8-23-2024

Transnational Druze and Reincarnation: Remembering, Recording, and Reconnecting

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation “Transnational Druze and Reincarnation: Remembering, Recording, and Reconnecting,” calls attention to transnational Druze communities in the U.S. and Lebanon, most notably to their fundamental belief in reincarnation, as an intervention into the fields of transnational, Arab American, memory, trauma, and gender studies of the U.S. and the Global South. In this research, I introduce the concept of "Druze afterlives" to provide a new way of understanding how empire, war, trauma, memory, and gender intersect within and across the borders, bodies, and stories of the transnational Arab world. Focusing my analyses on diverse and interdisciplinary textualizations of transnational Arab identities, cultures, and lived experiences across racial and ethnic frameworks and solidarities, in this project I address several key questions: What does it mean to inherit trauma and memory, not only from family or culture, but from a past life? How do the afterlives of traumatic experience continue to shape lives, experiences, memories, histories, (un)official archives, and politics across the transnational Arab world? What interventions can/do Druze experiences and stories make in individual, national, and global contexts? What future possibilities in seeing, listening to, understanding, and, ultimately, *transforming* the transnational Arab world are forged when we pay attention to its marginalized voices? In exploring these questions, I aim to accomplish a broader understanding of the multiplicity of Arab and transnational Arab identities and cultures, as well as highlight the profound theoretical significance of the Druze and Druze reincarnation across multiple and overlapping fields of thought, ultimately pushing scholarship on the transnational Arab world in new directions.

TRANSNATIONAL DRUZE AND REINCARNATION: REMEMBERING, RECORDING, AND RECONNECTING

by

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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Syracuse University
August 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must start by extending my deep gratitude and appreciation to my committee members: Carol Fadda, Roger Hallas, Robin Riley, Tony Tiongson, Amira Jarmakani, and Dana Olwan. Each of you has been a source of mentorship, guidance, and support for me during both the writing of this dissertation and my time at Syracuse. Thank you for believing in me and this work. To Carol, in particular, who has not only been my primary advisor, but my friend and ally, thank you for all that you do and all that you are.

The completion of this dissertation was also assisted by a series of grants and fellowships from the Modern Language Association, the Center for Arab American Philanthropy, Network 1017, as well as the English department, the Women's & Gender Studies department, the Middle Eastern Studies program, and the Humanities Center at Syracuse University. Thank you for your recognition and support of this project.

To my peers at Syracuse University, particularly Taylore, Neil, Johanna, Debra, Arianna, Ejiofor, and Katherine, I am got this far because of you. Your friendship got me through this program on days it felt impossible to get through this program. Thank you.

Thank you to American University of Beirut for allowing me to dig into your archives, and to Rania Kanj Kiwan for digging alongside me.

To my friends across this interconnected world, especially Mirna, Michelle, and Marwan, thank you for dealing with my "Ph.D. brain." To Deena, thank you for sharing my "Ph.D." brain, and your heart.

Amira and Deena, I am so proud to be in your company as a "Rad Druze Feminist." Thank you. I treasure you both and our collectivity more than words can express.

To our Lebanon, the roots of this project lie with you. Amongst your cedar trees and under your clouds, I have found all the inspiration I have ever needed. To survive. To rise again. In a country so affiliated with war, I have always found my peace. Thank you.

To my beloved Druze—so many of whom have encouraged and enlightened me along the way—this work is by and for us. Thank you so much for taking this journey with me. May our stories and voices always find and bring light.

Finally, to my family: Mom, Dad, Baha, Jason, and Nadene. Mama, thank you for always bringing me joy, hope, and above all else, love. Dad, thank you for being wisdom incarnate. Jason, thank you for pushing me to think more and better. Nadene, thank you for sharing every laugh and every tear. Baha, thank you for never leaving. This work is about souls, and my family is mine. In every lifetime, I will love you.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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In 2008, after the sudden death of my oldest brother in a car accident when he was just twenty-seven-years old, my family felt ripped wide open. Exposed, wounded, reeling, unsure of what to do next or how to move forward, unsure if we even could. A local news reporter came to our home shortly after the accident; I don't even really remember the conversation my remaining siblings and I had with her. All I remember is later reading the news article she wrote, describing the three of us described as "inconsolable." I found this to be an apt description, though tragedies such as these do seemingly necessitate attempts at consolation. "He is in a better place," we were told over and over again. In my quiet moments, then and now, I frequently wonder where that place may be. My brother, Baha, died in the U.S., just down the street from the home where we had spent our childhood. My siblings and I were all born in the U.S., where my parents had immigrated during the Lebanese Civil War. Despite being born and raised in the U.S., we were raised with a deep appreciation of Lebanese culture and people, frequently visiting our homeland during summer vacations. These feelings of love and belonging, for me, were so profound that I moved to Lebanon to complete high school and began my undergraduate career at the American University of Beirut in 2006. After a series of sociopolitical crises during my time living in Lebanon (including several assassinations, car bombings, sporadic outbursts of fighting, and, in particular, the 2006 Hezbollah/Israel war and the 2008 Hezbollah attacks on Beirut and Mount Lebanon), my family and I decided it would be best for me to move back to the U.S. Two months after my return, I lost my brother. The heightened sense of feeling constantly between two countries and two homes that I immediately felt upon returning to the U.S. gained an even

more vivid momentum after the loss of my brother, particularly in the sense of contending with this horrific tragedy. Most of my American friends (outside of the Lebanese community and within) offered words of comfort that centered Christian perceptions of the afterlife and thus hegemonic ways of dealing with death in the U.S. that pertain to notions of heaven and angels, loss and gain. Though we lost my brother, I was frequently told, he "gained his wings." With this, I began to wonder: what is or can be gained from loss? The frequent tension and, at times, even discomfort I felt when offered deeply kind words of consolation from loved ones in the U.S. were, I believe, rooted in my Druze identity, one I had more fully embraced and learned about after my move to Lebanon. The Druze believe in reincarnation, which, in the Arab world, is a belief singular to the Druze. A small ethnoreligious and widely diasporic community, it had been rather hard to connect with Druze peoples and culture growing up in the U.S. However, I had just come back from living in Lebanon, where many of my days were spent in Druze mountain villages finding connection, community, strength, and love with Druze peoples in these unique (and limited) Druze spaces. Thus, after my brother's passing, though so many around me offered and found healing in a belief in heaven, I found myself turning to a critical alternative space, one in which my mother in particular was dwelling, and one that she forged. "I hope he comes back to us," she would repeat, as a wish, as a prayer. "I hope we get to meet him again."

The Druze believe that the second a person dies, their soul migrates to another Druze body. This moment of death is thus also a moment of life and rebirth. Moreover, my brother died both tragically and at a young age. These two factors–youth and traumatic death–are often notably present in the stories of reincarnated Druze peoples who are able to remember and speak to their past lives. With this (here particularly Druze) belief in reincarnation, my mother and I thus found both solace and possibility. Those are the feelings that have inspired this dissertation

project. Inspired by what we can know by paying attention to affects and stories, this work is not interested in providing "proof" or "evidence" of the veracity of reincarnation. Rather, in this project, I look at the *implications* of the Druze belief in reincarnation, within and beyond transnational Druze communities, particularly surrounding conceptualizations of transnationalism, diaspora, gender, memory, and trauma. In this dissertation, across these multiple and overlapping fields of thought and scholarship, I explore what critical interventions can be made when centering Druze reincarnation stories across media genres such as films, novels, and self-conducted oral interviews. In doing so, I address key questions such as: In a region so frequently associated with war and violence, how do the afterlives of traumatic experience continue to shape lives, experiences, memories, histories, (un)official archives, and politics across the transnational Arab world? What future possibilities in seeing, listening to, understanding, and, ultimately, *transforming* the transnational Arab world are forged when we pay attention to its marginalized voices? This project ultimately foregrounds a critical engagement with such questions, positing a central intervention across multiple fields of study including transnational Arab, memory, trauma, and gender studies.

This dissertation thus calls attention to the Druze, a heavily undertheorized and oft-invisibilized ethnoreligious group with origins in the Levant, and whose members exist today, in limited numbers, all across the globe. The unique cultural and religious Druze population, widely considered esoteric by Druze and non-Druze alike, is frequently associated with secrecy and mystery. In fact, towards non-Druze, members of the Druze community themselves enact a strict secrecy about the religion across transnational Druze communities. Moreover, Druze communities themselves often have limited understandings of the tenets and beliefs of the Druze due to the closed off nature of the faith, which restricts non-Druze from converting to the

religion and mandates that one must be born Druze to be Druze. One of the defining and well-known aspects of the Druze, however, is their widely held collective religious and cultural belief in reincarnation. In my focus on the Druze in this project, I thus analyze the Druze collective specifically in terms of transnational Druze cultural formations, identities, and religious belief in reincarnation. In doing so, I highlight the testimonies and stories of those we call the *natqeen*, or the "talkers" (known as the ones who remember and have spoken about their reincarnation stories), in order to both reconceptualize the way we currently understand trauma, memory, and witnessing within and beyond the transnational Arab world as well as expand the existing borders of knowledge surrounding transnational and diasporic Arab identities.

In this project, I introduce what I refer to as "Druze afterlives" as a framework for understanding how Druze reincarnation can help us rethink the ongoing hauntings of traumas in the transnational Arab world, the interconnections between time and space these traumas engender, and, importantly, how these traumas are *carried*—by bodies, souls, and stories. In doing so, I employ an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that places the study of the transnational Arab world, memory, and trauma in conversation within my multimodal analysis of media forms such as novels, films, and self-conducted oral interviews with Druze peoples in Lebanon and the U.S. Both my research and lived experiences make increasingly evident the notion that many Druze who remember their past lives have died in traumatic and/or violent ways. This pattern, in my contention, highlights the ways in which, for the Druze, trauma marks not just mind and body (as theorized in contemporary trauma and memory studies), but a transmigrating soul. Offering new interventions into the fields of memory and trauma studies, I thus contend in this dissertation that studying Druze reincarnation does not simply "add to," but transforms contemporary theorizations of what scholar Marianne Hirsch has named "post-" or

"inherited" memory by considering how Druze memories are inherited not from other loved ones, cultures, and/or communities but from one's own self and soul—at another time, and even, sometimes, from another place. Building on the ways in which scholars such as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman have fundamentally defined eyewitnessing and testimony in trauma studies, I center Druze reincarnation in this work to explore the cultural, social, political, and historical implications of giving eyewitness testimony from a different body or/and space, particularly within the overtly politicized, militarized, and racialized contexts of the transnational Arab world. In my conceptualization of afterlives in this work, I also draw from and expand upon the important work of Saidiya Hartman (*Scenes of Subjection* 1997), which sets the foundation for grappling with the "unthinkable" or "unimaginable" enduring legacies of trauma and terror (here in relation to chattel slavery) across traditional and non-traditional sources that testify to Black life and lived experiences, particularly informing my own analysis of the spiritual dimensions of afterlives in a Druze context. Afterlives, in my purview, thus refers to 1. The literal transmigration of the soul, for the Druze, from one human body to another 2. The individual experiences and specters of trauma and memory that reside in almost every Druze reincarnation story, and 3. The ongoing effects of collective trauma given the exceptionally traumatized historical and contemporary contexts of the transnational Arab world at large. While centering what I frame as Druze epistemologies of listening in order to displace the primacy of the visual in "eye"witnessing, I examine not only who gets to testify/speak but, importantly, who gets listened to/heard across constructions of gender, class, and nation. In doing so, I interrogate and disrupt the pervasive silencing in relation to trauma and memory in Lebanon across transnational, national, and private/personal spheres by attending to and amplifying the voices of the marginalized. Ultimately, I contend that what I name as Druze afterlives opens critical

spaces–on individual, national, and global levels–for Druze peoples and transnational Arab communities more broadly to contend with and bear witness to the ongoing specters of trauma and memory in their everyday lives, enacting in the process alternative and integrally important ways of remembering, connecting, and healing across literal and imagined bodies and borders.

A Brief Background on the Druze

The Druze have an estimated global population of between 850,000 to two million members, though the exact number of Druze is unknown.[1] As the Druze are indigenous to the Levant, countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, and Jordan have historically held the largest populations of Druze people across the world. These communities, however, have been divided and sometimes pitted against one another through projects of colonialism and nation-making. The Druze religion branched off the Fatimid Shi'a establishment in Cairo around 986 A.D. In its refusal and repression of the new interpretation of unitarian faith and philosophy put forth by the Druze, the Fatimid Caliphate enacted the beginning of a long history of Druze persecution and oppression by other Arab religious communities, which is one of the primary reasons there is no longer a significant Druze community in Egypt today. The aggressions and repressions directed towards the Druze are often motivated by notions of religious "otherness" and segregation, as Arab Christians have often considered the Druze Muslims and Arab Muslims have historically considered the Druze heretics (Betts). Moreover, within the Druze community, some Druze adamantly identify as part of Islam and others, with equal vigor, do not.

[1] The last official population census in Lebanon was in 1932. In 2023, the American Druze Foundation launched a survey titled "Druze Be Counted" to better understand how many Druze people currently live in the U.S. (results forthcoming). With the current lack of official figures across nations, there is a large discrepancy across estimates of how many Druze peoples exist around the world.

Today, tensions between the Druze and other Arabs in the Levant are also informed by the relatively good (yet undoubtedly tense) relationship that the Druze have with the Zionist government of Israel, the prominent Druze presence in the Israel Defense Forces and in local Israeli politics, as well as sectarian-inflected fighting as part of regionally located and internationally informed conflicts such as the Lebanese Civil War, the latter becoming a central point of analysis in this project. Most Druze are diasporic, with diverse points of origin and connections to their homelands, though the majority of Druze people today live in and/or come from the Levant. These diasporic and transnational identities also serve to complicate monolithic understandings of the Druze as a cultural and/or religious entity. The transnational and diasporic conditions of the Druze, as well as their small population as a whole, result in a constant struggle for the Druze to preserve collective ancestral, familial, social, cultural, and religious ties across national borders and transnational states of being. Importantly, this struggle for preservation is deeply gendered. As such, Druze women—who face enormous pressure to marry Druze men and raise Druze children—are particularly subjected to real and imagined threats to survival across transnational Druze communities. The ways in which these gendered struggles and survivals connect Druze epistemologies of listening (which include who is allowed to talk/testify and who is listened to/heard) to trauma and the Druze ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation in particular are highlighted and asserted throughout this project.

The Druze maintain specific religious, cultural, social, and political roles and beliefs in and beyond the Arab world. Despite the small number of its transnational and diasporic population, one religious tenet of the Druze maintains that one is not able to convert into being Druze; rather, one must be born Druze. This religious principle places a palpable and significant burden to “carry on” the values of the religion and culture onto Druze women in particular, who

thus become responsible for bearing and raising Druze children, as well as maintaining Druze networks across time and space. Furthermore, if one marries outside the Druze religion, one is thus ex-communicated from Druze prayers and protections and is effectively considered "damned." These are pressures that transnational and diasporic Druze outside of the Levant especially must contend with, as they struggle to maintain connection to the faith, community, and culture while living outside of specifically Druze communities. Maintaining connections between and amongst transnational and diasporic Druze thus becomes of vital importance to these notions of cultural, religious, and familial preservation. As I illuminate, the primary ways in which these connections are maintained include Druze stories/storytelling and epistemologies of listening that enact indigenous ways of knowing, (re)connecting, and, therefore, worldbuilding, which this dissertation examines across various forms of Druze traumatic testimony and media genres (visual, written, and oral).

Despite their small number and diasporic conditions, the Druze have played significant and critical historical, political, and social roles, particularly within the Levant. Certain regional spaces, such as the Chouf Mountains in Lebanon and Jabal al-Druze (in English, Druze mountains) in Syria, are also critically important in terms of locating and understanding Druze culture, historically and contemporarily known as a central home-spaces for regional Druze as well as transnational Druze communities. As such, these are important regions to examine and underscore in understanding long and important Druze political and social histories within the Levant, in which Druze have been largely associated with mountain-dwelling and fighting in protection of their communities and lands. The congregations of Druze in different mountain regions across the Levantine nations in which they dwell is not coincidental; rather, the Druze intentionally inhabit these regions because the mountains provide both protection as well as a

space for community (see Rabah, Hitti).[2] These regions thus reinforce the gendered roles of the Druze, in which men traditionally serve as fighters, defenders, or "warriors" during (frequent) times of struggle and strife, and Druze women often work as caretakers and carriers of community and tradition, roles I interrogate in relation to reincarnation, trauma, violence, and the Lebanese Civil War throughout the dissertation and especially examine in chapter three.[3]

For the scope of this project, I focus on the regions of Mount Lebanon and its US diaspora for several reasons. Most obviously, as a Druze Lebanese American woman who has lived and studied in both the US and Lebanon, these are the communities of and for whom I hold the most knowledge and connection. Centering my work on the transnational Lebanese Druze also allows me to examine the historical and ongoing geopolitical complexities of Lebanon, given the nation's multi-confessional and regionally segregated structures, as well as the ways in which these complexities carry, travel into, and are replicated in the US. With this context, it is critical to note that in focusing on the Druze communities of Lebanon and the US, I resist reified borders of these regions, thus complicating notions of over "here" versus over "there" by looking at the longstanding transnational currents between these spaces, with a particular focus on bodies, souls, and stories. In my purview, these migrations become significantly palpable when examining the phenomenon of Druze reincarnation.

Among the unifying historical, cultural, and religious beliefs that set the Druze apart from other religions and Arab cultures is reincarnation. Reincarnation, I argue, is not only a core

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[2] The Chouf Mountains are the heartland of the Druze in Lebanon. Interestingly, the word "chouf" or "shouf" in Arabic means "look." I have often heard in Lebanon that the mountains provided the Druze a large vantage point of oversight during numerous wars, battles, and periods of Druze oppression and/or persecution. I was unable to find anything in my research that confirmed the Chouf region was named such because it has served as a critical "looking" point for the Druze but find this connection notable.

[3] For more on Druze connections to warriordom, see chapter 3 "From an Early History of the Druze to the Modern-Day" in Chadi Radwan's "The Sweet Burden: Constructing and Contesting Druze Heritage and Identity in Lebanon" (2016).

ethnoreligious belief for the Druze but is a critical component of the transnational and diasporic Druze stories and connections that I investigate in this dissertation. Reincarnation and reincarnation narratives like the ones I gather/analyze across the genres of film, novel, and oral interviews are key objects of study in examining transnational and diasporic Druze communities whose collectivity and community is dependent on creating/maintaining these interconnections despite their limited numbers globally as well as transnational and diasporic lived conditions. My historical period of focus in this project is what I frame as the ongoing Lebanese Civil War (officially periodized from 1975-1990) because of its role as one of the central if not the key collective traumatic event of the 20th century for Lebanon and its diasporas. As such, it is important to note that the Lebanese Civil War (LCW) was not something that I initially centered for this dissertation, rather, it became the key context for this project on its own. In the novels I read, the films I watched, the conversations I had with people within and beyond Lebanon, studying and following Lebanese traumatic experience almost always brought me back to the war. The pervasiveness of the war in relation to Lebanese lives around the world today is why I see and frame the LCW as very much ongoing, the afterlives of which profoundly affecting Lebanon and the Lebanese across national borders and transnational bodies. Indeed, most of the reincarnation narratives I heard from Druze in the U.S. and Lebanon engaged the LCW, in particular, the war's imbrications within men's war stories and gendered notions of martyrdom, honor, and gender violence, which I examine throughout this dissertation.[4] While highlighting the ways in which reincarnated Druze men's war testimonies break critical silences that transform the ways in which we do (or do not) understand the ongoing sociopolitical

[4] The prevalence of Druze reincarnation stories in relation to the Lebanese Civil War is also evident in Gebhard Fartacek's chapter, "Ethnographic Insights: Narratives Dealing with Previous Life Memories Among the Druze" in *Druze Reincarnation Narratives: Previous Life Memories, Discourses, and the Construction of Identities* 2021 (68).

implications of the war, I also assert the ways in which understudied reincarnated Druze women's narratives face heightened silencing and erasure that must be attended to in order to comprehend the pervasive violences and enduring traumas of the war both within and beyond Druze communities. With these foci, however, it is also critical to note that my analysis of the afterlives of the Lebanese Civil War comes with an understanding that speaking to and from the transnational reincarnated Druze histories I am engaging requires a permeability between moments in history that are inherently connected to one another and the objects of study that build from them. I thus examine the contemporary Druze texts curated for this project within contexts of intense militancy, war, violence, and trauma for both the Arab world and the West that cut across time and space (including but not limited to: the Lebanese Civil War, the Gulf wars, the establishment of Israel and the corresponding Arab-Israeli wars, 9/11 and the War on Terror, among other events and actions).

Global Narratives about Druze Reincarnation

Within and without its engagements with trauma and traumatic experience, reincarnation is of critical importance to Druze communities around the world. For both the Druze in the Arab world and those in diaspora, it is hard to come across a Druze person who has never heard a Druze reincarnation story. As a widely diasporic and global community, Druze stories, like Druze souls and bodies, transmigrate and transcend national borders. For instance, while giving a talk on Druze reincarnation at the American Druze Convention in San Antonio, Texas in November 2023, after asking who, in the room full of Druze living in diaspora, had ever heard a Druze reincarnation story, almost every hand quickly was raised into the air despite gender, age, and/or country of birth and upbringing. Indeed, as Druze around the world, we have all heard

Druze reincarnation stories, quite often in abundance–stories that, I argue, both shape relations to one's own Druzeness within the Arab world and across its diasporas as well as speak to the profound impacts of Druze reincarnation and storytelling across time and space.

Moreover, as I reveal throughout this dissertation, stories pertaining to the Druze ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation hold vast national and transnational implications that extend beyond Druze communities to non-Druze, whose knowledge about the Druze religion often centers reincarnation (albeit with limited knowledge about it). The fact that Druze stories are included in some of the most famous studies of reincarnation conducted around the world to date underscores a global curiosity surrounding Druze belief in reincarnation. One of these works is undoubtedly the foundational study *Twenty Suggestive Cases of Reincarnation* (1966) by renowned psychiatrist Dr. Ian Stevenson (1918-2007), a leading expert and prolific writer of hundreds of papers and multiple books on reincarnation. Indeed, one of the twenty cases Stevenson documented in the groundbreaking *Twenty Suggestive Cases* was of Imad Elawar, a young, reincarnated Druze boy from Mount Lebanon who died in a previous life by being run over by a truck. Other cases of reincarnated peoples from the Arab world that Stevenson studied and reported on throughout his career include the testimonies of Faruq Andary (suicide), Mounzer Haider (gunshot wound), Rabih Elawar (motorcycle accident), Salem Andary (murder), Suleiman Andary (disease), Zuheir Chaar (disease), Nazih Danaf (murder), and Wael Kiwan (died by suicide in U.S. and reborn in Lebanon)-- all Lebanese Druze boys or men who died in traumatic ways and were reborn remembering and testifying to their past lives.[5]

[5] Though beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note here that a critical part of Stevenson's work on reincarnation within and beyond Lebanon included the investigation of physical bodily features. See, for example, Stevenson's analyses of two hundred cases in which present-life birthmarks and birth defects seemingly correspond with a site of injury on the person's past life body in his 1997 work, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects.* Interestingly, several of the reincarnated Druze people I spoke to for this project made note of present life medical issues and pains that they attribute to their past life deaths.

The well-known nature of Stevenson's work perhaps marks the beginning of scientific reincarnation studies in the West as the 1960s, yet Western academic studies of reincarnation–as well as a discerned Western public interest in reincarnation–has not only remained constant but is markedly growing. For example, in May 2024 the popular U.S. daily newspaper *The Washington Post* published an article titled "The Children Who Remember Their Past Lives," centered on reincarnation stories of American children today. In its discussion of several U.S. children who, like majority of the Druze *natqeen,* are haunted by often traumatic past life memories, the article draws on research from the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS) within the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, a division founded by former department chair Dr. Ian Stevenson (see above).[6] Today, this work is carried on by Stevenson's former assistant and mentee, Dr. Jim Tucker, who himself has worked with almost one hundred and fifty reincarnation cases, most often involving children with traumatic past life memories (*TWP*), the majority of whom (60%) are male (Lyons). An increase of academic and public engagements with reincarnation in the West is also evidenced today by the popularization of past-life regression therapy by American psychiatrist Dr. Brian Weiss, who has treated thousands of patients since the 1980s and whose book, *Many Lives, Many Masters: The True Story of a Prominent Psychiatrist, His Young Patient, and the Past-Life Therapy That Changed Both Their Lives* (1988) is an international bestseller. Beyond reincarnation studies in the West, global academic scholarship centered specifically on Druze reincarnation also importantly continues to grow, as seen in the recent production and

[6] The article also makes mention of Tom Schroder, a former *Washington Post* editor and journalist and author of *Old Souls: Compelling Evidence from Children Who Remember Past Lives* (2001). In his book description, Schroder is credited with being the first journalist to accompany Stevenson in his fieldwork, "bringing to the mainstream" children's reincarnation cases "from Lebanon to suburban Virginia" https://www.amazon.com/Old-Souls-Compelling-Evidence-Children/dp/0684851938. The article also makes a passing mention to Stevenson's work in Lebanon but does not mention the Druze.

publication of the European study titled *Druze Reincarnation Narratives: Previous Life Memories, Discourses, and the Construction of Identities* (2021).

Moreover, cultural texts specific to Druze reincarnation outside of the academic sphere are also excitingly emerging, with projects across media forms importantly being headed by Druze writers, artists, producers, and creators themselves. For instance, Druze Lebanese American journalist Sarah Aridi's 2021 article for *The New York Times,* "My Sister Remembers Her Past Life. Somehow, I Believe Her," describes Sara and Heba's reckoning as Lebanese Americans with her sister Heba's past life memories as Nada, a wife and mother who had died in Lebanon. In 2023, a podcast episode titled "A Past Life" was published by Kerning Cultures, an award-winning women-led independent podcasting company with a global audience that focuses on audio storytelling and journalism on the Middle East and North Africa.[7] In this episode, Heba, Sara, and I were interviewed about the ethnoreligious belief in Druze reincarnation from our different positionalities and perspectives as Druze women. This episode was co-produced and conducted by Dana Ballout, a Lebanese Druze producer based in California who herself describes the questions and curiosities she has about Druze reincarnation in our collective conversation. These works add to a growing number of contemporary Druze cultural productions (here defined as works by Druze that engage the Druze) being created across transnational contexts, two of which have already been analyzed in this dissertation: transnational British filmmaker Lawrence Abu Hamdan's 2019 documentary *Once Removed* (see chapter one) and Lebanese American writer Rabih Alameddine's 2001 fiction novel, *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (see chapter two).

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[7] See "A Past Life." 23 March 2023. *Kerning Cultures*. https://kerningcultures.com/a-past-life/.

Reincarnation and the Druze

The emerging scholarship and cultural productions on the Druze's ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation thus importantly engage notions of the "afterlife," which has long been a subject of interest and intrigue for global communities, as made evident in the time-old yet profound question: what happens when we die? For millions around the world, the answer is reincarnation. Indeed, it is important to recognize that reincarnation is far from solely a Druze or even Eastern belief. Religious and cultural beliefs in various forms of reincarnation have long been widely held in the East for followers of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, while also discussed by thinkers such as Plato, Nietzsche, Khalil Gibran, and the American Transcendentalists. Newer religious and spiritual movements such as scientology and wicca have also further made evident a Western belief and investment in the phenomenon of reincarnation, as has the celebrity of public intellectuals such as American psychiatrist Dr. Brian Weiss, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Many Lives, Many Masters* (1988) who is often credited with the popularization of past life regression therapy in the West.

The Druze are thus in community with many other diverse groups of peoples and cultures around the world who believe in reincarnation. With this, it is important to chart the ways the Druze ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation does and does not overlap with other communities. The Arabic word for reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, is *taqqamus*. Derived from the word *qamis*, or shirt, for the Druze, the body is understood as merely "the shirt for the soul" (Swayd 238); as such, the body is only a shell whereas the immortal soul is the essence of every human being. The Druze believe that a soul must always have a body, so that the very moment of death for the body marks the moment of rebirth into another body. Consequently, the death date

of the previous body must align with the birth date of a new body. Moreover, the Druze believe *taqqamus* only happens amongst humans, i.e. a human soul will only transfer to a human body. Furthermore, reincarnation is perhaps best conceptualized through notions of cyclicity or what Druze scholar and physician Anis Obeid describes as "forces of change and renewal in life and existence in general" (123). For the Druze, each lifespan is thus meant to be spent in pursuit of knowledge, elevated consciousness, and awareness of *Tawhid*, i.e. "belief in the Unity or Oneness of God" (Swayd, Obeid). In relation to reincarnation, the Druze ultimately believe that "the purpose of the human soul is to evolve and advance to a state whereby it gets ever closer to the Creator;" in this sense, each lifespan should mark an increased consciousness and progression of the soul (Obeid 153, 155).

The Druze belief in reincarnation has several other unique and important guiding components specific to the religion, listed here in no significant order: The Druze believe that a Druze will always be reincarnated as another Druze as well as maintain their assigned sexual identity (i.e. male to male, female to female), thus reinforcing the religious and gender binaries examined in this dissertation. However, a Druze soul will not necessarily be reincarnated into a body within the same national borders (for example, a Druze person living in the U.S. may be reincarnated into a Druze person living in Venezuela). Most Druze believe that, despite these transnational mobilities, one's previous life holds a personal connection to their present one (i.e. via family, neighborhood, village, kinship relations). Indeed, tracing these connections often allows for Druze (re)connections with other Druze across past and present lives and across geographical boundaries. Moreover, the reincarnated play an important role in transnational Druze culture, a role that is explicitly connected to acts of bearing witness, speaking, testifying, and storytelling centered in this project.

The Druze believe that every human being is indeed reincarnated, but not everyone remembers their past lives. The reincarnated Druze who do remember their past lives and testify/speak to their past life experiences are referred to in Arabic as the *natqeen*, or, in English, the "talkers."[8] Translated from Arabic, the word *natq* means "to talk" or "to speak." There is an important distinction to be underscored between the Arabic word for reincarnation (*taqqamus*) and the Arab word for reincarnation speech (*natq*), as the words are not interchangeable. *Natq* does not refer to the reincarnation of the soul, rather, it is an act of speech, testimony, and "talking." However, talking, in this sense, holds distinct meanings for Druze and Arab communities more broadly, making evident the key connections between witnessing, talking/telling and reincarnation in transnational Druze communities. To talk to in the form of *natq* means that one has been reincarnated and has told their reincarnation story. In this project, I thus reshape and redefine theorizations of testimony in trauma and memory studies (see Laub, Felman, Caruth, Hirsch) by centering Druze acts of *natq* across different media forms, narratives, and discursive texts. In doing so, I argue that *natq*, a Druze act of speech and testimony which occurs in a place of remembering and telling, brings one's past life into their present one, forging deep connections between the two across time and space. Here, the reincarnated person becomes both witness and chronicler to (often traumatic) memories that have henceforth been unspoken and unspeakable because of the death of the former body in addition to transnational, national, social, and political structures of silencing. "Talking," and telling, in this capacity, take on new meanings as reincarnated peoples break these seemingly unbreakable silences, telling their stories and providing their testimonies from a space of rebirth, renewal, and, importantly, survival. Reincarnation, for the Druze, is thus recognized through the recuperative act of talking,

[8] *Natqeen* is the plural form of "*natq*" (masc.) or "*natqa*" (fem.)

which resuscitates one's past life from a space of death represented by the passing of the body as well as, for some, the silencing of past life stories and memories. As I posit Druze talking/ "telling" in the form of *natq* a form of survival in this project, I thus examine who gets to survive—i.e. who is allowed to "tell" or testify and, importantly, who is listened to.

In order to examine transnational Druze formations to rethink and resist hegemonic notions of understanding Arab and Arab American identities, my project specifically interrogates the cultural, social, and historical implications of Druze reincarnation in individual, national, and global contexts, asking: What does it mean to "talk" in the sense of *natq*, for and beyond the Druze? How do these stories, once spoken into existence, travel and expand? Who is able/not able to "talk," to be listened to and heard, and why? What future possibilities do these testimonies allow? These questions become critical points of discussion when considering the larger framework of the project's intervention into expanding/complicating borders of knowledge surrounding transnational and diasporic Arab identities across various conceptualizations of religion, gender, class, and nation, particularly guiding my analysis on the deeply gendered implications of reincarnation testimonies in terms of the cultural preservation/significance of this limited and esoteric ethnoreligious group. They also help underscore the importance of Druze storytelling and epistemologies of listening in relation to transnational, memory, and trauma studies.

Creating Connections Between Druze, Transnational, Memory, and Trauma Studies

My work aims to accomplish a broader understanding of the multiplicity of Arab, Arab American, and transnational Arab identities, as well as highlight the theoretical and transnational significance of the Druze and Druze reincarnation. Although most critical scholarship on the

Druze to date is limited in both interdisciplinary depth and breadth, I place my interventions in conversation with scholarship within the fields of transnational Arab, diaspora, memory, and trauma studies in order to bring new meaning and understanding to the regional and global importance of the transnational Druze, despite our relatively small population numbers. I argue that a study of transnational Druze and Druze reincarnation expands some of the critical tenets and understandings on which these fields are based. Drawing on key critical concepts within these fields of thought, I conduct a multimodal analysis of Druze films, novels, and self-conducted interviews that refuses to privilege one form of Druze testimony/"telling" as more authentic than the other in resistance of problematic notions of authenticity that themselves haunt work on marginalized cultures such as the Druze and colonial archives and ways of knowing more broadly. In the vein of the anticolonial methodologies and theories put forth by scholars such as Katherine McKittrick (*Dear Science* 2021) and Saidiya Hartman ("Venus in Two Acts" 2008), my engagement with Druze traumatic testimony across media forms serves as an assertion that one can never get any type of absolutely "real," or "true" knowledge of the Druze or any other community. In engaging and bearing witness to multiple forms of Druze "telling" within and across the written, visual, and oral, I thus expand on scholarly engagements with several critical concepts, delineating and pursuing in the process new directions for an interdisciplinary critical study of memory, trauma, transnationalism, and diaspora. I list some of these concepts in the section below, signaling the ways in which I transform and broaden their frames of reference and analysis in this dissertation.

In-Betweenness of Migrating Bodies and Ideas

In this project, I show how an examination of Druze reincarnation necessitates a rethinking of the concept of transnationalism as it has been theorized, particularly in relation to the Arab diaspora. Arab American studies scholars such Sarah Gualtieri in *Between Arab and White* (2009), Nadine Naber in *Arab America* (2012), alongside others, have spent much time thinking about and theorizing the in-betweenness of transnational and diaspora Arab racial and ethnic identities and bodies. Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber have theorized the shifting invisibility/hypervisibility of Arabs in America across time amongst these racial and ethnic critical frameworks. Scholars such as Carol Fadda have examined how the conceptualizations of over "here" in the West versus over "there" in the Arab world are depicted as seemingly disparate and mutually exclusive entities via national and cultural discourses. In *Contemporary Arab American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014), for example, Fadda importantly argues that, for transnational Arab communities, existing in one space should not be contingent on the erasure of the other. Building on Fadda's fundamental work, I argue that, for transnational Druze, this in-betweenness takes on new meaning as reincarnated Druze lives not only exist in limited numbers and spaces between over "here" and over "there," but, also, in transphysical, transtemporal, and even transgeographical spaces between life "then" and life "now." In chapter one, for example, I examine how Druze diasporic identities exist in multiple spaces of in-betweenness by looking at the testimony of Bassel Abi Chahine as depicted in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's audiovisual documentary *Once Removed* (2019). A reincarnated Druze man who remembers dying in the Lebanese Civil War, Bassel was born in his present life in Kuwait, first had reincarnation memories in the U.S., and currently lives between Lebanon and Canada. In listening to Druze testimonies of reincarnation, I expand a more traditional analysis of transnationalism and geographical in-betweenness by illuminating

how Druze identities deal with the added disaggregation between presence (life) and absence (death) as well as present (now) and past (then). My intervention, which lies at the intersections of multiple and interdisciplinary fields of such as transnational, trauma, memory, and gender studies, thus not only contends with the migration of Druze bodies, but with the idea of a transnational soul as it is understood within the Druze context. In doing so, I add a crucial element to discussion of transnational in-betweenness by emphasizing the transmigration of souls between and across bodily life/death boundaries as well as physical boundaries of state and home.

For the Druze, bodies die, but souls do not; a Druze soul transmigrates into another body after the death of its previous body. What may emerge is thus a physical body that has never traveled the national borders in its present homeland, but a transnational soul that may maintain a visceral connection to and lived memory of a different national landscape. Transnationalism here, I argue, also takes on new meanings as we consider its possible spiritual dimensions, made evident in the ways Druze souls are believed to transmigrate across national borders. There is thus a transcendence of borders in these transmigrations, and is, I argue, distinctly gendered and classed, as made particularly evident in my analysis of the transnational nature of Lamia's characterization in Rabih Alameddine's novel, *I, the Divine,* in chapter two. In considering how Druze bodies do or do not travel and live through the diasporic condition, I thus additionally examine how Druze stories and traditions (here, specially, in relation to reincarnation), also have to negotiate borders and cultural landscapes in gendered and classed ways, negotiations that become especially pertinent given the cultural and religious stakes at hand in maintaining Druze beliefs and communities across space and time. Looking at what it means to be Druze in different global landscapes allows me to chart the ways in which these transmigrations of the

soul work with and against traditional notions of transnational in-betweenness of diasporic bodies. In doing so, I explore how reincarnated Druze peoples, such as Lamia, Bassel, and many others contend with the lived memories of and connection to a home and/or nation they have never been to and, perhaps, cannot and/or will not return to. My analyses thus underscore the various positionalities that transnational and diasporic Druze maintain, pushing against a monolithic understanding of the Druze as a religious and cultural formation, and consequently further complicating and undoing monolithic understandings of Arab identities as a whole as asserted by Western hegemonic discourses. In fleshing out the borders of knowledge surrounding this esoteric religion across different media forms and modes of "telling" via *natq*, the impossibility of finding an absolute "truth" or knowledge to the Druze religion or to being Druze is rendered legible. Rather than engaging with the notions of truth and authenticity in relation to testimony that do not and cannot exist (see Felman & Laub), I find productive the tensions that exist between transmigrating Druze souls and the Druze bodies that they become tethered to, bodies that must contend with social constructions of nation, religion, gender, class, etc. In this project, these tensions become particularly palpable when examining the Druze bodies, minds, and souls in relation to the traumas they carry and speak to across time and space. Broadening ideas of how trauma marks the mind and body (see, for example, Bessel van der Kolk's 2014 bestseller *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*), I thus consider the implications of how, for the Druze, trauma marks transmigrating souls, informing contemporary Druze lives, cultures, and stories across bodies and borders.

Trauma, Testimony, and the "Imperative to Tell"

In examining the Druze and Druze reincarnation, my engagement with trauma studies opens up lines of critique that extend the modes and foci informing this field's scholarship. Most of the memories of the past lives to which Druze *natqeen*, or "talkers," bear witness are traumatic. Indeed, it is widely understood by the Druze and supported by my research throughout this project that the Druze most likely to remember and speak about their past lives are those who died traumatic deaths. The unique acts of speech from the Druze *natqeen* thus become testimonies from scenes of bodily death and silencing, speaking to what has henceforth been unspoken and unspeakable.[9] Scholars within the field of trauma studies have done critical work on theorizing the important connection between trauma and acts of speech. In one of the foundational texts of trauma studies, *Testimony Crisis in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1990), psychoanalyst Dori Laub calls the critical act of testifying to one's trauma for Holocaust survivors the "imperative to tell." For Laub, telling one's story becomes inherently linked to a survivor's ability to actually survive, as "not telling" here is linked to a "perpetuation of its [the trauma's] tyranny;" left unspoken, these traumatic events, Laub argues, continue to "pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life" (79). Moreover, as I explore across the dissertation, the abilities to speak/testify/tell and—crucially—the dynamics determining who is likely to be listened to are deeply gendered. Telling/not telling, I contend, is thus an important critical framework through which to study and understand the uniqueness of Druze reincarnation testimonies and *natq* in relation to who speaks, who gets listened to and, thus, who gets to survive. Indeed, here, telling cannot be separated from listening and surviving. The imperative to tell for the Druze is an imperative to survive on multiple levels. The first, I argue, is a survival of a past life via the transmigration of the soul and articulation of

[9] See Hartman's conceptualization of the "unthinkable" or "unimaginable" self-possessed subject (here in the context of slavery) in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997).

(often traumatic) memories, thus becoming, quite literally, a Druze "talker." "Not telling" for the Druze not only leads to the festering of that trauma but keeps the past life in a literal zone of death and silence, which I explore throughout the dissertation. Moreover, for transnational Druze communities, whose small populations and histories of oppression have long inspired notions of the Druze being under threat, survival remains at the forefront of many contemporary Druze people's minds (as discussed in the CODA to this dissertation). Telling, listening, and sharing/passing Druze stories, (particularly those pertaining to reincarnation which, in turn, forge imperative connections between Druze across time and space) thus become vital acts of survival and indigenous ways of knowing religion, culture, and one another for Druze in the Levant and in diaspora.

As has been theorized by scholars in the field, and as Druze reincarnation testimonies certainly underscore, trauma is not linear. For the Druze, this nonlinearity speaks across different bodily lived experiences for one soul and the afterlives of Druze trauma. Therefore, reincarnation testimonies become critical for survival on an individual level as a Druze person—through talking/ "telling" /*natq*—resuscitates their own past life and, almost always, past traumas, their particularly traumatic deaths. Moreover, reincarnation testimonies are critical for the Druze as a collective. Not only does *natq* move a Druze person into recognition of their reincarnation, but it also works towards cultural survival, indigenous ways of knowing and (re)connecting across transnational Druze communities in shifting global geopolitical landscapes. Indeed, Druze reincarnation stories travel, and many Druze have thus been able to reconnect with loved ones from their past lives, though factors such as gender and class can and do restrict who stories travel and whose stories are listened to/believed, as I address throughout the dissertation. Therefore, not only do these stories become collective and cultural acts that circulate around

transnational Druze communities, but these testimonies can and have worked to (re)connect Druze with their loved ones across different spaces and times. Considering the limited numbers of the transnational and diasporic Druze community, these (re)connections thus become crucial to individual, collective, and cultural survival, as well as call into question who gets to survive.

In theorizing testimony, literary scholar Shoshana Felman and psychoanalyst Dori Laub argue that: "Since the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated, or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony, the burden of the witness--in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses--is a radically unique, noninterchangeable, and solitary burden" (3). I contend that Druze reincarnation testimonies also reframe the unique and solitary importance of eyewitness testimony being asserted in this quote as, in the Druze context, interchangeability and eyewitnessing are no longer mutually exclusive. I thus examine what it means to give an "eye"witness testimony from a different body or/and space, in turn, decentering the primacy of the visual and centering Druze epistemologies of listening. In doing so, I explore the social, political, and historical effects of these new types of "eye"witnessing by examining the interconnections between the oral, the written, and the visual across different media forms of Druze testimony.

In my explorations of the testimonies and stories of the reincarnated Druze throughout this project, I ultimately explore how the soul bears the mark of the witness for Druze communities. This is a mark, I argue, that is importantly connected to experiences of trauma, which are a daily reality for people of the Arab world and their transnational communities given the region's long histories of war, violence, colonialism, and foreign intervention. Druze reincarnation testimonies, as I show, call attention to the importance of witnessing that is not firsthand, i.e. memories that are inherited from a past life, yet experienced as "eye"witness

accounts. In their frequent relaying and repeating of reincarnation testimonies from Druze talkers, the transnational Druze collective at large, I argue, is also bearing witness to these stories, listening to/contending with these traumas, and making/facilitating critical connections between and among families and transnational communities, activities which I also partake in throughout this project.

Post-Memory and Witnessing

As scholars of memory studies have argued and asserted, not all memory is traumatic. However, there are distinct overlaps between the fields of trauma and memory studies that I engage with in order to examine the transnational Druze and Druze reincarnation, thus expanding on these existing scholarly conversations. As critics such as Marianne Hirsch and Susannah Radstone have argued, as trauma is transmissible through time and space, so are memories. I argue that this is particularly the case for the Druze. In illuminating this point, I place the Druze and Druze reincarnation in conversation with memory studies, particularly in a rethinking and expanding of Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post-memory" or inherited memory. I argue that Druze reincarnation testimonies are critical for cultural survival and collectivity as they can reconnect Druze with their loved ones from previous lives. These reincarnation stories are also collective and cultural acts of survival as they are transmitted across (and connect) transnational spaces, cultures, and generations. For Marianne Hirsch:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to

> constitute memories in their own right…These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.[10]

Reincarnation memories, I argue, are a special type of post-memory, which function in a very similar capacity to the post-memories Hirsch theorizes in her work, as exemplified in the quote above. As illuminated throughout this dissertation, Druze reincarnation memories, often based in and coming from traumatic experiences of a different life or even generation, are indeed often felt "deeply" and "affectively" by the Druze talkers who are remembering and speaking to these memories. However, they are also quite literally and viscerally embodied. These memories are thus transphysical, transgeographical, and transtemporal. They stem from a past, often traumatic, that very much informs the present. This is a type of inherited memory one inherits not from a loved one, but from one's soul and self, at another time and in another place. Reincarnation memories, though they do serve as a type of "post-" memory thus also very much serve as a living, fleshy, embodied memory, therefore necessitating an expansion in scholarly discussions of post-memory as is currently discussed in memory and trauma studies. In their connection to testifying and "talking," these reincarnation memories also serve as critical records of literally and figuratively buried pasts, previously inaccessible until one speaks in the form of *natq* and, importantly, *is listened to*.

Memory and remembering are of critical importance to the Druze. Without remembering, one cannot become a "talker" who can speak to their past lives and trauma thus making these traumas and transmigrations recognizable via their testimonies. For the Druze, to remember and to talk in the form of *natq* is literally to speak one's past life into existence. In exploring the vast societal, political, cultural, and historical implications of these acts, what transnational Druze artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan calls "impossible acts of speech" (see chapter one), I also

underscore the gendered nature of who is discouraged/encouraged to remember as exemplified by the various Druze peoples I am in conversation with throughout these chapters, and, thus, whose testimonies are recorded. In listening to and recording the voices of those marginalized/erased/unseen across different forms of testimony, I therefore engage in a form of non-traditional and anticolonial archival practice and theory inspired by the work of scholars such as Avery Gordon (*Ghostly Matters*) and Irene H. Yoon and Grace A. Chen ("Heeding Hauntings in Research for Mattering").

Afterlives, Haunting and Eternal Specters of Violence

My conceptualization of Druze afterlives builds on and expands theories of haunting in relation to trauma put forth by scholars such as Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters* (2008), Grace Cho in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* (2008), and Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997). In Gordon's conceptualization,

> Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention. (xvi)

Following Gordon's theorization of haunting, I examine throughout this dissertation the critical roles marginalized Druze communities can and do inhabit in the processes of bearing witness to, carrying, and/or memorializing the many "specters" or "ghosts" that continue to haunt the transnational Arab world, particularly via the structures of war and empire. As such, I give these

"ghosts" due attention by listening to who/what has been silenced, as made evident by the fleshy, embodied "ghostly" stories of trauma and war told by the Druze *natqeen*. Indeed, the Lebanese Civil War holds a particularly unique positionality in terms of what Avery Gordon states can no longer be "contained or repressed or blocked from view," as Lebanese state has played a notorious and active role in shoving the horrors of its fifteen year long civil war under the blanket of an ongoing national and cultural amnesia.[10] In their acts of witnessing, "telling," and testifying to the traumas of the LCW, the Druze *natqeen* thus play a critical and understudied role in breaking the ongoing violent state-enforced silences surrounding the traumas of the war. Due to its long histories of war and violence, Lebanon in particular is often compared to a phoenix in its ability, or more accurately put, need to rise, again and again, from the ashes of its ongoing crises and traumas. Here, I connect this metaphor of dying and rebirth for Lebanon as a nation to the phenomenon of reincarnation within Druze communities, where those who die are born/rise again, in many cases remembering and testifying to past life traumas that carry implications across personal/individual, national, and transnational spheres. My conceptualization of Druze afterlives is thus offered as a framework to examine the ongoing hauntings of traumas and memories in transnational Druze and Lebanese communities, as well as the interconnections between time and space, bodies and borders, that are engendered and carried as a result of these violences more broadly and the Lebanese Civil War in particular. In exploring what I refer to as Druze afterlives, I argue that stories of Druze reincarnation demand scholars reconsider and redefine the ways that the ongoing hauntings of trauma and memory are both contended with and (re)lived within and beyond the Arab world. Moreover, I offer Druze epistemologies of listening—to self and to one another—as a form of survival from the lingering

[10] For more on how the Lebanese state has enforced a cultural and political amnesia pertaining to the traumas and violences of the Lebanese Civil War, see Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 2010.

impacts of the afterlives of these traumas on individual and collective levels for the Druze, the Lebanese, and their diasporas.

Importantly, however, I do not suggest that the reincarnated Druze themselves are ghostly figures that "haunt" the transnational Arab world. In fact, reincarnated Druze are living beings, with their embodied selves coming in stark contrast with the disembodiment suggested by the figure of a ghost. They do not haunt; rather, the *natqeen*, too, are haunted, as are all Druze and Arabs more broadly, by war and violence.[11] As I explore, however, haunting takes on new forms when we consider the ways in which Druze *natqeen* are also haunted by past lives and traumas, the memories of which transmigrate with Druze souls across the borders of time and space. With these distinctions in mind, I introduce Druze afterlives as a new and useful intervention and framework for understanding, redefining, and expanding the individual, collective, and gendered ways in which nations, cultures, communities, and families within the transnational Arab world are "haunted" by ongoing trauma and violence, with an emphasis on reconceptualizing "haunting" to account for the embodied nature of the reincarnated Druze *natqeen*.

In doing so, this work also builds upon the foundational framework of afterlives presented in Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), which importantly charts the pervasive practices of subjection and violence that continue/d to shape Black identity and everyday lived experiences in the U.S. during both slavery and ongoing the "reign of terror that accompanied the advent of freedom" postbellum (13). Though the fundamental dehumanization of Black life that continues today is markedly different than the violences continuing to shape transnational Arab lives post-LCW that I trace in this project, I am inspired by the way Hartman

[11] My theorization of the ways in which Arabs within and beyond the Arab world are "haunted" by war and violence is influenced by the ways in which Grace Cho theorizes how Koreans in the U.S. remain haunted by the "forgotten" Korean War. See Grace Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (2008).

draws on both traditional and non-traditional narratives to resist beliefs that these respective wars, and their traumas, have ended. Instead, I follow Hartman's footsteps by attending to oft-marginalized everyday voices and stories in order to underscore the ongoing horrors of (here, the Lebanese) war, particularly "civil" war. I believe these interventions—across our respective yet interconnected histories and contexts of trauma and violence—help us to, in Hartman's words, "recast the past, guided by the conundrums and compulsions of our contemporary crisis: the hope for social transformation in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the quixotic search for a subject capable of world-historical action, and the despair induced by a lack of one" (14).

Mixed Methodologies: Being and Listening to Druze

"And like making a record, listening became perhaps the most important methodology"

Robyn Maynard & Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living*

Remembering. Recording. Reconnecting.

I began this introduction with a prologue about the personal aftermath of my eldest brother's passing to mark what I ultimately consider to be my entry point to a critical reflection of the Druze belief in reincarnation. However, this story also serves as a form of situating myself within my research. In his various interviews and projects, Edward Said would often cite his favorite quote by Antonio Gramsci, which reads: "'The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'" (*Orientalism* 25). What Said and renowned scholars before him thus designate as a starting point for critical scholarship is a situation of self within it. Interestingly, the situation of self within academic scholarship is today also an important form of the transnational feminist praxis that

inspires and shapes this dissertation, one that advocates for a more open, collaborative relationship between researcher and interlocutor that problematizes the already problematic binary between "subject" and "object," "knower" and "known" (Haraway 1988, Hill Collins, 1990, Abu Lughod 1990). As a Lebanese Druze first-generation American woman who has lived and studied in the U.S. and Lebanon, my research is situated at the intersections of my lived experiences: Druzeness, Lebanon, and the U.S. The Druze community, and I, are thus always already subject and object in this work, "knower" and "known."

Indeed, this project emerges from multiple intersections. Interdisciplinary in both its methodologies and the fields of scholarship it engages, my research redefines and expands conceptualizations of transnationalism, memory, and trauma within Arab American studies, transnational American studies, critical race & ethnic studies, and women's & gender studies, drawing new and understudied lines of connection between and across these fields of thought. This work emerges from the recognition that existent scholarship on the Druze is not only egregiously limited within and across disciplines, but deeply Orientalist, sensationalist, and colonialist in nature. As noted by scholar Graham Auman Pitts in his article "Essential Readings in Druze History," the primary academic texts of Druze studies today are "largely drawn on the archives of the British, French, and Ottoman Empires along with documents produced by the non-Druze inhabitants of the region." In considering future directions of Druze studies, Pitts goes on to assert that "the extent to which the Druze will feature in histories of the region depends on access to the archives relevant to their history." Part of the problem that has "frustrated academic inquiry," according to Pitts, is the "tradition of concealment" across transnational Druze communities, particularly surrounding Druze beliefs and holy texts. In this project, rather than following a Western imperial need and academic tradition of "uncovering" and "unveiling," I

thus turn—and listen—to an oft-invisibilized, non-traditional Druze archive –one that is not only already existent but flourishing across media genres. In vein with the critical work offered by scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, Saidiya Hartman, Eve Tuck and C. Ree, and Irene H. Yoon and Grace A. Chen on the problems with colonialist archives and alternative methodologies, I therefore not only reject the colonialist/research imperative to "discover" through research (particularly given the esoteric nature of the Druze and my own responsibility as a scholar and Druze woman) but also interrogate what kinds of research materials are valued by engaging in a multi-modal analysis via a methodological practice of "listening" to different forms of Druze traumatic testimony; as argued by Yoon and Chen, "By returning to haunt, ghosts offer a way for researchers to recognize what previously could not be known based on factual evidence, official accounts and data/archives, or direct observation (Cho, 2008; Crawley, 2018; Gómez-Barris & Gray, 2010; Gordon, 2008; D. Scott, 2008). By haunting, ghosts reject the primacy of empirical and official knowledge that perpetuate the state so that knowledge is not the point of research, transformation is" ("Heeding" 81-2). Attending to the testimonies of the *natqeen*—fleshy, embodied, living ghosts—across different media forms allows me disrupt assumptions about what kinds of knowledge and research are most valued, as well as what kinds of stories and testimonies—and whose—are uplifted and heard. Thus, inspired to partake in new analytics that I argue cannot be contained by disciplinary boundaries, I employ in my research an interdisciplinary approach to transnational feminist theory and praxis that centers the testimonies and experiences of oft-invisibilized Druze peoples. In this project, I have curated a selection of discursive texts that engage Druze voices in relation to reincarnation and trauma across Druze cultural productions (here defined as texts by Druze on the Druze) within traditional media genres such as novels and films, in tandem with oral interviews that I have conducted with Druze

peoples in the U.S. and Lebanon. Moreover, drawing on feminist investments in lived experience and positionality (see Haraway, Hill Collins, Abu Lughod, Naber), in coalition with the testimonies I have gathered from Druze communities, I also situate and interweave my own lived experiences and knowledges as a Druze woman and child of the Lebanese diaspora into my academic work.

As contended by Yoon and Chen, "Being haunted is to be repeatedly visited by multisensory and affective evidence of spirits who are not alive and not quite dead; who are silenced or hidden; who are actively unremembered" ("Heeding" 77). The Druze have collectively endured long, violent histories of silencing and oppression that continue in multiple ways today, especially for Druze women, who, as I show throughout this project, exist in heightened states of invisibility. Given the scarcity of Druze narratives and stories told by the Druze themselves, in this dissertation I thus engage multiple narrative forms of Druze testimony. Felman and Laub's groundbreaking work in *Testimony* (1990) underscores the importance and perhaps even the necessity of seeing and examining testimony across multiple media genres, particularly when testimony is speaking to trauma and thus particularly subject to silencing. As the Druze are a minority community whose voices are already subject to marginalization, I find it imperative to engage Druze testimonies across different media genres (here film, novel, and oral interviews) as ways of telling, listening, and knowing. As an interdisciplinary and multimodal project, this dissertation does not privilege one genre over the other but looks at different media and textual genres to explore myriad possibilities (and limitations) for testifying and bearing witness to Druze stories, particularly those that represent traumatic experience. With the knowledge that archives are traditionally colonialist and violent, I begin my analysis with Bassel's story in Abu Hamdan's film *Once Removed* in chapter one and Lamia's story in

Alameddine's novel *I, the Divine* in chapter two before moving into Druze interviews/conversations in order to push back on traditional notions of archives and the positivist and colonialist academic privileging of what stories are considered "real" and thus worthy of consideration. Despite the multi-modality of the different discursive texts analyzed in each chapter, each chapter makes evident the multiple and overlapping ways in which reincarnated narratives play critical roles in transnational Druze culture explicitly connected to acts of bearing witness to trauma, testifying, storytelling, and breaking silence(s). This project is thus fundamentally based in the methodological practice of an active, critical, and interventional listening, which I apply from my positionality as both a Druze woman and scholar who grew up listening to reincarnation stories. For the Druze, listening to reincarnation stories is a way of knowing, of connecting—to our stories, to our culture to one another. I want to continue listen to these stories—and ask others within and beyond Druze communities to as well—as I chart the substantial importance in these acts of telling/listening that play across individual and collective levels of cultural, social, geographical, and historical significance. Listening to trauma, in the vein of Cathy Caruth's work, is a critical way to reflect on "its ongoing impact in our approaches to human suffering and our understanding of the world" (ix).[12] As argued by Laub, having a listener, or, as he calls it, an "external addressee," is also a critical component of testifying to and, thus, surviving trauma (*Listening* 49-50). Following Yoon and Chen, who argue that "Hauntology reflects not just the topic of research or inquiry (i.e., not all research has to be about ghosts, but it very well may be); hauntology reflects how the research is undertaken, how the researcher is transformed, and how different, multiple ways of knowing and mattering are part of making the past and future ("Heeding" 76), I take seriously my own role as researcher in

[12] See Cathy Caruth's *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (2014).

listening to and thus bearing witness to each testimony of trauma and reincarnation engaged in this dissertation. Moreover, as examples of "different, multiple ways of knowing and mattering" the films and novels I examine in this project not only function as testimonials in the same way as the oral interviews I have collected and curated, but each equally serve as examples of what I frame as Druze epistemologies of listening. That is, these texts serve to elucidate the indigenous forms of Druze knowing, "telling"/speaking, and listening that are central to the widespread implications of Druze reincarnation stories for Druze across the world, for whom a belief in reincarnation and traditions of storytelling in relation to Druze reincarnation remain widespread and paramount. I also highlight how Druze stories can transform understandings of trauma and memory within and beyond the Arab world.

In examining the act of listening as a methodological practice in my exploration of Druze afterlives and *natq*, I specifically focus on the interconnection between listening and witnessing, an interconnection gaining increasing momentum in studies of trauma. The importance of listening as a methodological practice in trauma studies is perhaps nowhere made more evident than in the collection of interviews that Cathy Caruth holds with some of the most prominent leaders and thinkers of trauma studies in the 20th and 21st centuries, including literary theorists and critics, filmmakers, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, political activists, public intellectuals, and researchers (*Listening*). Here, Caruth outlines what she describes as "a new mode of listening across disciplines" (ix) in engaging with traumatic and catastrophic experiences. Of the importance of such praxis, Caruth contends:

> Each interview, in its own unique manner, similarly reveals the surprise and the complexity of this personal entanglement of thinker or clinician with his or her subject, of theory with the catastrophe about which it speaks. In pursuing their innovative work over

> the last several decades, all of the scholars and clinicians I have interviewed have allowed themselves to think, to listen, to act, and to create from a locus of vulnerability, a place that is never fully outside, if it is also not fully inside, the traumatic experiences to which they respond. But the possibility of remaining in this world in between is also the great strength of these leaders in the area of trauma, each of whom attempts to create a bridge from trauma to testimony and from denial to a future possibility of witness. (xviii)

As described above, the new interdisciplinary mode of listening that Caruth describes and is herself deeply invested in as a literary scholar is centered on the relationship between listener and testifier, a relationship I center in this project. I position myself as the scholar or thinker who can never be fully "inside" of the traumas they are listening and bearing witness to but are also not located on the outside. In navigating the "personal entanglement" between scholar and interlocutor, I am deeply cognizant of the vulnerabilities I must contend with in my methodological praxes in relation to my own positionalities as a listener, recorder, and Arab American Druze woman. In each chapter, I thus forge spaces of coalition and care with Druze communities, whose stories I here amplify to show what may transform when I employ listening as a methodology that disrupts traditional notions of archives and academic scholarship, as well as testimony/telling, beings/bodies, and national borders.

Chapter Overviews:

In chapter one, Listening to "Impossible Speech" in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Once Removed*: The Druze, Reincarnation, and Remembering the Lebanese Civil War, I examine audiovisual texts that showcase a traditionally Druze male yet critically important example of Druze reincarnation and testimony/ "telling," or what transnational Druze artist Lawrence Abu

Hamdan refers to as "impossible speech" ("Natq" 2019). In doing so, I explore two films by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, self-described as an "ear witness" heavily invested in the practice of listening across audio and visual media that privileges the oral over the visual. Abu Hamdan's critical audio-visual work on Druze reincarnation includes his documentary, *Once Removed* (2019), which bears witness to the story of Bassel Abi Chahine, the reincarnation of Lebanese Civil War soldier Yousef al-Jawhary. In listening to Bassel's story, *Once Removed* engages both Bassel's individual spoken testimony and his curated photography archive of the Lebanese Civil War. Listening to Bassel and Lawrence, in this chapter I delineate the social, political, and historical implications of war reincarnation narratives like Bassel's, which, as I take up further in chapter three, serves as an example of the dominant types of reincarnation narratives heard across transnational Druze communities, particularly in its connections to war, martyrdom, and honor.

In chapter two, Listening to Lamia: Druzeness, Trauma, and Literary Testimony in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*, I conduct a literary analysis of Druze trauma and reincarnation testimony by listening to Lamia, a silenced minor character in queer Druze Lebanese American writer Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001). As argued by trauma scholars such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, literature can and does serve as an important form of testimony, particularly traumatic testimony that engages the unspeakable and unimaginable. Testimony, as Laub argues in *Listening to Trauma,* is always literary in its moment of imagining, and all testimonies serve as narratives (58). The important relationship between storytelling and trauma that I explore in this chapter is one that is critical to listening and, thus, healing. Alameddine's work often testifies to traumatic transnational and diasporic Arab experiences, bearing witness to and connecting regional and global trauma narratives.

However, little to none of the extensive literary scholarship on the novel has looked at and listened to Lamia. As the ostracized sister of the novel's protagonist and a reincarnated survivor of past and current life domestic violence, I call attention to Lamia as a critical representation of how reincarnated Druze women experience trauma in ways that resist, disrupt, and reshape dominant reincarnation narratives of Druze men and the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War. In doing so, I see Lamia's story as emblematic of the traumatic experiences of the reincarnated Druze women I highlight and examine in chapter three, particularly in her testimony's relation to gender and domestic violence. As one of the only Druze "talkers" in the canon of Arab American literature and the only representation of a reincarnated Druze woman, listening to Lamia, I argue, is thus imperative to understanding the ways in which the novel is engaging with and testifying to gendered narratives of trauma and understandings of war in relation to the transnational Arab world more broadly and reincarnated Druze women in particular.

In chapter three, Listen to Our Stories: Gendered Reincarnation(s) of the Lebanese Civil War, I build on my gendered analyses of Bassel's and Lamia's reincarnation narratives by offering my own curation of what as I frame as not only Druze testimonies based on interviews/conversations I held with transnational Druze communities in the U.S. and Lebanon, but ethnographic narratives in the form of embodied, interactive, discursive encounters. These narratives serve as a different yet overlapping form of semi-public discourse on Druze reincarnation forged by Druze artists such as Abu Hamdan and Alameddine that I engage in chapters one and two. In centering everyday Druze voices in this chapter, I argue that Druze peoples can and should serve as the creators and producers of knowledges about their transnational communities. As relevant objects of study relating to the Druze themselves are rather limited in quantity and often focus on a historization of the Druze or an exposition of their

religious values, in this chapter I bear witness and record fellow Druze's testimonies of their contemporary lived experiences—particularly in relation to gendered traumatic experience—in order to both amplify living Druze voices as well as illuminate the transformations that occur when transnational communities, within and beyond the Druze, listen to them. In doing so, I examine the deeply gendered nature of *natq,* Druze reincarnation testimonies, and Druze trauma by charting whose/what stories get told and listened to versus whose/what stories are silenced or even condemned. In this chapter I thus bring together an analysis of the ways in which state-enforced silences are being broken by reincarnated Druze soldiers like Bassel with an analysis of the ways in which heteropatriarchal structures of the state—as replicated by transnational Druze communities themselves—are resisted and disrupted by testimonies of reincarnated Druze women like Lamia. In illuminating and analyzing the patterns that emerged in my conversations with reincarnated Druze men and women in the U.S. and Lebanon, I ultimately contend Druze women's reincarnation stories interrupt and revise the long-standing association of contemporary Druze *natqeen* testimonies with Druze martyrs and honor (i.e. male soldiers who died in the Lebanese Civil War) by often falling within the realm of what I call *dishonorable death,* deeply connected to discourses of shame that exist in tension with the discourses of honor in the transnational Arab world. In doing so, I illuminate the patterns of domestic and gender violences that often guide and shape Druze women's lives within the context of war and its afterlives, as made evident in the stories of reincarnated Druze women. The taboo or "dishonorable" nature of their testimonies, I argue, makes it more difficult for traumatized Druze women to speak, to be listened to, and, therefore, to survive. However, I end this chapter by reflecting on how the heightened erasures Druze women endure underscore the power of their voices in placing heteropatriarchal structures (including war and empire) under threat, in turn, breaking the

silencing of traumatic experience within and beyond Druze communities, the nation of Lebanon, and the transnational Arab world.

I close the dissertation with a CODA titled "Listening to Each Other Across Space/ Creating Alternative Spaces." Here, I reflect on some of the central themes and tensions that emerged in my studies of the Druze across the chapters of this dissertation, in particular, the ongoing Druze preoccupation with survival and Druze futures. In doing so, in line with the interventions of this project, I underscore the need to continue to listen to Druze voices. I also chart several productive future directions scholarship on the Druze may take. In particular, I suggest that online culture has become a key alternate public sphere for connection that, I argue, necessitates examination and analysis in order to further understandings of contemporary transnational Druze formations, including the intracommunity tensions that themselves threaten Druze survival.

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Chapter One: Listening to "Impossible Speech" in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Once Removed*: The Druze, Reincarnation, and Remembering the Lebanese Civil War

As scholar Sune Haugbolle describes in his book *War and Memory in Lebanon* (2010), from the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 "Lebanese officialdom discouraged critical memorialization and instead promoted a culture of letting bygones be bygones. In the absence of state-sponsored attempts to establish what happened in the Lebanese Civil War and who was to blame for the human tragedies that accompanied it, the politics of remembering in postwar Lebanon emerged mainly through cultural production, by which various nonstate actors disputed the ethical, political and historical meaning of the civil war" (4). Turning to the work of nonstate actors and cultural artists participating in the ongoing debate on the multiple meanings of the Lebanese Civil War, in this chapter I focus on contemporary transnational Druze artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan, in particular, two of audio-visual his projects centering on Druze reincarnation. The first of these projects is a 2019 audio-visual documentary titled *Once Removed,* which revolves around a conversation Abu Hamdan has with his friend and relative, Bassel Abi Chahine. Bassel is a reincarnated Druze writer and historian in his thirties who spent ten years of his life documenting the understudied role of the People's Liberation Army and the Druze in the Lebanese Civil War for his book project, *The People's Liberation Army: Through the Eyes of a Lens, 1976-1991* (2019).[13] In *Once Removed,* a film largely centered on Bassel's oral testimony on his lived and past life experiences as a reincarnated Druze person, Abu Hamdan interestingly

[13] Founded at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War (1976) and disbanded soon after the war's conclusion (1991), the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was the army of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), a political sect founded by the prominent Druze historical figure and leader Kamal Jumblatt. The PSP is still active in Lebanon today. regionally based in the Druze stronghold of the Chouf, Mount Lebanon, and primarily composed of Druze members. Walid Jumblatt, the son of Kamal Jumblatt, is the current leader of the PSP.

also embeds photographs and facts from Bassel's historicist project on the Druze. The interweaving of the histories, investments, interventions of both Abu Hamdan and Bassel into *Once Removed* via a multi-media engagement is thus examined in this chapter as a critical and unique form of listening and bearing witness to both Druze reincarnation and the buried narratives of Lebanese Civil War. In conversation with *Once Removed,* I will also turn to Abu Hamdan's audio-visual lecture "Natq" (2019), created after filming *Once Removed* in order for Abu Hamdan to reflect on the political implications and interventions at stake–here, in particular, regarding the civil war–when one considers the phenomenon of Druze reincarnation with the example of Bassel's reincarnation story. These texts will here be engaged to render legible the connections between state-sponsored amnesia, war memories, *natq*, and reincarnation that this chapter addresses.

Moreover, I begin this dissertation with Bassel's testimony as a classic example of the dominant type of *natqeen* narratives circulated around transnational Druze communities today. By listening to Druze reincarnation stories in the U.S. and the Lebanon, stories which are widespread within transnational Druze communities, I have found that those most frequently heard center testimonies from reincarnated Druze men who remember dying in Lebanese Civil War. Furthermore, these stories, passed within and across transnational Druze communities, often situate reincarnated Druze men within discourses of honor, glory, and martyrdom, revealing both the gendered nature of *natq*—and silencing of trauma—that I analyze more fully in chapter three. Given the public nature of his reincarnation testimony and present life work historicizing the Druze roles in the Lebanese Civil War, Bassel's is one of the most popular and well-known of these reincarnated Druze men's war stories. According to his testimony, in his past life, Bassel Abi Chahine was Yousef al-Jawhary, a sixteen-year-old child soldier killed by

shelling during the Lebanese Civil War. For Bassel, the "letting bygones be bygones" attitude that Sune Haugbolle describes as adopted by the post-war Lebanese state is not an option. Bassel's memories (and traumas) did not die with his former body. So, Bassel has broken his silence by way of *natq,* the critical and unique form of Druze speech enabled by Druze afterlives that allows Bassem and other reincarnated Druze like him to become both witness and chronicler to memories that have henceforth been unspoken and unspeakable. *Natq* or "talking," and thus, telling, in this capacity take on new meanings as reincarnated peoples tell their stories and provide their testimonies from a space between life and death—a space of rebirth, renewal, and survival. Indeed, silence or not "talking" about one's past life ultimately leaves that past life in the space of death. This form of speech is thus distinctly connected to reincarnation. As in his audio-visual essay "Natq," which ultimately explores the phenomenon of reincarnation as a medium for political justice, scholar and artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan explains: "Amongst our family, as it is in many Druze households, *nate'q* or *natq* or utterance does not only refer to the physical act of speaking but to a form of speech that is impossible to explain by any other means than reincarnation. The closest translation I could find in English is xenoglossy, referring to speech that has not been learned, testimony unknown to the individual under conventionally explainable conditions–impossible speech" (00:01:49-00:02:09). Building on these notions of (im)possibility theorized here by Abu Hamdan, in this chapter I ask: What silences are broken when the dead, disappeared, and haunted soldiers of the Lebanese Civil War return to speak—and we listen? What do the acts of "impossible speech" attributed to Druze afterlives make possible– particularly in terms of the gendered acts of remembering, bearing witness, and testifying to the ongoing violences of the Lebanese Civil War and state-enacted erasures that surround it?

In attending to these questions, I argue that the Druze phenomenon of *natq* within the context of what I frame as the ongoing Lebanese Civil War serves as a form of critical resistance and disruption to state-sponsored amnesia put into effect after the Lebanese Civil War, as well as the ongoing violences inherent to these politics of (forced) forgetting. Exploring the important ways in which these war testimonies, largely coming from reincarnated Druze male soldiers, resist and disrupt the state-enacted silences and amnesia surrounding the Lebanese Civil War on a national level will then allow me to map how such disruptions transcend national borders, ultimately (re)shaping transnational collective memory of the war beyond Lebanon into the Lebanese diaspora. Alongside this intervention, I also contend that Druze reincarnation and the phenomenon of *natq* open up new and transformative categories of witnessing, testimony, trauma, and memory across the borders of academic inquiry, societal structures and laws, as well as region and nation. I contend that the embodied nature of Druze reincarnation memories not only serve as a unique form of what trauma scholars such as Marianne Hirsch refer to as "post-" or inherited memory, but demand that we redefine and expand theorizations of post-memory within memory and trauma studies. Moreover, the fact that most Druze who remember their past lives died in a traumatic or violent ways beckons scholars of trauma and memory to contend with the undertheorized ways that trauma can mark or "haunt" not only the body and mind, but also the transmigrating soul. Theorizing the impact of trauma on the combination of mind, body, and soul, in turn, enables me to rethink, redefine, and expand our contemporary understandings of trauma's transphysical, transtemporal, and transgeographical effects, particularly given our increasingly politicized, militarized, and interconnected world. These testimonies, a key characteristic of what I call Druze afterlives, are thus distinctly transformative on transnational

and national levels, but also critically important for Druze peoples on an individual and human level. They are an imperative to testify, to tell, to "speak,"—and to survive.[14]

I will first contextualize my interventions by providing an overview of contemporary critical scholarship on the Lebanese Civil War, particularly key works participating in the debates on its memorialization (or lack thereof). I will then briefly chart a transnational archive of contemporary cultural productions that contend with bearing witness to and documenting the Lebanese Civil War in order to illuminate the ways in which, as both a scholar and artist, Abu Hamdan works within and outside of these archives. In doing so, I examine Abu Hamdan's methodological practices of "listening," in particular, the ways in which Abu Hamdan embeds both Bassel's own critical scholarship and lived experiences into the audio-visual projects of *Once Removed* and "Natq." Building on Abu Hamdan's theorizations of *natq* and "impossible speech," I will then also examine the multiple possibilities offered by Bassel's critical modes of testifying and "talking," both within and beyond the Lebanese national context.

Remembering the Lebanese Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War (LCW) is widely-known for its multifaceted and complex nature, one that imbricates a complex configuration of Lebanese political and religious sects and leaders, broader nation states and alliances, as well as phases of conflict.[15] As such, over three decades later, both the causes and ongoing impacts of the war on the Lebanese state and its peoples remain subjects of extensive debate both across critical scholarship and the cultural

[14] See Dori Laub's theorization of the "imperative to tell" in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* Routledge, 1999.

[15] The Lebanese Civil War can be broadly understood as occurring in four phases (1975-1977, 1977-1982, 1982-1984, and 1984-1990), each of which contained a series of sub-conflicts in different regions of Lebanon and involved multiple yet intersecting national and international players.

productions of artists and activists. Though the LCW is popularly (and all too easily) periodized from 1975-1990, the longstanding and ongoing sectarian nature of the Lebanese state has led to a wide range of scholarship that has interrogated what marks the official "beginning" of the war and the multiple causes of conflict. Some scholars locate and sometimes even center the cause(s) of the war on global events and foreign conflicts both near and far in geographical proximity to Lebanon, such as the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli wars; following these thinkers, I suggest that such foreign presences and interventions are not only inextricably interwoven into a Lebanese past and present, but are brought to the forefront when considering the multi-faceted nature of Lebanese Civil war on both international and national fronts.[16] Indeed, many scholars of Lebanese Civil War studies see Lebanon as especially susceptible to foreign influence and intervention given its longstanding and deeply sectarian nature, one that remains in full effect on political and societal structural levels in Lebanon today.[17] If we are thus to understand historical and contemporary Lebanon as what Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi aptly described as "a house of many mansions," I argue that the Lebanese Civil War, following Gordon's theorization of

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[16] See, for example, Farid El Khazen's *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon: 1967-1976* (2000), which describes a pre-war political collapse of the Lebanon that, Khazen argues, ultimately engendered the war due to external factors such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the PLO presence within and outside of Lebanon, in coalition with the pluralistic nature of the Lebanese state. Others, such as Ghassan Tueni in *Une guerre pour les autres* (EN: *A War of the Others,* 1985*)* argues the Lebanese Civil War was instigated primarily because Lebanon has never existed without foreign intervention and influence, serving during the civil war period in particular as a playground for both regional and Cold War conflicts as made evident by the multiple international players of the LCW (including but not limited to: Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Iran, Russia, France, and the United States).

[17] One particularly notable manifestation of this deep-rooted sectarianism is the 1943 National Pact post-declaration of independence from France, in which Lebanese leaders agreed to distribute the political positions in the country according to religious affiliation, a national political structure which remains in place today; for example, the President of Lebanon must always be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Parliament must be Shia. Another critical example of the forms of sectarian rule and governance in Lebanon is the lack of a civil code regulating personal status matters (such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, etc.), instead depending on fifteen separate personal religious-based status laws and courts for eighteen legally recognized categories, making inherent differential treatment of Lebanese citizens based on characteristics such as religion and gender. For a brilliant analysis of the ways in which gender, sexuality, and sect intersect with law and sovereignty in Lebanon see Maya Mikdashi's *Sextarianism: Sovereignty, Secularism, and the State in Lebanon* (2022).

haunting, is ongoing–continuing to affect not only how people in Lebanon do (or do not) "separate the past, the present, and the future," but also how these traumas move across borders and spaces, both for those living in Lebanon and for the approximately one million who, as a result of the war, became a part of its global diaspora.[18]

Indeed, more recent critical debate on the LCW considers whether or not the fifteen-year long war can be seen as truly "over," particularly given the absence of any effective post-war reconciliation process and the active role of silencing the events of the war played by the Lebanese state. One of the most telling examples of the erasures that make evident a willful and violent state-induced amnesia is the post-war general amnesty law of 1991, in which the Lebanese parliament agreed to exonerate, with few exceptions, all political and civil war crimes for Lebanese governmental leaders and officials preceding this date.[19] Soon after the war's end, the Lebanese state thus popularized discourses such as "afa Allah 'amma mada" (let God forgive the past), and "la ghalib wala maghloob" (no victor, no vanquished), mottos still often repeated as an ongoing mode of contending with trauma and violence in Lebanon today. However, as scholars such as Lyna Comaty make clear, the 1991 amnesty project was not consensual, ultimately fostering a contemporary condition in which "the state has been pushing for a politics of forgetfulness, and civil society for one of remembrance and commemoration, the social and political dynamics proper to the local context are hindering the issue's passage from one state to the other" (*Post-Conflict Transition in Lebanon: The Disappeared of the Civil War* 4, 40).

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[18] See Walid Jumblatt, quoted in Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, 1988.

[19] For more on this, see the 1997 Amnesty International report "Lebanon: Human Rights developments and violations," which offers a comprehensive critique of the 1991 amnesty law and asserts the need for Lebanon to "face up to its past" in order to provide justice for the victims of the war, particularly the more than 17,000 people, who, after the war, were simply labeled as "disappeared."
https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde18/019/1997/en/

Moreover, the role that collective memory plays in what I frame as the afterlives of Lebanese Civil War has recently and increasingly become a topic of great interest for scholars across disciplines conducting research on contemporary Lebanese society.[20] Despite this important shift towards memory, as Lebanese historian Makram Rabah points out in his latest book, *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites, and Collective Memory* (2020), though Lebanese Civil War studies have been conducted at an abundant level across disciplines, not enough academic works have looked at collective memory as a framework for understanding Lebanon's complex history and current affairs. Even fewer, I argue, pay attention to the unique roles Druze reincarnation memories and testimonies serve in expanding and reshaping critical discussions of historical and contemporary Lebanon. In my contribution to these critical discussions on collective memory in Lebanon, I find it particularly helpful to turn to Marianne Hirsch's conceptualization of "post-memory, which provides a framework for how we contemporarily understand how traumatic memories may be inherited across time and space. For Marianne Hirsch:

> 'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right…These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.[21]

[20] For example, see books such as Craig Larkin's *Memory and Conflict in Lebanon: Remembering and Forgetting the Past* (2012) and Yasmine Khayyat's *War Remains: Ruination and Resistance in Lebanon* (2023).
[21] See Marianne Hirsch, https://www.postmemory.net.

Building on Hirsh's definition of post-memory, I contend that reincarnation memories, as a unique type of "post-" memory, call for an expansion in scholarly discussions of post-memory as it is currently theorized in memory and trauma studies. Reincarnation memories do indeed function in a similar capacity to the post-memories Hirsch theorizes above in that they are often felt "deeply" and "affectively" by the Druze talkers who are remembering and speaking to these memories. However, reincarnation memories also complicate the notion of "post" in post-memory in that they do not "seem" to constitute memories in their own right, rather, they are indeed memories in their own right, embodied and remembered firsthand by reincarnated Druze peoples. Often based in and coming from traumatic experiences of a different life or even generation, Druze reincarnation memories are thus a type of memory one inherits not from a loved one or a culture, but from one's self and soul, at another time, and, often, in another place. These memories are thus transgeographical, transphysical, and transtemporal. They stem from a past, often traumatic, that very much informs a lived and embodied present.

Engaging Hirsch's conceptualization of post-memory in his study of how collective memory functions in contemporary Lebanese society, Craig Larkin argues that the current generation of Lebanese youth in Lebanon have grown up shaped and affected not by the violences and the traumatic experiences of the civil war themselves, but by the narrative accounts of said events (*Beyond the War?:The Lebanese Postmemory Experience* 2010). In doing so, Larkin considers the "lingering" and "residual" effects of the war on Lebanese youth; as Larkin quotes from Rami, a then-21-year-old student at the American University of Beirut from Kaflik, Mount Lebanon:

> The war is talked about all the time—the war is always on people's tongues even though we have no memory of what happened . . . Taboo—yes, in class it is just known as the al-

> ahdas¯ [the events]. After "the events," during "the events"—"the events" are a big void, a nebulous concept, what's inside you don't know, but you know it's black! You know it's there, it's ominous, but you don't know what's inside.

What Larkin (and Rami) point to are the ways in which, given the lack of reconciliation pertaining to the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War in particular, the war cannot truly be framed as over for any Lebanese person, its afterlives continuing to haunt both Lebanon and those affected by the traumas of Lebanon both within and beyond Lebanese borders. Building and expanding on Larkin's argument, however, I ask us to also consider the Druze *natqeen* who, contrary to Rami's assertation above, not only *do* have memories of what happened but are testifying to them. For the Druze *natqeen*, war memories are carried across time, space, and bodies in a way that thus expands and shifts both how scholars have previously thought about inherited memory as well as how we remember the Lebanese Civil War in particular. Though thirteen percent of those Larkin interviewed are identified as Druze, Larkin (as well as most other scholars studying memory and the Lebanese Civil War) does not consider the unique ways Druze memories of these traumatic experiences, and thus, also, the narratives and testimonies ascribed, are inherited, carried, and passed on amongst transnational Druze networks, migrations which I will attend to in this chapter by looking at the case of Bassel.

Studies such as Rabah's and Larkin's thus make critically evident the ways in which listening to the stories and experiences of non-state members of Lebanese society can help us understand not just the complex histories of the war and the events leading up to it, but the way in which the war is (or is not) remembered across formations of nation, religion, and gender. Given the ongoing effects of state amnesia and silences surrounding the war, recent studies have also turned to examinations of postwar cultural productions created by artists both within and

beyond Lebanon, making evident a longstanding and ongoing effort by non-state actors to remember (and recover) by bearing witness, testifying to, and resisting the silences and violences surrounding Lebanese Civil War.[22] This range of artistic productions exists across a vast variety of mixed-media practices, including an ever-growing visual archive that emerged soon after the war's end, popularized by the work of early artists such as Ziad Abillama, Walid Sadek, and Jayce Salloum, and first receiving international recognition at the documenta X art exhibition in Germany curated by Catherine David.[23] Today, visual artists such as Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, Bernard Khoury, Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Ali Cherri, Fouad El-Khoury, Marwan Rechmaoui, Paula Yacoub, Mona Hatoum, Lamia Joreij, and Nadine Touma have also become part of what is now known as the postwar generation, whose artistic works resist and intervene into the absences and silences that work to invisibilize traumatic experiences such as the war.

According to scholar Sarah Rogers, these projects intervene in a contemporary discourse that the war provided a blank slate for artists in Lebanon, as she insists that these visual works instead "call on viewers not to mistrust the image" but "to persistently acknowledge the historical conditions of its production" ("Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut"). With this claim, I contend that we can and must frame these artistic works as political projects that work to (re)instill a transnational collective memory regarding the shrouded histories of the Lebanese Civil War. In this sense, Lawrence Abu Hamdan's mixed-media cultural productions can be placed within an archive of non-state actors of the post-war generation (such as Raad, Zaatari, and Hatoum) who use visual and aural art as forms of critical testimony and resistance to willful

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[22] See, for example, articles such as Aseel Sawalha's "After Amnesia: Memory and War in Two Lebanese Films" (2014) and Zeina Halabi's "The Unbearable Heaviness of Being: The Suicide of the Intellectual in Rabīʿ Jābir's *Rālf Rizqallāh Through the Looking Glass*" (2013) and books such as Felix Lang's *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital* (2016) and Chad Elias's *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post–Civil War Lebanon* (2018).

[23] See Sarah Rogers, "Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut." *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (2007): 8–20.

state resistance. However, what sets Abu Hamdan apart from other artists in this archive, I suggest, is rooted in the critical and active methodological practice of listening he engages across both the medium and content of his cultural productions, in tandem with his own unique positionality as a transnational Druze scholar representing oft-marginalized Druze stories within and beyond Lebanon. Indeed, globally renowned for his audio-visual art and films, Lawrence Abu Hamdan was born in Jordan, raised and educated in the United Kingdom, and is currently based in Dubai. His work, like his life experiences, are inherently transnational in nature, as he has presented all over the world across the genres of lectures, live performances, films, publications, and exhibitions, frequently recognized and awarded for his groundbreaking audio-visual projects.[24] Both his substantial investment in critical and active listening as well as his own positionality as a transnational Druze scholar and artist mark Abu Hamdan as a unique figure within the post-war generation. Moreover, Abu Hamdan's investment in the methodological practice of listening can also be further connected to the work of trauma scholars such as Cathy Caruth, who argues that listening to trauma, as I, Abu Hamdan, and others around the world are increasingly deploying as a methodological praxis of "personal entanglement" between scholar and subject, ultimately helps us all reflect "its [trauma'] ongoing impact in our approaches to human suffering and our understanding of the world" (*Listening* ix, xviii).

Critical Methodologies in Listening to the *Natqeen*

[24] Abu Hamdan's various projects have been exhibited in cities including, but not limited to, Sydney, Venice, Gwangju, Sharjah, Beirut, Rotterdam, London, Frankfurt, Los Angeles, and New York. For his trailblazing work, Abu Hamdan has received awards such as the 2023 Festivals Connexion Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Award, the 2020 Toronto Biennial Audience Award, the 2019 Turner Prize, the 2019 Edvard Munch Art Award, the 2016 Nam June Paik Award for new media and, in 2017, the Tiger short film award at the Rotterdam International Film festival.

As an artist, activist, and scholar, Lawrence Abu Hamdan describes himself as a "*Private Ear*," defined as one who is centered on listening to, with and on behalf of people affected by corporate, state, and environmental violence."[25] In this play on the popular term "Private Eye," here Abu Hamdan asserts the importance of not only seeing, but *listening* in investigative work and practice across disciplinary fields engaging social justice, belying the primacy of the visual in epistemologies of witnessing and knowing. Furthering the self-description of his methodological praxes, Abu Hamdan also names his work as deeply invested in what he calls the "politics of listening," thus implying that what we hear (or refuse to hear) is deeply political. As Abu Hamdan defines it, the politics of listening is not only about where voices travel, who hears/doesn't hear them, but also "reorganizing what we define as speech, intervening into the ways in which voices are heard and stories are listened to" (SFU SCA, "Lawrence Abu Hamdan: 2021 Fall Audain Visual Artist in Residence"). With this, I take as example Abu Hamdan's audio-visual essay "Natq," which examines "the political possibilities of a speech that is conventionally considered impossible" (00:03:38) in order to explore *natq* as a medium of justice for the both the victims and survivors of the Lebanese Civil War. Following Abu Hamdan, I contend that to listen, particularly to testimonies of traumatic experience, is thus not a neutral act, instead it can (and does) serve as a critical methodology that, as I examine in this chapter, carries multiple political, historical, social, and cultural meanings. Though Abu Hamdan uses listening as a mode of investigation and theorization across projects that do and do not engage the Druze, I suggest, however, that this form of critical listening takes on a heightened importance when we are asked to hear and consider the possibilities of "impossible speech" here ascribed to the understudied radical forms of witnessing and testimony made evident in Druze reincarnation

[25] See the "Information" section on Abu Hamdan's website http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/information.

stories and made possible by the platform of what I call Druze afterlives. These forms of witnessing and testimony, in my estimation, both resist willful state amnesia narratives of the past and present across time, space, and body, as well as transform how scholars contemporarily understand conceptualizations of trauma, witnessing, and testimony themselves.

In *Once Removed,* Abu Hamdan's conversation with Bassel is largely based on Bassel's transnational lived experiences as a Druze man who remembers his past life experiences and has spoken to them in the mode of *natq*, or what Abu Hamdan refers to as "impossible speech.".[26] Importantly, within this film project, Abu Hamdan gives Bassel the space to tell his story without skepticism or the imperialist attempts at evidentiary verification often centered in Western studies of Druze reincarnation.[27] Rather, Abu Hamdan, as listener and ally, remains relatively decentralized as the film remains largely focused on Bassel's own lived experiences and research on the People's Liberation Army.

As detailed in *Once Removed*'s description, Bassel's "obsessive analysis, collection, and unprecedented research into this one militia was done in pursuit of material to reconstitute what he describes as flashbacks and inexplicable memories from a previous life. Through his research Abi Chahine realized that his own lucid memories of a war he had not lived were due to the fact that he was the reincarnation of a soldier Yousef Fouad Al Jawhary, who died aged 16 on February 26, 1984 in the [Lebanese] town of Aley."[28][29] Bassel's research archive and book thus

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[26] According to its abstract, *Once Removed* was commissioned by Sharjah Biennial 14 curated by Egyptian artist Omar Kholeif. For this film, Abu Hamdan was awarded the Jean Vigo Prize for best Director at Punto De Vista Festival 2020 and the Dialog Award of the Federal Foreign Office from 33rd European Media Art Festival.

[27] For a prime example of such Orientalist projects, see BBC's C4 documentary on reincarnated Druze children in Mount Lebanon, *Back from the Dead* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_v2Pb9jopo.

[28] Quoted from the film's description on YouTube; see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVycau9O1.

[29] Yousef was killed during the time of the War of the Mountain, or Harb al-Jabal. One of the many sub-conflicts of the war, Harb al-Jabal is known for its many interconfessional massacres between the Druze and Maronite Christians in the Chouf and Aley regions of Lebanon from 1982-1984. This conflict led to a large displacement of Christians from the region. For more, see Makram Rabah's *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites, and Collective Memory* (2020).

itself breaks the silences surrounding the understudied role of the Druze and the PLA in the Lebanese Civil War. Moreover, I contend, Bassel's obsessive pursuit of this project here is directly linked to the ways in which today he, as a reincarnated Druze, is seemingly haunted by the flashbacks and memories of being a child soldier in past life, memories that also play critical collective roles within Druze communities.

Despite the central focus of the film on Bassel, it is important to note that Abu Hamdan also distinctly situates himself in relation to his research on Druze reincarnation early on in *Once Removed*, making evident his "personal entanglements" with his subject. As, looking at a picture of Bassel with his past life father Fouad Al Jawhary, Abu Hamdan tells Bassel:

> Of course, what is obvious from this picture is that Fouad Al Jawhary, Yousef Al Jawhary's father, was a sheikh from the Druze sect, and the vast majority of [PLA] fighters were Druze.[30] You and I were brought up in a Druze environment also and one of the main things that distinguish Druze from other sects of Islam is the belief in reincarnation [..] I think, and so [..] the belief of the transmigration of soul after death is widely held. It is, of course, believed by Fouad Al Jawhary. Although the belief is that we all reincarnate, the only conditions by which one can remember is if someone died under tragic or painful circumstances" (00:05:47-00:06:42).[31]

In this statement, Abu Hamdan weaves several interconnections that are critical to a reading of this film project as a whole. He notes Bassel's past life family's strong adherence to the Druze faith as made evident by Fouad's positionality as a Druze sheikh. He then broadens this web to

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[30] A Druze sheikh is a Druze man initiated into the Druze religious community and thus able to serve various roles as a religious and/or spiritual leader for uninitiated Druze members.

[31] The claim that Druze people can *only* remember their past lives if they died traumatically is not universally agreed upon. I note here that though traumatic deaths and past life remembrances frequently go hand-in-hand, my own research shows that there is at least one exception to this correlation.

connect the individual (the Al Jawhary family) to the structural (the PLA and PSP, primarily composed of Druze peoples). Lastly, Abu Hamdan then draws a clear connection between Bassel and himself, "you and I," to Druze communities at large, in which a belief in reincarnation is both widely held and distinctly linked to experiences of trauma.

This connection of self to "subject" is also a critical move Abu Hamdan makes in "Natq," the audio-visual essay Abu Hamdan composes after the filming of *Once Removed*. Filming himself reading a self-written essay across images and clips taken from *Once Removed*, in "Natq," Abu Hamdan theorizes the political implications of Bassel's testimony, and Druze reincarnation more broadly, pertaining to notions of witnessing and the Lebanese Civil War. However, before charting these important interventions in "Natq," Abu Hamdan again first situates himself within his arguments by opening with a comedic anecdote from his own life. Layered on top of a deep, womb-like, pulsating noise that seemingly alludes to a moment of (re)birth, Abu Hamdan chooses to open his ruminations on the political implications of Druze reincarnation with a description of ingredients of the dessert his aunt served at the dinner where Abu Hamdan first met Bassel. In an intermingling of comedy and political commentary, Abu Hamdan describes these ingredients as ones that "taste of nothing except the contents of the fridge in which they were stored overnight" yet, simultaneously, like "years of failed assimilation into the USA" (00:00:00-00:00:44). As Abu Hamdan then reveals, his voice now layered above the sights and sounds of his one-on-one conversation with Bassel in *Once Removed,* "It was at this same aunt's table, with an unspeakably disgusting trifle awaiting us, that I first met Bassel, the son of my aunt's husband's niece." Despite this having been the first time that they met, Abu Hamdan then goes on to recall, "We found ourselves sitting across from one

another and, being that we are the same age, my aunt sought to break the silence by saying 'Lawrence, bta'aref inno Bassel *natq*?"[32]

The opening of "Natq," in which Abu Hamdan shares a personal anecdote from his own life, first makes evident the quotidian and everyday nature of hearing Druze peoples hearing reincarnation stories at the dinner table, amongst other communal Druze spaces. Moreover, this opening anecdote also asserts Abu Hamdan's own relationalities to Bassel, Druzeness, reincarnation, and, of course, awful-tasting American desserts made by immigrant families struggling to assimilate. Abu Hamdan thus uses this personal anecdote as a launching pad into the broader claims his audio-visual essay goes on to make, establishing himself, in the vein of the new mode of methodological listening Cathy Caruth describes and upon which this dissertation builds, both on the outside and inside of his research and arguments.[33] Though, in both "Natq" and *Once Removed,* we can instinctively position Abu Hamdan as "scholar" or "thinker" and Bassel as "interlocutor," by situating himself within these projects, Abu Hamdan problematizes this boundary. First, he points to his community/familial relationality with Bassel, as well as their shared positionality as young Druze men in their thirties who live and work from a variety of national landscapes. Secondly, in amplifying Bassel's own work and research archive in *Once Removed*, Abu Hamdan also positions Bassel as a scholar and thinker himself, rather than as a "subject" just to be studied. With these methodological practices, I argue, Abu Hamdan is thus helping to radically redirect the ways in which the West studies the "Other" from imperialist modes of data collection, fact-gathering, objectification, and notions of veracity to that of a new mode of active listening and bearing witness, a shift long overdue, particularly in studies of the

[32] Translated from Arabic, this line reads "Lawrence, do you know that Bassel is a talker?"
[33] See introduction's discussion of Caruth, Cathy, ed., *Listening to Trauma*, Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

Druze.[34] By listening to traumatic experience in collaboration with his interlocutor, I contend that Abu Hamdan displaces the primacy of the visual in terms of witnessing and knowing, emphasizing instead the oral. With his projects on Druze reincarnation, as a contemporary living Druze artist Abu Hamdan thus points to the critical implications of the unique acts of telling of the Druze *natqeen*, here, particularly here surrounding narratives, historicizations, and specters of the Lebanese Civil War, whose ongoing traumas and violences are still felt by Lebanese across the globe today. Critical to these interventions are Abu Hamdan's selected mediums, which, I suggest, work in coalition with the content of *Once Removed* and "Natq," in order to visually and orally (re)construct memories, stories, and lives literally and figuratively buried within the state erasures of the Lebanese Civil War.

The Medium is (Part of) the Message

Working within the role of what he calls "ear witness" Abu Hamdan's projects are almost always audio-visual in nature, his selected medium itself thus also stressing the importance of bearing witness by listening to the traumas of others. Abu Hamdan's projects on Druze reincarnation, I argue, serve as particularly compelling examples of such methodological practices in their demand for audiences to listen to what Abu Hamdan aptly phrases as "impossible speech," or speech unable to be performed by any means other than reincarnation and remembrance. Though reincarnation testimonies are often dismissed by a Lebanese state that both does not recognize reincarnation testimony as a legal form testimony and is explicitly invested the amnesia surrounding the LCW, Abu Hamdan insists we, Druze and non-Druze alike,

[34]The landscape of Druze studies is largely composed of Western projects stemming from the disciplines of history, religion, sociology, or anthropology, as well as predominantly Israeli-centered and thus hegemonically reflective of Israeli Druze perspectives and experiences.

listen to Bassel. For example, Abu Hamdan visually heightens and directs the audience's critical and active listening processes in *Once Removed* and "Natq" is via lighting and focus, as both projects are filmed in near pitch-black rooms where the eye is most often only drawn the photographs being projected behind the standing figure(s) of Abu Hamdan and/or Bassel, who are similarly dressed in dark clothing. In "Natq," though it is Abu Hamdan who is reading aloud his essay, the emphasis of the video continuously remains on his voice and words, not his face and body.

Figure 1, "Natq" (2019)

Throughout "Natq," Abu Hamdan himself remains in the shadows, his dark form only sometimes given shape by the images being projected behind him. As seen in Figure 1, the dim light from the iPad Abu Hamdan reads from only sometimes illuminates a bit of his face; otherwise,

throughout the 45-minute film viewers are exposed to Abu Hamdan only via his voice echoing to us in the dark, underscoring both the centrality of listening as praxes in this work and the transformative impact of Bassel's oral forms of witnessing and testimony.

Likewise, in *Once Removed,* voices are also being projected into the predominantly dark room in which the eye is thus most often directed to the large photographs being exhibited, all of which have been selected from Bassel's historical archive on the PLA. Occasionally in the film, one or two of these photographic images flood the viewer's screen entirely, drawing the viewer into an immersive experience of the stories these photographs tell about the Druze in the Lebanese Civil War. However, immersions into the photographs are frequently disrupted by

Figure 2, *Once Removed* (2019)

the silhouetted figures of Abu Hamdan and Bassel (see Figure 2). These disruptions and multi-layerings, I suggest, forge a variety of meanings and effects. First, the photographs themselves serve as critical modes of visually bearing witness and testifying to the roles the Druze and the

PLA in the Lebanese Civil War, underscoring the undertheorized role Druze communities can and do play in both the ongoingness of the war itself as well as how it is remembered. Indeed, even though the PLA was one of the largest and well-organized sectarian militias of the time, little has been written about the role of the PLA during the Lebanese Civil War. Swept into the larger cultural amnesia of the Lebanese Civil War, it is all too easy to forget the many players imbricated in Lebanon's traumatic histories, both nationally and across its easily permeated borders. Therefore, at the heart of Abu Hamdan's cultural production *Once Removed* is Bassel's photography book project, *The People's Liberation Army: Through the Eyes of a Lens, 1976-1991* (2019), which is to-date not only the largest, but one of the very few collections of memorabilia in the world centered on the PLA in the Lebanese Civil War. In addition to the contribution and intervention Bassel's book project itself offers to studies of the Lebanese Civil War, it is critical to remember that this specifically Druze narrative of the Lebanese Civil War is one that–as transnational Druze men with physical and emotional connections to Lebanon–neither Bassel nor Abu Hamdan are far removed from, hence the title of the production itself. As such, I suggest that the interesting visual coalescence forged between the speakers' body shapes and the photographs amplifies the oral testimony being given by Bassel, thus both visually and orally underscoring the ways in which Abu Hamdan and Bassel–living figures with close ties to Lebanon, the Druze, reincarnation, and the ongoing violences of the Lebanese Civil War–are imbricated in the historical moments they are both attempting to document and recover (see Figure 2). Abu Hamdan and Bassel, in these multiple and (quite literally) overlapping ways, are both a part of these stories, images, and histories they are sharing, and these histories are a part of them. Moreover, I contend that the interconnections made visually and orally evident in this film also exist more broadly across Druze communities both in Lebanon and all over the world.

Though the Druze exist as a small, widely diasporic community, they also remain intimately tied together throughout time and space via their beliefs, experiences, and testimonies, particularly those of reincarnation, as this dissertation addresses.

Though faces are largely left in the shadows in *Once Removed,* it is also important to note in an examination of the cinematographic effects of Abu Hamdan's medium that at particularly poignant moments of testimony the camera and lights will shift to illuminate Bassel, thus completely decentering Abu Hamdan and placing the emphasis on listening to Bassel's words and testimony in particular. For example, Figure 3 highlights a particularly significant moment in the film– Bassel's testimony of the vivid memories he carries of his past life death. In

Figure 3, *Once Removed* (2019)

remembering that day, the memories of which still deeply haunt him, Bassel details being wounded by a shell in the Druze town of Aley during the Lebanese Civil war, after which he was carried by friends into a pickup truck where, unable to find a hospital with availability, he

eventually died. Creating another powerful connection between the visual and the oral during this moment of testimony, as Bassel recollects how he (as Yousef) died, the camera then centers on a recent image of the shelter outside of which Yousef was fatally injured in 1984, an image Bassel himself took in his present life as witness, historian–and survivor.

With the emphasis on sound and listening via medium Abu Hamdan methodologically utilizes to emphasize testimony and witnessing in both *Once Removed* and "Natq," there is also an important deployment of visual archives in these projects, mainly composed of photographs from historic and contemporary Lebanon. Indeed, Bassel's collection contains both photographs he uncovered in his ten-year long process of locating and archiving the PLA, as well as others he tediously took (and reconstructed) himself. With the bodies and faces of both Bassel and Abu Hamdan largely decentralized across the darkness of these films, the viewer's eye is thus frequently drawn to Bassel's photographs, which serve a significant role within the film as a medium within a medium.

Once Removed can be described, in one way, as a film of Bassel's photographs interwoven with his oral testimony. As film scholar Roger Hallas importantly argues of the embeddedness of photography into documentary, "Photographs [...] retain a stronger trace of their presentational status within documentary film because the viewer recognizes them as the incorporation of a different medium, one marked by stillness and muteness. Through these characteristics they always bear the stamp of external evidence—images produced elsewhere, at other times, and for other purposes," engendering not just medial but political reflexivity (979). In *Once Removed,* these medial and political reflexivities become particularly palpable in the moments in which Bassel's contemporary photographs confront the obfuscated past of the Lebanese Civil War.

Figure 4, *Once Removed* (2019)

Take, for example, the moment captured from *Once Removed* in Figure 4. On the right side of this screenshot viewers see a photograph taken in 1989 that Bassel was able to locate from Getty Images. Placed alongside the left of this image is a photograph of the same building Bassel took himself, years later, careful to replicate in terms of camera angle and positionality on the road. This building is of particular personal significance to Bassel, as it is the site of land memory that helped trigger his past-life recollections when he was a child. The photograph from 1989 also represents the political significance of this site as a place where soldiers gathered and fought during the war. Straddling different moments of time, indicative of both change and permanence, when placed alongside one another these photos also mimic Bassel's own in-betweenness across time and space as a reincarnated Druze person who died in

the LCW. Importantly, both Bassel's oral testimony and these photographs bear witness to the ongoing hauntings of the Lebanese Civil War on individual and collective levels. Bassel's primary use of photographic images in *The People's Liberation Army: Through the Eyes of a Lens* thus both traces and confronts the changes (or lack thereof) of time, space, and traumatic experience in Lebanon. However, it is Bassel's oral testimony in *Once Removed* which importantly breaks what is often considered the most unbreakable of silences—that of the grave.

Breaking Silences: Listening to "Impossible Speech" in *Once Removed*

As Dr. Shawky Hamadeh notes in the preface to Bassel's book, "It is as if Yousef's soul has brought to this life the dusts of his old battles that have crossed time zones, to tell war stories and exhibit all the faded facts from the past" (9).[35] In the crossing of time zones described in this quote, we see a co-temporality that is uniquely enabled by the specters of Druze "afterlives," here Yousef's, an active force that, as Hamadeh describes, "has brought to life the dusts of his old battles." For Bassel, formerly Yousef, these afterlives continue to shape his present lived experiences. As Bassel writes in his book's introduction: "Although in my current life I have never been in a battlefield, fired a gun, or experienced the hardships of the Lebanese Civil War, yet the images of the PSP's and PLA's heroic moments have remained vivid in my thoughts and imagination, since my early years. This fine-drawn yet powerful sense of belonging to a community I have never actually lived in created the urge and motivation in me to seek and search for facts capable of capturing my flashbacks and unexplainable memories" (11). Bassel's words here make evident the ongoing effects, or afterlives, of not only of the war–but of being Druze, an identity which allows Bassel to forge interconnections across time as he negotiates

[35] Dr. Hamadeh is professor of Arab literature and as well as a Member of the Linguistic League in Lebanon.

specters of fierce "belonging to a community he has never actually lived in." Druze afterlives, as I see them, thus function on deeply individual and personal levels, but also operate on a much wider collective level. As Druze *natqeen* embody and remember experiences from a previous life that continues into the present, they can speak to and break long silences—here shrouding the Lebanese Civil War—making evident the unique role Druze can and do hold in bearing witness and testifying to personal as well as national histories. Moreover, Bassel's above quote also underscores the frequent connections between reincarnated Druze men's testimonies not only to the LCW, but gendered notions of heroism, glory, and martyrdom within and beyond Druze communities that I will further take up in chapter three.

Oral testimonies such as Bassel's are thus a critical way in which the silences surrounding the civil war are broken–first, as interventions in the process of "letting bygones be bygones" that the 1991 general amnesty law exemplifies and enforces, and also in the fact that the testimony of the reincarnated peoples is not an accepted category of legal witness. Indeed, reincarnation testimonies hold a particular "threat" to the Lebanese state, as these unique acts of remembering and speaking, Abu Hamdan explains, "operate outside of the law and the forms of witnessing that have been blocked thus far by legal instruments and political maneuvering" ("Natq" 00:07:17). For example, Abu Hamdan underscores the significant political meaning of considering Bassel's testimony as evidence that PSP leaders, in direct violation of international law, used child soldiers (here, Yousef Al Jawhary) in paramilitary operations that took place during the LCW. Though all forms of evidence of these violences are denied by the Lebanese state, Druze reincarnation testimonies thus complicate these state-sponsored denials and erasures because and in spite of their "impossibility." Moreover, though these acts of remembrance and testimony may seem "impossible" to non-Druze, as Abu Hamdan notes, it is extremely difficult

for Druze political leaders (such as current PSP leader Walid Jumblatt) to dismiss them considering the widespread belief in reincarnation across Druze communities around the globe. Furthermore, though reincarnation memories may be dismissed by the Lebanese state due to their (albeit complex) associations with religious doctrine, it is also quite difficult to deny the powerful role religion plays in Lebanese politics, particularly given the deeply sectarian nature of Lebanese governmental institutions, laws, and society.[36] Therefore, following Abu Hamdan, we are able to contend that for religious (and, I would add, ethno-Druze) communities, *natq* is an act of speech that holds a distinct validity as a form of witnessing (00:08:44-00:11:49), both reshaping, redefining, and expanding how we understand "eye"witnessing today.[37]

Moreover, returning to Hirsch's theorization of "post-" or inherited memory, we must also consider the transmigration of memory's connection to rebirth and survival in the context of Druze reincarnation. As noted earlier in this chapter, after his anecdotal reference to his aunt's dinner table, Abu Hamdan begins "Natq" with a compelling definition of the eponymous term: "*natq* or utterance does not only refer to the physical act of speaking, but to a form of speech that is impossible to explain by any other means than reincarnation" (00:01:39-41). In other words, Abu Hamdan frames the Druze phenomenon of *natq* as a form of xenoglossy, or "speech that has not been learned." The Druze believe that all people are reincarnated. Indeed, for Druze across the world a belief in reincarnation is widely held. Therefore, in the Druze context, as Abu Hamdan illuminates, "Natq does not refer to the reincarnation of the soul but the transmigration

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[36] For example, after declaring independence from France in 1943, Lebanon leaders agreed on the distribution of the political positions in the country according to religious affiliation, known as the National Pact, which remains in place today. Amongst many other forms of sectarian rule and governance, for example, in Lebanon, the President is always Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament must be Shia.

[37] With this claim, it is critical to remember that reincarnation is not solely a Druze, or even Eastern, belief, and cannot be relegated to a certain region of the world. Though the exact number of believers in reincarnation across the globe is difficult to ascertain, we can be certain it is significant (see more on this in the introduction to this dissertation).

of speech from the dead to the living" (00:02:53). Expanding on Abu Hamdan's definition, I argue that it is not simply a transmigration of speech that creates *natq* but the transmigration of memory being spoken, and, thus, being brought back to life or reborn. This transmigration of firsthand memory across time, space, and lives, thus expands the current conceptualizations of inherited memory put forth by memory scholars such as Marianne Hirsch.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of *natq* asks us to reconsider the ways in which scholars have previously conceptualized not only testimony, but survival. In one of the foundational texts of trauma studies, *Testimony,* psychoanalyst Dori Laub calls the critical act of testifying to one's trauma for Holocaust survivors the "imperative to tell." For Laub, telling one's story becomes inherently linked to a survivor's ability to actually survive, as "not telling" here is linked to a "perpetuation of its [the trauma's] tyranny;" left unspoken, these traumatic events, Laub argues, continue to quote "pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life" (79). As the closest translation of the word *natq* from Arabic means "to talk" or "to speak," indeed, reincarnated Druze people, even at incredibly young ages, seem to feel a distinct need to tell their stories–and a distinct need for us to *listen*. To talk or to tell, here, I contend, is an important critical framework through which to study and understand the uniqueness of Druze reincarnation testimonies, their imperative to tell, and its link to survival, as made evident by Druze survivors such as Bassel.

I believe the imperative to tell, for the Druze, is an imperative to survive in multiple forms. The first, I argue here, is a survival of a past life via the transmigration of the soul and articulation of (often traumatic) memories. "Not telling" for the Druze can not only lead to the festering of that trauma but keeps the past life—and the histories they are testifying to--in a literal space of death and silence, as exemplified by both Lamia and Bassel's stories. As I outline

above, these testimonies, and their afterlives, can also work to undo erasures, amnesias, and silences of selective national histories and memories. Moreover, as I will illuminate next, reincarnation memories transcend and travel across national borders into the diaspora, having the ability to shape transnational collective memory, here of the Lebanese Civil War, within and beyond the context of Lebanon. In this sense, both the war and its traumas survive and remain ongoing, its afterlives shaping the lives of the Druze and the Lebanese around the world today.

The Druze Diaspora: Crossing Borders and (After)Lives

As, in the previous section of this chapter I aimed to underscore the extraordinary possibilities of witnessing via *natq* on a political front in the nation of Lebanon, in this section I hope to show what reincarnation stories may reshape on a transnational level, thus redefining and expanding critical scholarship on transnationalism and in-betweenness, sticking with the example of Bassel between the contexts of the U.S. and Lebanon. The fields of Arab American and transnational Arab studies are abundant with many brilliant and comprehensive theorizations of transnationalism and in-betweenness, as well as problematizations of the binaries hegemonically drawn across media landscapes and national borders between "East" and "West," "here" and "there."[38] Missing from this array of works on Arab Americans and the Arab diaspora, however, is a consideration of the unique positionalities and experiences of the transnational Druze. I argue, in their transgressions of both time and space via reincarnation, the Druze play an under-examined and critical role in problematizing the boundaries and borders of nation-states via their transnationalist states of being and (re)living. In underscoring this

[38] See, for example, Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber's edited collection, *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging* (2011); Evelyn Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (2012); Sarah Gualtieri's *Between Arab and White* (2009), Nadine Naber's *Arab America* (2012).

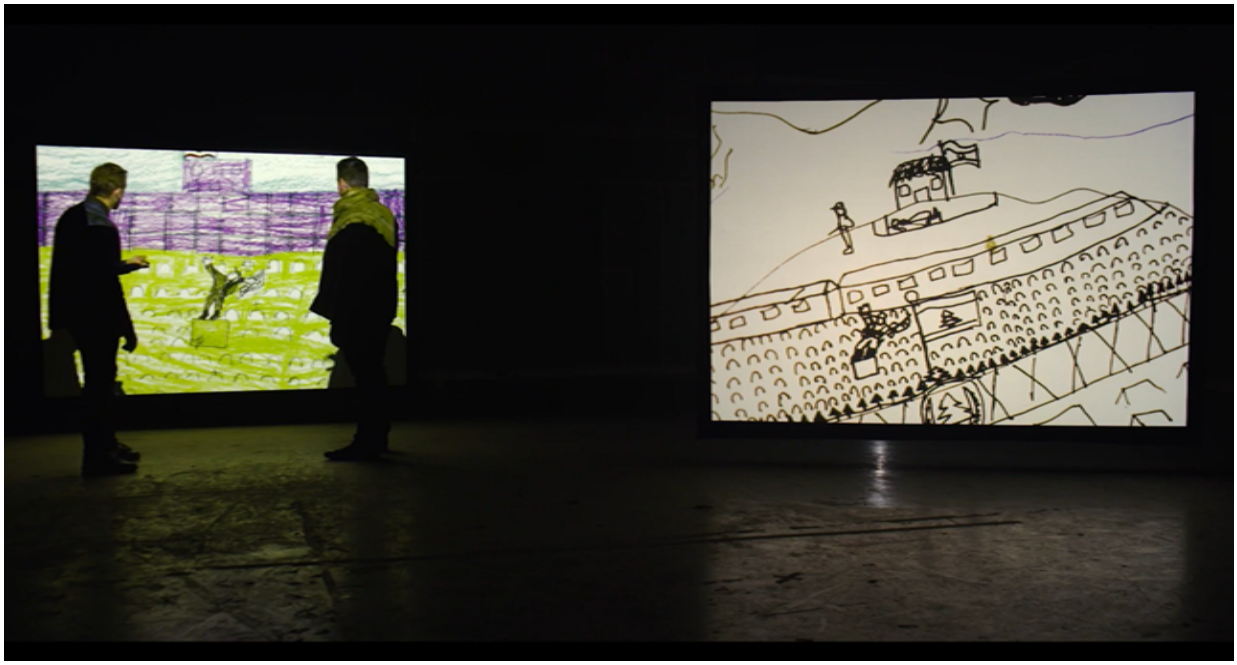
argument, I return to Bassel. Though Bassel was born in Kuwait in 1987 and currently lives between Canada and Lebanon, the earliest occurrence of Bassel's past-life memories was triggered by his 1991 visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Arlington Cemetery in Washington D.C.[39] This trip to the U.S. had a transformative impact on Bassel, who was only five years old at the time; in *Once Removed,* standing in front of a photograph of himself as a young child in front of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial statue of three fallen soldiers, when asked by Abu Hamdan what it was about this statue that triggered his flashbacks, Bassel responds it was "Just the three fellow comrades." Even as a young child, Bassel therefore clearly feels a keen sense of comradery and fellowship with these soldiers, an interconnection, through war and its specters, felt across the borders of time and space. Indeed, when Abu Hamdan asks Bassel if it mattered that these soldiers were from a totally different time, Bassel responds with a firm "No, no it didn't matter. They were just three soldiers who died together." The trauma that Bassel carries having lived through the Lebanese Civil War in a past life thus engenders a simultaneity of time and even nation for Bassel who sees these American soldiers, despite the different contexts and spaces of the Lebanese Civil War to the Vietnam War, as inherently interrelated. Moreover, it is important to remember that the U.S. played a critical part in *both* of these wars.[40] Though he was only around five years old, Bassel was so struck by the mass graves at Arlington that he would repetitively draw them until he was a teenager, making evident his own imperative to tell, to bear witness to the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War that he carries and is deeply shaped by, even from his critically young age. The tens of drawings that Bassel

[39] Interestingly, this is the same year the general amnesty law on the civil war was established in Lebanon. As the histories of this war were being legally erased a world away, Bassel's memories of said war were triggered in the national landscape of the U.S.

[40] The histories of U.S. political and military intervention in Lebanon are long and ongoing. One such example is the U.S. "boots on the ground" military operation based in Beirut from the years 1982-84 of the Lebanese Civil War.

created from the time he was five to the time he was thirteen all speak to connections across time and space enabled by Druze afterlives. Though Bassel, in this life, was not born in Lebanon and

Figures 5 & 6, *Once Removed* (2019)



was not alive during the time of the civil war, he still feels the need to speak to–and (re)write–an invisibilized Lebanese past, both at the individual and collective levels. For example, in Figure 5, we see a U.S. military graveyard Bassel has drew as a child that was remarkably close in resemblance to that of Arlington, the tombstones etched onto a green lawn, many of which are adorned with crosses, indicative of the fallen soldiers being primarily Christian. However, here Bassel has drawn Dar al Tayfe in the background, the religious hall for the Druze located in Beirut, forging connections across nations and religions frequently represented as separate and mutually exclusive. Figure 6 is a different drawing of Bassel's, which depicts another U.S.-style military graveyard, this time fused with symbols and traces of Lebanon such as the Lebanese flag, again connecting both national landscapes and symbols of nationalism across the U.S. and Lebanon. As Bassel repeatedly began drawing these memorials of the Lebanese Civil War, but in the style of war memorials in the U.S., Bassel transposes these seemingly separate and different national war traumas, making evident both the way that these wars interconnect sufferers of traumatic experience, in particular, war. Moreover, in these drawings Bassel also makes evident the ways in which the realities of these wars continually work across time and space, especially for transnational Druze communities contending with reincarnation and *natq*.

Importantly, these drawings also indicate the inherent *need* to memorialize a war for both Bassel and millions of Lebanese in Lebanon and its diasporas who remain haunted by the ongoingness of war traumas and the state-imposed amnesias, silences, and erasures that surround them. Reincarnated Druze testimonies like Bassel's help to break these silences. For example, here are no military graveyards such as Arlington Cemetery in Lebanon. Indeed, the few war memorials that do exist in the nation are not only extremely limited in number, but also often erroneous and misrepresentative of the war's histories and martyrs. The phenomenon of

Druze afterlives such as Bassel's can, I argue, thus shape the way the war is or is not remembered both within and beyond Lebanese borders.

Figure 7, *Once Removed* (2019)

For example, pictured in Figure 7 are Bassel and Abu Hamdan standing in front of a drawing Bassel, as a young child, made of his own tombstone. Here, Bassel's drawing is juxtaposed with a picture of Bassel as an adult in front of a real-life civil war memorial in Aley, Lebanon. Importantly, this real-life memorial contains a multitude of false information. As Bassel points out, not only is the date on which Yousef al-Jawhary was killed listed here incorrectly, but the memorial gets several dates—and even names of the fallen—wrong. With these drawings, and with his reincarnation story, Bassel, and others like him, are thus not only breaking historical silences, but critically rewriting the memorialization of such events. Indeed, Bassel's seemingly inherent *need* to rewrite and remember the Lebanese Civil War seems directly related to the war's numerous afterlives–here not just via the carried traumas of Bassel's own past life death and reincarnation, but the ongoing traumas of the war itself. What the

traumas of the war–and its multiple reincarnations–have also thus made evident is the necessity of healing for those who continue to suffer from Lebanon's state of enduring crises and violence, both at home and abroad. Druze epistemologies of remembrance, bearing witness, and importantly, *listening* to these stories demonstrate some possible pathways for recovery and moving forward, particularly for the Druze, who are carrying these traumas in critically unique ways.

With this, I suggest that listening to Druze reincarnation stories becomes critical for both survival and healing. This healing certainly can and does occur on an individual level. For

Figure 8, *Once Removed* (2019)

example, in Figure 8 we see a picture of Bassel in his present life taken with his past-life father, Fouad. According to Bassel, despite his need for "closure" and feeling "hell because I wanted to get so many things off my shirt" he had to wait until he was twenty-one years old to connect with his father and others from his past life because his parents in this life did not support or, at first,

even believe his reincarnation stories (*Once Removed* 00:10:02-00:10:53). When asked how he felt upon meeting his past-life father and family, Bassel said one word: "Relief." This sense of reunion and catharsis, it is important to note here, is one that is also described in the novel *I, the Divine*, as Lamia is finally reunited with her past-life daughter in her beloved homeland of Syria (see my analysis of Lamia chapter two). These fiction and non-fiction stories thus both speak to how breaking silences and reconnecting with lost loved ones across transnational Druze communities can be a medium for individual healing, a way of contending with traumatic experience via testimony and listening.[41]

As Bassel reveals, if he did not remember his past life, he "wouldn't have known about the party," the PLA, or have had this intense need to testify to and historicize its role in the Lebanese Civil War (00:27:00-48). It is because he is reincarnated that he remembers and bears witness to these histories, ones that are not taught in school, or memorialized in national landscapes, rather they are silenced and erased. For this inherited remembrance, in the *Once Removed*'s closing, Abu Hamdan thus importantly gives credit not only to both the "words and images of Bassel Abi Chahine and the memories of Youssef Al Jawhary" (00:28:04). Reincarnation stories, as Bassel's testimony makes evident, work beyond the individual and across time and space, serving as a form of collective healing through justice and resistance via remembrance. For example, when Abu Hamdan asks Bassel why he does this critical work of historicizing and speaking about his past life, Bassel tells stories of civil war survivors who "live in misery," who were never given justice or taken care of by the political parties with whom they

[41] Although here I center positive forms of interconnections across Druze communities, this is not always the case. Though some Druze do (re)connect with their past-life families and forge significant and lasting relationships via these remembered intimacies, other Druze may not want to do so, may not be encouraged to do so, or simply may not be able to reconnect with their past life families, for a variety of reasons. It is thus important to keep in mind these limitations while considering these possibilities.

were aligned. Bringing attention and recognition to these erased pasts and their ongoing hauntings is both critically important for collective healing, and, I argue, is distinctly enabled by the platform of Druze afterlives.

With implications beyond the individual, reincarnation testimonies are thus also paramount for the Druze as a collective, working towards cultural connection and communal survival in a shifting transnational geopolitical landscape. Druze reincarnation stories travel. It is hard to find a Druze person who has not heard a reincarnation story about another Druze. In fact, these stories frequently serve to connect Druze around the world. It is not uncommon, when hearing someone in their family speak of past-life memories, for Druze families to trace and track their loved one to their past life family, even, for some, developing close, loving, intimate relationships to their past life families in their current lives. Therefore, not only do Druze reincarnation stories become collective and cultural acts that circulate around transnational Druze communities, but these testimonies can and have worked to reconnect Druze with other Druze across different spaces and times. Considering the limited numbers of the transnational and diasporic Druze community, these (re)connections can and do become crucial to individual, collective, and cultural survival.

Today, many Druze across the world live in diaspora. And for so many, the goal, and the hope, is that they continue to carry with them Druze histories and traditions, stories and memories. Therefore, though trauma thus plays a key role in my conceptualization of Druze afterlives, so does healing. Druze afterlives thus not only interconnect nations and histories, pasts and presents, but also speak to and shape Druze futures, and the ways that we continue to find, connect, and relate to one another, no matter where we may migrate—or, in this case, where our souls may transmigrate.

Future Possibilities: Looking Back to Look Forward

Druze afterlives, as addressed in this chapter specifically through the work of Lawrence Abu Hamdan and testimony of Bassel Abi Chahine, also have an imperative function beyond Druze communities. The Lebanese Civil War resulted in an estimated seventeen thousand "disappeared" persons. Often shoveled into mass graves, dumped into the sea, or kidnapped in enemy territories, the disappeared were those simply never to be seen or heard from again, buried in the secrets and hidden histories of the war, erasures in which the Lebanese state played and continues to maintain an active role. Including the horrifically large population of those disappeared, the Lebanese Civil War is estimated to have led to at least one hundred thousand deaths and an exodus of one million peoples from Lebanon, many of whom would never return. With these violences, traumas, and losses, so many questions (and traumas) remain. Over three decades have passed since an official "end" was declared to the Lebanese Civil War. However, the ongoing presence(s) of its traumas, memories, and histories remain evident in Beirut's architecture–still riddled holes from bullets and bombs, in traumatic experiences depicted in contemporary transnational Arab cultural productions–such as those of Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Rabih Alameddine (discussed in chapter two), and, perhaps most importantly, in the hearts, minds, and spirits of the Lebanese people, for whom war, and its afterlives, have not ceased their hauntings.

In 2024, the nation of Lebanon exists in a state of unprecedented sociopolitical crisis. The country currently has no president, and its government has spent months in a political deadlock. Due to an ongoing electricity crisis, many homes receive only an hour (if that) of electricity from the government per day. Despite the rampant outbreaks of diseases such as

COVID-19 and cholera, the most standard of medications have become difficult to find on any pharmacy shelf. Shortages of living essentials have forced residents of Lebanon to hoard barrels of water for when their homes inevitably run dry, as well as oil for wood stoves to keep warm and cook through increasingly brutal seasons and natural disasters. Furthermore, one must be able to not only find but to afford these resources. In what has been described as one of the worst financial crises across the globe since the mid-19th century, the Lebanese pound has suffered a ninety percent devaluation since 2019, already ranking as the world's worst-performing currency of 2023.[42] The economic crisis has led to a near-total depletion of people's access to their own monetary funds, which are now worth a mere fraction of what they once were. In 2020, an explosion in the port of Beirut ranked as one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history. Moreover, the Israeli aggressions in Gaza since October 7, 2023, have violently spread to southern Lebanon, with threats to the whole country once again being engulfed in war remaining heavy. As multiple crises in Lebanon continue to cyclically unfold, the traumas of the past seem more than ever to inform the lives of those living in Lebanon today. Indeed, trauma and violence themselves are consistently reincarnated in Lebanon, a nation popularly associated with the phoenix in its ability and need to continuously rise from the ashes. The current crisis and traumas of Lebanon thus beg the questions: how long can Lebanon survive if it refuses to reconcile with its cyclical histories of trauma and violence? As death and displacement continue to be woven into the fabric of everyday life in Lebanon, can we really continue to, in the words of the Lebanese state as described by Sune Haugbolle, "let bygones be bygones?"

Though in this chapter I point to the significance of listening to Druze stories, I would like to end with the emphasis that listening to, thus recovering, Lebanon's past at large can help

[42] See Omar Tano's "World's Biggest Currency Crash Prompts Lebanon to Intervene Anew," *Bloomberg News* 2023.

us recover Lebanon's ongoing violences and seemingly perilous future. The work of cultural artists, or nonstate actors such as Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Rabih Alameddine (see chapter two) is becoming increasingly important given the ongoing militarization, politicization, and globalization of our contemporary world more broadly, the Arab world in particular, and the state of persistent crises in Lebanon. On June 4, 2023, the global news organization *The Guardian* published an article titled "'I Want to Be Part of the Rebirth': The Artists Bringing Creation Out of Beirut's Chaos." This article, a series of interviews with authors, actors, chefs, fashion designers, musicians, painters, and filmmakers whose projects, often framed throughout the article as "political" are also described as modes of contending with, bearing witness to, and resisting the ceaseless violences of daily life in Beirut; as Lebanese author and journalist Joumana Haddad writes in this article's introduction, "The big war ended – at least officially – in 1990, but our tribulations, our *petites guerres*, did not." However, the hope, strength, and resistance has continued as well. As Haddad asserts:

> Wherever I travel, people ask me about the "Lebanese secret": what makes us so driven? (Notice how I did not use the word "resilient," which I, and many others, resent.) Is it the fact that we have been trained, through decades of hardship, to get quickly back on our feet and recover after each blow? Has it become an instinct engraved in our genes? I am convinced it's much more than that. It's a defiant, offensive stance, not just a defensive reflex. It is, to put it bluntly, our individual and collective middle finger in the face of everything and everyone that keeps trying to dishearten us, scare us and murder us.
>
> Don't get me wrong: this is not the cliched refrain of "what doesn't break us makes us stronger." I've always found that to be horribly reductive of people's suffering and pain; a way of depriving people of their right to feel vulnerable and wretched. No.

> This is a story of revenge and atonement through art and creativity. And there's no sweeter revenge, nor greater atonement.
>
> So, here's to middle fingers, and to the creators, and creations, that they inspire.

I believe the Lebanese "secret" alluded to above is best described as a will to survive in the face of ongoing trauma, crises, and hauntings (as well as a noted resentment that we are continually forced to do so). Yet, as Lebanese people in Lebanon and around the world continue to avenge and atone, resist and refuse, they also work towards healing and rebirth – here not of trauma, but of hope. Attending to Lebanon's past is thus not only a critical mode of recovery for Lebanon's tumultuous present, but its unknown future. As addressed in this chapter, the transmigrations of Druze memories across time, space, and body are vital forms of this survival and remembrance, offering distinct avenues towards healing on both individual and collective levels within and beyond Lebanon. As the Druze and other Lebanese around the world continue to bear witness, to testify, to tell us their stories, and, as Gordon puts it "demand their due," it is my own hope that we listen, see, and contribute to what they may transform.

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Chapter Two: Listening to Lamia: Druzeness, Trauma, and Literary Testimony in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet.

Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*

How can an examination of Druzeness in a contemporary Arab American novel expand and reshape our contemporary understandings of transnational bodies and lives? What is the relationship between traumatic experience, bearing witness, and literary fiction, and how does centering these intersections on Druze experiences bring new knowledges of these interconnections to the forefront of contemporary scholarship in trauma, memory, and transnational studies? This chapter engages the methodological approach of narrative inquiry by looking at the work of queer Druze Lebanese American living writer Rabih Alameddine, specifically, his novel *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001), at the intersections of nation, religion, gender, sexuality, and class. In conducting this analysis, I will first provide a brief historical background on the longstanding Western histories and investments in the Druze in Orientalist and Neo-Orientalist thought, as made evident in existent yet understudied fiction and non-fiction global literatures published as early as the 18th century. Charting these works and histories across various times and spaces, I argue, not only shows the often-overlooked imbrications of Druze thought, culture, and peoples within studies and conceptualizations of (Neo)Orientalism, but also illuminates an enduring desire of Western literary scholars to better

"know" and "understand" the Druze, often considered elusive and esoteric beyond and even within the Arab world. I will then turn to our contemporary literary movement, in which Druze voices are finally forging space within the areas of Druze literature and studies. As I will briefly overview, in the 21st century, more Druze writers, across literary genres, are publishing works than ever before. In this chapter, I focus on the emerging genre of the "Druze novel," which I define as novels written by Druze authors that engage notions of Druze cultures, communities, practices and/or religion. Though the Western historical works on the Druze I will chart below inform a much needed and developing conversation on the undertheorized relevance and importance of the Druze in contemporary and transnational literary studies, to better "know" or "understand" the Druze, I emphasize the need to engage Druze voices in any study of the Druze, literary or other. In an overview of the more recent critical conversations on the Druze in literary studies, I thus briefly consider why the category of a Druze novel may be helpful while thinking through the limitations of such a label, particularly one often and erroneously considered purely religious.

These important contexts and backgrounds serve as critical bases for this chapter's focus on the contemporary work of Druze author Rabih Alameddine, in particular, his novel *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters.* As I will highlight, previous critical scholarship on *I, the Divine* has importantly analyzed the novel's articulations of transnationalism, hybridity, in-betweenness, diaspora, and trauma largely via an examination of the novel's protagonist, Sarah Nour el-Din. Working within these intersections, in this chapter, however, I redirect our attention to the silenced women of Sarah's narrative, specifically, Sarah's ostracized and reincarnated Druze sister, Lamia. Though Lamia serves a seemingly minor role in Sarah's memoir, this chapter aims to illuminate Lamia's critical importance in our understandings of not only Sarah,

but the gendered, classed, and queered articulations of Druzeness, transnationalism, and traumatic experience in *I, the Divine*. In this chapter, I thus ask: What does it mean for a Druze woman to be reincarnated in one nation and remain deeply connected to another, a place she has not stepped foot in during her present lifetime? How does trauma carry and manifest for reincarnated Druze lives across time and space? What happens when Druze traumas, particularly for women, are silenced and oppressed? In short, how does silencing as a form of oppression transmigrate? In Lamia, a reincarnated child once vibrant and talkative turned "mad" in adulthood, I explore answers to these questions.

In my analysis, I employ a theoretical framework that draws on transnational feminist theory and scholarship, notions of transnational citizenship, belonging, and diaspora, as well as trauma studies. Though Lamia is a character predominantly immobilized within a domestic and heteropatriarchal sphere within the novel, in this chapter, I explore the ways in which Lamia provides a compelling example of the political and social implications for reincarnated Druze women crossing borders of home, family, and nation. As I note in chapter one, the most circulated and heard Druze reincarnation testimonies today center reincarnated Druze male soldiers, testimonies which, I argue, not only resist and disrupt the state-enacted silences and cultural amnesia surrounding the Lebanese Civil War but situate reincarnated Druze men within popular discourses of honor, glory, and martyrdom in the transnational Arab world. As I further contend and explore in this chapter, the reincarnation stories of Druze women such as Lamia also maintain critical roles in breaking silences and reshaping our contemporary understandings of traumas such as the LCW across public spheres that are often privileged in our theorizations of collective traumatic events. Moreover, listening to the experiences and traumas of reincarnated Druze women, I argue, importantly disrupts structures of erasure existent within the private

spheres of Druze families and transnational Druze communities, both furthering and complicating our understandings of the pervasive and enduring impacts of war as well as importantly compelling us to push back on notions of the public/private binary, along with its hierarchical privileging of the public.

As I argue and illuminate both here and in chapter three, the heteropatriarchal state structures of silencing and cultural amnesia in Lebanon that I examine in chapter one are often replicated and perpetuated within and across transnational Druze communities. Therefore, though their belief in reincarnation is widespread and paramount, Druze communities themselves are more likely to silence the traumatic stories of reincarnated Druze women, especially when (as they often do) these narratives fall within the realm of domestic, interpersonal, and/or gender violence and are thus considered *dishonorable,* taboo, or shameful.[43]

A Historical Overview: Transnational Western Literatures on the Druze Across Time

First, in order to examine the ways in which narratives about the Druze are (or are not) currently contested by the burgeoning fiction narratives of Druze writers across the world today, we must first briefly overview Western historical works about Druze communities, most often—as evident in this section—written by non-Druze authors. Though much has been studied and written about Orientalism and its intersections with hegemonic understandings and representations of historical and contemporary Arabs and Arab Americans, the Druze's rootedness and fundamental role within Orientalist theory and thought is often overlooked or undiscussed. For instance, arguably the most prominent and fundamental work on Orientalism in

[43] The tension between the notions of honor and martyrdom attached to the stories and lives reincarnated Druze men and dishonor and shame attached to reincarnated Druze women is one I explore more fully in my analysis of Druze oral interviews in chapter three.

the 20th century, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), brilliantly nuances and illuminates Orientalist representations of the East as primarily rooted in Britain, France, and the U.S. However, in addressing a prominent gap in his own theorization of the Orient, Edward Said notes the crucial role of nations such as Germany in contemporary Orientalist scholarship, describing French nobleman Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, known as the founder of German comparative linguistics, as "the first modern and institutional European Orientalist" (*Orientalism* 26).[44] However, it is critical to note and often left unstated that de Sacy's work, thus inherently transnational in nature, had a distinct focus on not only Islam and Arabic literature, but, specifically, the Druze religion. De Sacy's profound interest and investment in the Druze was a lifelong and prolific endeavor. After retiring from public service in 1792, de Sacy focused his attention on a study of the Druze, who became the subject of his last published work, the *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* (French, 2 vols., 1838). De Sacy's lifelong interest and culminative project not only make evident a historical literary presence of the Druze in the West (here, France), but a deep Western interest and need to unpack and make "known" Druze religion, peoples, and cultures–"exposing" them to Western thought and knowledge formations of the Arab world. In de Sacy's work, we thus see representations and contentions with the Druze in literary Orientalisms as early as the 18th century.

Indeed, this period seems to mark a time of increasing Western thought and engagement on the Druze as made evident in Western literature. For example, among renowned poet and playwright Robert Browning's lesser-known and understudied works is a play titled *The Return of the Druses* (1843), a work which was described by famous English actor and producer

[44] According to the Cambridge Library Collection, not only was de Sacy the most distinguished French Orientalist of his time, but he is also considered the father of Arab scholarship in Europe. De Sacy also held a life-long interest in the Druze, preparing for forty years to publish *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* (1838).

William Charles Macready as “mystical, strange, and heavy.”[45][46] Though Macready’s description of Browning’s play underscores its Orientalist nature, a brief description of the work leaves no doubt that the Druze had a distinct place in Western Orientalist thought and imagination in the 19th century. Set in the 15th century on "An Islet of the Southern Sporades, colonized by Druses of Lebanon, and garrisoned by the Knights-Hospitallers of Rhodes” Browning’s Druze characters are inherently connected to Lebanon, the beloved homeland they longingly and almost obsessively wish to return to as part of long-awaited divine incarnation. *The Return of the Druses* largely portrays the Druze as simple-minded, silly, and naive tribal folk. However, evident in the description of the Druze as ‘colonizers’ of a Western land points to what Lynn F. Fulton, building on the work of Herbert Tucker, describes as “Browning's uneasiness about the Druses' belief in the physical incarnation of their god and the realization on earth of their dreams” (167).[47] This depicted threat of the Druze to Western thought and beliefs, particularly regarding Christianity and God, is underscored in a 1898 collection of Browning’s plays edited and introduced by Helen Archibald Clarke and Charlotte Endymion Porter.[48] In their introduction, Clarke and Porter not only point to one of the important themes of *The Return of the Druses* as the “contrast between Christian and Druse ideas” (xx), but reveal a substantial interest in this play above the others included in the collection, as noted in an admittedly long

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[45] William Charles Macready was one of the most prominent and renowned English actors of the Victorian era. For more on Macready see *The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833-1851*, ed. William Toynbee (1912; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 2:80.

[46] Known as one of the major English poets of the Victorian age, Robert Browning also had a short-lived career as a playwright, though deemed by many as unsuccessful in this attempt. Browning wrote most of his plays for William Charles Macready, an actor, producer, and friend. Macready had a particular dislike for Browning’s *The Return of the Druses,* writing in his diary "I yield to the belief that he [Browning] will never write again - to any purpose. I fear his intellect is not quite clear” (2:72).

[47] See Fulton, Lynn M. “The Standard of Flesh and Blood: Browning’s Problems with Staged Drama.” *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 2 (1997): 157–72.

[48] Clarke and Porter were prominent American writers, editors, and literary critics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the founders of *Poet Lore,* the oldest continuously published poetry journal in the United States.

discussion of this particular play in the collection's introduction. According to Clarke and Porter, "'The Return of the Druses' illustrates the dramatic embodiment of a large socially significant over-movement more perfectly perhaps than any other of the plays in this volume, a fact which may justify the choice of it in this Introduction for so full a discussion (xvii).[49] Clarke and Porter here thus emphasize a discerned interest in the play's connections to social and cultural movements working across the intersections of race and religion. Revealing their belief in an additional importance of the play, Clarke and Porter also claim, "As a generic piece of Browning's dramatic workmanship, it is also noticeable for the completeness with which it incorporates with the underlying motive revealed through personality, the more usual stage interests of telling character-progression, and of mere plot– surprising situation and effective spectacle" (xvii-xviii). Here, Clarke and Porter's connection of Druze religion and people to "spectacle" and "surprise," verifies them as effective subject for Western cultural production and entertainment. Explicitly labeled as "Orientals" by Clarke and Porter, this introduction, Browning's play, as well as de Sacy's earlier work, all signal a lengthy yet undertheorized role of the Druze in Western Orientalist literary imagination, one that demands contemporary critical attention. From de Sacy in France, to Browning in England, to Clarke and Porter in America, Western writers and scholars across the world have clearly long exhibited an orientalist fascination with the Druze. Moreover, although heavily undertheorized, this interest and investment in Druze culture, peoples, and beliefs continues today. Building on the longstanding and transnational Western investments in literary representations of Druze culture and peoples, contemporary scholars are also attempting to better know and understand the Druze, forging and naming spaces for them in Western and transnational literary canons, scholarship, and thought.

[49] See Browning, Robert, Helen A. Clarke, and Charlotte Porter. *The Return of the Druses*. New York, Boston: T. Y. Crowell & company, 1898.

In this exciting moment, Druze peoples across the world are also finally getting their own say in literary constructions of their histories, experiences, and cultures, begging the question "How can the categorization of a "Druze novel" expand, reshape, or refine contemporary transnational literary studies?"

Considering Druze Literature in the 21st Century

Since the start of the 21st century, an emergent, increasing, and critically important presence of Druze authors has become marked across several transnational contexts and spaces. In Francophone literature, for example, we can find Druze author Leila Barakat's novel *Sous les vignes du pays Druze* (1993). Contemporary Druze novels written and published in Arabic include Anis Yahya's *Jasad Kana Li* (2002) and Iman Humaydan Younes's *Toot Barri* and *Hayawat Ukhra* (2008 and 2010, respectively). In addition to the novels of Rabih Alameddine that I describe below, Druze novels written in English also include Nada Awar Jarrar's novel *Somewhere, Home* (2003) and Fadya Alameddine's *Deep Within the Nectar of the Gods Rests the Druze Faith* (2017).[50] These contemporary global Druze novels, in their vast multiplicities of language and subject, importantly serve as a resistance to any hegemonic understanding of the Druze literature and cultures within and beyond Druze, Arab, and transnational communities. The heterogenic and complex nature of Druze works, however, is made particularly evident in the canon of Rabih Alameddine, whose novels are widely different in nature, subject, and form. As one of the few Arab American (let alone queer) writers giving voice and representation to Druze characters in his novels, Alameddine, I argue, helps forge an important space for

[50] Though these examples are all of Druze novels, we can also chart an emergence of Druze works across genres such as essays, non-fiction, and poetry. See, for example, contemporary Lebanese American Druze artists Ghinwa Jawhari's poetry collection *Bint* (2021) or Robert Lee Hamady's non-fiction memoir, *Groceryman: The Hamadys of Flint Michigan & The American Dream* (2013).

transnational Druze communities within a contemporary American as well as Arab literary tradition and imagination, both of which have yet to fully recognize or contend with Druze peoples and cultures, compounding the Druze's long-standing association with esotericism within and beyond the Arab world.[51]

Often testifying to traumatic transnational and diasporic Arab experiences in his work, through his unique literary forms, structures, and content, Alameddine bears witness to and connects regional and global trauma narratives throughout his novels, giving shape and voice to transnational Arab stories. In *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014), Alameddine interrogates whose lives are seen as necessary, grievable,[52] and remembered via the point-of-view of Aaliya, a blue-haired 72-year-old divorced shut-in living in Beirut, whose "best friends," the writers of her treasured books, she has never met. *The Angel of History*'s (2016) protagonist, Jacob, is a gay Arab writer living in San Francisco contending with the palpable tension of remembering and forgetting critical historical moments--here, the AIDS crisis--experienced by those outside of a dominant U.S. national consciousness. Alameddine's first novel, *Koolaids* (1998), connects the horrors of the AIDS crisis in the U.S. to the Lebanese Civil War, giving voice to an abundance of characters in San Francisco and Lebanon contending with their individual and collective traumatic experiences. In *The Hakawati* (2008), Alameddine weaves together classical and contemporary stories from the old and new Arab world through Osama, an American who has inherited the gift of storytelling from his grandfather, a renowned *hakawati*[53].

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[51] This is not to say that the work of Rabih Alameddine is or could be "authentically" representative of Druze identities, religion, or cultures; rather, I argue that Alameddine's fiction importantly offers differing perspectives of the Druze by the Druze–perspectives that are egregiously limited in transnational Western and Arab literary canons.
[52]See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009).
[53] The Arabic word for "storyteller."

Via his frequent engagements with the oft-invisibilized Druze in his novels, I contend that Alameddine helps forge a critical space for the Druze both with the Arab world's historical past and increasingly transnational contemporary present. While recognizing the important role Alameddine's novels have in representing and including Druze experiences, however, I also reject the idea that his or any other novel engaging the Druze can be taken as a form of absolute knowledge about this highly complex and heterogeneous ethnoreligious group. Given the limited nature of Druze novels, this, however, is perhaps a mistake easily made. For example, in "A Francophone Druze Novel?: Postwar Ethnography and (Anti)Sectarianism in *Sous les vignes du pays Druze*" literary scholar Michelle Hartman looks the work of self-identified Druze author Leila Barakat, whose French novel, *Sous les vignes du pays Druze* (1993) was praised by scholars as "revealing the hidden and supposedly secret world of the Druze" (243). Indeed, as Hartman reveals, critics such as Ramy Zein lauded *Sous les vignes du pays Druze* as an "expose of Druze life," one, I argue, that is in line with the non-fiction *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* that de Sacy wrote over one hundred years earlier.[54] Importantly, Hartman argues that Barakat and her novel ultimately maintain a "uniqueness in reclaiming ethnography as a genre, particularly in a Druze setting, where there are so few French-language authors (or Arabic-language authors, for that matter)" (265). In this argument, Hartman reveals a tension that Druze authors writing on the Druze must inherently face, given the esotericism and secrecy of their transnational communities. Rabih Alameddine, though a transnational Druze writer writing on the Druze, complicates any notion of representing absolute knowledge of the Druze, as made evident in the vastly different characterizations of his Druze characters, particularly Druze women. Therefore, refusing to examine a Druze novel as a type of exposé of esoteric Druze

[54] See Ramy Zein, *Dictionnaire de la littérature libanaise de langue française*. Paris: L'harmattan (1998).

communities, here, I suggest a focus on how literary representations of Druze identities and experiences can expand, animate, and redefine critical conversations–here, namely, transnational, trauma, and literary studies.

Considering the complex nature of Druze literature, though the 21st century is witnessing an exciting growth of Druze works across literary forms and world languages (in particular, English, Arabic, and French), relatively few works can or have been categorized as "Druze novels" in contemporary critical literary studies. However, literary scholars have recently begun to consider the undertheorized potentials of such a label. For example, literary scholar Syrine Hout, in "The Tears of Trauma: Memories of Home, War, and Exile in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*" (2008), analyzes the character of Sarah to argue for a classification of the novel as contemporary world literature, specifically at the "intersection of trauma fiction in general and the post-1990 anglophone Lebanese novel in particular (60)." Though Hout does not focus on the Druzeness of the text, centering, rather, on the novel's articulations of trauma and transnationalism via Sarah, she ultimately argues that because *I, the Divine* serves as "a culturally hybrid novel succeeds artistically in combining historical particularities with psychodynamic universals, it gains entry into world literature" (62). With this claim, I must ask, in its potential categorization of "world literature," what is *I, the Divine* gaining "entry" to? In other words, what new directions in studying literature can be taken when the rather limited and exclusive category of Druze novels is placed into a larger global literary framework?

This is also a question that Michelle Hartman takes on in "Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine: A Druze Novel as World Literature*" (2015), as she explores the generative potential of placing "Druze novels," be this a "parochial or restrictive label," into conversation with a broader "world literature" framework, ultimately arguing that the seemingly contradictory labels

and frameworks interanimate one another; as Hartman contends, as a Druze novel "*I, the Divine* contributes to a definition of world literature because of how these various elements [Druze, Arab, Lebanese, American, Arab American] work together to create a multilayered novel that can express many identities simultaneously" (355). In exploring how a Druze novel may contribute to a definition of world literature via its multilayered elements, however, I think it is critical to highlight the multilayered nature of a Druze identity itself. As Hartman notes, the "Druze" label is not just a religious one; this statement, contentious as it may be for and beyond Druze communities, is arguably embodied by author Rabih Alameddine, who identifies as both atheist and Druze. Being Druze, as this dissertation illuminates, surely works outside of religion, as Druzeness has multiple ethnic, social, cultural, and political connotations, particularly across different national landscapes. Understanding the complexities (and, thus, limitations and possibilities) of a Druze label are important—for example, as Hartman claims, Sarah Nour el-Din, as a feminist, transnational Druze character, expands the boundaries of what the Druze label may mean as a literary categorization (355) beyond religion. However, the Druze categorization ultimately, as I contend, remains restricted in critical ways, as I do not think that it is possible to entirely divorce the "Druze" label from notions of religion. If one is to see the character of Sarah as indicative of the ways the Druze literary label may be expanded, it is also critical to note that not even Sarah is able to escape from the religious connotations of Druzeness, particularly as a Druze woman. This restriction is perhaps most evident in the novel's conclusion, as the meaning of Sarah's nickname, "Divine Sarah" is shifted from an association with Western actress Sarah Bernhardt to the what her sister Amal describes as Sarah's "real namesake," the "Druze Sarah" (289).[55] In considering the possibilities and limitations of a Druze categorization in world

[55] In the Druze religion, Sarah was a religious messenger who successfully converted many men and women to the Druze faith before it was closed to outsiders.

literature, I thus want to resist Hartman's claim that "Druzeness is neither inward-looking nor exclusive" (355). In fact, I would argue that, in this novel, it is the exclusivity of Druze community, culture, and religion for the Nour el-Din family that eventually leads to the death (by suicide) of Sarah's mother. Though this novel is, as Hartman suggests, a commentary on the how fluid the label of "Druze" may be, how such a label can and does maintain multiple meanings, I would thus argue that this novel also comments on the possible restrictions and limitations of the Druze identity category, both within the text but also a world literature framework. Indeed, the fact that one cannot convert into the Druze religion, and many of its members pride themselves on the exclusivity of the religion, points to the limitations of such a category. This is not to disagree with Hartman's assertations that the category of a "Druze novel" should be read within a "world literature" framework, and that these two labels are not incompatible, rather, I point to the limitations to consider within and beyond this novel, amongst its multiple possibilities.

Though defining a "Druze novel" might be contentious, and, at times, limiting, in looking at the complex and multiple engagements across nations, regions, and cultures across Druze literature and *I, the Divine* in particular, I want to build on Hartman's and Hout's analyses in placing Alameddine's text within a transnational and world literary framework that works both within and beyond the label of "Druze novels"—one that is critical of singular understandings of identity, home, and belonging for both mobilized and, importantly, immobilized characters. Here, I center the generative potential of Druze novels on what they may add to global theorizations of transnationalism in particular. I have selected *I, the Divine* as a work of primary analysis for this paper because of its inclusion of one of the only Druze "talkers" within the Arab American literary canon: Sarah's sister, Lamia. For the Druze, a "talker" or *natq/a* is a reincarnated Druze person who not only remembers their past life but speaks about these

memories–i.e. "talks." [56] I aim to show the ways in which shifting attention to this minor character of the text enables a critical and nuanced understanding of the ways in which trauma, memory, and transnationalism inform Druze lives, particularly those of Druze women. Centering my analysis on the gendered and classed representations of the Druze in *I, the Divine,* alongside the broader questions I engage in this chapter, I ask: How is the experience of Druze trauma represented on a transnational and regional level in *I, the Divine,* particularly for contemporary Druze women? How does reincarnation inform, connect with, and illuminate literary textualizations of Druze traumatic experiences? To answer these questions, I focus on Lamia, who, I argue, is a yet unexamined but critical key to discussing the gendered articulation of transnational Druze identities and traumatic experience in *I, the Divine*.

Focusing on the articulations of transnationalism and trauma *I, the Divine* not only allows for an expansion of possibilities in defining/categorizing global and world literature(s) but calls into question how we contemporarily understand/theorize/define transnationalism within and beyond literary frameworks. In doing so, I look beyond articulations of transnationalism in the novel that center on Sarah, focusing instead on the marginalized acts of Druze storytelling done by the minor women characters of the novel, particularly Lamia and her unique acts of talking related to Druze reincarnation. In doing so, it is critical to note that the gendered stories of both Sarah and Lamia are both deeply traumatic. However, unlike Sarah, who physically travels back and forth across the national landscapes of the U.S. and Lebanon, Lamia's transgression of borders of her two homelands—Syria and Lebanon—is largely psychological. As perhaps the most immobilized character in the text, Lamia's minor presences in the novel are primarily confined within nation (here, Lebanon) and, more specifically, home (i.e. the domestic

[56] Throughout this chapter, I will use quotation marks to indicate when a character is "talking" in the designated Druze sense of acts of speech that involve remembered reincarnation memories.

sphere). Despite these immobilities, my analysis of Lamia will illuminate her profoundly transnational nature as a reincarnated Druze woman with a transmigrating soul. Having lived her past life in Syria, as a reincarnated Druze woman in Lebanon, Lamia remains deeply connected to a Syrian national landscape and personal past that she has limited access to. This connection remains profound despite the fact that, during her present life, Lamia only once manages to physically visit her former hometown and family in Syria. Considering what it may mean for reincarnated Druze peoples, particularly women such as Lamia, to be transnational yet immobilized, I argue, has broad and transformative implications across multiple academic fields of thought (including but not limited to transnational Arab, Global South, and Third World feminist studies). Furthermore, I contend that Druze storytelling and notions of Druze reincarnation (as represented by Lamia in this novel) serve as an important point of interconnectivity across diverse communities in the Global South, particularly those of Third World women.[57]

It is not easy for Druze stories to cross borders. Druze storytelling, in particular, stories related to Druze reincarnation, are widely oral and limited in number, thus susceptible to erasure and/or colonization. This erasure is especially profound for Druze women, who face numerous social and political tensions, consequences, and violences in speaking and writing about their experiences, as the case of Lamia exemplifies. However, allowing the multiplicity of Druze voices and stories to be heard and taken seriously, I argue is not simply additive, but transformative, rendering legible the interconnections across the borders of empire and nation as

[57] My use of the term 'Third World Women' here follows in the footsteps of Chandra Mohanty, who engages Third World Women as a social, analytical, and political category as well as heterogenous "imagined community" that foregrounds potential collaboration and solidarity across differences by exploring "the links among the histories and struggles of Third World women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital," while remaining deeply critical of the "third world" categorization itself (*Feminism* 46).

well as necessitating new analytics that cannot be contained by disciplinary conventions/boundaries across literary, transnational, and trauma studies, as made evident in this dissertation.

Transnational Movements in *I, the Divine*

The complex configuration of Druze identities, cultures, and notions of belonging have multiple implications, particularly for contemporary members of the transnational and diasporic Arab communities. As literary scholar Carol Fadda argues in "Transnational Diaspora and the Search for Home in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine*" Sarah's dynamic and complex relationship with her homeland of Lebanon is indicative of "more immediate, and more critical, transnational connection" that "widens the scope of the early immigrant model" based on a nostalgic longing for return (164). In this claim, Fadda points to the vast real-life and literary importance of contemporary Arab American (and Druze) characters such as Sarah, characters who complicate and thus represent complicated notions of belonging to one's homeland as well as to one's place of migration. Also taking Sarah as a subject of analysis, literary scholar Cristina Garrigós sees *I, the Divine* as evidentiary of a postmodernist intercultural location and hybridity, one that embraces a fragmentary sense of being as "kaleidoscopic" and "enriching" (200). *I, the Divine,* particularly in its representations of Sarah, has thus pushed scholars to (re)consider the meanings and implications of belonging and in-betweenness for contemporary Arab Americans. Here, I contend that these critical conversations can be elaborated upon and reshaped by centering on notions of Druzeness in the text, as I illuminate how a study of Druzeness in *I, the Divine* refines our contemporary understandings of transnational Arab bodies and lives. Can one be transnational without having migrated? What does it mean to have a transmigrating soul?

Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*, is a fiction novel that primarily contends with the memories and stories of its protagonist, Sarah Nour el-Din, as they are shaped by traumatic experiences–predominantly the Lebanese Civil War and its afterlives. As noted in its title, *I, the Divine* is a novel composed entirely of first chapter attempts to construct Sarah's autobiographical memoir. What unfolds is a fragmented narrative that contains vignettes of war, disease, murder, suicide, rape, love found and lost, and the emotional turmoil that accompanies all of these lived experiences for Sarah and those closest to her. As a Lebanese American woman Sarah has lived in both Lebanon and the U.S., yet throughout her memoir struggles to satisfactorily relay the experiences of her life in either national landscape. A novel written entirely in first chapters, each chapter is, in a way, a rewrite of the one before, a failure of continuity that vividly shows the devastating and enduring impacts of trauma, silencing, and the difficulty of testifying to both.

Time and space also play a vital role in this text, as Sarah struggles to locate herself, and is perpetually indecisive as to in what time and space her story should begin. Sarah's first chapters each take place across various moments in her life: different national and intranational contexts, different ages, with different characters emphasized across the first chapters. In some chapters, Sarah starts with her childhood in Lebanon, relaying profound descriptions of how she, her family, and her country were shaped and stifled by the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War. In other first chapters, Sarah's story starts with her later life in the U.S. as a forty-year-old woman, haunted by her past in Lebanon, struggling with the longstanding brokenness of her love life and familial relations. In most chapters, Sarah seems caught in a place of in-betweenness across nations, spaces, and moments in time, unable to successfully speak to or write her own often-traumatic life story.

In framing a concept she calls the "transnational diaspora" while attending to the differences between the two terms, Carol Fadda contends that "transnationalism–the movement between/across two nations and the identity politics resulting from such movements–becomes an important condition of the diaspora under study" ("Transnational Diaspora" 168). According to Fadda, though most transnationals are in some sense diasporic, diasporics, in their varying senses of connections to the homeland, are not always transnational (*Contemporary Arab-American Literature* 6). For Fadda, *I, the Divine's* Sarah is "the epitome of what I call the transnational diasporic subject that cuts across the Lebanese and American cultures but is nevertheless displaced in both and belongs completely to neither" ("Transnational Diaspora" 165). Since Sarah importantly already possesses an Arab American heritage before she (willingly) travels to the U.S., Fadda sees Sarah as a diasporic subject, rather than an immigrant or exile. This sense of in-betweenness, Fadda argues, is indicative of Sarah's "physical and emotional transnationalism that suspends her within two countries" (166). Fadda's scholarship on *I, the Divine,* thus importantly theorizes a transnational and diasporic mode of being in relation to Sarah's physical and *emotional* in-betweenness as a Lebanese American woman navigating her travels and traumas across national boundaries and borders. In arguing for the ways in which the postmodernist literary techniques of *I, the Divine* convey an "intercultural dislocation" Cristina Garrigós argues that this novel is "not an instance of assimilation but a cosmopolitan and post-ethnic perspective that privileges an anti-essentialist attitude, rejecting a fiction of authenticity and cultural purity to embrace instead hybridity and cross-pollination" (188-9). In "The Druzification of History: Queering Time, Place, and Faith in Diasporic Fiction by Rabih Alameddine," Alberto Fernández Carbajal contends that *I, the Divine's* Sarah Nour el-Din is "the perfect embodiment of identitarian assemblage: she is constantly torn by her clashing need to

embrace American individualism and Lebanese sectarian clannishness" (86-7). Following the work of these scholars, I want to nuance these important theorizations of transnationalism by shifting from Sarah and centering what looking at characters like Lamia may add to this critical conversation of transnational belonging, within and beyond the novel.

Fadda's analysis calls in question the concept of an emotional transnationalism, one that is little (if at all) connected to the physical. Having died traumatically and thus been abruptly torn from her (previous) homeland of Syria, I see Lamia as, following Fadda's definition, a distinctly transnational diasporic subject, one's whose existence as such functions in different but overlapping ways in relation to Sarah's. Though, like Sarah, Lamia is suspended within two countries, Lamia's relationship to Syria is a deeply nostalgic connection to a homeland, a type of connection Sarah never feels about the U.S. or Lebanon. Despite this deeper connection to a sense of a homeland, Lamia is much restricted than Sarah in access to this point of origin, both in a physical and emotional sense. Of the former, Lamia does not have the privileges of mobility that Sarah has. Of the latter, as I will examine below, Lamia's talk of her previous life in Syria is unwelcome and silenced. As Lamia cannot travel beyond Lebanon as Sarah does, Lamia's transnational state is distinctly more emotional in nature than physical and, following Garrigós, more *intra*culturally dislocated rather than interculturally dislocated–all of which nuance and call into question what it means to have a diasporic transnational sense of belonging across different times, spaces, and peoples. In fact, an examination of Lamia demands that we restructure our contemporary theorizations of transnationalism to better understand how one may at once to immobile and transnational. In other words, what happens when a person does not have a transnational body, but has a transnational soul?

In speaking to the ways in which we understand transnationalism as contemporarily theorized within the Arab diaspora in particular, in her foundational book, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature,* Carol Fadda argues for a marked development of a complex transnational discourse and critical perspective in Arab Americans literature and cultural productions from the 1990s onward. This discourse, according to Fadda, is resistive and revisionist in nature, complicating hegemonic understandings of life over "here" (the U.S.) versus over "there" (the Arab world). Lamia's complex transnational state of being, marked in the carrying of her trauma across national borders, bodies, times, and families, in vein with Fadda's definition, further nuances and complicates our hegemonic understandings of Arab identities, experiences, connections to notions of the "homeland," and experiences of trauma–traumas which, as Fadda notes, importantly correlate with the increased U.S. military intervention and presence in the Arab world.[58] Though it is trauma and violence that motivates both women's senses of emotional and physical migrations, unlike Sarah, Lamia is relegated for most of her life to the walls of the home or hospital. Unlike Sarah, who shifts back and forth across the national landscapes of the U.S. and Lebanon, Lamia's physical transgression of borders (here, Syria and Lebanon) is limited to one stolen day amongst a lifetime of mental, physical, and emotional confinement. However, though she infrequently leaves the domestic sphere, Lamia, like Sarah, crosses many borders in *I, the Divine*: life, home, family, and nation. As Lamia's border-crossings, in relation to reincarnation in particular, are quite unique, they thus engender new questions for scholars of transnational studies.

[58] In addition to the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war detailed in *I, the Divine,* these interventions include, but are not limited to, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and the spread of pan-Arabism, the 1980s Cold War and the U.S. funding of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, the First Gulf war and the U.S. invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and the ongoing U.S. "War on Terror" beginning in 2001.

Foremost, we must explore what it means for Druze and other reincarnated peoples to have a transnational soul–a soul that holds memories of a country that person may have never even stepped foot in in their present life, a soul that feels a connection and belonging to a national landscape that is not part of their natal family (in this life's) history and memories—maintaining these personal histories over multiple times, spaces, and lives. In this sense, looking at Lamia (and reincarnated Druze like her) demands that we theorize transnationalism within and beyond the text in novel ways, emphasizing the psychological over the physical, particularly in relation to the traumatic experiences of Druze women. As Sarah's series of first chapters tells us, in writing the memoir of her own life, Sarah struggles to decide when and where to begin. Despite these movements through time and space in each first chapter, the narrative, as (mostly) a memoir, remains mostly centered on Sarah's own life and experiences.[59] There is, however, a distinct and significant break in Sarah's attempts to tell the story of her own life. This rupture occurs when, in the midst of a chapter titled "A Serial Killer in Our Midst" Sarah gives space for her older sister Lamia to "speak for herself" through a series of discovered letters that Lamia has written but never sent to their mother, Janet. In this already-fragmented novel of first chapters, this particular first chapter is a pivotal moment for several reasons. First, as we turn to Lamia's written letters, this chapter serves as the singular rupture in the novel from Sarah's own voice and writings. Secondly, as the included letters are chosen by Sarah, written by Lamia, and addressed to their mother, Janet, these letters serve as an imperative and, I argue, primary point of interconnectivity between these three women, whose lives (and traumas) have all fundamentally shaped and influenced one another. Third, this chapter gives profoundly significant and yet undertheorized insight into the life and mind of Lamia, one of the few if not

[59] Always autobiographical, in attempting to tell her life story, Sarah occasionally shifts generic form from memoir to novel, remaining largely rooted in the memoir genre throughout the novel.

only reincarnated Druze character in Alameddine's novels and the transnational Arab American literary canon more broadly.[60] As Druze themselves have a very minimal, although, perhaps, growing, role in Arab American, Arab, and world literature more broadly, the Druze *natqeen* within the transnational Arab literary canon exist in an even further marginalized space. However, examining Lamia's role as a reincarnated Druze woman, sister, daughter, wife, and talker, unveils critical insight across trauma's intersections with transnationalism, gender, and class in this memoir. Looking at Lamia, I argue, is also vital to understanding Sarah, the complex central figure of the story.

With the introduction of Lamia's letters, the entire meaning of the novel and its characters is shifted and remains shifting. To understand Sarah's in-betweenness, as well as, more broadly, that of other Druze women, I argue that we must consider characters such as Lamia, largely silenced and subjected to physical and mental confinement, yet crossing the borders of different bodies, lives, homes, families, socioeconomic statuses, and traumas. Despite these immobilizations, Lamia, and other reincarnated peoples like her, exist in a distinctly transnational yet undertheorized space. The transnational nature of Lamia's life (lives), I contend, is made explicitly evident in Lamia's letters, which testify to her existence within multiple consciousness and states of being across both Lebanon and Syria.

Though very different from Sarah's narratives of her own life story, I suggest a reading of Lamia's letters that understands them as mode of telling and self-testimony to Lamia's life and experiences–her own fragmented version of a memoir, counter to yet also informing Sarah's. In Lamia's letters, much like in Sarah's own writings, we find fragmented narratives interlaced with articulations of traumatic experience. These letters, which span thirty-five years of Lamia's life,

[60] "Marseille," a story from Druze author Ghassan Zeineddine's debut short story collection *Dearborn* (2023), briefly details the experiences of a male reincarnated Druze character named Nidal.

begin from the day that Janet "disappeared" and last long past the day that Janet commits suicide (147). The significant trauma that Lamia endures when Janet abruptly moves away is therefore what seemingly prompts Lamia to begin writing these letters/testimonies–the first of which, written in crayon and in a child's handwriting, simply reads "Come back, Mommy" (147). However, as indicated by the mere fact that Lamia continues to write to her mother after Janet's death, these letters are not truly meant for Janet. They have no addresses or envelopes and are undated. None of them were ever sent. They were well-hidden amongst Lamia's things, kept a secret from everyone, and, yet, described by Sarah to be frayed and well-read (147). What is inferred from this information is that Lamia not only wrote hundreds of secret letters (only five of which are shared by Sarah) that served as testimonials to her silenced and traumatized life, but frequently read them, bearing (sole) witness to these experiences and traumas, again and again. In these acts of reading and writing, Lamia thus finally has a space to "talk," to testify to her own experiences and traumas, if only to the written page. Though these letters are addressed to Janet, Lamia's lack of interest in archiving or responding to any of her mother's written communications to her–which came solely in the form of yearly birthday cards to her three daughters–is evident in the fact that Lamia would promptly burn Janet's cards to her after reading them, heavily invested in their incineration as "She did not remove her gaze until the flame died out, until the card evaporated" (146). It is Lamia's own unsent letters to Janet that she saves, that she reads over and over again. It is in these letters that Lamia is finally given a chance to speak.

In the five letters written by Lamia that Sarah shares, Lamia not only testifies to her invisibilized current life experiences and traumas, but she is also permitted to break the silences and erasures that often plague reincarnated Druze women's testimonies in particular (see chapter

three). With these written testimonies, Lamia is allowed to begin speaking in the form of *natq*. Unsurprisingly, however, the majority of the letters Sarah chooses to include have more to do with Sarah than with Lamia. The exception is the third letter of Lamia that Sarah includes in this chapter, which, I argue, reveals critically important insight into the life and mind of Lamia, Sarah, Janet, as well as transnational and traumatic experiences of reincarnated Druze women more broadly. This third letter not only details a secret trip Lamia made to her previous hometown in Suida, Jabal al-Druze, it also reveals her deeply transnational nature, despite her lifelong physical and mental confinement in Lebanon.[61] The purpose of this trip is clearly given by Lamia in this letter, who declares that she was going to Syria in her order to find her children (157). Lamia's visit to Suida, detailed in this letter, thus tells the story of her return–to her previous country, home, and family. Though Lamia's age when she makes this trip is not explicitly stated, she makes mention of her oldest child, Ashraf, so we know that Lamia is already a mother and a wife in her present life in Lebanon. She is also a woman who has been wanting to make this trip for, in her own words, "a long long time like from here to eternity" (157). Finally seizing an opportunity, Lamia steals away a day in order to make her trip home.

When Lamia reaches the border between Lebanon and Syria during this secret trip, she reveals that though she could and perhaps even should have told the officers that she was visiting Syria for shopping purposes, she instead states that she is going to visit family. Lamia's location of familial ties in a Syrian landscape are questioned by the Syrian officers who wonder why both Lamia's maiden name and married last name both differ from the last name of the "family" she claims to be visiting in Syria. To this, Lamia responds "all Druze families are one family don't

[61] Spelt various ways in English (Swaida, Suwayda, Sweida), Suida is a Syrian village located in Jabal al-Druze. Both the town and region are well-known hubs for Druze peoples in Syria. The majority of Suida's approximately 313,000 residents are Druze.

you know" (158). Afterward this claim, the patrol officers allow Lamia to enter Syria. This anecdote of border policing revealed at the beginning of Lamia's return to her previous homeland is critical first in that it affirms an interconnectivity of Druze people and families across national landscapes and borders. Furthermore, this border incident makes evident Lamia's own self-placement and familial connection to Syria, particularly Suida, a town she has not visited in her present life but remains forever connected to. This state of spiritual and emotional transnational in-betweenness, as also seen in the case of Bassel analyzed in chapter one, thus complicates our understandings of national, political, and social categorizations of "belonging" to certain nation-states.

Indeed, Lamia's letter testifies to the afterlives of deep belonging Lamia feels for Suida, made evident in both her remembrance of her previous house, as well as remembered knowledge of how to get to where she calls still calls "home." As Lamia writes:

> I drove all the way up to my home and nothing changes there only for the terrace in the front and now it had pots of flowers, most of all hydreyngeas and some pensees but it was still the stone house and shutters of the wood was not changed also. The paint had gone bad and the color of green was not there anymore at all almost because I was the last one to paint green on them there is fifty years ago. It did no longer look special like fifty years ago and not the best house in the village any more and look very smaller. I want to see under the pot of the flowers next to the door to see my key but I don't do that because it was long ago I left it there. (159)

Lamia's use of the phrase "my home" here immediately engenders a sense of belonging and return, as she finally makes her way back to a domestic and national space she traumatically left fifty years ago. In these lines, we see from the detailed recollection that Lamia has of her

previous home–from its (once more beautiful) appearance, to the ways in which she used to tend to it with care, to the secret place in which she used to stash her key–that Lamia not only remembers this former home but knows it well. She also carries a deep sense of attachment to the memories and personal histories she maintains with the home. Representative of broader Druze reincarnation experiences that often contend with these tensions, Lamia's return to Suida, her feelings of belonging to this home and village, I argue, both expand and refine contemporary ways of understanding transnationalism and trauma, and their afterlives, within and beyond the novel.

As trauma scholars such as Bessel van de Kolk (*The Body Keeps the Score* 2014) have argued, trauma leaves a distinct mark on the minds and bodies of those who experience it, particularly those whose traumas are silenced or suppressed. As van de Kolk contends, trauma, when left untreated, can return to physically and mentally haunt the traumatized throughout their lives. Experiences of Druze reincarnation, however, expand the ways in which we have theorized and understood trauma, emphasizing a different type of traumatic marking and score-keeping–beyond the body, into that of the soul. Within Druze communities, those who remember their past lives have often died in traumatic ways. For the Druze, if you have died traumatically in a past life, you are more likely to remember your past life in your present one. Remembrance as it pertains to trauma and Druze reincarnation thus suggests that trauma not only leaves its mark on the mind and body–but on the transmigrating soul. The Druze soul, as it transmigrates across time and space, thus carries this trauma across Druze bodies–hence the villager's warning that if Lamia's soul has returned, one must take caution.[62]

[62] The afterlives of trauma as manifested in the Druze soul are also gendered, as a Druze "woman" is believed to always be reincarnated into a Druze "woman" and a Druze "man" is always reincarnated as a Druze "man."

Often, past life memories cross borders–carried into a Druze person's new life and are remembered and discussed by talkers at a young age, as fictitiously represented by Lamia in Alameddine's *I, the Divine*. Carrying the marks and afterlives of a past life's trauma, the transmigrating soul creates Druze "talkers," who speak to the memories of a traumatic past life frequently soon after they develop language skills in their new one. These Druze acts of speech, aka *natq,* which start as soon after the Druze develop the skills of speech itself, thus work in parallel to what Dori Laub calls the "imperative to tell." As I argue, in *natq*, Laub's "imperative to tell" and its connection to survival takes on new meaning, redefining contemporary understandings of the way trauma informs and marks bodies and lives across time. The unique and particular need to "tell" becomes especially manifest in the Druze *natqeen,* quite literally called "talkers," who, as they begin to bear witness and speak to their traumas at a young age, make evident the imperative to talk/tell/speak about their past lives. They are just waiting for speech skills to articulate the memories and traumas that have been carried into their present lives. Furthermore, "not telling" or "not talking" may have higher stakes than Laub or van der Kolk have considered within the realm of trauma studies. Not being able to "talk" in the Druze sense of speaking to reincarnation memories not only leads to the festering of that trauma in a present life but keeps the past life in a literal space of death and silence. Considering that interconnection for the Druze (who Lamia tellingly describes as "one family") is paramount, the silencing of one's past life memories can also sever already-limited connections across this relatively small and widely diasporic group, particularly across constructions of gender and class.

Lamia's return to Suida, mentally, physically, and verbally, brings to light her perpetual sense of in-betweenness and dislocation. The transnational memories, histories, and feelings of belonging engendered for Lamia in Syria are made even more poignantly evident as Lamia

recalls her encounter with her daughter from her past life, a daughter who is now older than Lamia herself. Lamia's daughter quickly recognized Lamia; as Lamia reveals, "Her eyes knew me" (159). It takes Lamia a moment, but then, without words, she recognizes her daughter too. In the conversation that proceeds between daughter and reincarnated mother, detailed by Lamia in this letter, we are given critical insight into the life and mind of "A Serial Killer in Our Midst." It is confirmed that Lamia remembers all of the details of the culminating traumatic event of her past life–the murder of her husband and Lamia's own past life suicide. As Lamia writes:

> She surprised I remember all that but I was upset because she thinks I forget something like this because all the time I rememeber what happenned that day all the time never forget you see and how can she think I forget what my husband he did and I killed him because he did when I see him over her on top. what can I do? so I killed him and cut the throat and then cut my throat because after I cannot explain why I killed him because she will never have a husband if I say why and she was not pure you see. (161)

According to Lamia's testimony in this excerpt, she not only vividly remembers the traumatic incident of domestic violence that ended her previous life but thinks about it "all the time," seemingly haunted by the afterlives of this tragedy. Throughout time, body, and space, Lamia's soul has carried this trauma. Moreover, Lamia's memory of this trauma had been kept secret from her family, as she was forced into silence at a young age. In this intimate and gendered exchange between these two women, a critical component of Lamia's previous death is thus revealed, something she never shared with any member of the Nour el-Din family: Lamia killed her husband as an act of defense after finding him raping their daughter. After killing her husband, Lamia then killed herself so that did not have to publicly justify why she murdered her

husband, thus keeping secret her daughter's compromised "purity," or virginity. Lamia's acts of murder and suicide, therefore, hitherto described in the novel as the violent manifestations of a mad and murderous mind, are thus ultimately revealed to be acts of women's sacrifice and honor.[63] However, given the taboo nature of this murder-suicide, here committed in protection of a daughter's life and future, is cast within the realm of the *dishonorable*, shameful, and, thus, silenced, as is the case for the reincarnated Druze women's stories I share in chapter three. As exemplified here in the character of Lamia, analyses of Druze reincarnation stories therefore must attend to the gendered nature of *natq* and traumatic experience, and Druze epistemologies of listening, which include who gets to "talk" and who is listened to.

The truth behind Lamia's murder-suicide is a secret kept between women, in protection of women. Even though they may be understood as redemptory, Sarah only discovers the reasons behind the murder-suicide via this letter addressed to Janet, a letter which, in detailing the intimate exchange Lamia had with her daughter in Syria, serves as a point of connection, trauma, and secrecy between seemingly disconnected women characters. Lamia and her daughter tell no one of these past traumas and violences, including her daughter's husband. In this unsent letter to Janet, Lamia asks Janet to keep this secret. Furthermore, upon discovering Lamia's letters, as Sarah reveals, only she, Amal, and their stepmother Saniya, read them; "Their presence was kept a secret among the three of us. We never told my father" (148). In not telling any of the male characters the reasons behind Lamia's past life murder-suicide, Lamia's daughter's compromised virtue thus remains a women's secret, illuminating the ways in which gender can and does inform not just reincarnation stories, but who gets to "talk."

[63] For more on how acts of women's sacrifice are embedded within (and in tension with) patriarchal conceptions of "honor" and "shame" see chapter three.

The Imperative to "Talk": Trauma and Testimony in *I, the Divine*

In the groundbreaking and foundational work on bearing witness to trauma, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991), psychoanalyst Dori Laub argues that a listener of traumatic testimony is listening to "a record that has yet to be made" (58). The record, or testimony, is made only in the moment of its telling. In *I, the Divine,* Sarah is attempting to make her own record, telling her life story, fraught with traumatic experiences, in the form of a fragmented literary memoir, deeply reflecting the fragmented nature of traumatic experience itself. As a fictional memoir, *I, the Divine* thus plays with the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, novel and memoir. Also complicating the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, according to Laub, the moment of "telling" (i.e. testifying to trauma) even outside the realm of literary fiction, is *always* a distinctly literary one. There is thus a profound connection between literary narratives, trauma, and witnessing theorized within Trauma studies.[64] For example, in a 2013 conversation with Cathy Caruth, Laub explained why, as a psychoanalyst, he co-edited *Testimony* with literary scholar Shoshana Felman. As Laub contends of listening to traumatic testimony, "The historian is more attentive to the facts and to the written document [...] The psychoanalyst is more attentive to the internal reality and has a difficult time with the external reality. With the literary scholar, it's imagination. It's not limited to reality" (58). Literary fiction is thus an important component of foundational theories on bearing witness and testimony within trauma and memory studies because, in its capacity for imagination, literary fiction provides a critical avenue for speaking to the unimaginability of traumatic experience. As Shoshana Felman contends in *Testimony,* "It is precisely because history as

[64] For a deeper look into literary scholars' (such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman) theorizations on the relationship between trauma and literature, see Cathy Caruth's Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience (2014).

holocaust proceeds from a *failure to imagine,* that it takes an *imaginative* medium [...] to gain an insight into its historical *reality,* as well as into the attested historicity of its unimaginability" (105). In literature that bears witness to trauma, we thus see intersections of history and imagination, fiction and non-fiction, possibility and impossibility. In its capacity for tapping into the imagination, literary fiction allows for an expression of contemporary Arab and Arab American traumatic experience–here in *I, the Divine*–that, I posit, is critical to examine as an act of speech, an act of telling, and a request for others to listen to stories and people that often go unheard.

As protagonist, notions of Druzeness throughout the text have thus been theorized as part of a matrix of 'split vision,' hybridity, belonging, and unbelonging–primarily in relation to Sarah.[65] However, I contend, a central component of articulations of (non)belonging in the novel relates to Lamia's status as a reincarnated Druze woman both separate from but essential to understanding the Nour el-Din family and Sarah herself. As author of her memoir, it is critical to note that it is Sarah who introduces and constructs her sister. Readers get to know Lamia through Sarah's eyes, as we discover Sarah's father Mustapha Nour el-Din's first marriage to an American woman named Janet Foster led to the birth of three children: first Amal, then Lamia, and finally Sarah.[66] Throughout the text, Lamia is depicted as Sarah's "nemesis" (278), closest to her in age "yet the farthest in temperament" (122) A divide between the two sisters is demarcated in nearly every mention Sarah makes of Lamia. The first time Sarah describes Lamia in the novel Sarah describes an "air of gloom around her [Lamia]" as Lamia sits with the Nour el-Din family "head bowed, not participating" (39), immediately casting Lamia within a space of sadness and

[65] See Hartman, Garrigos, Carbajal, Fadda.

[66] Moustapha's second marriage to a Lebanese Druze woman named Saniya would later yield Sarah's three half-siblings: two girls, Majida and Rana, and one boy, Ramzi.

distance. Lamia is thus depicted as a quiet, unhappy child (and woman) far removed from the dynamics of the family network. However, Sarah reveals in her first description of Lamia and must be noted: "She did not seem to belong to our family, *yet was an essential part of it*" (my emphasis 40). Despite the fact that Lamia never quite fits in, in this initial description of Lamia Sarah admits to Lamia's critical significance as a part of their family and Sarah's own story, a significance that is often overlooked in critical scholarship on *I, the Divine.*

In "A Serial Killer in Our Midst," Sarah explains that Lamia is what the Druze call a "talker," defined in the novel as "one able to say things as a child that related to her past life" (148).[67] As Sarah was too young to remember herself, according to their older sister, Amal, Lamia began recounting memories of her past life at an early age (also speaking a pattern of Druze women carrying one another's reincarnation stories that I describe in chapter three). Although reincarnated in Lebanon, in her past life Lamia lives in a different national landscape: Jabal al-Druze, Syria. To verify her reincarnation story, Lamia's grandfather travels to Jabal al-Druze and speaks to villagers in the area.[68] In Syria, Lamia and Sarah's grandfather verifies that Lamia came from a wealthy family in the Jabal al-Druze area, was married to an "ostentatious" man, and had three children (149). Though, in Syria, Lamia lived what is described as a "normal life," she was constantly berated by her husband, whose throat she eventually cut before taking her own life. As in the case with many reincarnated Druze peoples, Lamia's past life ended traumatically, afterlives of its traumas thus haunting her current life. Indeed, when Lamia's grandfather travels to the area of Lamia's previous life to investigate her reincarnation story, he is warned by villagers that "if her soul was back, our family should be wary" (149).

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[67] Despite the gendered language of this quote, a Druze talker may be of any gender.

[68] As Alameddine notes in this chapter, it is customary for a family member of the reincarnated or the reincarnated person themselves to travel to the area of their previous life to investigate the details of the reincarnated person's previous life and death (148).

Here, it is first imperative to juxtapose Lamia's trip to Suida with her grandfather's in order to further chart the gendered obstacles reincarnated women may face in having the resources–money, transportation, permissions– to return to a past home (see chapter three for more on this). Lamia struggles to return to Syria, taking many years to plan an escape from Lebanon for a day, including finding ways to obtain a new car, make sure her children are cared for at home, departing at 4 a.m., justifying her visit at the border, all while traveling a very far distance, alone, for the first time. None of these obstacles are detailed in Hammoud's trip to Syria. In his capacity as a male head of the family, in fact, little is mentioned of his journey to Suida itself, only that he speaks to and obtains his information about Lamia from the (presumably male) villagers of Suida. Upon her own return to Suida, in contrast, Lamia speaks to no one but her daughter, and is even eyed suspiciously by village residents. However, unlike Hammoud, Lamia does not need to engage these villagers for information. Importantly, though she has not visited Suida in her present life, Lamia not only apparently remembers how to reach Suida but, as she describes, she remembers it clearly: "the village was just like I remembered déjà vu," though "when I was there there was no electricity in the village but now here it is" (158). In remembering the details of this village and national landscape, Lamia again asserts sense of belonging to them, reified in her declaration that she was not an "outsider" of the town; as Lamia states, "Everyone I saw stared at me very much because I'am an outsider but I wasn't of course but how do you tell that to stupid people don't you know" (158)?

Despite Lamia's requests as a child to be taken back to her past life husband and children in Syria, the Nour el-Din family never allows Lamia to visit Syria, prohibiting connection to her past life family and home. Instead, Lamia's grandfather, Hammoud, leaves Lamia in Lebanon as he travels to Syria to validate Lamia's story. Although Hammoud discovers that Lamia's claims

were true, that "She had come from a rich landowning family and had three kids of her own" (148), Hammoud still does not allow Lamia the leeway to work through and speak to the (particularly traumatic) memories of her past life, which, as we find out in Lamia's letters, she remembers in great detail but is never given the space to "talk" about. Hammoud also never tells Lamia of his visit to Syria. Once described by Amal as "playful, if not too rowdy" (145), the family "talker" is effectively silenced by her family, a silencing that has numerous gendered and classed implications for Druze women.

There are multiple reasons why the Druze may silence a "talker" within their family. For example, the present family could feel a sense of competing ownership with the past life family over a child they want sole possession of. For Druze women, whose lives (and traumas) are particularly relegated to the sphere of the domestic, this type of crossing borders is not always readily encouraged. Other Druze families simply may not wish for their children to think through or talk about the often-traumatic experiences of their past lives as they may be re-triggering, confusing, and difficult.[69] However, the motivations behind silencing Lamia have little to do with negotiating a conflicted familial belonging or past trauma–instead, they center on family prestige and reputation. As early as three years old, Lamia begins "getting into trouble" with the Nour el-Din family as she remembers the details of her past life and, in particular, her former upper-class lifestyle. For example, as a young child Lamia refuses to eat items such as sandwiches for dinner and only agrees to eat if the dinner table was set. According to Sarah, Lamia told "everybody" that when she lived in Jabal al-Druze she "always had lavish feasts for dinner." Lamia also longed for the fancier material items of her past such as a bathtub that's "intricate turquoise-colored designs on the side" she remembers in detail (148). These quotes

[69] For more on these limitations, and how they are gendered, see chapter three.

thus reveal the fine details in which Lamia remembers her past life, Lamia's desire to speak about this past life with "everybody," i.e. her "imperative to tell," and Lamia's strong desire to return to her previous mode of living and family, all important characteristics of *natqeen* narratives. Moreover, Lamia's testimony underscores the (re)traumatization/s that may occur when these thoughts, feelings, and memories are silenced as, without these items, Lamia would refuse to eat or bathe, repeatedly asking to be brought back to her husband and children.

Though Lamia's story is indeed Alameddine's fictional representation of a reincarnated Druze child, "talking" is not a particularly exceptional circumstance for a Druze family. As Alameddine explains in the novel, "Usually such behavior is taken with a degree of acceptance among Druze families, allowing the child some leeway until she adjusts to her new life. It is considered normal. Unfortunately, Lamia was insulting the family so she was made to shut up" (148). Interestingly, Alameddine's explicit use of "her" in these lines reveals a gendering of reincarnation trauma made evident throughout the novel, one that works intersectionally with notions of class and socioeconomic status. As Lamia was telling "everybody" about her past life ways of living she becomes so threatening to the family's reputation and social standing that she is not only silenced but punished and retraumatized; as Sarah goes on to reveal, Lamia "was forced to eat sandwiches, use cutlery not made of silver, and bathe in a regular porcelain bathtub. It was at that time that she began to withdraw" (148). Lamia's withdrawal here is thus explicitly paralleled with her family's silencing and suppression of her thoughts and feelings, a forced erasure of her past life's ways of living, and attempted erasure of the memories and stories of Lamia's past life. In addition to revealing the ways that reincarnation intersects with notions of class in the novel, the Nour el-Din family's retraumatization of Lamia via these punishments

both marks Lamia for the remainder of her life, as well as establishes a present and compelling function of silence/silencing in Druze reincarnation narratives.

Gendering Reincarnation: Who Gets to "Survive?"

By reading Lamia's reincarnation memories as an insult, the Nour el-Din family denies Lamia the space to work and talk through her past memories and traumas. Instead, Lamia's talking caused her trouble with her current family. Therefore, although Lamia is categorically defined and described as a "talker" as early as three years of age, by five years old Lamia shifts into the oppositional space of silence and repression. Once so vocal, as Sarah describes, as a young child Lamia becomes a person who "spoke so little many assumed she was a deaf-mute or incapable of understanding our language" (145). This breakdown of language and communication is directly correlated to traumatic experiences that Lamia endures and is forced to suppress in both her past and present lives. Talking plays an incredibly important role in healing for trauma survivors, as theorized by Freud and Breuer as early as 1893. In their paper titled "The Physical Mechanisms of Hysterical Phenomena," Freud and Breuer theorize the importance of what today is famously called the "talking cure." As Freud and Breuer contend, talking about trauma allows "its strangulated affect to find a way out through speech; and it subjects it to associative correction by introducing it into normal consciousness" (*Mechanisms).* Without this action of language, psychological conditions and disorders manifest within traumatized individuals. Contemporary trauma scholars such as Dori Laub have also theorized this need to talk, to testify, and speak to trauma, in what Laub refers to as "the imperative to tell," or the need for survivors to tell their stories in order to truly "survive" (*Testimony* 78). In *I, the Divine,* the importance of talking and telling, particularly for reincarnated Druze, literally

deemed “talkers” becomes critically evident. In not being allowed to share her stories, Lamia is forced into a space of silence that, I argue, has an enduring and debilitating effect on her present life. In not being able to “talk,” here in this unique act of Druze speech, Lamia is not able to “survive” in the Laubian sense of working through trauma. Indeed, as is revealed through the fragmented narration of the novel, Lamia is institutionalized for madness as an adult in her present life, becoming who Sarah calls “The Serial Killer in Our Midst.” In this chapter, Sarah reveals that Lamia, who eventually becomes a nurse, successfully murders seven of her own patients and attempts to murder two more simply because they “irritated her” (147). Lamia then also attempts to take her own life. These murders and attempted suicide, the “madness” and violence attributed to Lamia, I contend, is a distinct manifestation of the silenced and festering traumas of Lamia’s past and current lives. As Sarah claims, “By the time Lamia had succeeded in pulling herself out of our world and was institutionalized, I had come to the realization that I knew little if anything about her. Apparently no one else did either” (146). Lamia thus existed in a space of invisibility, even within her own family. In this space of silence and invisibility, Lamia was forced to hold her secrets, never again “talking” to her family in the Druze sense of remembering and speaking to her past life.

In examining the ways in which Lamia is silenced, it is critical to chart the gendered ways in which Lamia’s reincarnation stories do (or do not) travel, as the gendered violences have numerous implications for Druze women today who try to testify, or “talk” to their traumatic experiences within and beyond the realm of reincarnation traumas. As previously noted, Lamia’s grandfather, Hammoud, in making the initial trip to Syria to verify Lamia’s reincarnation stories, learns about Lamia’s past life murder-suicide. Hammoud passes this knowledge of Lamia’s past along gendered lines, only telling Lamia’s father, Mustapha. It was Mustapha who then tells his

wife, Sarah's stepmother, Saniya, who eventually tells Sarah. Hammoud, as patriarch, thus serves as the public keeper and transmitter of these important memories throughout the novel. Hammoud holds the secrets of Lamia's past life, never sharing his discoveries with Lamia herself. Hammoud also frequently disparages Lamia, as she reveals in one letter, "He knew I was always saying the truth yet always he said I was a lyer" (160).[70] Moreover, he forces Lamia into silence when she tries to "talk" about her past. In the need to silence and deny Lamia, it becomes clear that Lamia's testimonies and acts of speech serve as threatening to the Nour el-Din family, threats that work at the intersections of gender and class.

Of Lamia's past life murder of her husband and suicide, Sarah says, "It became a tale, an interesting family story. No one mentioned anything to Lamia. In her letters, though, it was obvious that she knew the exact details of her life in Jabal al-Druze" (149). Though the story of Lamia's past life murder-suicide was shared from her village, to her grandfather, to her father, to her stepmother, to Sarah, Lamia herself never told or was told the story. It was assumed she never knew. However, in the above quote, readers learn that Lamia had indeed always known the details behind the traumatic end to her previous life. Though she was a talker at a young age, this is a memory that Lamia does not ever speak about with her current family, keeping it repressed within the confines of her mind. Deemed mad by those who never allowed her a chance to speak, Lamia is eventually institutionalized after committing the murders of her patients and then attempting suicide in her current life. Her letters thus give voice to a woman driven at a young age to a silence that manifested into a "mad" mind. As Sarah notes, revealing their diary-like testimonial nature, "there were over four hundred and fifty letters, written about once a month, in which Lamia chronicled her life and feelings in a mundane, running conversation" (147). All of

[70] Lamia's letters are abundant with misspellings and grammar mistakes, evidencing her lack of fluency in the English language.

the letters are written in broken English, and all of them are addressed to Sarah and Lamia's mother, Janet. However, of the over four hundred and fifty letters that Sarah discovers, she shares five. These letters are framed by Sarah in a way similar to that in which Sarah frames her sister: insignificant, nonsensical, and easily dismissed. Before revealing any of their contents, Sarah states her belief that "Most of the letters are simply ramblings." In addition, Sarah ironically also describes Lamia's letters as "jumbled" and "nonlinear" (147), a criticism that fails to observe the jumbled and nonlinear nature of Sarah's own series of first chapters and, thus, memoir itself. However, as Sarah does admit right before transcribing the first letter she includes in this chapter, "It is quite possible that I am not the best person to describe my sister or to speak for her. I am biased and cannot write objectively about her. I will let her speak for herself" (149). Sarah thus transcribes five of Lamia's discovered letters, seemingly word for word, finally allowing Lamia's voice to be heard. However, it is critical to note that this amplification of Lamia's voice is also filtered by her nemesis, Sarah, who decides which of the hundreds of letters to include, even here somewhat remains the authorial voice.

Because Sarah cannot access an objective space in her writing about Lamia but considers Lamia's story an important part of her own, Sarah thus gives Lamia an (albeit limited) opportunity to once again "talk," uniquely breaking the narrative to center a voice other than Sarah's–a voice that had previously been silenced. With this, we can—and must—attend to these "ramblings," and their critical implications. Lamia's talking here is specifically directed to Janet, the mother she was abruptly separated from as a child, interconnecting the traumas and experiences of Lamia, Janet, and Sarah. In this fact, it is critical to recognize that along with the silencing Lamia faced when bringing up her past life, Lamia also endured a series of other (often gendered) traumatic experiences at a young age that "forced her inward" (146). These traumas

include her parents' divorce, her mother's "sudden disappearance" (146), and her father's subsequent remarriage. The severance of Lamia from her mother Janet leaves a tangible mark on Lamia's current life; this separation was abrupt, traumatic, and would forever haunt Lamia. As Sarah describes, "Our mother simply vanished. One day, she was not there. Without any explanation or elaboration. 'Your mother went back to America,' our father said. That was all. We were supposed to live with that" (146). As Lamia henceforth operated from a space of silence, Sarah, knowing only her own pain, assumes that it is Sarah herself who suffers most when their mother is sent back to America. However, Sarah later admits that she was wrong–it was Lamia (146). Lamia's trauma after being separated from Janet was never seen or understood by her family, and only comes to the forefront for Sarah when she discovers the series of secret letters Lamia wrote to her mother over the years, letters never sent and never before seen. These letters offer a critical insight into a mind that was closed off to the family at a young age, a mind that eventually is enveloped into madness.

If, as Laub argues, the "imperative to tell" is linked to survival, we must then ask: who gets to survive? For Druze experiences of reincarnation and trauma, I argue, survival is distinctly gendered, a contention underscored in *I, the Divine* that I also take up in chapter three. As I argue, Lamia's letters serve as her distinct form of self-testimony, counter to yet informing Sarah's own. The nature of Lamia's letters as "counter-narrative" shift several important factors in the novel–how we understand Lamia, how we understand Sarah, and, how we understand their grandfather, Hammoud. Until Lamia's secret letters were discovered, which allowed for an amplification of Lamia's voice for the first time, Hammoud remained the primary silencer of Lamia's memories, traumas, and secrets. Throughout the text, we are made privy to Sarah's loving relationship to her grandfather, who, in her many mentions, Sarah considers formative to

her life and stories in distinctly positive ways. Indeed, Sarah's memoir as a whole opens with her grandfather. In this short first of all the first chapters, Sarah reveals:

> My grandfather named me for the great Sarah Bernhardt. He considered having met her in person the most important event of his life. He talked about her endlessly. By the time of five, I was able to repeat each of his stories verbatim. And I did.
>
> My grandfather was a simple man (3)

Our initial understandings of Sarah's life are thus given in direct relation to the importance of Sarah's grandfather to her story. As this opening makes evident, Hammoud's stories become Sarah's own at a very young age, as she can and does often memorize and repeat them. In fact, Hammoud not only names Sarah, but shapes her. Sarah grows up "infatuated with Sarah Bernhardt" (59). This infatuation parallels Hammoud's own, as Sarah reveals in one important chapter "He was infatuated with her. Since he chose my name, stamped me, I immediately became his favorite granddaughter" (77). Hammoud's favoring of Sarah as grandchild, via a paralleling with her to Sarah Bernhardt, indeed informs and "stamps" Sarah. As Sarah continues to say,

> I grew up believing I was the Divine Sarah. I could do anything I wanted. This gift from my grandfather was the greatest bestowed on me. Growing up female in Lebanon was not easy. No matter how much encouragement parents gave their daughters, pressures, subtle and not so subtle, led girls to hope for nothing more than a good marriage. Being the Divine Sarah, I was oblivious to such pressures, much to the consternation of many. (78)

In these lines, Sarah frames her association with Sarah Bernhardt as her greatest gift, allowing her to escape from the gendered pressures other Lebanese women face. Moreover, it is a gift

given to her by her grandfather. This association allows Sarah to transcend gender roles and conformities, dress as a tomboy, excel at sports and math, perform and act, travel the world, mobilities other women in Lebanon are often not allowed. These privileges, which surpass gendered expectations and pressures placed on other Lebanese women, make Sarah's life easier. However, in a childhood where Sarah's mobilities are encouraged, Lamia remains suffering, oppressed, and silenced. For example, in the following paragraph of the same chapter, Sarah reveals; "Lamia, who was two years older, got so fed up with the performances that she slapped me across the face. I cried, ran to my father, complained about her, and when she came after me to defend herself, I stood behind my father, orating a new monologue just to annoy her. To this day, with all her problems, what with being institutionalized and all, she is my least favorite sister" (79). In this first mention of Lamia's institutionalization, we are privy to one of several biased constructions of Lamia. In this childhood anecdote, nothing is mentioned of Lamia's silencing and retraumatization. Instead, only through reading Lamia's letters (included later in the novel) can we understand that Hammoud's gift to Sarah was Lamia's curse. As he encouraged Sarah, he silenced Lamia. Without this context, Lamia's physical abuse of Sarah here, explicitly tied to her later institutionalization, seems to be the act of a consistently mean-spirited and violent sister, rather than the repressed and resentful behaviorisms of a woman deeply and repeatedly traumatized. In understanding the contentious relationship between Sarah and Lamia, the question still remains, however: why did Hammoud, from the moment she was born, favor Sarah over everyone else? To answer this question, we must again look beyond Sarah to another deeply silenced and traumatized woman of the text: their mother Janet.

Before becoming part of the Nour el-Din family, Janet, described as "an independent woman of twenty, wanting to explore the world" (46), decides to attend the American University

of Beirut in Lebanon in order to complete her bachelor's degree. Swimming at the university's beach one day, she is stung by a sea urchin. Sarah's father, Mustapha, then a medical student, rushes to Janet's aid and they quickly fall in love and get married. This love is described by Sarah, Janet, and Mustapha as deep and genuine. However, the idea of bright, successful Mustapha marrying Janet, a non-Lebanese, non-Druze, American, horrified both Sarah's grandparents and the larger Druze community. To counter this resistance, Sarah reveals, "Janet became more Druze than any Druze woman, even though she could not actually become one" (48). Interestingly, what it means to be a Druze woman is most directly taken up in the text with this non-Druze female character. Here, Janet drops her studies to support Mustapha as he completes his. She takes on the title of Druze housewife, learning to cook and excelling in it (her kibbe described to be unequaled in all of Lebanon), dressing more conservatively, and respectfully attending all the obligatory Druze social functions (weddings, funerals, hospital visits).

Beyond solely learning to speak Arabic, Janet even conforms to the linguistic standard of Druzeness, and began to speak Arabic with "a mountain Druze accent" (48). This way of speaking, for the Druze, is a culturally and ethnically important marker of Druzeness and/or region. Druze are known to speak Arabic by accentuating the "qaaf" sound and letter normatively silenced in colloquial Arabic. Speaking Druze Arabic is thus a way of marking and even celebrating Druzeness within and beyond Druze communities. As Druze communities in Lebanon are most concentrated in the mountains, here Alameddine marks Janet's performance and adherence to Druzeness by region and performance, noting an adeptness in Janet's "mountain Druze accent." Moreover, the traditional and historical importance of Janet's ability to speak Druze Arabic is evident when Alameddine reveals this skill "pleased the elders."

Janet's ultimate failure as a Druze wife, however, was her inability to reproduce Druze sons. Of the three children Janet bears--Amal, Lamia, Sarah--none are boys. Encouraged by his parents to find "a Druze wife who would provide him with a bushel of boys," Mustapha thus divorces Janet and sends her back to New York (49). In considering Mustapha's eventual rejection of Janet, it is important to note, however, that the gendered oppressions and expectations revealed in Janet's performance of Druzeness are not exclusive solely to Druze women. Constructions of "ideal" womanhood across time and place have often centered on aptly fulfilling the role of wife and mother. In this case, however, it is critical to remember Alameddine's initial description of Janet's Druzeness. Though Janet became "more Druze than any Druze woman [...] she could not actually become one" (48). Unique to the Druze community, and, thus, a pertinent aspect of its gendered expectations and pressures, is the Druze central tenet that one may not conform to the religion but must be born into it. Janet, always lacking by birth the central component of what it meant to be Druze, was striving to achieve an ideal of cultural and ethnic womanhood she could never truly fulfill. In Janet, we thus see a non-Druze woman who succeeds in almost all notions of Druze womanhood, nearly achieving a gendered Druze perfection, but, ultimately, always already failing.

Janet's presence in the novel, like Lamia's, is thus one of a traumatized woman. As Sarah reveals, "After the divorce, she [Janet] was never strong again. The first time I saw her after she left, I was eighteen. She did not resemble the women described in any of the stories I had heard about her [...] She had been wronged, and lived that wrong for the rest of her life" (49). In Lamia and Janet, we thus see interconnected and gendered violences. It is Janet's inability to serve as a "proper" Druze woman that leads to her silencing and ejection. The significant loss of Janet retraumatizes Lamia, whose inherited traumas of gendered violence had already been festering

and invisibilized. Moreover, the silencing and trauma of both Janet and Lamia is explicitly linked to Hammoud, who, I argue, despite his overall positive relationship with Sarah, is emblematic of the patriarchal violence that all of the women characters in the text are all subjected to, as well as many women living in heteropatriarchal societies today within and beyond the Arab world.

Though the connection is never explicitly made, upon once again meeting Janet as an adult, Sarah ironically finds Janet to be much like Lamia, "enigmatic and morose," as well as often silent. Indeed, not remembering what Janet was like before she was sent away from Lebanon, this side of Janet, who was once, like Lamia, quite talkative, is the only side that Sarah is ever able to know. In one particular instance that Sarah recalls, however, Janet was in a "talkative mood for a change" (294). What Janet shares with Sarah in the following lines, like Lamia's own previously suppressed testimonies, shift our understandings of the novel's central characters as well as its broader critical intersections with gender and trauma:

> 'Your grandfather was an evil man,' she [Janet] said without any hint of emotion. 'He made my life miserable. Whenever no one was around, he would whisper things like, 'You may think you have him because you spread your legs but all vaginas go sour after a while.' He even called me a couple of times and I picked up the phone and bang, he'd call me a whore or a slut. What could I do? I tried telling your father, but he didn't believe me. There was no one I could talk to. He did not relent, kept going after me again and again. You know, when I heard your father remarried, I was so hurt at first. I wanted his new wife dead. But then I thought, you know, there's no worse fate I could wish on someone than having that devil for a father-in-law' (295)

Like Lamia's important counter-narrative of Hammoud's character, Janet reveals her own traumatization by patriarchal violence and misogyny. Hammoud's treatment of Janet, which

Janet finally testifies to in this chapter near the novel's end, reveals Hammoud's misogynistic hatefulness and intolerance–reducing Mustapha's love for Janet to her sexual prowess or "sluttiness," for which Hammoud consistently accused, harassed and abused Janet. Moreover, Mustapha's apparent refusal to listen to and/or believe Janet points to a broader structure of patriarchal violence in the text that many of its women suffer from–such as Janet, Lamia, and, as made evident in this passage, Sarah's stepmother Saniya. Sarah, though privileged by her grandfather in many ways, is also connected to and subjected within these structures of gendered violence, a point which is made clear in the final part of Janet's testimony in this scene. As Janet continues to reveal,

> 'The worst was after each of my deliveries. Did I ever tell you what he [Hammoud] told me after you were born? He and his fucking wife were in the hospital room with me. Your father was in the waiting room playing host with all the visitors. Your grandfather picked you up and said, 'You know, Janet, I love this girl so much. Do you know why?' Like an idiot, I asked, 'Why?' And he said, 'I love her so much because she's the reason I am going to be able to return you to your fucking country.' (295)

Hammoud's formative and seemingly genuine love for Sarah, it is thus revealed, is born from a space of hatefulness and misogyny. Janet's failure to deliver a boy is indeed what motivates Mustapha's decision to divorce and send Janet back to America. It is thus Sarah's birth that puts the final nail in the coffin of Janet's marriage, and, in turn, happiness. In many ways, Janet dies the day that Sarah is born. Janet is never able to recover from this loss of family and home, after all she sacrificed to become the ideal "Druze" housewife. It was not, and, perhaps, never could be, enough. Whereas Janet's "failure" to adhere to the gender expectations of providing a son led to her exile and a life of unhappiness, Sarah's "gift" from her grandfather, her association with

Sarah Bernhardt, allows her to transgress the gender norms the other women characters must adhere to, as well as informs her tomboyish and, thus rather liberated, childhood.

In this (amongst other) heterogeneous characterizations of its women characters, *I, the Divine* ultimately troubles notions of gender essentialism frequently associated with hegemonic understandings of Arab people, bodies, and cultures.[71] In opposition to her mother, Sarah, though a "true" Druze woman by birth, "fails" in all aspects of traditional Druze and Arab womanhood (such as being a good cook, speaking with a *qaaf*, etc.). However, unlike Janet, Sarah is able to produce a son, Kamal. Sarah's and Janet's personalities and behaviors thus exist on opposite ends of the spectrum of essentialist notions of Druze and Arab womanhood, each having what the other lacks. With this, Sarah's memoir and life are marked with a distinct social, cultural, religious, and, at times, sexual queerness. Indeed, the queerness of Sarah, and the novel as a whole, exists within and without the realm of sexuality. As Sarah says in the third rendition of her memoir's first chapters, "I had always been a little odd, which people blamed on my mother, but she was not at fault. My sisters were normal. My half-sisters turned out to be more normal than normal. Except for being gay, my little brother was probably the most normal of us all. I was the strange one" (5). In these lines, for once, which describe Lamia as normal and Sarah as "odd" we see a "normativity" defined by sexuality and gender performativity. Due to her boyish mannerisms and hobbies, Sarah's sexual identity during childhood is questioned by her community, and even by the boy she quickly falls in love with at school. However, Sarah makes no admission of sexual queerness in the novel; rather, Sarah's gender performativity, or lack thereof, queers her childhood. The gender roles of a Druze woman in particular, so aptly fulfilled by Janet, are resisted by her daughter. As a child in Lebanon, Sarah was often filthy and refused

[71] Consider here, for example, Sarah's best friend Dina, an ultra-femme lesbian who influences Sarah's shift from tomboy into a femme adult or, for another example, Ramzi, Sarah's openly homosexual half-brother

to wear dresses, preferring the casual "boyish" clothing options of jeans and a sweatshirt. She cannot stand cooking and sewing, both hobbies her sisters, Amal and Lamia, naturally pick up (35). To the great horror of her stepmother, yet in line with her father's teachings, Sarah was, however, a "true poet" when it came to Lebanese curses (7). After she is transferred from all-girl's Catholic school to a boy's school where she could learn English, Sarah's queerness reaches new heights. Though she "had always been a tomboy" (11), at the boy's school where soccer is the primary sport Sarah was best in her class, a victory which officially marked her as "one of the boys" (13). As she grows older, Sarah's queerness shifts forms, but does not fade. She begins wearing makeup only because of her new best friend, Dina. Dina's character (ironically, a lesbian) thus again signifies a resistance of an inherent connection between queerness of sexuality and queerness of gender performativity/normativity. Moreover, Sarah's refusal (and ability to refuse) to adhere to the regulations, limitations, and struggles faced by "normal" women, such Janet and Lamia, comes at great cost to the other women in her life, whose traumas enable Sarah's "gift." Sarah's relative freedom from these gendered oppressions is thus rooted in structures of patriarchal violence and misogyny that interconnect many of the traumatic experiences of the novel.[72] These gendered violences, I argue, are a critical part of the traumatic domestic/interpersonal experiences in this text, replicated in the reincarnation testimonies of Druze women more broadly, as I further elaborate in chapter three.

In Alameddine's novel, Sarah's interpersonal relationships later on in her life also replicate these patterns of heteropatriarchal violence and trauma within and across transnational Druze communities. As an adult in America, Sarah no longer exemplifies the "tomboy"

[72] These gendered violences, and their "taboo/dishonorable" natures, also include, for example, Sarah's half-sister Rana's murder by a Syrian solider who shoots Rana and commits suicide after being denied Rana's hand in marriage. Another prominent example of gendered violence in the novel is the graphic depiction of Sarah's rape by three strange men, impregnation, and subsequent abortion–a secret Sarah only shares with her best friend, Dina.

behaviors of her childhood. She now dons curve-hugging and risqué outfits, and is even the envy of other women, such as her ex-husband's new wife, Charlene (19). Indeed, this new sexy and desirable Sarah marries twice. Sarah's first marriage was to a Lebanese Christian, specifically, Greek Orthodox, who was "more acceptable than a Maronite," but still not acceptable to Sarah's family, as Omar was not Druze (50). Her second marriage is to a rich Jewish man named Joe who physically resembled Omar very much. In this marriage, Sarah notes that Joe's parents disapproved of his marrying a non-Jewish girl who was not as wealthy as he was. In both marriages, Sarah marries outside of her religion and, thus, does not uphold the traditional and religious principles of her Druze communities. In charting the ways in which Sarah's queerness of Druze womanhood stands in opposition to Janet's (in terms of dress, behavior, language, customs, and religion), Sarah's marriage to Omar uniquely parallels that of Janet's marriage to Mustapha. Janet, the woman who was the epitome of a Druze woman yet could never truly be Druze, and Sarah, a born Druze who did not fit into any standard of Druze womanhood, both had eerily similar experiences of falling in love with their first husbands. I argue, in the interconnectedness of these two failed marriages, we see a reincarnated and gendered intergenerational experience, a pattern and inheritance of love found only to be lost again.[73]

In exploring the experiences of gender, interconnectivity, reincarnation, and trauma in *I, the Divine,* it is remiss to not take note of the distinct parallels that can be observed between the characters of Sarah and Janet. I have argued above that, in many ways, Janet dies the day Sarah is born. Sarah as a (here, non-literal) reincarnation of Janet is made evident in both physical appearance and life experience. Though once a tomboy, as Sarah explains, "As I grow older, I

[73] My use of the term "reincarnation" here differs from its other usages in this chapter. Rather than defining reincarnation solely as a transmigration of the soul across human bodies, here, I shift to an understanding of reincarnation as a new repetition or version of something of the past. For more on how love, hate, and other affects are also reincarnated for the Druze *natqeen*, see chapter three.

notice how much I look like my mother" (138). Sarah notes a sameness in their eyes, nose, forehead, and hair, even though "mine is more brown than red, but I do dye it red every now and then" (138).[74] In this same chapter (one of the few titled chapters in the novel), "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, I Am My Mother After All," Sarah reveals that she will sometimes recite this chant while looking in the mirror, then proceed to break down into tears. However, these parallels do not stop at mere physical appearance; as Sarah makes clear, "It isn't just the looks. I notice how my life ended up and realize I am my mother, though I hardly knew her" (139).

Though Sarah does not remember her mother in Lebanon, being too young when her mother left, Sarah's life, particularly in love, ironically echoes Janet's own. In placing Sarah's marriage to Omar next to Janet's marriage to Mustapha, there are important parallels and, in my estimation, reincarnated experiences to be noted. First, both marriages are interfaith, a fact that serves as a particular point of tension for both women–as Sarah states "Though interfaith marriages were fairly common, they simply were not acceptable in my family" (50-1). Despite the obstacles of religion, both women quickly experienced and married for love. In fact, both Janet and Sarah's first meetings with their future husbands were undeniably similar. Like Janet and Mustapha, Sarah and Omar met at the American University of Beirut beach. Though Sarah required no saving from a sea urchin, quickly after Omar came up to Sarah she fell hard, revealing, "Like my mother, I was smitten on that beach" (50). Sarah and Omar were also married soon after meeting. However, Sarah was able to do something that Janet never could–deliver a baby boy. Here, we see a reversal of Janet and Sarah's roles as Druze wife; as Sarah reveals "I may not have been a good housekeeper, but I was a great mother" (50). Janet, a

[74]In an earlier first chapter, Sarah reveals that "To this day, whenever I feel slightly depressed, I dye my hair red" (80). The correlation of Sarah's dying her hair red to sadness is omitted here, as is the fact that Sarah Bernhardt's hair is also described to be red like Janet's.

fantastic housekeeper and Druze wife, could, alas, not mother a son. For this, Sarah came to believe that "I reminded my mother of her failures" (52). In fact, it is because Sarah "did not want to end up like Janet" that, after Sarah and Omar move to the U.S., Sarah insists on hiring a nanny for Kamal and going back to school. Omar objects to this decision, and, though he finally gives in, his objections mark the beginning of Sarah's changing feelings for Omar. When Omar finishes school and demands that they return to Beirut, Sarah insists on staying in New York and finishing her own schooling. Since they cannot come to an agreement, and Sarah and Omar ultimately, like Janet and Mustapha, divorce. These divorces, for both women, result in their living in the U.S. without their children as both of their ex-husbands reside in Lebanon with their children. Though immensely difficult, this separation of mothers from their children is not exceptional. As Sarah reveals of Omar, she "underestimated his sense of property. I belonged to him. I was his wife. Kamal belonged to him" (53). Though Sarah can sever her relation to Omar as his wife, she cannot sever Omar's relationship to Kamal as his father. In the Arab world, men generally maintain custody over their children in instances of divorce. Like Janet, Sarah is therefore forcibly separated from her child.

Though it is rather easy to see the ways in which Sarah's and Janet's loves and losses–of home, family, and nation–parallel and duplicate one another, it is also easy to forget the ways in which Lamia's traumas, though extremely important, are invisibilized and forgotten by Sarah in her ruminations on her divorce, as well as perhaps by readers themselves, who are only shortly privy to Lamia's voice. Though Sarah sees herself as repeating "the same story" of Mustapha and Janet, Sarah never reflects on the ways in which her traumas, and Janet's, are deeply interconnected to Lamia's. Rather, Lamia is consistently dismissed in the text as "mad." As is the case with Janet, Lamia is deeply manipulated, abused, and traumatized by Hammoud. Sarah's reflections on the insidious nature of her grandfather, which she only brings up towards the end

of her series of first chapters, never consider the ways in which Hammoud (re)traumatizes Lamia. Though earlier in the novel Sarah knows and details the ways in which Lamia is silenced as a child by her grandfather in particular, Sarah reveals near the novel's end, "It took me years to accept the truth. When I finally heard what my grandfather told my mother at birth, I was converted" (293). Despite this an early knowledge of the ways Hammoud abused Lamia, Hammoud is still depicted in an overwhelmingly favorable way throughout the majority of the text.

This alignment with Hammoud–and against Lamia–is maintained even when Sarah discovers, by mistake, that the stories she grew up listening to from her grandfather, the ones that "stamped," shaped, and liberated her, were all based on lies and omissions, including the fundamental story of Hammoud's infamous meeting with Sarah Bernhardt. Though described in the opening chapter as "the most important event in his life," Sarah eventually discovers that her grandfather could have never actually met Sarah Bernhardt in person. Having been in an accident that resulted in an amputated leg, Sarah Bernhardt could not possibly have performed in the play at the time Hammoud claimed to have met her. Despite this knowledge, Sarah Nour el-Din always believed in Hammoud's love for Sarah Bernhard, a love, I argue, is foundational to Sarah's understanding of Hammoud's love for herself. Sarah's insistence that Hammoud loved Bernhardt, however, is directly contested by her sister, Amal, who tells reveals to Sarah "He did not [love Bernhardt]. He loved the myth, the unattainable myth of what a woman was. He had no clue who Bernhardt was. He apotheosized her." Interestingly, Amal's statements here echo Hammoud's apparent sentiments towards Janet, a woman who was "more Druze than any Druze woman" but still not enough to satisfy Hammoud's ideas of what a wife/mother/woman should be. As Amal adds, further destabilizing Sarah's (and readers') impression of Hammoud: "It's a good thing for you he died when he did. If he had waited until you reached puberty, he would

have turned against you." As Hammoud's love for Sarah, which stands above his love for every other woman in the family, is discovered to be rooted in Janet's demise, we can assume that Amal's claims here are valid. After recounting their grandfather's endless abuse of the Saniya and Lamia–both of whom Sarah uncoincidentally disliked–here, Amal tells Sarah a simple truth she had long wished to ignore: "He hated women" (288).

Though Sarah's feelings are finally admittedly "converted" in knowing that Hammoud used Sarah to get rid of Janet, the impact of Janet's loss on Lamia is never reflected upon. Lamia's profound trauma of losing Janet is only made known in Lamia's letters–for whom Janet stands as addressee but never recipient. Though, by the novel's end, Sarah seemingly develops a more cordial relationship with her stepmother, Saniya, who Sarah once saw as evil, Sarah's relationship with Lamia is never improved, despite the interconnections of their traumas, which are all rooted in structures of patriarchy and misogyny. Though Sarah herself never makes the connection, it is also critical to note that Janet and Sarah are not the only mothers in the text to lose their children. Lamia's death in her previous life, an act of suicide, was done in protection of her daughter against the sexual violence of Lamia's own husband. To save her daughter, Lamia thus lost her, as well as a life she truly loved. Ultimately, Lamia's letter to Janet detailing her present life visit to her past life daughter in Suida makes evident the significance of this loss on Lamia, torn by tragedy from family, home, and nation much in the same way of Sarah and Janet. These violences and traumas more explicitly paralleled between Sarah and Janet but are also replicated for Lamia in her present life as she again becomes known as a violent murderer. Therefore, in her present life, though Lamia is not successful in her attempt at suicide, I contend, Lamia, like Janet and as in her past life, does not survive these traumas. Rather, Lamia remains forever locked away in spaces of isolation and silence.

Listening, Witnessing, Knowing

Ultimately, the reincarnated experiences and interconnections between the women of *I, the Divine* reveal a distinct need to look at the traumatic experiences within and beyond this novel intersectionally. We cannot understand different yet overlapping articulations of traumatic experiences without consistently taking into consideration the multiple intersections of gender, religion, class, and sexuality at play. Similarly, we cannot understand trauma within and beyond the novel without first considering who gets to speak, and, thus, following Laub, who gets to survive. In *I, the Divine,* Janet eventually commits suicide. Lamia, after attempting her own suicide in her present life, remains institutionalized, perhaps living, but certainly not surviving. In trying to testify to the experiences of her own life, as informed by this series of interconnected traumatic experiences, Sarah can seemingly only produce a series of fragments and rely on the reader to put them together, fragments that echo the effect of fragmentation traumatic experiences has on the mind and body. As Dori Laub tells Cathy Caruth about testifying to traumatic experience (here, the Holocaust):

> As long as the memory is inside, it is in fragments, in intense affects, and they [survivors] need the proper conditions in which they can come together. Not all the way, necessarily, but the story begins to be told. It's not tell-able in vivo, without this additional circumstance of an adequate listener. (qtd. in Caruth, *Listening to Trauma*, 49)

Lamia, perhaps more than any other character in the novel, is never given what Laub calls an "adequate listener." She is rarely spoken of, and even more rarely spoken to. The exception is the extraordinary shift from Sarah's writings to Lamia's, a rupture that holds significant meanings for and beyond the novel. Though, for most of the text, Lamia remains in spaces of silence, gender violence, and sadness, *listening* to Lamia, as I illustrate above, is transformative. Ultimately, though Sarah remains the most "heard," listened to, and critically examined, Sarah's

testimonies of her own life reveal that she cannot tell her own story without amplifying the voices of those around her–particularly those of the women in her life who have been silenced, women whose traumas and reincarnations inevitably inform Sarah's own. As Sarah reveals of Lamia, "She did not seem to belong to our family*, yet was an essential part of it*" (my emphasis 40). Sarah's description of Lamia in these lines thus points to Lamia's presence—and the function of silence and silencing more broadly—as a presence and not an absence despite the erasure of Lamia and Lamia's story throughout the text. Likewise, after her mother's suicide, when Sarah discovers and marvels at the fact that Janet did not switch to her maiden name after returning to the U.S., rather choosing to remain Janet Nour el-Din, Dina reveals to Sarah "'She [Janet] was as much a Nour el-Din as any of you. Just because she was ostracized doesn't mean she's not part of the equation. Think about it'" (262). This thinking Sarah apparently does, as the last lines of the novel reveal:

> I had tried to write my memoir by telling an imaginary reader to listen to my story. Come learn about me, I said. I have a great story to tell you because I have led an interesting life. Come meet me. But how can I expect readers to know who I am if I do not tell them about my family, my friends, the relationships in my life? Who am I if not where I fit in the world, where I fit in the lives of the people dear to me? I have 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)

There are two important points to be drawn from those closing lines. The first is Sarah's hope that the "imagined reader" will listen to, and, in turn, "know" the story of her life–who she is, where she comes from–on individual and collective fronts. Of literary testimony, the idea of a "literary reader/listener" that Sarah, and, following, Alameddine alludes to in these lines has been importantly theorized by Dori Laub, who names this role as that of a "belated witness;" as Laub contends, "The specific task of the literary testimony is, in other words, to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history--what is happening to others--in one's own body, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement (*Testimony* 108). In this theorization, a reader of testimony, particularly traumatic testimonies, is not passive, but agentic, becoming a type of witness themselves, despite space, time, gender, religion, sexuality, or any other real or perceived difference between speaker and listener.

Indeed, in his latest novel, *The Wrong End of the Telescope,* Alameddine directly questions the role of literature, author, and reader in testifying/bearing witness to real-world trauma, political, social, and cultural peril—in this text, the refugee crisis engendered by the ongoing civil war in Syria. In this work, although Alameddine somewhat pessimistically reflects on the inaction of writing rather than *doing,* the author ultimately locates an agency in writing about, and thus testifying to, traumatic experience. As Alameddine importantly reveals in an article explaining what inspired this latest novel and his recent engagements with Syrian refugees Alameddine writes, "If nothing else, I could be a witness" ("Hope and Home). [75] As readers we, too, and perhaps, must, bear witness and testify to the traumatic experiences of others, particularly the most silenced and invisibilized among us. Moreover, I assert the role of reader-

[75] See Alameddine, Rabih. "Hope and Home." *Freeman's: Home.* 2017, pp. 73-87.

as-witness is premised on forms of witnessing that require *listening* as an act of reparation and reconciliation, an epistemology of listening that itself is agentic. Indeed, I insist on an Arab futurity that continues to look to the margins, expand, include, unpack, transform our multiple identities, positionalities, relationships, and ways of life, within and across our many differences. If, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty declares in *Feminism Without Borders,* we must acknowledge that "there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities are real–and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division" (2), then we must begin and/or continue to take seriously the testimonies and experiences of those both like and unlike us, finding commonalities in our mutual and continual aims of decolonization and social justice and underscoring the critical roles women play in these missions.

Furthermore, the closing lines of *I, the Divine* suggest readers cannot "know" Sarah without knowing those who surround her, even, and perhaps, especially, the most invisibilized. This is her pride, both in the sense of group and affect. From this important emphasis on the collective in Alameddine's *I, the Divine,* I make a parallel argument. Can we "know" or "understand" diasporic and transnational Arab identities without looking at, and, indeed, centering our most marginalized voices? As this chapter reveals the critical and transformative importance examining Druzeness—within and beyond this novel and across multiple academic fields of thought—I thus illuminate the emancipatory potential of listening to broken silences, particularly surrounding traumatic and often considered taboo/dishonorable experiences of reincarnated Druze women. As made clear in Lamia's case, though Lamia told her story in letters, these testimonies were never witnessed, and therefore the telling did not help her to heal, to survive. Therefore, I argue that the transformative implications of centering and attending to Druze reincarnation stories, across academic, political, and cultural spheres, is vast. Rather than

question the legitimacy of such reincarnation stories, I suggest a focus on their transformative implications across the multiple and overlapping fronts of transnational, trauma, and literary studies. I stress a need to continue to amplify and take seriously the heterogenous voices of Third World Women in particular, often silenced and de-legitimized in and across inter- and intra-national private and public realms. In the footsteps of Mohanty, "I want to speak of a feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our every day lives" (2). In centering Druze women and culture more broadly, I hope this work crosses its own borders in decolonizing knowledges about transnational Arab and broader Asian identities and communities. In coalition, in understanding, in knowledge production, may they resist the silences, violences, and delegitimization that surround them. Indeed, if we take seriously the fundamental trauma theories of Dori Laub, our collective survival, perhaps now more than ever, may depend on these vital acts of speech and listening and, indeed, on the exchange that they require.

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Chapter Three: Listen to Our Stories: Gendered Reincarnation(s) of the Lebanese Civil War

As I continue to explore who gets to "survive" in the sense of testifying to trauma, in this chapter I explore some of the conversations I had with Druze peoples in the U.S. and Lebanon while conducting research for this dissertation. In doing so, I start with a telling anecdote. In the summer of 2022, I was sitting in a restaurant in a Druze village in Lebanon having a conversation with several Druze people (three men, one woman) about my research on reincarnation. One of these friends, an older male in his 60s born and raised in a Lebanese Druze village, astounded me by saying "I have never heard a reincarnation story of a Druze woman." The son of the man in his 60s, himself a man in his 30s born and raised in Druze villages in Lebanon, added "It makes sense. Women usually die natural deaths. They do not die in violent ways." This anecdote thus underscores a discourse surrounding women in Druze reincarnation narratives, one that assumes that reincarnation testimonies of Druze women do not exist simply because they have not been heard, despite the wide prevalence of Druze reincarnation stories told within our transnational communities. It also speaks to a silencing and/or erasure within the community that I realized early on in my research, as Druze women's reincarnation stories were consistently harder to access than Druze men's.[76] As the Druze believe that all people are reincarnated, it of course follows that Druze women are also reincarnated and have reincarnation memories and testimonies. Yet the conversations with the Druze that I explore in this chapter reveal the profoundly gendered nature of *natq*, the Arabic word for the unique form of speech and telling that pertains to remembering and testifying to a past life that, as I have shown, is

[76] I use the word "access" very deliberately here. Druze women's reincarnation testimonies very much do exist. They are simply, I have heard, less circulated and listened to, for reasons I explore in this chapter and in chapter two.

deeply intertwined with the ability to testify to traumatic experience and to be listened to/heard, as well as gendered notions of violence and what constitutes a "violent death," as indicated by the conversation I reference above. As discussed in previous chapters, since Druze around the world widely ascribe to the notion of reincarnation as afterlife, speaking in the form of *natq* maintains a large social and cultural acceptance within the community. However, in conducting the research for this project I have found that this acceptance is largely limited to the reincarnation narratives of Druze men. Moreover, in the context of Lebanese Druze today, these stories most frequently pertain to the war stories and traumas of men who died in the Lebanese Civil War (LCW).

Indeed, as I chart the oft-invisibilized traumas and violences that guide and shape Druze lives throughout the chapters of this dissertation and the oral interviews I detail in this chapter, it is critical to note that the testimonies of Druze *natqeen* in Lebanon and across the Lebanese diaspora today, across their different media forms, more often than not lead back to the war, informing both my focus on the war in this project and my framing of the Lebanese Civil War's ongoingness. As I argue, for Lebanon and its diasporas, the LCW (officially periodized from 1975-1990) maintains a central role as one of the most devastating regional and international crises and collective traumatic events of the 20th century, shaping the socio- and geopolitical histories of the Arab world and its diasporas. As such, the Lebanese Civil War has and continue to profoundly affect and shape Lebanon and the Lebanese across national borders and transnational bodies.

As I illuminate here and in previous chapters, the afterlives of the Lebanese Civil War and its traumas for and beyond transnational Druze communities remain particularly significant today given the lack of a reconciliation process and silencing enforced by the Lebanese state

after the war's "end" in 1990.[77] As I continue to explore the pervasive afterlives of trauma and war for Lebanese Druze and its, here, their U.S. diasporas, by engaging self-conducted oral interviews in this chapter, I therefore address the following key questions: In what ways is *natq* a gendered phenomenon? How does the erasure and/or silencing of Druze women's reincarnation testimonies inform women's ability not only to bear witness to trauma–*but to be listened to*? What does breaking these silences make possible in relation to understanding (and surviving) gender violence and traumatic memory in relation to the ongoing Lebanese Civil War? In attending to these questions, I assert the Druze's own roles as subjects and historical agents, critically important given the obscurity of Druze voices from Druze scholarship above and the resultant colonialist, Zionist, masculinist nature of studies on the Druze, all augmented by the paucity of scholarship on the Druze at large. Following the demand within and without gender studies to attend to the ways in which women's lives in particular are critically shaped by war & militarization–in indirect, direct, and ongoing ways–in this chapter I underscore the ways in which women' stories from Arab world, one of the most militarized and politicized regions in the world, are of vital importance, in turn, critically and vitally shaping our understandings of war, here, specifically the Lebanese Civil War and its ongoing traumas for Druze women.

In centering reincarnated Druze women's voices in this chapter, I thus show how their traumatic past life experiences, more imbricated within the realm of domestic, interpersonal, and gender violence, thus exist in within notions of *dishonor* rather than the notions of honor and glory that are attached to Druze reincarnated men's testimonies such as Bassel's (see chapter one), ultimately making it more difficult for Druze women to speak, to be listened to, and to survive. In attending to the key questions of this chapter, I start by tracing and illuminating the

[77] For more on the ongoing state-enforced political and cultural amnesia surrounding discourses of the Lebanese Civil War, see Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 2010.

complex and interconnected ways Druze reincarnation narratives typically uphold heteropatriarchal structures within and beyond the nation of Lebanon that mobilize men to fight (and die) for both their lands and their women's honor across constructions of gender, family, and community.[78] In doing so, I particularly attend to how *al a'ard*, the Arabic word for a gendered type of honor that has to do with a woman (in particular, a woman's body) is taken up in Druze culture. Following this with an analysis of patterns of gender and domestic violence (i.e. violences against women and women's bodies) that I have found existent across the testimonies of several reincarnated Druze women in the U.S. and Lebanon, I thus examine the ways Druze women's stories resist and revise the long-standing association of contemporary Druze *natqeen* testimonies with male Druze martyrs (i.e. soldiers who died in the Lebanese Civil War). In doing so, I center the multiple and overlapping ways Druze women experience/d the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War, particularly within domestic and personal spheres they are frequently situated within. I also chart the critically understudied ways in which reincarnated Druze women remain deeply impacted by the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War across public and especially private realms, which remains understudied and undertheorized.

Importantly, the oral testimonies shared with me for and by Druze women for this chapter thus opened a space for me to amplify their own voices, experiences, and traumas in ways that the existing archive of Druze reincarnation narratives, which includes the texts analyzed in previous chapters of this dissertation, has not.[79] In providing a space for their often-silenced

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[78] Important to note here is the Druze belief that Druze men will always reincarnate into Druze men and Druze women will always reincarnate into Druze women, reinforcing a social and cultural gender binary based on assigned sex. All interlocutors I have spoken to for this project identify as their assigned sex. The gender analysis in this chapter follows these identifications not to reinforce this binary, but to interrogate the effects and implications of these gender constructions for transnational Druze communities.

[79] Like many of the existing works engaging Druze reincarnation, it is important to note here that Lawrence Abu Hamdan's important work on Druze reincarnation in *Once Removed* centers the experience of a Druze man, and, although Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine* describes the experiences of a reincarnated Druze woman character, Alameddine himself is a queer Druze man.

voices, I thus aim to render Druze women's "impossible" representations, stories, and speech, possible, as they exist within an already existent framework of impossibility (see Lawrence Abu Hamdan's theorization of Druze reincarnation testimony in relation to "impossible speech" as discussed in chapter one of this dissertation and in Abu Hamdan's audiovisual essay "Natq"). In doing so, I challenge the discourses of impossibility that, as made evident in the opening anecdote to this chapter, particularly surround reincarnated Druze women's testimonies. As I ultimately argue and reveal, the reincarnation narratives of Druze women disrupt heteropatriarchal structures of violence and war that are replicated in Druze reincarnation stories that silence and/or erase Druze women's experiences and traumas. Therefore, attending to Druze reincarnation narratives, particularly across constructions of gender, further transforms the ways in which we currently understand the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War and its afterlives across transnational lives, bodies, and borders. With this, I assert that equally important to analyzing the ways in which state-enforced silences are today being broken by reincarnated Lebanese Druze men around the world is the need to underscore the ways in which these heteropatriarchal structures of the state, including discourses of shame and honor, are resisted and disrupted by testimonies of reincarnated Druze women. To illustrate this argument, I examine the Druze women's reincarnation stories as imbricated within the sphere of what I call *dishonorable death*– which I theorize as deeply connected to discourses of shame that exist in tension with the discourses of war, violence, honor and martyrdom in the transnational Arab world that I explore below.

Many feminist scholars on gender and militarism today (Enloe, Hawkesworth, Yuval-Davis) have revealed the ways war and warriordom themselves are inherently masculinist structures. Indeed, within and across transnational Druze communities in particular there is a

significance emphasis placed on Druze warriordom and honor, which, I argue, informs the fact that the most popular reincarnation stories heard and repeated by Lebanese Druze today, in both the U.S. and Lebanon, are stories of Druze men who bravely and tragically lost their lives during the long, catastrophic, and ongoing violences of the Lebanese Civil War. In my analysis of Druze women's stories, I attribute the pervasive inter- and intra-community silencings and erasures that envelop their stories to social and cultural situatedness within a sphere of what I call *dishonorable death*, which, I argue, is in tension with the notions of honor often attached to reincarnated Druze men's deaths. Rather, dishonorable death, in my purview, is deeply connected to the prevalent and gendered discourses of shame attached to women in the transnational Arab world.[80] As the public nature of martyrdom and death in war, for men, is so often depicted as honorable, the private and often taboo nature of Druze women's stories–which can and do include war-related traumas such as domestic, sexual, and gender violence–informs their situatedness within the realm of the dishonorable. As such, they are not to be discussed. These discourses of shame and fear of dishonor that surround Arab women, I suggest, has informed a heightened silencing and erasure of Druze women's reincarnation narratives that I explore (and disrupt) below. In doing so, we must first listen to their stories.

Listening to Druze Voices: A Methodology

The ethnographic narratives that I have curated in conversation with Druze peoples in the U.S. and Lebanon are thus presented as my own contribution to a growing (yet still scarce) archive of Druze reincarnation testimonies, which importantly includes works such as Lawrence

[80] For more on the tension between shame and honor as it exists within the transnational Arab world and Druze communities more specifically, see El-Eid, Jarmakani, Naime "A'ala Qalbek: Introducing a Feminist Druze Framework," forthcoming.

Abu Hamdan's documentary *Once Removed* (2019) and Rabih Alameddine's novel *I, the Divine* (2001). As I turn to the analysis of oral interviews in this chapter, I contend that the importance of listening to different forms and genres of Druze testimony is perhaps clearest when we consider the profound silences surrounding the experiences and voices of Druze communities within Druze studies and transnational Arab studies more broadly. As Arab studies scholar Graham Auman Pitts notes in his article, "Essential Readings in Druze History," beyond any demarcations of periodization, "Druze voices remain largely obscured in the documentary record." In resisting the profound erasure of Druze voices from archival records about their communities, homelands, histories, and traumas, and illuminating how listening to Druze stories transforms how scholars of the transnational Arab world understand Arab histories and futures, this dissertation project as a whole looks at various media forms of Druze testimonies and talking as forms of survival with critical implications for and beyond Druze communities. In doing so, I assert the importance of listening to different forms of Druze voices across time and space (as I do in chapters one and two) without privileging one form over another. Engaging oral interviews with Druze peoples that I analyze here as ethnographic and discursive narratives, in this chapter I turn to a different (perhaps more traditional) form of bearing witness and testimony.

Alongside the testimonies I have examined from Druze novels and films, the discursive narratives I have collected and curated for this chapter engage conversations I have had with Druze people in the U.S. and Lebanon in order to further underscore how Druze reincarnation testimonies make evident gendered relationalities between Arab bodies and traumas within and beyond the SWANA region, intersections which, I argue, can transform understandings of the Lebanese Civil War, transnational Druze communities, and the afterlives of both. As I add the testimonies and experiences reincarnated Druze people, particularly women, in Lebanon and the

U.S. have shared with me to an emerging archive of Druze voices, works, and cultural productions, I emphasis a multimodal approach to Druze studies that looks within, beyond, and across traditional spaces of academic disciplines and scholarship. I do so with the awareness that scholarship on the Druze is largely shaped by mechanisms of colonialism, (neo)orientalism, and Zionism that have historically worked to sensationalize and tokenize Druze narratives, if not blatantly silence them (see El-Eid, Jarmakani, Naime "A'ala Qalbek: Introducing a Feminist Druze Framework," forthcoming). The Druze stories I share here in coalition with Druze interlocutors are thus offered to amplify Druze voices with great care not to exploit them, particularly those of oft-invisibilized Druze women. This is done by forging a platform of discursive collaboration and conversation that has been lacking in dominant scholarship and cultural productions on both Druze reincarnation and on the Druze more broadly.[81] In my conversations with the Druze in this chapter, as I do throughout this dissertation, I therefore put into practice the "new mode of listening across disciplines" theorized by Cathy Caruth in relation to hearing and relaying traumatic stories, a listening practice that centers vulnerability, intimacy, and coalitional exchange between testifier and listener (*Listening to Trauma* 2014). In doing so, I both recognize and underscore my role as listener, witnesser, and as such, co–creator in hearing and relaying these testimonies (Laub, *Testimony* 57-74). As Dori Laub contends, all testimony is a form of storytelling. And all stories need listeners. In each chapter of this dissertation, I thus ask us as readers to listen to the Druze within a particular media genre/form, while highlighting various critical analyses and interventions that can be made when we attend to Druze voices across different forms of testimony.

[81] For more on the undertheorized importance of oral history, oral interviews, and memory as a way of understanding history, here specifically in relation to the Lebanese Civil War, see Makram Rabah's *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites, and Collective Memory* (2020).

Partaking in new analytics that transgress and, I contend, cannot be contained by disciplinary boundaries and methodologies, the Druze archive I construct in this chapter thus resists, disrupts, and reshapes dominant narratives on the Druze within and beyond academia and academic scholarship, extending to the ways in which the Druze understand themselves and one another, particularly in relation to war and traumatic experience. In doing so, I also situate and interweave my own lived experiences and knowledges as a Druze woman, American child of the Lebanese diaspora, and academic scholar into this chapter as part of an interdisciplinary transnational feminist theory and practice that informs this dissertation project as a whole (Abu Lughod, Naber, Haraway, Hill Collins). Importantly, in this chapter I also highlight the importance of oral narratives and oral storytelling as a mode of interconnection and even survival for small, widely diasporic Druze communities. As I underscore in the anecdote of asking Druze in the U.S. at our annual convention who has heard a reincarnation story and seeing most hands shoot into the air: Druze stories travel, and Druze reincarnation stories are amongst those that circulate the most often across our transnational communities. We have all heard these stories. Now we must listen to them.

In this chapter, I thus listen to and represent nineteen conversations curated based on the patterns and themes that I have found in across these transnational narratives, which include gendered notions of trauma, remembrance, honor, shame, and (re)connection. My criteria for participation for this IRB-approved study was as follows: All participants must be Druze ages 18+ with a working knowledge of either English and/or Arabic. Participants may be located anywhere, but must access to a laptop, internet, and registered on Zoom in order to participate in interviews online. Participants in the NY/CT area of the United States, as well as those located in the Beirut or Jabal (mountain) region of Lebanon, may be eligible for in-person interviews if

preferred.[82] Audio-video recording of interviews is optional. During each conversation, interlocutors were asked a series of demographic questions regarding age, gender, location, etc. They were then asked to answer a series of questions pertaining to stories, memories, and experiences as pertaining to being a member of the Druze community and the Druze ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation in particular.

Intentionally unsettling imperialist attempts at evidentiary verification or Orientalist undertakings to "know" or "uncover" the secrets of the Druze, I root the conversations with Druze peoples I here describe in a transnational feminist praxis of love, care, and solidarity that troubles the oft-reinforced binary between interviewer and interlocutor. My archive of Druze reincarnation stories was thus created and curated from a feminist epistemological standpoint that asserts non-academic subjects and Druze women in particular as the producers of knowledge by underscoring the importance of listening to Druze voices when creating scholarship on the Druze, building Druze archives, and telling Druze stories. In sharing these oral narratives, I underscore the importance of oral history to the Druze–particularly in relation to their ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation–by examining how Druze narratives travel and interconnect transnational Druze communities across time and space. In doing so, I examine what is not or cannot be told, i.e. whose stories are silenced and erased, and, accordingly, who gets to survive, by illuminating the yet unexamined yet deeply important gendered nature of *natq* and Druze reincarnation more broadly.

As I share what was shared with me, I take seriously my own positionality as a Druze Lebanese American woman with deep connections to Druze communities in both the U.S. and Lebanon. What I share in this chapter is thus shaped by the lived knowledges I have of and a

[82] The Jabal (mountain) regions of Lebanon hold the largest congregations of Druze communities in Lebanon.

recognition of the profound responsibility I have to my beloved community–especially the women, with whom what would begin as an interview would often become a space of intimacy, tears, laughter, food, coffee, and, yes, plenty of matté.[83] Indeed, though we would always begin with my guideline that the interview would last between one to two hours, most lasted much longer, and we rarely noticed the time fly by. I hold these stories and moments with the utmost gratitude and care. In doing so, in this chapter, I not only assign pseudonyms for my interlocutors and remove any identifying factors pertaining to them to the best of my capabilities, but I also attempt to speak more to patterns and trends I find across stories rather than the specificities of the stories themselves.[84] I do so with the knowledge that any testimony that pertains to trauma and violence comes with risk, and that those risks are gendered and classed in ways that affect certain bodies and lives more than others. To those who found safety in talking and "telling" with me, thank you.

Gendered Discourses: *Al A-Ard* and the Druze Women of the Lebanese Civil War

"Sometimes I still feel the pain up and down my leg where the Israeli soldiers shot me."

"I remember being shot in my wedding dress. He shot me because I was going to marry another man."

"Ever since I was a child, I had flashbacks in my mind featuring war, soldiers, and bombs, and definite places and buildings in the west district in Aley."

"I ate something to poison myself because I hate him."

[83] A tea vastly popular amongst Druze communities around the world, often drunk in communal settings.
[84] Several interviews I held with the Druze in Lebanon were conducted in Arabic. All translations to English made in this chapter and project are my own, unless stated otherwise. In translating spoken Arabic into English, words and meanings may be inevitably lost. With this, any mistakes made due to (mis)translations are my own.

The quotes above are all taken from individual conversations and stories reincarnated Druze people in the U.S. and Lebanon have shared with me since I began interviews for this project in 2021. I highlight these short quotes here to mark the presence of, borrowing language from Avery Gordon, "eternal specters of violence" and afterlives of individual traumatic experience that exist at the heart of almost every Druze reincarnation story.[85] Furthermore, with these quotes, I also point to how these testimonies, and thus traumas, are gendered within and across public and private spheres. As noted, for the national contexts of the U.S. and Lebanon I focus on in this project, and as replicated in the cultural works I examine by Alameddine and Abou Hamdan in chapters one and two, the central traumatic event that shapes these stories and their (re)tellings has been the Lebanese Civil War and the afterlives of its traumas. Here I consider the pervasive and enduring effects of the war and implications of Druze reincarnation testimonies for both men and women across public and, importantly, private spheres, complicating this binary and its privileging of the public. The interviews and readings I conducted for this dissertation project, as well as my own lived experiences as a Druze woman, all support a striking pattern: most reincarnation stories heard in Lebanon and by Lebanese Druze in diaspora today predominantly come from men (see, for example, all of the cases listed in the work of Dr. Ian Stevenson as well as my analysis of Bassel in chapter one of this dissertation).[86] This is not entirely surprising, for, as feminist scholars such as Mary Hawkesworth have argued, "Militaries are perceived as masculine institutions not only because

[85] See Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (2008).

[86] As noted in the introduction, one of the twenty cases Stevenson documented in the groundbreaking *Twenty Suggestive Cases* (1966) was of Imad Elawar, a young, reincarnated Druze boy from Mount Lebanon who died in a previous life by being run over by a truck. Other cases of reincarnated peoples from the Arab world Stevenson studied and reported on throughout his career include the testimonies of Faruq Andary (suicide), Mounzer Haider (gunshot wound), Rabih Elawar (motorcycle accident), Salem Andary (murder), Suleiman Andary (disease), Zuheir Chaar (disease), Nazih Danaf (murder), and Wael Kiwan (died by suicide in U.S. and reborn in Lebanon)-- all Lebanese Druze boys or men who died in traumatic ways and were reborn remembering and testifying to their past lives.

they are populated mostly with men, but also because they constitute a major arena for the construction of masculine identities" ("Women, War, and Peace" 556). This argument can also be applied to our contemporary understandings of Druze male identity in relation to the pervasiveness of war and militarization in the Arab world, as, for example, underscored by a declaration made by a Druze user on the Instagram page "Druze Confessions" on February 24, 2024 that **"**men become men when they die in war."[87] Indeed, as a Druze woman who has lived in both the U.S. and Lebanon, time and time again the reincarnation stories I would hear of Druze *natqeen* were not only predominantly male, but, more specifically, male soldiers who died in the Lebanese Civil War, soldiers who are widely considered within and beyond Lebanon as martyrs.[88]

However, as I argue in this chapter, these popular war narratives must also be interrogated not only for the state silences they break within and beyond national borders that have enforced a "cultural amnesia" around discourses on the LCW (see Huagbolle, *War & Memory in Lebanon*), but for the gendered silences and erasures they often reinforce. With its wide association with men, like war, we therefore must also understand martyrdom as a gendered term and phenomenon, one that is particularly imbricated within gendered notions of honor. This is not to say that women do not exist as martyrs and do not participate in the public realm of war around the world, the Lebanese Civil War being no exception.[89] Rather, I am pointing to the

[87] Druze Confessions is an online forum on Instagram that allows Druze peoples to make anonymous posts related to contemporary Druze lives and experiences, to which other Druze Instagram users can then publicly respond. For more on the importance of online spaces to the Druze, see the CODA to this dissertation.
[88] The prevalence of Druze reincarnation stories in relation to the Lebanese Civil War is also evident in Gebhard Fartacek's chapter, "Ethnographic Insights: Narratives Dealing with Previous Life Memories Among the Druze" in *Druze Reincarnation Narratives: Previous Life Memories, Discourses, and the Construction of Identities* 2021 (68). Though Fartacek does not outwardly mention the gendered nature of the war narratives he examines, it is important to note that all of the cases Fartacek lists and analyzes are of reincarnated Druze men.
[89] For a compelling exploration of Lebanese women who *insisted* on partaking in the LCW, see Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations" 2018.

ways in which women's war stories, within and across public and private spheres, remain buried under heightened levels of censorship, silencing, and/or erasure. Indeed, for Druze women, these erasures exist not only within the state-enforced cultural amnesia surrounding the war but also within, across, and beyond transnational Druze communities whose stories and voices have not been listened to and/or given due attention, despite the vast ways Druze women experience/d the LCW.

Indeed, Druze narratives as an important and understudied example of the ways in which gendered notions of honor are constructed and upheld by heteropatriarchal structures that are frequently reinforced, for the Druze, by oral testimonies and traditions. In his own oral interview work with Druze members in Israel, for example, Rabah Halabi quotes "Najeeb" an Israeli Druze who declares, "We, the Druze, it's known that we have three very important fundamentals–the faith, the honor of women, and the land. The land we protect, of course, and also our faith, so what's left is the honor of our women. If we don't protect that, meaning to protect a daughter's honor, then our Druzeness will be damaged" (Halabi, "The Faith, the Honor of Women, the Land: The Druze Women in Israel," 430).[90] Halabi goes on to argue this claim is corroborated by several as his interviewees as well as scholarship on identity in the Druze community such as Nejla Abu-Izzedin's *The Druzes in History* (1990) and Kamal Jumblatt's "Muhowlah fe tefham musader wasul alkhikmah walarfan" in Sami Makarem's edited work *Comments on the Foundations of the Druze Religion* (1966). Of the three fundamentals of the Druze faith and culture—the faith, the land, and the honor of women—Halabi finds that the honor of women and the land were most the mentioned by his Druze interlocutors (430).

[90] My use of parentheses around the name "Najeeb" here is to signal Halabi's own use of pseudonyms in his work.

In support of Halabi's findings, my own conversations with the Druze for this project, as well as my own lived experiences as a Lebanese American Druze woman growing up in the U.S., underscore the claim often heard/repeated in Druze communities that the three things that matter most to Druze communities at large and to Druze men in particular are *al deen* (the faith), *al ard* (the land) and *al a'ard* (the honor). Of course, for many societies, including the Druze's, the nation's honor at large is deeply connected to both land and honor, particularly a woman's honor (see Peteet cited by Halabi 437). Moreover, as control of women is usually at the base of social order (Yuval-Davis 1980) it is not exceptional that, for the Druze, this control is directly linked to a "woman's honor." However, in my use of the terms "woman's honor" or the "honor of women" in relation to the Druze, war, and martyrdom in the transnational Arab world, I must here however underscore the particular and unique meaning and connotation of the Arabic word *al a'ard* in relation to more traditional understandings and conceptualizations of honor, here as connected to men and warriordom.

The standard Arabic word for honor is *sharaf*. Though *al a'ard* is often translated simply as "honor" *al a'ard* is not the same as *sharaf.* Rather, *al a'ard* specifically refers to a gendered type of honor that has to do with a woman, in particular, a woman's body. For the transnational Arab world and the Druze more specifically, notions of honor and women, particularly, women's bodies, are deeply interconnected—a connection that holds significant and far-reaching social and cultural implications. For example, in his work with Druze in Palestine and Israel, Halabi describes a Druze "honor complex," in which Druze people (including Druze women) "connect the woman's honor inherently with the honor of the community." As such, "woman's honor" here can and should be understood as an extension of a man's honor, as determined, shaped by, and contingent on his women kin. Importantly, it is also clear that "the honor of all Druze, or the

preservation of Druze identity, depends on the woman's body, or her lower half" (Halabi citing Alsaadawi 437).[91] With this, Druze women, much like other women around the world, exist as the embodiment of nation and community men must protect and defend, particularly during times of war and violence. Moreover, Druze women's bodies, and the traumas they endure, are therefore seen as extensions of Druze men's honor, and are thus controlled accordingly. The heteropatriarchal structures and violences of the Lebanese state and transnational Druze communities must then be viewed as deeply imbricated within gendered notions of honor and control, particularly during times of war. As such, I argue, it is critical to listen to Druze women's reincarnation stories in order to help break multilayered silences surrounding the traumas of the Lebanese Civil War, including its historical and ongoing impact(s) on Lebanese women within and beyond the Druze.

As the violences of the Lebanese Civil War (LCW) were profound, as are its ongoing effects. Though the exact number of people who died in the LCW is unknown, international organizations and investigations have estimated at least 150,000 lives lost (Reuters, AP), whereas the Lebanese government reports only 35-40 thousand deaths (*Middle East International* No 361, 20 October 1989; G.H. Jansen p. 4). The massive discrepancy in these reports underscores the substantial investment the Lebanese government has in erasing, silencing, and dismissing the horrors and atrocities of the war, as well as its ongoing social, political, and cultural implications, particularly for Lebanese women. With the lack of due process and investigation surrounding the horrors of the LCW made evident by these statistics

[91] Halabi asserts and it is important to note here that these roles of women and women's bodies in relation to collective identity are not singular or unique to the Druze. Halabi gives several sources of similar cross-cultural findings, including Chatterjee (1989), Accad (1991), Peteet (1993), and Katz (1996). See Halabi, "The Faith, the Honor of Women, the Land: The Druze Women in Israel" (2015).

alone, it is important to note that the number of women in particular who died in war is unaccounted for and unknown.

Regardless of the lack of national statistics and state reports, however, international investigations and reports have stepped in to interrogate the failure of the state to provide special protection for women during the Lebanese Civil War. One such investigation is the *People on War Country Report: Lebanon,* published by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in November 1999 in order to promote understanding of the effects of the LCW on Lebanese women. For example, when asked how many of a list of twelve negative effects of the war they had experienced, 85% of Lebanese women said they had been the victim of at least one, compared with 89% of men. 42% of women reported experiencing more than four such incidents, compared with 47% of men. The report also reveals that although men were twice as likely to have been imprisoned, kidnapped, or tortured in LCW, the difference with respect to being wounded in the fighting was quite slight (17 % of men versus 11% of women). Other tragedies endured by Lebanese peoples during the war are also comparable across gender, such as losing a family member (30 % each), being forced to leave home (42% versus 44 %), serious damage to property (47 % each), or loss of contact with a close relative (59 % versus 62 %). The Red Cross findings thus underscore the significant and enduring ways in which Lebanese women also suffered from the war, historical accounts of which so often erase their voices.[92] Furthermore, it must also be critically underscored that these are only the reported figures within reports limited in number themselves. Many testimonies (and lives) remain unaccounted for, including and especially Lebanese women more broadly and Druze women more specifically.

As these statistics underscore, the direct and indirect ways in which Lebanese women experience/d the civil war are vast. Yet, we are far less likely to hear (and listen to) their stories. For Druze women, who already exist in spaces of heightened invisibility due to the esoteric and closed-off nature of the Druze, these silences are even more profound. In my analysis of Druze women's stories, I attribute the pervasive inter- and intra-community silencings and erasures that envelop their stories to social and cultural situatedness within a sphere of what I call *dishonorable death*, which, I argue, is in tension with the notions of honor often attached to Druze men's deaths. Rather, dishonorable death, in my purview, is deeply connected to the prevalent and gendered discourses of shame attached to women in the transnational world.[93] As the public nature of martyrdom and death in war, for men, is so often depicted as honorable, the private and often taboo nature of Druze women's stories–which can and do include war-related traumas involving domestic, sexual, and gender violence–informs their situatedness within the realm of the dishonorable. As such, they are not to be discussed. Moreover, in their engagements with interpersonal bodily violence, they are deeply imbricated within social constructions of shame across transnational Arab and Druze communities. As Arab women across the world, many of us grow up fearing what we are saying, doing, wearing is *a'ayb* (the Arabic word for shameful that many of us beginning hearing at a very young age). For the Druze in particular, shame is not only gendered, but also exists in tension with *al a'ard*, or gendered notions of honor.[94] As a central content of the Druze faith is to protect *al a'ard*, then a violation of *al a'ard*, though deeply harmful for both men and women, carries particularly damning repercussions for

[93] For more on the tension between shame and honor as it exists within the transnational Arab world and Druze communities more specifically, see El-Eid, Jarmakani, Naime "A'ala Qalbek: Introducing a Feminist Druze Framework," forthcoming.

[94] For example, a very common curse used in Lebanon is *yela'an a'ardak* which is a threat to violate/harm/sully the women of one's family. The immense popularity of this curse itself points to a commonality in threatening and actual violence against women, particularly by men.

the women whose honor has been sullied. Even in a different life, body, and time, this dishonor carries for Druze women, similar to the ways war honor carries for Druze men. It also informs the silencing of their stories and traumas, which, in collaboration with fellow Druze women, we here break.

Druze Women: Reframing Heteropatriarchal Structures of War, Nation, & Reincarnation

In the summer of 2022, I paid a visit to the home of a Druze family in the mountains of Lebanon, where I shared a meal with three generations of women–a daughter, a mother, and a grandmother. All three of these women were from the same family and had been born and raised in the same village, located in a Druze area of Mount Lebanon. The daughter, who for the purposes of this chapter I will refer to as Amal, is a housewife and mother in her 40s. Her mother is a housewife in her 60s. Amal's grandmother was a sheikha in her 90s.[95] These women were accompanied by Amal's brother, a single man in his 30s who was also born and raised in Lebanon, but currently lives abroad. I had been invited to their home because Amal's brother had heard I was interviewing reincarnated Druze peoples who were willing to speak with me about their reincarnation stories. He connected me with Amal, who spent the evening generously sharing with me the difficulties she contended with as a reincarnated Druze woman, particularly as a young child. Amal's stories, like many reincarnation testimonies, are deeply painful and traumatic. In her past life, having spent years enduring the miseries of both an abusive husband and father, Amal committed suicide by ingesting poison in front of the father she hated. In her present life, Amal began speaking about these traumas at only two years old. By the age of six,

[95] A sheikha is a female Druze religious figure.

Amal's present life family had encouraged Amal to stop talking about her past life. Amal remains deeply haunted by her past life memories.

The profound difficulty Amal contends with in discussing past life traumas, particularly those surrounding her death, makes evident the gendered traumas and pressures many Druze women, particularly the *natqeen*, must endure across time and space. "Still the hatred comes until this day," her brother told me, speaking in her presence of the way Amal feels about her past life husband, who, she believes, played a large part in her eventual decision to commit suicide. Amal not only distinctly remembered the tragic moment in which she ingested poison to take her own life, but also the names and appearances of the men who abused her in her past life, particularly her father and husband. Moreover, Amal remembers the Lebanese town in which she lived with her husband and children before she died. Until today, Amal cannot enter this town without enduring great emotional distress. What Amal's story thus makes clear is the way that her traumas have carried across lives, bodies, borders, and time.

Importantly, Amal's past life death, though it happened within the private/domestic realm and did not involve any direct or public military involvement, occurred during the time of the Lebanese Civil War and thus must not be understood as separate from the war's pervasive violences. As recently argued by feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe in *Twelve Feminist Lessons of War* (2023), the social and political influences that shape wars across the globe—which include military recruitment, economic collapse, sexual assault, reproductive rights—are not only deeply gendered, but they pervade women's lives before, during, and in the aftermath of war. Violences and traumas against women in war are also less studied than those of men. When considering the Druze, whose communities at large always already exist in spaces of obscurity and/or misinformation due to their limited numbers and closed-off nature, breaking the silences

surrounding the traumas of Druze women thus takes on a heightened critical importance. It is also very difficult to do.

Indeed, in addition to the state-enforced cultural amnesia regarding the violences of the LCW, the silencing of women's stories, particularly in their relation to trauma, also exists *within* Druze communities, as evidenced in the opening anecdote to this chapter and with the analysis of the character of Lamia in chapter two. This silencing also happened to Amal. In her present life, Amal began remembering her past life at the age of two. Though Amal, having been so young, cannot remember what it was like when she first began "talking" in the Druze sense of speaking about reincarnation memories, her mother clearly remembers the ways in which Amal felt the continuous need to tell her story. "She would go overboard with talking," her mother revealed, "Like she would tell everyone and talk, everything in her she would want to say. Sometimes we would silence her." When I asked her why she felt the need to silence her daughter, Amal's mother replied, "They say the kids get bothered and upset, so because of that parents might try to make them forget, so that they don't get upset. Like forget it, that previous life is over, live the life you are living now." Indeed, of the reincarnation stories I have heard, several families have turned to silencing as a way of "protecting" the reincarnated person from their haunting past, which is often riddled with trauma and pain. This seems to be the particular case for reincarnated Druze women, who often must contend with the pain of remembering a traumatic past, being forced into a state of silence about that past, and the paradoxical burden of carrying forward Druze values and histories, which include the centrality of reincarnation to Druze religion and culture.

Furthermore, the silencing of a traumatic past can also be retraumatizing. In order to get Amal to stop "talking," her family, as Amal put it, albeit laughingly, would "threaten" her.

Whenever Amal would talk, her current family would threaten to take her to her past life family, whom she took her own life to escape from. With this, by the age of six, Amal stopped talking about her past life. She maintains this difficulty in "talking" until today. Because she was silenced at a young age, Amal no longer remembers in great detail the reincarnation stories she used to tell. In fact, her mother and her grandmother, having heard Amal talk so much as a child, now have a better recollection of what Amal at one time remembered so vividly (though her grandmother has since passed away). The carrying of these memories and traumas, here, is thus distinctly gendered.

Indeed, these Druze women's stories often are carried by and pass along gendered circuits. As another reincarnated Druze woman in her 40s, who I shall here call Nisrine, shared with me "During the early years of my childhood, as I was just beginning to articulate words, I recounted a captivating tale that left my family astounded. I spoke of another sister, with different parents, sharing intricate details about their lives. [Name redacted for privacy], my sister, cried while listening to my ramblings.[96] This peculiar recollection prompted my mother to grab a pencil and paper, suspecting that I might be recounting a past life." In her testimony, Nisrine revealed the deep emotional impact her reincarnation story had on her sister.[97] She also described, in particular, her mother's role as a listener and, as such, co-witness. As such, Nisrine's mother, in listening to her story, helped her heal. As Nisrine went on to disclose, "Though emotionally challenging for a young child, revisiting [past life] memories became a burden my mother assisted me in carrying, diligently documenting every detail." Indeed, Druze

[96] Note the connection here to the way Sarah also describes Lamia's testimonies as "ramblings," as examined in chapter two (126).

[97] For another example of how Druze women today are profoundly impacted by their sister's and mother's reincarnation testimonies, see Sarah Aridi's non-fiction *New York Times* article "My Sister Remembers Her Past Life. Somehow, I Believe Her" (July 2021).

women's reincarnation stories, I have found, are often shared in private to mothers or other female family members or in the intimate gendered spaces in which women gather together– cooking dinner, drinking coffee and, of course, the popular Druze tea, matté.[98] As one American Druze reincarnated woman who I shall call Yasmine shared with me, when Yasmine began saying she was not from "here" but a place "far away" at around two years old "my mom and aunt helped me deal" whereas her dad was indifferent if not discouraging. When Yasmine began experiencing such deep fear and anxiety about being in bathrooms and using toilets that were not "hers" that, as a child between the ages of two to four, she developed multiple UTIs, it was her mom and aunt that would listen to her, even setting up a kiddie pool for her to use to urinate. Accordingly, Yasmine shared that her mother, like Amal's, has a better memory of her reincarnation testimony that Yasmine does herself. As Druze women share these stories with each other, they thus help heal both themselves and one another, assisting each other in carrying the past life traumas that often feel like a "burden." In turn, these stories break critical silences—here across a specifically gendered domestic realm—shaping generations of Druze across time and space, making evident gendered relationalities, possibilities, and (im)possibilities between Arab bodies and traumas within and beyond the SWANA region.[99] As Amal's, Nisrine's, and Yasmine's testimonies underscore the gendered ways in which women's stories circulate between women, their stories thus, in many ways, parallel Alameddine's fictional representation of Lamia in the novel *I, the Divine*, as discussed in chapter two.

[98] For a compelling theorization on what the intimacy of Druze women's spaces makes possible, see Deena Naime's dissertation "Sobhiyat w Zyarat: Generations of Druze Feminism Through Shared Spaces, Emotional Intimacy, and Care" (forthcoming).

[99] For a fantastic analysis of how Arab women hold an underexamined role as conduits of memory in relation to traumas of the transnational Arab world, here, specifically, the Nakba, see Humphries & Khalili "Gender of Nakba Memory" (*Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* 2007).

Like Amal, Alameddine's Lamia committed suicide as a response to gender violence within the domestic sphere. Like Lamia, Amal was also silenced and retraumatized by her family when she began telling "everyone" about her traumatic past life experiences. Moreover, it is Lamia's sister Sarah who discovers Lamia's secret letters, which reveal Lamia's knowledge of how and why Lamia committed suicide in her past life. The pattern of other Druze women remembering and carrying traumatic reincarnation memories of a female Druze family member was also detailed in *I, the Divine*, as it is Lamia's sister Amal who is described as beginning to remember Lamia's story better than Lamia herself because Lamia was so frequently silenced by her family. In Alameddine's novel, Lamia's knowledge of this trauma becomes a secret passed and held between the women of the family much in the way Amal's stories are passed amongst and narrated by her mother and grandmother, who now know/knew these stories better than Amal herself. In listening to and sharing Amal's story, it is also important to note that Amal's brother is the one who provided me "access" to Amal, much in the same way that, in Alameddine's novel, Hammoud, Lamia's grandfather, controls the mobility of Lamia's self and narrative within the public sphere. Similarly, Amal's brother was not only present during our conversation, but facilitated the conversation at several points, often exhibiting a protectiveness of his sister given the deeply traumatic and painful nature of her testimony, which I was, in a sense, making public. I note this to mark a pattern of heteropatriarchal structures of control surrounding the public circulation of these narratives, which, as I elaborate more below, involves their sensitive and often "taboo" imbrications with domestic and interpersonal violence, thus tainting them as shameful or dishonorable.

Furthermore, in listening to Amal and Nisrine's stories, it is critical to chart the ways in which these reincarnation narratives do and do not intersect with those of the Druze men.

Importantly, Amal and Nisrine's testimonies, unlike the tales of war and martyrdom often told by reincarnated Druze men, are centered in the private and domestic sphere. For example, like Amal, Nisrine also remembers having died at home. She remembers standing on the balcony watching her severely ill past life father, then falling from the balcony due to an absence of railings during the Lebanese Civil War, since which damaged infrastructure remains a pervasive issue in Lebanon.[100] Though Nisrine expressed a desire as an adolescent to reconnect with her past life family, her past life parents and the two children whom she especially vividly remembered and expressed "deep affection" for, guidance from a psychologist led her parents to discourage reconnection out of concerns for Nisrine's mental health. Indeed, concerns for mental health often seem to inform familial decisions to encourage reincarnated Druze girls and women to remember and reconnect with their past lives and family members. This is a significant difference I have traced between the reincarnation stories of Druze men and women, as men are much more likely to be encouraged and assisted in locating their past life families, and doing so is even celebrated.

For example, Nader is a Druze man in his early 40s who I spoke to in Lebanon. Nader remembers his past life in great detail and has done so from a very young age. These powerful memories deeply shaped Nader's childhood and upbringing, as he would frequently speak about the family and life he lost after being shot by an enemy soldier during the war. Interestingly, Nader's inability and unwillingness to forget his past life forged a space of deep interconnection and possibility in his current one. As a teenager, Nader received blessings from his parents to locate and seek out his past life family, permissions which mark a cultural albeit gendered norm for Druze families. Upon doing so, Nader verified his belonging to his past life family both

[100] In another example, a different reincarnated Druze woman I talked to for this project also died at home on her balcony during a shelling incident during the LCW.

emotionally and materially: he was able to detail intimate family knowledges and histories to his past life family as well as, as the soldier and self-described "defender" of the family, give them the previously undisclosed location of where he had hid the family weapons.[101] After these verifications were made, Nader was wholly embraced by and himself fully embraced his past life family, so much so that until his immigration to Canada several years back Nader would spend at least one weekend a month sleeping at his past life family's home. His past life children, now close to him in age, became his dear friends. Indeed, according to Nader, his past life children, in this life, have practically taken on the role of his siblings.

Nader's story, one of many examples in which Druze *natqeen* form intimate relationships in their present lives with their past life families, thus makes evident the gendered ways in which Druze interconnections reframe and expand notions of kinship at the intersections of the real and the imaginary. These unique forms of Druze kinship, I contend, are emboldened by the Druze religious tenets that one cannot convert to being Druze; indeed, this closed-off and guarded nature of the Druze reifies their situatedness within discourses of the "mysterious" and "secret." As the Druze believe that you not only must be born Druze to be Druze, you must also be Druze to have (albeit uneven) access to Druze religious texts and knowledges. With this, the Druze therefore always already exist in a space of exclusionary kinship as a community that often describes itself as "one big family" across widespread and diasporic spaces, hence the saying "We are born in each other's houses" (Khuri cited in Radwan, 132). Just being Druze thus engenders a real, genetic, and even biologically essentialist form of kinship and intimacy across

[101] Particularly during the time of the Lebanese Civil War, it was not uncommon for men to store or hide weapons in their homes for defense. Many of these weapons remain in Lebanese homes today. Interestingly, a frequent mode of "verification" for Druze *natqeen* in reconnecting with their past life families is to reveal to them where items such as weapons, money, and/or jewelry are hidden. This verification process, it is important to note, is also particularly classed. For example, those who are reincarnated into what are read as "lower class" Druze families often have a more difficult time being "verified" or (re)connecting with past life families should they be of a "higher class."

transnational Druze communities one that, I contend here, is underscored by the Druze belief in reincarnation and the corresponding beliefs that all people are reincarnated and that Druze will always reincarnate to Druze.[102] Moreover, following these core ethnoreligious beliefs of the Druze is thus the popular Druze practice of endogamy, which maintains Druze community, religion, traditions and even gender across time and space, thus carrying particularly gendered implications.

In tandem with the notions of biological or "real" kinship existing amongst tight-knit transnational Druze communities also exists, I contend, the imaginary. To clarify, my use of the term "imaginary" in relation to some forms of Druze kinship here is not to cast doubt upon or question the Druze belief in reincarnation.[103] It is instead used to signal the fact that even if Druze reincarnation is not "real" the social, cultural, and historical implications of it are, an argument which this dissertation project as a whole explores and illuminates. In this sense, even if Druze reincarnation cannot be found scientifically and/or biologically "provable," the intimacies and kinships Druze *natqeen* like Nader form between themselves, their past life families, and their current life families are in fact very real.[104] Indeed, Nader's testimony shows these intimacies can be as real as those held between current life family members, if not even more. This is true for Nader, who strongly maintains the belief that he lost his previous life during the Lebanese Civil War, and for his past life family who, via the Druze belief in

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[102] See, for example, the "Druze Y-DNA Project" started in 2001, one of the goals of which is to "identify the main Y-DNA terminal haplogroups for Druze families & to infer the agnatic kinships amongst members through genetic analysis" of males with Druze patrilineal ancestry (https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/druze/about/goals).
[103] For an interesting analysis of what he describes as "imagined communities," particularly in relation to nation and nationality, see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).
[104] For a review of academic literature on Druze in relation to notions of kinship, see Chad Kassem Radwan, "Formative Cultural Facets: Proximity, Endogamy, Kinship and Reincarnation" (*The Sweet Burden: Constructing and Contesting Druze Heritage and Identity in Lebanon* pp. 12-19).

reincarnation and the afterlives of memory for the Druze *natqeen*, are able to, in a sense, get back the beloved soldier and family member the war took from them.

Of course, since the common belief is that since the *natqeen* usually die traumatic deaths, they unexpectedly leave behind children and families, whose memories they often carry and mourn. I have found that these losses, memories, and (re)connections are also gendered. Indeed, most of the reincarnated women I spoke to and heard stories of specifically remember their past life children in fond and intimate ways, whereas the majority of the men I spoke to or heard of made little to no mention of their past life children. Moreover, the men who did mention the children of their past lives did so in much less intimate ways. As Nisrine relayed to me, as a child she "eloquently described a world where I was married with two children [names deleted for privacy], providing comprehensive portraits of their lives and expressing deep affection for them." One pattern I also noticed for reincarnated Druze women who carried loving memories of their past life family members in this life was that of caretaking practices, in particular, wanting to prepare meals for past life loved ones. As Amal and her family described, when Amal was around two, she began fondly remembering the four children of her past life and deeply wanting to take care of them. "She would say I would want to cook. We would tell her let's go out to eat, she would say 'I want to cook for my kids. My son loves this food, my daughter loves this food.'" "I would stay in the house as a kid" Amal said, "holding a spoon and pot and cooking, fixing food." One woman, who I will call Shadia, would often wait by the window as a child. When her family asked her what she was waiting for she would say "my children." Another reincarnated woman I spoke to would, as a young child, often attempt to make food for her past life husband. This love for children and/or family that may carry into a reincarnated person's present life is also evident in the Alameddine's fictional representation of Lamia, who not only

committed suicide in her past life in protection of her daughter but carried the deep love she had for her child into her next life (see chapter two).[105]

However, the possibilities of these "imaginary" kinships also have gendered limitations. With these stories, it is important to consider the multiple ways have charted in which Druze families do or do not investigate and trace the reincarnation stories of their loved ones by attempting to locate their past life families and build connections. Though some reincarnated peoples, like Amal, refuse to build relationships with their past-life families due to their inherited traumas, others, like Nader, thrive on these connections, developing relationships with their past life families that can be as strong as the connections they have to their families in their present life. However, testimonies such as Nader's also call attention to the ways in which in these (re)connections are gendered. Indeed, my conversations with the Druze have revealed that reincarnated Druze women are generally less encouraged or strictly not allowed to reach out to past life families for a range of reasons, one of the most popular being concerns of mental health as described in Nisrine's testimony above.

Moreover, I have found that mothers in particular may feel threatened by the idea or practice of their children (re)connecting with a past life family, as it threatens a sense of "ownership" over their children. As one reincarnated Druze man told me, "I don't really talk about it (my past life). It really bothers my parents, especially my mother." With Amal, though her mother silenced her as a child, it was the hatred and fear Amal carried for her past life husband and father that prevented her from reconnecting with them, even though she dearly

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[105] Again, it is important to note here that Druze reincarnation, including the ability to reconnect with a past life family, is also classed. The Druze *natqeen*, especially when born into a family that is of a "lower" class or family than their past life one, are often asked to verify their memories/connection by stating knowledge specific to their past life (e.g. pointing out a family home in a neighborhood, demonstrating knowledge of the location of family heirlooms or money, and/or generally possessing information that only the person who had passed would know). For one example of how class intersections with reincarnation, see analysis of Lamia in chapter two.

missed her past life children and remembered exactly where they were. In fact, despite happy stories of (re)reconnection such as Bassel's (as detailed in chapter one) and Nader's, in all my conversations with the reincarnated Druze and in all the stories that I have heard I yet to come across one example of a reincarnated woman with intimate, loving connections to past life family. I believe the gendered nature of these reconnections is due to the taboo or dishonorable nature of many Druze women's past life deaths, which also shapes the gendered ways in which these stories are/are not told. As, according to feminist scholar Nira Yuval-Davis– "it is women–and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia–who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally, and symbolically" (Gender & Nation 3). In considering testimonies of the *natqeen*, equally important to analyzing the ways in which state-enforced silences are being broken by reincarnated soldiers is thus interrogating the ways in which heteropatriarchal structures of the state, including discourses on shame and honor, are resisted and disrupted by testimonies of reincarnated Druze women—when they are heard and listened to.

Moreover, as situated within the domestic sphere, Druze women's reincarnation testimonies do not explicitly read as the traditional civil war narratives that often involve and circulate across the public and collective spheres of Lebanon and its diasporas. However, I contend that we cannot read these stories as separate from the more openly discussed reincarnation testimonies of the LCW, nor can we understand the full implications of the war without listening to stories of reincarnated Druze women. I thus read Amal's and Nisrine's stories, and others like reincarnation narratives like theirs, as underscoring what Mary Hawkesworth describes as war as a structure and mechanism of gendered power that reinforces and perpetuates women's subordination within domestic, national, and international realms ("Women, War, and Peace" 2009). Therefore, as we analyze the multiple ways in which war is

carried out within and shapes the public sphere, we must also attend to the ways in which women—and oft-invisibilized Druze women in particular—are subjugated to its traumas within private sphere. Doing so, I argue, offers critical means and routes of understanding the traumas of war more broadly and the ongoing implications of the Lebanese Civil War more specifically.

As connected to the domestic/private sphere rather than the public one, it is important to attend to the ways in which Druze women's reincarnation narratives, however, carry different implications than those of Druze men, particularly in relation to the notions of honor discussed above. As I listen to Druze women's stories, I have found that as Druze men are mobilized to fight for *al a'ard*, or women's honor, within the public sphere, women, in turn, become subjugated to war violences predominantly within the private sphere. As follows, though notions of men's martyrdom, within and beyond the Druze, are deeply imbricated in notions of honor, it is very rare to hear honor in reference to Druze women's stories, if we hear these stories at all. For example, though her current life family are avid believers in reincarnation and her story is less directly related to domestic violence than others, Nisrine, like many other Druze women I spoke to for this project, revealed an ongoing anxiety about making her reincarnation story public. In our conversation, Amal expressed great emotional, psychological, and verbal difficulty in describing the aspects of domestic and interpersonal violence involved in the "telling" of her traumatic reincarnation story. In another instance, let's listen to Abeer.

In her present life, Abeer immigrated to the U.S. from Lebanon several years ago. She is currently in her 30s, and a beautiful, successful working woman from a well-respected family with whom she is very close. Given what she considers to be the immense blessings of her present life, Abeer faces great difficulty in talking about and contending with her past life, in which she was murdered on her wedding day by an obsessed and enraged man who did not wish

to see her marry someone else. This trauma continues to deeply impact and haunt Abeer, who vividly remembers and carries the trauma of being shot to death in her wedding gown. Abeer also expressed great concern over the ways in which this horrific memory of gender violence has often hindered her from developing close interpersonal or romantic relationships with men in her present life. As she recalled the details of her traumatic death, Abeer expressed great sadness and pain, trying and failing to hold back her tears from the moment she began telling her story. In my role as listener and co-witness, we grieved together for a long time. At the end of our conversation, Abeer expressed deep appreciation for my attentiveness to her story. She encouraged me to keep listening to, and thus helping, other reincarnated Druze in contending with their past life traumas.

As I listened to Abeer's story, I was reminded of the fictional representation of another Druze woman in Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine.* Indeed, in the novel, Sarah and Lamia's younger sister, Rana, is shot and murdered by an obsessed and enraged solider whose offer of marriage Rana rejected. These parallels between fiction and non-fiction reincarnation narratives of Druze women thus, in my estimation, point to value of tracing (often unseen and/or undervalued) connections between fiction and non-fiction reincarnation testimonies of Druze women, particularly given their scarcity across genres. Moreover, these testimonies critically and importantly allude to a commonality and pervasiveness of these types of violences against transnational Druze women as represented and testified to in both fiction and non-fiction forms. For Abeer, on an individual and personal level, the violence of her murder did not "die" with her body–the afterlives of this trauma very much shape her present life today. Moreover, on a collective national front, Abeer's testimony, and others like Abeer's, are examples of the many types of violence that are exacerbated by militarism, which include but are not limited to assault,

trafficking, prostitution, and domestic violence (Hawkesworth 565). Indeed, as feminist scholars such as Mary Hawkesworth have found, women are not only most displaced/made refugees by war, but they often also make up the majority of casualties in war (555, 564). In the context of the Lebanese Civil War, these disproportionalities are all too easily invisibilized in the sparse official war archives of the Lebanese state, in which the experiences traumas of all Lebanese, but especially Lebanese women—be they soldiers or civilians—are buried in mass amounts of erasure and gross misinformation. Reincarnated Druze women's testimonies, as I assert in this chapter, therefore underscore the ways in which we must listen to women's stories in order to more fully contend with the multiple and ongoing ways the Lebanese Civil War profoundly impacts and shapes Lebanon and its diasporas, including and particularly women's lives.

Given their frequent associations with the private sphere, domestic violence, and dishonor/shame, Druze women's reincarnation narratives, I have found, are more likely to be silenced. Indeed, Lebanese Druze women with past life memories contend with these silencing at multiple levels. Firstly, heteropatriarchal societies at large often enforce collective gendered silences in testifying to trauma. As discussed, of the historical and ongoing traumas of the Lebanese Civil War, the Lebanese state itself has enacted and enforced a collective cultural and social state-sponsored amnesia that, I argue, Lebanese women are particularly affected by. On a more private/individual level, I have found that reincarnated Druze women are more likely than men to be subjected to intracommunal and/or familial silencing of their traumatic past life memories. Finally, reincarnated Druze women may and sometimes do censor themselves, particularly as adult women contending with the often taboo, private, and thus "dishonorable" nature of their reincarnation stories. All of these silencings are profoundly connected to notions of stigma and shame that surrounds women's traumatic experience in particular. Furthermore,

these silencings are connected to the risks of testifying to and making known broader patterns of interpersonal, domestic, and gender violence evident within and beyond reincarnated Druze women's testimonies, patterns that, I argue, place patriarchy under threat in a society (one of many) that strongly upholds heteropatriarchal notions of family and honor. For Druze women, testifying to traumatic interpersonal experiences thus carries the risk of being dishonored on individual and collective levels, the anxiety of which I felt palpable in almost all of my conversations with Druze women.

Due to these threats and risks of dishonor and shame, as I note above, I have found that Druze women's reincarnation stories most popularly circulate orally in women's circles and spaces or in private conversations amongst women, if at all. One such story, for example, is that which I shall call "The Woman and the Well." Importantly, this narrative, unlike the others, was not one I heard from the "Woman" herself, rather, it is a story that is passed around women's circles. Indeed, though I heard this story multiple times while conducting research for this project, it was primarily orally circulated between and amongst Druze women in the mountains of Lebanon.[106] Its telling, like those of the narratives I describe above, also renders visible significant political, social, historical, and gendered implications for understanding the ongoing nature of trauma and memory in Lebanon. The story goes that there is a reincarnated Druze woman, who I shall call "the Woman" in the mountains of Lebanon who remembers her past life, particularly the tragic details of her past life death. In her present life, the Woman began asserting that she was murdered in her past life by a jealous and angry mother-in-law, who pushed her into a well. Remembering intimate details such as her past life home, family name,

[106] I have been given the name and location of "The Woman in the Well," but have not attempted to personally seek her out for this project. A mutual contact has relayed that "the Woman," due to the traumatic nature of her reincarnation experiences, does not wish to pursue any further public testimony on this matter.

and village, and "telling" them to those around her, the Woman and her present life family are said to have instigated an investigation of this violent murder. The Woman's past life body is said to have been discovered and charges were brought against the past life family, who were then prosecuted.

The story of "The Woman and the Well" is important for multiple reasons. Firstly, it points to not just the personal but the legal ramifications of reincarnation testimony. As noted in the analysis of Bassel in chapter one, reincarnation testimony is not a legitimate form of legal testimony in Lebanon. However, the Woman's past life family is said to have been prosecuted under Druze law, not national law. This is possible because Lebanon does not have a national civil code that regulates "personal status matters," which include profoundly gendered issues such as—to name a few--marriage, divorce, child custody, financial rights, adultery, and domestic violence.[107] Instead, Lebanon presently and has long operated under a system of judicial pluralism that contains fifteen separate personal status laws for eighteen religious sects put into place by religious authorities in order to "protect Lebanon's religious diversity."[108] In actuality, the lack of an equal personal status law in Lebanon has enabled differential treatment in contending with these issues, including a severely discriminatory impact on Lebanese women, who often experience violences under the domestic and private realm and that thus fall under the purview of personal status matters (See, for example, the 2015 Human Rights Watch report, "Unequal and Unprotected: Women's Rights under Lebanese Personal Status Laws"). For Lebanese women regardless of religion, the personal status law system thus leaves women

[107] For a strong analysis of the ways sex, sexuality, and sect shape and are shaped by law, secularism, and sovereignty in Lebanon see Maya Mikdashi's *Sextarianism: Sovereignty, Secularism, and the State in Lebanon* (2022).
[108] Druze personal status code was codified by the Lebanese parliament on February 24, 1948, and continues to be implemented today (Human Rights Watch 2015).

vulnerable to discretionary and biased practices in terms of the resolution of domestic issues in religious courts. Cases like "the Woman and the Well" therefore importantly put the gendered biases of these practices into question. Moreover, the story of the "Woman and the Well" also opens up the question of reincarnation testimony in Druze personal status courts, which follow religious law; given the centrality of reincarnation to the faith, Druze personal status courts therefore do not (and cannot) deny reincarnation testimony in the ways of the Lebanese state.

The story of "the Woman and the Well," amongst the countless other reincarnation stories Druze recite and circulate, is but one example of the importance of oral tradition and storytelling to transnational Druze communities. As noted, it is hard to find a Druze person, both in Lebanon and in the diaspora, who has not heard at least one Druze reincarnation story, if not several or many. With this, the gendered circulation and curation of these oral traditions and narratives should and must be further examined, particularly given the traumatic nature of these testimonies. If, as Hawkesworth importantly argues and the reincarnation stories of Druze women that I have spoken to corroborate, women experience increased levels of domestic and sexual violence in war time (Hawkesworth 555), it follows that among the ongoing ramifications of the Lebanese Civil War include public and private traumas, violences, and, importantly, silences.

As war perpetuates women's subordination (Hawkesworth 574), then we must unpack the ways in which the reputations and positionalities of Druze men as particularly militaristic, fearless, and strong warriors of the mountains may have reinforced domestic and interpersonal violences against Druze women both historically and today. Every single reincarnated Druze woman I spoke to for this project, for example, expressed some form of struggle, hesitation, shame, fear, and pain in telling their stories—emotions that were not as palpable if at all present

during my conversations with reincarnated Druze men. I attribute these different affective responses to the fact that the traumas Druze women were describing–which critically revealed patterns of domestic, interpersonal, and gender violence–are more of a private than public nature, and thus, for all of these women, had more to do with shame or dishonor than honor and glory. If then, feminist scholars understand war as "a dehumanizing process" that relies and reinscribes male power and heteropatriarchal structures (Hawkesworth 570), I contend that Druze women's reincarnation narratives may serve as counter discourses to hegemonic understandings of Druze reincarnation narratives as related to Druze men, martyrdom, honor, and the Lebanese Civil War. As such, Druze women's reincarnation narratives and testimonies interrupt, reframe, and, indeed, even threaten pervasive heteropatriarchal discourses of the war.

Rethinking Martyrdom and Witnessing in the Lebanese Civil War

In centering the testimonies of reincarnated Druze women above, I do not suggest that we negate the stories of reincarnated Druze men. Rather, I aim to chart the undertheorized and often unseen ways in which all of the stories Druze *natqeen* carry multiple historical, political, social, and cultural implications, within and across forms of nation-making and belonging, kinship and connection, and transnationalism and in-betweenness. In this dissertation at large, I chart the profound significance of the testimonies of the Druze *natqeen* across media genres in relation to the ways in which the violences of Lebanese Civil War are (or are not) remembered, as well as the ways that individual and collective trauma carry for the Druze and Lebanese more broadly across time and space. As analyzed in chapter one of this dissertation, one of the most-known contemporary cases of reincarnation in Lebanon is that of Bassel Abi Chahine, who I spoke to

for this project and here do not assign a pseudonym given the public nature of his testimony and narrative.

Importantly, the personal testimony Bassel shared with me, like that of many other reincarnated Druze men, is also deeply imbricated within notions of martyrdom. Upon first suspicion that Bassel was Yousef al-Jawhary, his friends and family began checking martyr lists from Aley, the region in which Bassel remembers dying.[109] They also began collecting contact information for members of the al-Jawhari family to inquire as to whether or not they had "a martyr in the family." Upon finding and meeting the al-Jawhari family, Bassel's inherited memories served as sufficient evidence that Bassel was the reincarnated martyr Yousef. As Bassel shared with me, the al-Jawhari family had kept a "hero martyr medal" issued by the People's Liberation Army commandment to "the hero Youssef Al-Jawhari." At a celebration dinner for their reconnection, the al-Jawhari family granted Bassel this medal. Furthermore, Bassima, Bassel's past life sister, had washed Youssef's old army clothes and gave them to Bassel. Importantly, the martyrdom and honor Yousef's death garnered carried and was granted to Bassel, despite Bassel never having served in the war in his present life. This testimony thus makes evident the ways in which honor and martyrdom, for Druze civil war soldiers, carries across time, space, body, and life for Druze civil war soldiers much in the way their traumas do. The stories of reincarnated Druze martyrs can be and often carry notions of glory, celebration, and reconnection in ways that many reincarnated Druze women's stories do not.

Along these lines, another person I spoke to in Lebanon who testifies to having died as a soldier in the Lebanese Civil War is a man whom I will refer to as Fareed. Fareed is a

[109] Though these lists are often inaccurate, as discussed in chapter one, they do provide some form of scant record of those killed during the war. Critical to note, these records primarily list the names of men. As I will discuss below, this is not because women did not die during the LCW. They just have not recorded in the (albeit also insufficient and unreliable) ways that men have.

reincarnated Druze man in his forties born, raised, and currently living in Lebanon. Having been traumatically murdered in Lebanon during the LCW, Fareed's memories of his past life death are very visceral. He remembers, against the advice of other soldiers, leaving the camp where he and many other soldiers were stationed. He had been feeling pent-up and exhausted and wanted to go for a walk with a fellow Druze soldier from the same camp. Importantly, Fareed claims they felt safe going for a walk because they were Druze and thus the Israeli soldiers stationed nearby would surely not shoot them (a claim I explore in the following paragraph). This decision proved to be fatal, as both Fareed and his Druze comrade were shot and murdered immediately upon their initial sighting by the Israeli army. In his current life, upon investigating why he and his friend were killed by the Israelis despite their being Druze, Fareed told me their dark clothing was reported to have allowed the Israelis to mistake them for enemy Palestinians. Had they known they were Druze, Fareed believes, the Israelis would not have killed them. Instead, Fareed was shot multiple times from his leg all the way up to his chest.[110]

Fareed's reincarnation carries several personal, psychological, as well as sociopolitical implications. Upon investigating his past life death, he was able to receive closure over his murder in his present life, as evidenced by his stated understanding as to why he and his friend were shot and killed by the Israelis. Fareed's story is also another way of understanding and seeing the multi-faceted and deeply sectarian nature of the Lebanese Civil War, which involved many international forces and agendas, such as those of Israel, Palestine, the U.S., Russia, Syria, and others–nations and parties maintain external influence in Lebanon today.[111] Finally, Fareed's

[110] Though biological and physical reincarnation markings are beyond the scope of this dissertation project, it is worth noting here that Fareed in his present life claims to feel phantom pains in his leg that he believes are reminiscent of his past life death. These physical pains and markings are not uncommon amongst reincarnated peoples (see Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology*) and call into question physical afterlives of individual past life traumas to the body.

[111] For more on the long and ongoing histories of external national influences on Lebanon leading to, during, and after the Lebanese Civil War, see, for example, Farid El Khazen's *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon: 1967-*

story is emblematic of the way Druze communities can be and are divided by projects of colonialism and nation-making within and across different national contexts. Fareed's feelings of safety around Israeli soldiers during the Lebanese Civil War--even though the Lebanese Druze were in generally opposition to the occupying Israeli forces and in solidarity with Palestinians during the LCW--is due to the unique positionality of the Druze in Israel and Palestine, which Druze scholars such as Kais Firro have described as "Druze particularism." [112] When the occupation of Palestine began leading to the Nakba of 1948 and creation of the Israeli state, many Druze chose not to resist the Zionist army in the hopes that their cooperation would prevent their forced removal from their beloved homes and lands (see discussion of the special relationship Druze have to the land, aka *al ard*, below). This predominant lack of Druze military resistance at the start of the Israeli occupation has since informed the Druze in Israel's relatively good relations with the Israeli state, as evidenced by their participation in state politics and, importantly, the now-mandatory conscription of Druze men to the nation's military, known as Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). With this, the Druze participation in the settler-colonial project of Israel is perhaps the greatest point of intra-community tension and division amongst transnational Druze communities today. In Fareed's testimony, Druzeness and soldierhood in Lebanon becomes representative of that tension, in which, because of his Druzeness, Fareed (wrongfully) assumes he is protected in any engagements with the IDF, despite the Lebanese Druze's general opposition to the Israeli state both during the time of the war and today.[113]

1976 (2000), Ghassan Tueni's *Une guerre pour les autres* (EN: *A War of the Others*) (1985), and Andrew Arsan's *Lebanon: A Country in Fragments* (2018).

[112] For more on Druze roles in Israel, including oft-invisibilized histories of Palestinian Druze resistance to Zionism and the Israeli state, see Kais Firro's *A History of the Druzes* (1992) and "Reshaping Druze Particularism in Israel." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 40–53.

[113] In the early years of the Lebanese Civil War, Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt headed the Lebanese National Movement, a group of pan-Arabist, left-wing socialist parties that held unwavering support for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). For more on this, see Makram Rabah's *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites, and Collective Memory* (2020) and Fawwaz Traboulsi's *History of Modern Lebanon* (2012).

These sociopolitical tensions and divisions thus come to the forefront in Fareed's testimony. It is important to note that when Fareed follows the fatal belief his Druzeness will save him from being murdered by the Israeli soldiers, he is suggesting that the Druze exist in a space removed from Palestinians and even other Arabs. Indeed, the unique ways in which Druze in Israel live and participate in Zionist settler colonial state have informed their positionality as what scholars such as Sylvia Saba-Sa'di and Ahmad H. Sa'di call "non-Arab Arabs."[114] To further complicate these feelings of ambiguity and in-betweenness, it is important to note here that not only have there also been long histories of Druze resistance to the Zionist state of Israel, but there are also many Druze in Israel who have historically and continue today to identify as Palestinian.[115] With stories such as Fareed's, we thus see the transnational implications of the complex positionality of the Druze in Israel, alongside Druze living in Lebanon and other national landscapes who often hold ambiguous, uncertain, and shifting relationalities to their ethnicities, homelands, communities, and religion in relation to ongoing wars and traumas.

The testimonies of the Druze *natqeen* that I highlight above thus point to the diversity of personal and sociopolitical histories as well as ongoing implications of the Lebanese Civil War, for and beyond the Druze, so many of which are buried within state-enforced silencing of war narratives.[116] They serve as critical testimonies of the complex and invisibilized fifteen-year long Lebanese war, illuminating the war's afterlives on individual and collective fronts. Importantly, these war stories also travel within, across, and beyond Lebanese Druze diasporas in profound

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[114] See Saba-Sa'di, Sylvia, and Ahmad H. Sa'di. 2018. "State Power and the Role of Education in the Constitution of Natives' Subjectivities: The Druze in Israel." *Social Identities* 24.6: 817–35.

[115] See, for example, the Druze community youth organization and movement in Israel and Palestine, Urfod, which rejects the compulsory recruitment of Palestinian Druze men into the IDF. Urfod operates under the motto "Resist and your people will protect you."

[116] For more on the state-enforced silencing and cultural amnesia surrounding memories and narratives of the Lebanese Civil War, see Sune Haugbolle's *War & Memory in Lebanon* (2010).

ways, informing transnational, global, and gendered knowledges of the Druze, particularly in relation to Druze warriordom.

Importantly, all of the testimonies I describe above, as well as the many other stories of the Druze *natqeen* who died as fighters in the LCW are embedded in a popular global narrative of Druze warriordom. Indeed, one of the very real cultural and political effects of the Druze belief in reincarnation is the widespread belief that Druze men are said to be fearless warriors (Radwan 93).[117] As a Druze woman even in the U.S. but especially in Lebanon I have often heard this fearlessness directly linked to the Druze belief in reincarnation in that Druze fighters do not fear death as they know the soul is immortal and that they will go on to live another life. These oral testimonies and stories of the Druze community, particularly the connections of Druze males as fearless warriors, thus transcend national borders, shaping transnational understandings of the Druze in profoundly political, historical, social, and, importantly, gendered ways.

As feminist scholars have long contended in their research on gender and war, notions of war and warriordom themselves are inherently masculinist (See, for example, Yuval-Davis (1997), Hawkesworth (2009), Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009), Al-Ali &Pratt (2009), Enloe (2023)). Moreover, death in war is also often connected to and deeply embedded within masculinist constructions of honor, both within and beyond the Arab world. Indeed, the Druze are certainly no exception to these gendered constructions of war, death, and honor. As we see in the preface of *The People's Liberation Army,* of Yousef Al-Jawhary, the past life of Bassel Abi Chahine, Dr. Shawky Hamady describes a "courage and forthcoming on the battlefronts" made evident in the story of Yousef's death during battle. This tale of warriordom is seen as all the more honorable because Yousef was Druze and, as Hamady goes on to assert, "He [Yousef] knew that the Druze

[117] Graham Pitt's refers to the cliché of Druze "warrior people" in "Essential Readings."

only took up their arms to protect their mere existence and defend their rights and their culture" (9).[118] Men like Bassel, Nader, and Fareed are thus often remembered and lauded as martyrs who died for righteous and true causes, particularly by the Druze community for whom they honorably fought.[119]

However, my centering of Druze women's reincarnation testimonies in this chapter is also disrupts heteropatriarchal understandings of war and martyrdom, particularly in their capacities to bear witness to unseen and/or understudied ongoing war traumas. Interestingly, the word martyr itself in English comes from the Greek root "to witness." This explicit connection between martyrdom and witnessing in the English language is one that the Arabic language itself also makes profound and explicit. In Arabic, the word for martyr is *shaheed,* used to describe those who are believed to have honorably died in battle and war. *Shaheed/*martyr importantly shares its root with the Arabic word for witness, *shahid*, making evident the ways in which martyrdom and witnessing work in relation to one another within and beyond the Arab culture and language. Moreover, the Arabic word for testimony, *shahada,* further underscores not only the etymological relations between the terms, but the ways in which the acts of martyrdom, witnessing, and testifying are themselves inherently connected.[120] I argue that the connections and interrelations between these words and acts are both particularly palpable as well as deepened if we consider the testimonies of the Druze *natqeen*, which not only serve as

[118] For more on Bassel's reincarnation as Yousef in connection to the Lebanese Civil War, see chapter two.
[119] Though the word martyr is also used and understood outside of the Arab world, it is important to recognize that the terms martyr and martyrdom when used outside of the Arab world are often (problematically) racialized, most often connected to Arab, Muslims, and acts of global terrorism. For a discussion of how the notion of martyrdom serves as a core concept in Western European political and religious experience and an attempt to reform the disproportionate attention given to martyrdom's relation to Islam see Clayton Fordahl's *The Ultimate Sacrifice: Martyrdom, Sovereignty, and Secularization in the West* (1988).
[120]See Carol Fadda's discussion of the etymological relationships between the Arabic and English words for witnessing, martyrdom, and testifying in "Living Under Occupation: Women's Narratives of Incarceration and Resistance in South Lebanon" (forthcoming).

ethnographic narratives from those who were martyred in the Lebanese Civil War, but today provide living, embodied testimonies of the war violences they bore witness to and still carry. The testimonies of Druze *natqeen* thus serve as critical acts of resistance, disruption, rewriting, and breaking state-enforced silences surrounding the war and within transnational communities themselves.

Druze Interconnectivity: "Telling," Healing, and Moving Forward

In exploring testimonies pertaining to the Lebanese Civil War and its afterlives, it is also important to note that in listening to trauma also involves paying attention to what is not or cannot be said. As I explore different modes in Druze witnessing and testimony within and across different mediums (visual, written, oral) in the different chapters of this dissertation, the conversations I had with Druze peoples for this project also underscore the importance of paying attention to nonverbal testimony as legitimate testimony. In listening to Druze women in particular, I thus also want to note the prevalence of tears in our conversations. Indeed, as I spoke to reincarnated Druze women for this chapter, there was almost always tears, from both me and them. Some of these tears were sad, others engendered by happiness, beauty, and connection. As I cried with my interlocutors, I noted the ways in which their traumas, memories, and stories, also transformed me as a listener. As one who now carries their stories and, thus, bears witness with the *natqeen*, I offer these stories as ways for readers to also bear witness to the afterlives of trauma in Lebanon and across its diasporas. The afterlives of the ongoing civil war and of the reincarnated Druze underscore the individual and collective nature of traumatic experience. These afterlives also make evident how important it is to listen to one another, and the transformations that may occur when we do.

As Dori Laub contends of listening to traumatic testimony, "The historian is more attentive to the facts and to the written document [...] The psychoanalyst is more attentive to the internal reality and has a difficult time with the external reality. With the literary scholar, it's imagination. It's not limited to reality" (58). As Shoshana Felman asserts, "It is precisely because history as holocaust proceeds from a *failure to imagine,* that it takes an *imaginative* medium [...] to gain an insight into its historical *reality,* as well as into the attested historicity of its unimaginability" (Felman's emphasis,105). As we must pay attention to the ways in which imagination informs testimony, which must also examine how imagination thus informs history and remembrance. This includes, for Lebanon, notions of death and trauma as they are connected to constructions of honor and, relatedly, shame. As argued by Jan Willem van Henten & Ihab Saloul in *Martyrdom: Canonisation, Contestation, and Afterlives* (2020), "Imagination is thus a vital catalyst for martyrdom, for martyrs become martyrs only when others remember and honour them as such" (van Henten & Saloul 20). As reincarnated Druze women are often not considered martyrs, they are thus not often remembered or honored. Moreover, because they are not remembered, what they witness often goes unseen and unheard. In examining the afterlives of trauma in relation to the Lebanese Civil War, I thus ask us to tap into the transformative potential of our imaginations–to see what happens when we make what is seemingly "impossible" possible, particularly for reincarnated Druze women. In doing so, I contend, we more deeply understand the ways in which trauma and memory shape and inform the transnational Arab world. In this chapter and dissertation more broadly, I thus illuminate the ways in which listening to and centering Druze testimonies can help us better understand not only the Lebanese Civil War, but as well as the ways in which it (as well as other) ongoing traumas are carried, represented, or silenced across time and space. Moreover, in enhancing our

gendered understandings of reincarnation and transnational Druzeness I reveal how we can better analyze how gender dynamics operate within and beyond national cultures, nation states, and national boundaries, both in relation to trauma and, importantly, healing.

As Amal's grandmother told me during our collective conversation, *"The body goes, the soul does not go, the body goes. This is our belief."* This sheikha has since passed away. As her body has left this earth, many Druze, including her family, believe that her soul remains. As, certainly, do her words, with which I end this chapter. As analyzed throughout this dissertation, scholars of trauma and memory such as Dori Laub, and Shoshana Felman (*Testimony*) have long theorized the power, agency, and healing that comes from not only testifying to traumatic experience but being heard/listened to. This is a power and healing that is seemingly often denied to reincarnated Druze women. May we listen to their stories, carry them with us, recite them to each other. May they remain.

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CODA: Listening to Each Other Across Space/Creating Alternative Spaces

At my grandmother's deathbed, I hug my mother and ask her if she is okay. "I am okay," my mother replies, "I am imagining her being reborn. I am okay."

Is reincarnation "real?" Is any of this "provable?" These are questions I often get when I present this research to both non-Druze and sometimes even Druze audiences. This work may be greeted with skepticism or denial, especially by non-Druze, to whom these beliefs may seem "impossible" or perhaps just unfamiliar. Upon my vast engagements with audiences in Lebanon and the U.S., however, many others have welcomed this project with excitement, particularly my own Druze communities, whose lives and experiences, so often unseen and erased, are at the heart of this project. With this, because the ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation is so real to so many of us, so are the multiple historical, political, and social implications of the Druze belief in reincarnation—for and beyond the Druze—that I explore in this dissertation. Therefore, the Druze, and their stories of trauma, love, loss, and reconnection, in the words of Avery Gordon, demand their due—our attention. In conducting the research for this project, I have found a social, cultural, and academic demand within and beyond Druze communities for more intellectual studies of the Druze. I thus end this project with a reflection on future directions academic scholarship on Druze studies can and, I believe, should continue to explore, most of which center what I found to be a pressing and central preoccupation across transnational Druze communities today: Druze survival.

Though the Druze soul is immortal, the Druze faith, traditions, and cultures may not be. They must continue to be carried and taught across (increasingly precarious) times and spaces. As noted throughout this dissertation, because of their long histories of persecution and oppression at the hands of other religious sects, the Druze live in relatively isolated and

segregated spaces across the Levant, and with small diasporic communities living across the world. Their segregation, transnational and diasporic conditions of the Druze, and limited population as a whole result in a constant struggle for the Druze to preserve collective ancestral, familial, social, cultural, and religious ties across national borders and transnational states of being. My focus on reincarnation in this project thus engages one of the most prominent and widespread implications of the ethnoreligious belief in reincarnation, which importantly centers survival, rebirth, and reconnection. These notions are made evident in anecdotes like the one I share in the above epigraph, which describes a moment from the day we lost my grandmother in November 2024. This quote, one of so many I have heard from Druze contending with death and loss, underscores my contention that whether or not reincarnation is "real," the belief in survival and reconnection is profound. And, for small, widely diasporic, transnational Druze communities it is also imperative.

Druze Survival

Reincarnation, as I illuminate throughout the chapters of this dissertation, serves as an essential mode of interconnection for the Druze across borders, bodies, and time. Maintaining connections between and amongst transnational and diasporic Druze thus becomes of vital importance to these notions of cultural, religious, and familial survival, particularly for Druze women, who carry the burdens of maintaining and passing on these legacies, but whose voices remain in heightened spaces of obscurity. In listening to Druze voices across countless conversations with the Druze and engagements with Druze cultural productions both throughout my life and especially since I began the research from my project, I was struck by the pervasive anxiety surrounding the Druze futures in increasingly uncertain and violent times for the Arab world and across the globe. The concept and practice of survival thus also anticipates and

foregrounds future directions of Druze studies and scholarship, within and without their belief in reincarnation.

For one, the consistent struggle for preservation, a threat many Druze have testified to, often inspires Druze members, particularly Druze youth, to question the closed-off nature of the community, including the primary religious tenet that one is not able to convert into being Druze; rather, one must be born Druze. “What would happen if we opened the faith?” is a question that I often hear explored, and also often hear criticized and dismissed. Druze survival also brings up questions of access, as our religious texts are usually out of reach and, for many Druze, incomprehensible. Especially for Druze outside of the Levant, this lack of access to the faith and community cultivates distance and threats to preservation and survival that many Druze find troubling as they desire to know more about the faith in order to connect to it more deeply. In attending to these issues, in line with the interventions of this project, I underscore the need to continue to listen to and amplify Druze voices across different media genres and platforms for testifying and bearing witness to Druze lives, and their afterlives.

Further research on these issues can and should thus explore online culture as a critical and essential space for interconnectivity across transnational Druze communities today. I suggest that online culture has become a key alternate public sphere for connection that, I argue, necessitates examination and analysis in order to further understandings of contemporary transnational Druze formations, including the intracommunity tensions that threaten Druze survival in terms of cohesion and unity amongst the Druze, who consider themselves brethren across time and space. Arguably the most predominant point of intra-community tension and division amongst transnational Druze communities today, as noted in chapter three, is the Druze participation in the settler-colonial project of Israel, made evident in the vast debates between

Zionist Druze and non-Zionist Druze that can be witnessed on these online platforms, particularly since October 7, 2023. The possibilities and tensions that Druze online spaces bring to the forefront in providing a global access to one another is thus of critical importance, particularly given the diasporic nature of Druze communities. As contended by diaspora scholars such as James Clifford, transnational and diasporic communities often must attend to and rely on alternate public spheres. Given the limited physical access transnational and diasporic Druze have to one another as well as Druze cultural and religious texts, these important sites of (positive and negative) transnational interconnection, I argue, are alternate public spheres that, for the Druze, are difficult to forge anywhere other than online. If, as Khachig Tölölyan argues, to be of the diaspora is to seek connection with community and the construction of a collective identity that cannot be reduced to the borders of the nation-state, I suggest these online sites of interconnectivity, such as biweekly Zoom sessions with Druze religious figures working with the U.S.-based Druze Committee on Religious Affairs (CORA), Instagram pages for American Druze Young Adults (ADYA) and Druze Confessions (1 & 2), as well as smartphone applications such as Druze Link, are critically important texts for understanding contemporary and future states of transnational Druze communities as well as listening to Druze voices.[121]

Importantly, in this dissertation, one of the central points of analysis in examining the histories and contemporary lives of transnational Druze reincarnation is gender. Constructions of gender, gender roles, and gender violence within transnational Druze communities also warrants further attention in Druze scholarship, particularly in relation to other constructions of identity and society such as class. This dissertation touches on but does not fully explore how class functions across transnational Druze communities and their belief in reincarnation in particular.

[121] These platforms, with followings that range from approximately 1,000 to 20,000, are generally private with participation on these sites being limited to Druze communities across the world.

A class analysis of the Druze demands fuller attention to the verifications of Druze reincarnation institutionalized or normed within cultural traditions, which often include "proving" one's past life familial connection by "telling" where material items such as money, jewelry, or weapons are stored. I have also noted distinct limitations and difficulties for Druze *natqeen* being born into a lower-class family and attempting (re)connection to a higher- or upper-class past life family. These issues, which are imbricated within notions of who gets to testify to reincarnation stories, who is listened to, and how is the practice of *natq* itself a classed as well as gendered experience deserve further examination. As we continue to attend to one of the central questions of this project, who gets to survive, we must also critically examine *how* we survive.

Druze Futurisms

In my conversations with the Druze, another strand of further academic pursuit and inquiry that I found particularly compelling is Druze people's relations and connections to Druzeness that work outside religious identification, for example, the cultural, the ethnic, and the spiritual. These identifications are also interwoven into notions of Druze survival as they pertain who carries and follows the faith and who chooses not to. One man I spoke to was born Druze in the U.S., converted to Christianity, but still identifies as Druze within a social and cultural sense. This identification is based on two primary factors, the first being his intimate relationship with his Druze father, who has since passed. This man's father was reincarnated and would occasionally speak of his past life experiences with his family. His father was also deeply involved in the Druze in a spiritual sense. He therefore instilled in his son what he believes are the most beautiful and important spiritual aspects of the Druze faith, including Druze investments and teachings about oneness, connection, and love. This Druze man therefore contacted me not so much to discuss his family's experiences with reincarnation, but more so

because he just wanted to talk about his father. This father-son relationship is deeply connected to this man's relationship to a spiritual and cultural Druzeness tightly bound to notions of family and love. Another Druze woman I spoke to also only made clear that she identifies as Druze in the spiritual, philosophical sense rather than a religious one. She believes she cannot commit to the religion if she does not fully know/understand it, but the spiritual factors of love and reconnection importantly shape her life, including her belief in reincarnation. As another Druze person recently wrote on the "Druze Voices" Instagram page, "I'm not religious. In fact, I am agnostic and I am in a serious relationship with a non druze person. I'm not even straight. But I am starting to see our sect as a cultural sect. We belong to a group, and I cannot deny that. I love us, and I have the right to exist within the culture that raised and made me. And I have a right to tell my future children that they too are part Druze. We need to be more open and accepting, because we no longer live in a time that requires us to be secretive like at the beginning of our faith." I suggest we need to listen to these voices as well, as they are indicative of the multiple ways and forms of being Druze and relating to Druzeness in an evolving contemporary world. These perspectives and testimonies thus cannot and should not be ignored.

In terms of its engagements with reincarnation and Lebanon, further research should explore how the belief in reincarnation is taken up in Lebanon and its diasporas outside of the Druze community. Throughout my research, several Lebanese people (Christian, Sunni, and Shi'a) contacted me to discuss their reincarnations and/or belief in reincarnation. These stories also all engage trauma and traumatic experience. How reincarnation is (or is not) taken up in Lebanese contexts outside of the Druze is critically important. One Lebanese Christian man, who shared that his family took him to the church for an exorcism when he began speaking about his

life at a young age, reached out to me seemingly only because he wanted to be heard, listened to, and accepted in his reincarnation beliefs. I suggest we listen to these voices as well.

With this and amongst the broader implications of this work outside of transnational Druze communities, we must continue to explore the Druze's connectivity to the global belief in reincarnation. Though this dissertation project focuses on the reincarnation experiences of the Druze, I recognize the abundance of fictional and non-fictional reincarnation stories that exist across the world today, predominantly engaging greater Asia, as the most recent in a chain of long histories of global reincarnation testimonies. Each of these reincarnation stories are uniquely different yet inherently connected in crossing borders of home, life, and family. More research is needed as to how the Druze and Druzeness are and are not situated within global discourses of reincarnation while simultaneously underscoring the undertheorized critical linkages between studies of the Druze, the U.S., the Arab world, and the Global South.

Above all, I hope we continue to listen. To ourselves, and to one another. As I hope this project shows, it is imperative to our survival. Druze narratives, testimonies, and stories, as I illuminate throughout this project, are essential forms of Druze survival and (re)connection. Listening to, recording, and sharing these stories not only ensures the survival of our histories, but has and continues to shape Druze futures. Within and across our various communities, Druze and non-Druze, academic and non-academic, let us continue to give them our attention.

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2015 MA in English, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY

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RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

As a Ph.D. Candidate in English, a certified instructor of Women's & Gender studies, and Graduate Research Associate in the Middle Eastern Studies Program at Syracuse University, I specialize in 20th and 21st Century Transnational Literatures and Cultures of the Global South. My teaching and independently designed courses are built on frameworks of transnational feminist praxis, empire, war, trauma, memory, gender, and sexuality. In my research, I focus on diverse and interdisciplinary textualizations of transnational Arab identities, cultures, and lived experiences across racial and ethnic frameworks and solidarities. My dissertation project calls attention to transnational Druze communities, most notably, their fundamental belief in reincarnation, as an intervention into the fields of Critical Race, Critical Ethnic, Transnational, Arab American, Asian American, Memory, and Trauma Studies of the U.S. and the Global South.

PUBLICATIONS

2024 El-Eid, Natalie, Deena Naime, & Amira Jarmakani. "A'ala Qalbek: Introducing a Feminist Druze Framework." *Centering the Margins: Reimagining the Field of Arab*

American Studies, edited by Danielle Haque & Waleed F. Mahdi. (chapter accepted, publication forthcoming)

2023 Interviewee. "A Past Life." *Kerning Cultures*. 23 March 2023. Podcast. https://kerningcultures.com/a-past-life/

2022 "Visual Hakawatis: Drawing Resistance in Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi* and Malaka *Gharib's I Was Their American Dream*." *Mashriq & Mahjar: MENA Migrants and Diasporas in Twenty-First Century Media*.

2018 "United Arab Emirates." *Women's Lives around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*.

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Areas: 20th & 21st century Transnational Literatures & Cultures of the Global South, Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, Contemporary Movements & Migrations, War, Trauma & Memory, Relationalities & Solidarities, Transnational & Global Feminisms

Courses Taught as Independent Instructor:

Women & Gender Studies Department

WGS 201 Global Feminisms, Spring 2024
- Designed this course in collaboration with the SU WGS department to examine both how we understand the world and how gender as a category of analysis and an axis of identity shapes local and global realities at the intersections of race, class, sexual, national, embodied, and religious differences.
- Centered transnational feminist scholars, theorists, and activists who explore what feminist critiques and resistance to patriarchy, colonialism, globalization, and war look like in relation to dominant global powers, structures, and processes

WGS 101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, Fall 2023
- Designed this course in collaboration with the SU WGS department to approach the study of gender by foregrounding a critical intersectional feminist lens that pays particular attention to the categories of race, class, gender, religion, nation, and sexuality
- Centered Indigenous, Black, and Women of Color scholarship in the U.S. as well as in global & transnational contexts

English Department

ENG 193 Introduction to Asian American Literature, Spring 2022
- First graduate instructor to design and teach this course
- Centered this course on anti-racist, intersectional feminist pedagogical praxis via by examining complexity and shifts of Asian American experience across different historical,

political, social, and cultural contexts, as well as resisting hegemonic understandings of "Asia," "America," and "Asian American"
- Taught novels, poems, and films produced by artists, activists, and scholars of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, and Arab descent

ENG 119 Post-1945 American Fiction, Fall 2021
- Designed this course to examine on how notions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class complicate our understandings of the questions of how we define "America" and what it means to be "American" today by looking at different authors, historical moments, and literary movements after WWII
- Taught texts from Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx artists and/or scholars in the U.S., particularly women of color

ENG 153: Interpretation of Fiction, Fall 2020 & Spring 2021
- Designed this class to center on themes of national belongings/unbelongings by looking at American and British authors from the 19th century until present-day, and broader our understandings of "fiction" across media forms including novels, graphic novels, comics, short stories, poetry, and film
- Taught works that encompassed a variety of marginalized positionalities, such as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Arab, South Asian, East Asian, and Women writers and artists

Courses Taught as Teaching Assistant:

Spring 2020	ENG 170: American Cinema: Beginnings to Present
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FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, & AWARDS

External Fellowships & Grants

2024 Recipient of Modern Language Association (MLA)'s Edward Guiliano Global Fellowship

2023 Recipient of Center for Arab American Philanthropy (CAAP)'s Dr. Philip M. Kayal Fund for Arab American Research Grant

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2024 Recipient of Women's and Gender Studies Department's Joan Lukas Rothenberg Graduate Student Service Award
Recipient of English Department's Joseph Hughes Memorial Summer Fellowship

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2021 Recipient of Goekjian and Perryman/Middle Eastern Studies Program Research Grant
Recipient of Graduate School Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award
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2019 Recipient of Middle Eastern Studies Program's Young Scholar Prize

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PARTICIPATION

Spring 2024

Panelist, Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Annual Conference, Seattle, WA
Paper: "The Edge of Each Other's Battles": Arab/Asian American Studies and Investments

Panelist, Arab American Studies Association Conference (AASA), Dearborn, MI
Panel: Layers of Community Agency in Arab American Studies
Paper: 3'ala Qalbek: Introducing a Feminist Druze Framework

Fall 2023

Panelist, Bilingual Interdisciplinary Virtual Symposium: "Druze Studies- Past, Present, and Future," University of Kansas
Panel: Druze Identity and Politics in the Levant and the Diaspora: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives
Paper: "Reincarnation and (Re)Connection: Testimonies from Transnational Druze Women"

Discussant, Professional Development Session, American Studies Association (ASA) Annual Conference, "Solidarity: What Love Looks Like in Public," Montreal, Canada
Session: Arab American Studies Association: For the Love of Teaching: Arab American and SWANA Studies

Panelist, American Studies Association (ASA) Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada
Roundtable: Feminist Pedagogical Resilience: Labor and Justice in the Classroom

Chair, Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) Annual Conference, Palais des congrès de Montréal, Canada
Panel: Queer Artistic and Cultural Practices of Southwest Asia North Africa (SWANA)

Panelist, Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) Annual Conference, Palais des congrès de Montréal, Canada
Panel: Arab Faces, American Places
Paper: Drawing Selves and Stories: 21st Century Arab American Graphic Memoirs

Panelist, National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD
Panel: Friends Through Fire: Hmong, Latinx, Arab Feminists as "Bad" Academics
Paper: "'You're What?': A Druze Arab American Feminist in Academia"

Spring 2023

Panelist, "Druze in Their Adopted Homelands" International Conference, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) at Georgetown University, in partnership with the American Druze Foundation (ADF) and the American University of Beirut, Washington D.C.,
Panel: Druze Generational Bonds across Space and Boundaries
Paper: "Druze Afterlives: Between Bodies and Borders"

Chair & Panelist, Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) Annual Conference, SUNY Buffalo, Buffalo, NY
Panel: Intersectionalities of SWANA Bodies, Borders, Literatures
Paper: "Reincarnation and Relationality: Testimonies from Transnational Druze Women"

Fall 2022

Panelist, American Studies Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, Fall 2022
Panel: Where the Party At?
Paper: "The Phoenician Phoenix: To (En)Rage and Rave in Beirut"

Summer 2022

Chair, SPAWN 2022: "White supremacy, misogyny, and the 'new' terrorism," Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
Panel: Mapping Agency in Nonstate Armed-Governance–A Capacity Model

Spring 2022

Panelist, Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) 2022 Annual Conference, Denver, CO
Panel: Transnationalism as Method
Paper: "Transnational Druze and Reincarnation: Remembering, Recording, and Reconnecting"

Panelist, Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) Annual Conference, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
Panel: Studying Trauma as a Part of Life and Understanding/Seeking Reconciliation
Paper: "Druze Transnationalism and Trauma in Arab American Literature: Looking at Rabih Alameddine"

Discussant, Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA), Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
Roundtable: Intersectionality of Struggles in Arab Diaspora Literature

Paper: “Druze Transnationalism and Trauma in Arab American Literature”

Panelist, Arab American Studies Association Conference, San Diego, CA
Panel: Testimony, Collectivity, and the Ethics of Care
Paper: “Representations of Druzeness, Trauma, and Literary Testimony in Rabih Alameddine’s *I, the Divine*”

Spring 2021

Discussant, Arab American Studies Association Virtual Symposium, Zoom
Roundtable: The Transnational Americas and Druze Communities

Spring 2020

Panelist, “AASA 2020, Interrupted,” Arab American Studies Association Conference, San Diego, CA (paper accepted; conference canceled due to COVID-19)

PROFESSIONAL & COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Syracuse University

2023

- Founder of BIPOC English Graduate Student Collective, 2021-2024
- Member of SU’s Graduate School BIPOC Alliance for Excellence, 2021-2024
- Member of SU’s Feminist of Color Graduate Collective, 2022-2024
- Member of SU’s Ethnography Workshop, 2021-2023
- Active Member-at-Large of SU’s English Graduate Organization, 2021-2024
- Mentor for Incoming English Ph.D. Students at Syracuse University, 2019- 2024

2022

- Completed Future Professoriate Program (FPP), Spring
- Panelist, “Using Inclusive Language in Academia,” Psychology Graduate Students’ Committee for Diversity & Inclusivity (CDI), Spring
- Organizer, “Anti-Zionism vs. Antisemitism: A Critical Discussion” with PARCEO co-founder Donna Nevel and SU graduate students, Fall

2021

- Hosted and facilitated Professor Beth Berila’s “Women & Gender Studies Career Conversation with Graduate Students;” SU English Department, Spring
- Organized and hosted New Admit Meet-and Greet Grad Picnic and Virtual Series, Spring
- Volunteer for Syracuse University English Department’s Banned Book Reading, Fall

2020

- Organized first English Department Intergroup Dialogue among faculty and graduate students, Fall
- Organized and hosted End-of-Semester English Grad Student Community-Building Event, Fall
- Organized and hosted First-Year Welcome Picnic, Fall 2020
- English Graduate Representative of English Graduate Committee, 2020-2021
    - Served as EGO Representative to the Graduate Committee and Voting Member of the Department Assembly. Attended Department Assembly and Grad Comm meetings. The Grad Committee is responsible for reviewing and deliberating on all graduate student course petitions, exam proposals, and summer funding applications. The Grad Committee is also in charge of graduate admissions and general oversight of the graduate program.

2019

- #NotAgainSU English Graduate Student Organizer, 2019-2020
- Organizer and Presenter for SU English Department's Graduate Student Conference, "Negotiations," Fall & Spring
- English Graduate Representative for English Agenda Committee, 2019-2020
    - Liaison for faculty communication with graduate students and Voting Member of the Department Assembly. Attended monthly faculty assembly meetings, English graduate student meetings, and agenda meetings. Constructed lists and talking points from grad students to be brought to the faculty. Presented the issues grad students were contending with to the Agenda faculty committee for consideration of discussion at Department Assembly.

2018

- First-Year Graduate Representative for English Graduate Organization, 2018-2019
    - Elected in September from the new cohort of students. Served as a representative for first-year interests in the monthly English Graduate Organization (EGO) meetings. Primarily responsibilities included advocating for first-year students and encouraging first-year students to participate in EGO activities.

Public Humanities

- Community Organizer and Co-Founder of Syracuse Action Collective
- Co-organized, moderated, led breakout group for SU-ESF teach-in "The Urgency of Palestine: Learn, Act, Share," January 2024.

- Invited Speaker, "Druze Reincarnation," American Druze Convention, 25 November 2023, San Antonio, Texas
- Vice President, American Druze Youth Association (ADYA) Connecticut & New York Chapters, 2023-2024
- Current Board Member, American Druze Society (ADS) Connecticut & New York Chapters, 2023-2024
- Co-Founder & Member, Druze Feminist Academic Collective, 2022-Present
- Member of Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2022-Present
- Panelist, "In Support of a Free Palestine: A Conversation on the Middle East," Community Roundtable, 20 May 2021, Waterbury, CT
- Co-Founder and Fundraiser for the Baha G. El-Eid Scholarship Fund at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, CT (2009-Present)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Member of Arab American Studies Association (AASA)
Member of Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA)
Member of Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS)
Member of American Studies Association (ASA)
Member of Modern Language Association (MLA)
Member of National Women's Studies Association (NWSA)

LANGUAGES

English – native
Arabic – fluent
Spanish– advanced
French –conversational

REFERENCES | DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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