything of time" (Alameddine 2002, 101).One can say that Sarah's fragmentation and her diasporic situation reflect the complexity of Arab American hybrid identity. In other words, through using the character of Sarah, the author casts light on the notion how diasporic individuals negotiate a variety of experiences and identities. Additionally, one may add that the mother has a role in the protagonist's fragmentation and self-division even in her adulthood. This idea can be

highlighted in the novel through the protagonist's attempt to write her autobiography in which she searches for home, a sense of belonging and having a sense of coherent identity.

Accordingly, the novel represents many shades of diaspora as it gives voice to the problems of immigration, adaptation and family dyads. More than that, the novel is riven with the feeling of fear, anger and anxiety. It provides a critique of the Lebanese Civil War. It also deals with how oppression, estrangement and patriarchy play a role in destroying the mother- daughter relation. The latter is resulted from different problems including misunderstanding, miscommunication, identity crisis and cultural clash. These clashes play a destructive role in the daughter's lives. Lurking in the same background, Sarah's narrative is interwoven with her dysfunctional relation with her mother, resembling a complex process of constructing a diasporic identity. In her search for herself, she refers repetitively to themes of fitting, identity and home. In the novel, there is a chapter entitled "Here and There" that reflects the narrator's fragmentation between the two worlds. She maintains that "whenever she is in Beirut" she thinks that "home is New York. Whenever she is in New York, home is Beirut. Home is never where she is, but where she is not" (99).

During adulthood, the narrator strives to forget about the world of her childhood. She asserts that "I breathed deeply, slowly, trying to control myself as I parked along the side" (Alameddine 2002, 143).However, her mother's abandonment and displacement affects her even in her relationship with men. In the Intimacy V.S Isolation phase, Erikson uses the concept of intimacy to refer to the individual's "ability to fuse identity with somebody else's without fear that you are going to lose something or yourself" (Erikson 1950, 48). Drawing on Erikson's view, Sarah's daily life, however, is characterized by Loneliness, hopelessness, estrangement and doubt in others; this is why, she fails to establish social relations. She depicts:

> Throughout my life, these contradictory parts battled endlessly, clashed, never coming to a satisfactory conclusion. I shuffled [ad] nauseam between the need to assert my individuality and the need to belong to my clan, being terrified of loneliness and terrorized of losing myself in relationships. I was the black sheep of my family, yet an essential part of it. (229)

From the quote, one deduces that Sarah unconsciously uses defense mechanisms as displacement, fear of intimacy to protect herself from being too attached to others as Freud has referred to it in Studies *in Hysteria* (1895).

To shed light on the theme of marital conflict and its effects on the psychology of the child, one should refer to Michael Rutter (1979), E. Mavis Hetherington (1981) and Ann Goetting (1981) as psychoanalytic studies that fall in that realm. Goetting, for instance, argues that the recurrent parents' conflicts affect the child's social life, intimate relations, health and safety (350). In *I, the Divine*, the author explores Sarah's parents' bad relationship and its potential link with her adulthood. Due to her parents' un-intimate relationship, the protagonist, in adulthood, finds difficulties in forming intimate relations with men as she was divorced twice. She declares: "When it came to men, I did not pick the

beautiful or the correct. I picked the wrong one." (Alameddine 2002, 16). She adds: "I had failed every romantic relationship I had plunged into. The reasons for these failures continued to elude me. But the resulting feelings did not" (142). She specifically refers to her relationship with David, maintaining that she met David at a low point in her life. She discussed things with him particularly her life, showing how she rapidly tells him about her traumatizing life: "I told him about my son. In that confined space, with an avid listener, I poured out my feelings**,** my fears, my hopes. I felt heard. […] he gave me direction, became both my compass and my anchor. I was flailing and he gave me focus "(33; 101).

After her marriage**,** when she discovers that she is pregnant, Sarah falls into depression. She refuses not only her pregnancy but also her unborn child. She feels: "As though she is being eaten alive from the inside, something is slowly devouring her. A vampire sucks her soul" (211-212). Furthermore, due to her memories with her mother, she thinks that she will fail in fulfilling the role of being a mother. She, later on, abandons her family as she stays in New York instead of returning to Lebanon with her husband and son. She fails to create emotional bonds with her son. Sarah reveals that her friend was shocked about the fact that Sarah can be a mother: "Charlene made sure to mention how surprised she was that I had motherly instincts" (19). She realizes that her relationship with her husband is not what she expects. She refers to her relation with David as a toxique one especially when he criticizes her paintings. At that time, she narrates that she needs her mother; this is why she starts recalling certain memories: "I did not remember my mother from her days in Lebanon. I was too young when she left. When I moved to New York in 1980, I was able to get to know her, but my Janet was nothing like the Janet the rest of my family knew. My Janet was bitter, a defeated woman" (252). She adds that when she immigrated to U.S.A, she saw her mother repetitively. In these meetings, Sarah mentions that her mother becomes mentally disordered. She adds that her mother committed suicide in U.S.A: "I wanted my mother to see her grandson, but she refused […] I knew she would not show up with some excuse the next day when I call her. I was wrong. That night she cut herself with a razor in the bathtub, not just her wrists, but all over, and bled to death" (Alameddine 2002, 56).

To problematize Sarah's situation and her search for a whole self and identity, the author, throughout the novel, incorporates the motif of the quest for self-discovery metaphorically. In other words, Sarah's narration makes the novel enmeshes in a style that reflects her quest for reconstructing her identity. It is worth adding that the fragmented relationship goes parallel to the structure of the novel. In the process of writing her memoir, Sarah experiences with different stylistic levels. The novel is written in a first voice, which according to Hout is "Perhaps the subjective that best embodies the existentialist to be is to have become" (Hout 2008, 62). She writes her memoir in a fragmented, nonlinear, repetitive, blurry and tormented way. She asserts: "I am writing this to get it over with, to finally get completion" (115). From Apgar's perspective, writing is seen as a solace and truce: " One of the major components of recovery process is the establishment of a coherent personal narrative […] This task is often facilitated by writing about the abuse and the feelings, people, places, and events associated with it" (Apgar 1998, 48). Sarah further uses different languages. For example, the first two chapters are written in French. She also uses

fictionalized para-texts such as title pages, blank pages and dedications. Sarah's narrative voice prevails and projects the vulnerable familial relationship that shapes the novel's structure. The author also keeps repeating the expression of "split vision" to capture Sarah's existence between USA and Lebanon. Significantly, the author uses the technique of intertextuality, drawing from Shakespeare's "King Lear" to reveal how Sarah is seen as Cordelia who strives to overcome hardships in her life. In *I, the Divine*, Sarah who strives to reconstruct her life as a traumatized diasporic subject. In " Bringing Lebanon's Civil War Home to Anglophone Literature: Alameddine's Appropriation of Shakespeare's Tragedies" (2016), Awad maintains: " Reading Alameddine's novels as appropriations of Shakespeare's tragedies valorizes the novelist's contrapuntal vision and demonstrates how Arab writers in diaspora, writing in English for an international readership, strategically draw on Western canonical texts to represent the experiences of Arab characters" (86).

By referring to her plights and triumphs and how she turns her own life in a new direction, and how she strives to resist the side effects of her mother's absence, Sarah starts a process of self-definition and identity reconstruction. In order to reconstruct her life, she participates in a group that emotionally supports the AIDS patients. She also sees painting as a solace for her own traumatized self. She maintains: "Having my work exhibited changed my whole view of myself. I was no longer as lost. I had a purpose for waking up in the morning" (Alameddine 2002, 105). Sarah's escape to painting alludes to her state of internal displacement and moving forward to reconstruct her life. At the end of the work, in an epiphany moment, she sits in front of her TV, declaring: "I was having trouble writing my memoir, not being able to figure out how to attack it. I had tried different methods, but the memoir parried back expertly" (Alameddine 2002, 306). She strives to reconciliate with herself, highlighting: "I want to celebrate the new me" (Alameddine 2002, 217). She tries also to identify herself as a part of her family. She declares: "I had to explain how the individual participated in the larger organism, to show how I fit into this larger whole. So, instead of telling the reader, come meet me, I have to say something else. Come meet my family, come meet my friends, come here, I say come meet my pride" (308).

Conclusion

The novel *I, the Divine* is written in a form of memoir that chronicles the life of Sarah in a retrospective way: her memories of childhood, her relationship with her parents and the traumatic memories of the Lebanese Civil War. In essence, the author Alameddine brings to light how patriarchy, the Lebanese Civil War and other aspects affect the healthy mother-daughter relationship. He further scrutinizes how the mother and the daughter are victims of the family and the society that aggravate the gap between them. Additionally, the study makes evident how Alameddine's novel speaks to the delicacy of Sarah's consciousness; that is, Alameddine does not only refer to his protagonist's psychic turmoil but also dwells on the causes of her disorders and the projection of her traumas. The author further gives insight into not only how the mother-daughter relation is obscured by abandonment, displacement and

isolation but he also highlights how the protagonist strives to wind her way to identity reconstruction and autonomy fulfillment.

العلاقة المختلة بين الأم وابنتها في رواية ربيع علم الدين *(انا الإلهي)* (2002)

إكرام الشهب
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، جامعة 20 أوت 1955 – سكيكدة، الجزائر

الملخص

تعالج الدراسة علاقة الأم وابنتها المختلة في رواية ربيع علم الدين *(انا، الإلهي)* (2002). كما توضح كيف تؤثر الخلفيات الثقافية المختلفة والاختلافات بين الأب اللبناني والأم الأمريكية على تطور شخصية الابنة. بعبارة أخرى، تتعمق الدراسة في دورة حياة سارة والعوالم الداخلية لإظهار كيف أن مشاعر الخيانة والهجر وتدني احترام الذات هي الأعراض الرئيسية لانقسام شخصيتها. تكشف الدراسة، في المقام الأول، كيف تعيد سارة بناء نفسها خلال مرحلة البلوغ عبر وسائل مختلفة. لإلقاء الضوء على ثنائيات الأم وابنتها غير الطبيعيين في *(انا، الالهي)*، تستخدم الدراسة دراسات التحليل النفسي المختلفة بما في ذلك نظريات إريك إريكسون حول نمو الطفل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ربيع علم الدين الأول، *انا الإلهي*، الشتات، الأم والابنة، علم النفس وتكوين الهوية.

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