Arab Migrant Women:
Negotiating Memory and Creating Belonging in Diaspora

Submitted by:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores, analyses and documents Arab women's experiences of migration, and belonging in Australia. It does so by examining the role of memory in creating belonging and constructing identity. Arab migrant women in Australia are usually perceived as a homogenous group; therefore, this research project also studies the complexities and diversity of Arab identity. This study focuses on three main areas: Home and its memories for migrants, belonging, and Arab identity. These themes demonstrate how the women weave their narratives in relation to their experiences of migration while continuously negotiating their memories, navigating belonging, and constructing identities.

The study uses the qualitative research methodology, namely semi-structured interviews. While the ten-first generation Arab women interviewed in this study proclaim Arab identity, they also come from diverse national background, religious background, age, life experience, education and professions. The interviews were analysed through the lens of feminist intersectionality theories.
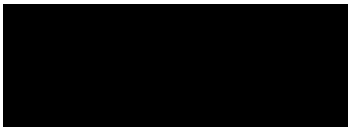
As a result of this research study, some significant conclusions can be drawn: memory of home is located at the heart of the belonging processes of migrants. Perceptions and understandings of the notion of home shape the women's experiences in relation to their experiences of belonging. Moreover, home and its memories prove to also play a crucial role in the way women perceive their Arab identities, and construct narratives about their identities in Australia. Although migration is perceived to be practiced mainly by Arab men, lately this perspective has been challenged by the increasing number of the Arab women who have embarked in this journey, and for a variety of reasons.

The findings of this thesis do not only emphasise the diversity of Arab women but accentuate the diverse understandings of Arab identity. Interrelated historical events and contextual factors that determine the women's understanding of Arab identity. This constructed identity is continuously negotiated through all the chapters of this thesis and is highlighted by the extensively diverse experiences of how Arab women create belonging. Memory of the homeland, on the other hand, is the centrepiece of this study; and its role has proven to influence women's practices in private as well as public life.

Master of Applied Research Student Declaration

I, Nabila Marzouk, declare that the Master of Applied Research thesis entitled Arab Migrant Women: Negotiating Memory and Creating Belonging in Diaspora is no more than 50,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work". "I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

Signature   Date:

30/06/2021

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Ethics Committee for application ID HRE18-112

Signature: Date:

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

According to Killian, Olmsted and Doyle (2012) "within the context of Arab communities, migration is generally assumed to be a male phenomenon" (p, 434). However, contrary to this perception, Arab women have indeed embarked in the journey of migration for various reasons. This study documents these journeys and narratives while highlighting the complexities of Arab identity.

The aim of this study is to analyse the role of memory in creating belonging for Arab migrant women in Australia and highlight the complexities of Arab identity and diversity amongst Arab women. Not only is it an opportunity to document the women's experiences, but also to understand the challenges faced by adult migrants and the techniques used to navigate these challenges. This research study argues that memories of home have a strong impact on the way migrants' approach important concepts such as home, belonging and identity. Thus, memories of home significantly contribute to shaping the women's experiences even in their post migration life. Studying memory does not only offer an insight to the pre-migration life of the participants, but allows us to understand their present state, and to indicate future directions. In this attempt of exploring the women's journeys of belonging and navigating Arab identity, the memory lens is used as a means to analyse data, and explore feelings of home, belonging and identity. Thus, the concept of memory, though dominating, is not the sole framework utilised to analyse the participants' journeys of belonging.

In this research study, all participants came to Australia as adults or as teenagers with vibrant memories of their homeland(s). The migrant women who were interviewed in this study came from six different countries (Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq). They also belong to two different religious backgrounds (Muslim and Christian). Their age varies between thirty as the youngest participant and late sixties as the most senior participant.

The women participants also came to Australia under different circumstances and for various reasons. While some came with their families, others migrated by themselves. Moreover, many migrated to Australia fleeing war or persecution; others came to build a family and join their partners; meanwhile some migrated purely to look for better opportunities for themselves and their families.

The participants are also diverse in terms of educational and professional backgrounds. Some of them own their own businesses, some are professionals, while others are currently not employed looking after their children or opted for retirement. With this diversity amongst the participants, the common denominators are gender; migration, age of migrating that allows for strong and vivid memories of their homelands and identity (they all consider themselves Arabs or Arabic speakers). This study focuses on examining Arabic speakers rather than a particular nationality, ethnic or religious group because of two reasons; the vague and ambiguous way Arab identity is perceived not only in the west but amongst Arabs themselves, and the lack of existing studies about Arab women in Australia.

The research question this study asks is: "What role does memory play in the process of creating belonging and reconstructing identity for first generation Arab women in Australia?" In order to answer this question, the study explores how Arab women experience migration to Australia; how home is remembered and to what extent the notion of homeland effects the process of creating belonging; and how memories of home are negotiated, supressed or accentuated in the process of creating belonging and constructing identity for Arab women in Australia.

The research objectives of this thesis are:
   a. Describe and understand the role of memory of home for the women migrants, and how memories of home inform migrants journeys of belonging
   b. Analyse the women's journey of belonging in their new home, and explore home building strategies as well as helping agents to build belonging
   c. Understand the significance of Arab identity for the women, and analyse their personal perceptions of their own identities while exploring the role of public discourse and perceptions of others in creating belonging and how that influences the women's perceptions of their own identities.

Context

The Arab community in Australia is diverse. Arab Australians can be from any of the twenty-two countries that make up the Arab region. The latter is also spread through two different continents; Africa and Asia, thus, the acronym MENA region (Middle East and North Africa). Arab migration to Australia started back in the late eighteen hundreds (Convy & Monsour, 2008) mainly from Syria and Lebanon. Currently, the Arab

community in Australia consists of populations from different

parts of the MENA region mainly Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria (Australian Bureau of statistics 2016).

Similar to Arab communities or Arabic speaking communities, Arab identity is fluid and pluralistic. It represents a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, including a number of nationalities and various ethnicities, experiences, and religiousaffiliations such as Muslim, Christian, Druze. This research project sheds the lighton the various understandings amongst the Arab women about Arab identity, and memories relates to their homelands. The women's narratives are redefining and reclaiming what it means to be an Arab.

It is also important to note that this research is conducted in the context of multicultural Australian society. Policies in support of multiculturalism were introduced since early 1970s, initiating implications of cultural pluralism, social cohesion and harmony. They came about as a result of failed policies of assimilation and integration which regarded white Anglo-Saxon culture superior to others(Jakubowicz, 1989). Multiculturalism in Australia is concerned primarily with linguistic and cultural diversity as it allows diverse communities the right to practice their cultural and religious beliefs (Koleth, 2010).

However, unlike other western countries namely Canada, "Australian multicultural policies have always been premised on the supremacy of existing institutions and values and the primacy of the English language" (Koleth, 2010). While multiculturalism has been relatively successful in accommodating the needs of diverse migrant communities, racist discourses continue to exist (Hage, 2000). Moreover, political and academic debates raise questions concerning the meaning and "relevance of culture, the parameters of multiculturalism within secular liberal democracies, the distribution of opportunities… the construction of nationhood and national belonging" (Koleth, 2010).

Therefore, even though multiculturalism in Australia allows people from migrant communities to practice their cultures, it does not negate racist discourses and existing structural forms of privilege in institutions and policies.

Research Considerations

Throughout this study, I was consumed by my own positioning as a researcher and how it would influence the findings of this study. Being a migrant Arab woman myself, who migrated multiple times to different destinations attempting to create belonging in every destination, I found myself consumed by the question of belonging. In many instances I find myself relying on memories created back home in order to navigate situations I find myself in not only in different locations but also at different stages in my life. Fascinated by the human capacity to create and recreate belonging, and continuously reconstructing one's identity, I embarked on this project. This personal interest and experience have informed my initial understanding of the subject matter.

Being personally invested in this study, I continuously questioned my voice and positioning through exploration of researcher participant relationship. These epistemological considerations are also based on the relationship between the researcher and the reality (Carson et al., p. 2001). It focuses on how the reality is being captured or known. Therefore, Reflexivity "a process whereby researchers recognise, examine, and understand how their social background, location and assumptions affect their research practice" (Hesse-Biber, p. 17) is a crucial process to conducting, understanding and examining the data collected. This process is extremely important given the nature of this research its aims and objectives. Capturing the research data is influenced by the perceived researcher's positioning as an insider and outsider, or both, by participants. This positioning effects the participants' levels of engagement and openness to share about their experiences.

Being perceived as an Arab Muslim migrant woman by the participants has definitely influenced their interactions with me as a researcher. The women were able to relate to my experience of migration and expected a certain level of affinity and at times understanding. In many instances, the women would compare aspects of their experiences to mine, either their national backgrounds or certain experiences such as growing up in a particular country or part of the world. However, as a researcher, my voice is restricted by a number of limitations. I

position myself as a woman, migrant of Muslim background. Similar to many of my participants, I am limited by my own understanding of Arab identity and heavily influenced by my own memories of home and upbringing. My ethnicity is also ambiguous to many, perceived as an African Arab, many might not even consider me 'fully' Arab. This ambiguity stems from the history of the Amazigh tribes of North Africa. Ethnically non-Arabs, the Amazighs still preserve local languages and traditions that differ from mainstream Arab culture. However, to me, my memories of my dad's and mum's village with Amazigh speakers everywhere referring to us as the Arab family are still vivid till today.

I grew up well aware of the duality of belonging to the Amazigh indigenous tribes of Morocco while also somehow and to a certain extent being an Arab. My Arab identity was strengthened by the patriarchal family tree my father would always refer to, and by my urban upbringing which was mostly influenced by Arab and French cultures. Nonetheless, my Amazigh ethnicity is strengthened by the aroma of fresh bread in dawn, the immensely emotional few Amazigh words I recall and rarely use with my children, and by the music I listen to whenever I want to remember my road trips with my late father. The memories of my upbringing have prepared me to be well aware that identity is an extremely personal, emotional and fluid space.

Methodology

The primary concern of this study is to analyse the role of memory in creating belonging in diaspora. To do so, the experience of migration is studied from different angles. Thus, reasons for migration; understanding and perceptions of home and homeland; interactions of the women with the rest of the Arab community, and ways of recreating home are all taken into consideration when attempting to understand the women's journeys of belonging.

The approach used in this study is the qualitative research method. For this matter, semi structured interviews have been used to gather data. This method allows the researcher to obtain answers beyond original statement of research participants. As a matter of fact, many participants at times prefer to answer by a "yes" or a "no", or offer little explanation. Therefore, this method permits the researcher to follow up

with questions in order to clarify the previous answer or seek further explanation. Another essential consideration in this research method is the use of a small samplein order to collect important and large amounts of data.

Moreover, qualitative research and semi structured interviews enrich the scope of a topic. For instance, when conducting an interview, a participant can take you attimes to a new point not being previously considered by the researcher. This interviewing technique used permits further investigation to be made in order toacquire more information and understand exactly what the participant means andwhy they prefer to share that experience (Patton and Cochran, 2002).

The data is analysed using intersectional feminist approaches. Even though memory has a female form, derived from the Greek Goddess Mnemosyne, the scholarship of memory is dominated by men. Looking at the subject of this research study through a gender lens, which focuses on migrant Arab women, is not its only feminist attribute. Intersectionality is used as an approach to examine data collected and allows "to analyse how different forms of disadvantage intersect and thereby explain the specific experience of certain groups of women on the basis of gender, race and class simultaneously" (Bastia 2014, p. 238). Thus, the choice of the cultural group and methodology used also enhance its feminist focus.

This study is guided by listening, acknowledging, and documenting women's stories and experiences. Having these stories available for the public both men and women enables change to take place not only for women, but also society in general which half of its history has been ignored for years. In fact, by undermining women's voices and stories, we, as a human collective, have missed out on at least half of the experiences that could have been available for us today. Eichler's (1997) states that "feminist scholarship is oriented towards the improvement of the status of women and is undertaken by scholars who define themselves as feminist" (Eichler 1997, p. 10).

I further argue that feminist scholarship is oriented towards the improvement of the human condition by creating a way for silenced and oppressed voices to surface. It also acknowledges that the only way for humanity to advance is through a fairer society that recognises the rights of women and those oppressed; a society that admits mistakes, and takes action to rectify them.

The second part of Echler's definition about the researcher defining themselves as a feminist is rather complex. While I consider myself a feminist, I have tremendous issues with some white privileged schools of Western Feminism that do not acknowledge or unpack positions of privilege related to race and western colonial history. Namely, their lack of affinity and inability to understand and incorporate the role of culture, politics, religion and class when conducting studies and analysing women from other backgrounds, especially third world countries. This issue in these schools of western feminism has resulted in a distorted analysis and rather ethnocentric study of women from different backgrounds. As a matter of fact, Mohanty (1988) states

> assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other, characterise a sizable extent of western feminist work on women in the third world (Mohanty 1988, p, 63)

Mohanty's critique of white feminists raises problematic assumptions about women's oppression in the third world. These assumptions are fed by western colonial pasts that resulted in the establishment of a world order dominated by the west. It is argued that white feminism has been used throughout history as a weapon of white supremacy and patriarchy directed towards black women, women of colour and indigenous women (Hamad, 2019). Thus, this study uses feminist approaches that allow to generate "reliable feminist analysis by Third World women themselves of Third World women's diverse forms of oppression and different modes of resistance on the ground" (Herr 2014, p.2). Studying Arab women with awareness of the cultural, historical and political contexts while respecting the women's stories and narratives is acknowledged throughout this study. This research study also recognises that women around the world do not face the same oppression simply by virtue of belonging to the same biological category. Intersecting oppressions that face Women from Arab background include race, gender and colonial histories.

It is true that this research study adopts a feminist lens by focusing on a cultural group of women that has been studied in a culturally insensitive and limited manner, but this study also adopts a feminist approach by focusing on intersectionality as a methodological framework in analysing the complex and crucial intersection of multiple features and influencers to women's experiences, such as race, class, ethnicity and culture (Gormez and Martin-Sevillano 2006).

Kimberle Crenshaw, an American scholar who developed the theory of intersectionality, believes that "contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of colour" (Crenshaw 1991, p.1242-1243). Undeniably, traditional western 'white' feminist discourses have failed to grasp the complexities of non-western and non-white women's positions. The lack of effort to understand the women's cultural backgrounds, daily struggles inside and outside one's family and community, cultural expectations… are just some examples of the multitude of issues faced by women.

Since its introduction by Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality has been used in different disciplines as it allows for "the tantalizing possibility of exposing multiple positions and power inequalities as they appear in any social practice, institutional arrangement, or cultural representation" (Lutz 2015, p.40). Intersectionality allows for the analysis of overlapping and intersecting systems of oppression that the women are subject to. Hence, in the context of this study, the experience of being a migrant Arab women cannot be solely examined as being women, being of a certain national background, belonging to a particular religious group or being a woman of colour each studied independently.

In order to fully comprehend the experiences of migrant Arab women, the studymust incorporate the interaction of all these social categories and the way they interrelate. Thus, none of these categories fits neatly or can provide a full explanation of the experiences of Arab migrant women in isolation of thecomplexities of their multi-faceted realities. This type of analysis is employed because of the belief in its "radical potential to alter social practices– to free individuals and social groups from the normative fix of a hegemonic order and to enable a politics that is at once more complex and inclusive" (McCall 2005, p.1777).

In this case, intersectional theoretical paradigm aims to provide an analysis that frees the Arab women from existing simplistic discourses that tend to portray Arab women as 'passive', 'submissive' and 'victims' (Povey 2009). Analysing thewomen's narratives and experiences takes place by first deconstructing the conceptof Arab identity with its existing narratives about Arab women, and highlighting the

complexity of Arab identity. Furthermore, the intersection of the women's identitiesis articulated through a single dimension of each category. In other words, an Arab Christian middle class professional woman from Lebanese national background is situated at an intersection of multiple categories: ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, etc. Thus issues related to race, nationality and religion are examinedfrom the perspective of the Arab women.

This table lists the ten women who participated in this research, and provides details about their country of origin, religious background, and reason of migration. Participants are identified by pseudonym for the purposes of this project, and any details that risk revealing participants' identities are not included. This table servesas a guide while reading this thesis;

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION

Name	Country of origin	Religious background	Reason of migration
Sanae	Algeria	Muslim	Marriage
Sawsan	Lebanon	Christian	Civil war
Zahra	Morocco	Muslim	Marriage
Clara	Lebanon	Christian	Civil war
Aisha	Lebanon	Muslim	Skilled migration as a family
Chaima	Iraq	Christian	Marriage
Ghazala	Sudan	Muslim	Marriage
Susan	Jordan	Christian	Religious persecution
Rana	Lebanon	Muslim	Civil war
Huda	Jordan	Muslim	Marriage

The women participants have shared their individual stories and experiences of migration, and their journeys of and to belonging. While sharing their migrationstories and memories of home, the women showed honesty, generosity, resilienceand extreme vulnerability at times. During the interviews, many of them baked cookies from home; made traditional teas or coffees, and brought something from home to share.

The memories of their homelands were present in their answers, attitudes, and items shared during the interviews. During the interviews, it became obvious that homeand its memories were a driving force in these migrant women's lives as it shaped experiences, impacted decisions, and influenced lives.

Thesis Overview

In this chapter, I introduced the study in which I explore the role of memory of homeland in creating belonging for Arab migrant women. I have also introduced the aims and research questions directing this research study. I also provided a description of the sample of participants in the study, and introduced the theoretical framework while providing epistemological assumptions and clarifying the study's context.

In order to answer the research questions, I have shed the light in existing research about memory studies in Chapter two, where I provided historical context to thestudy of memory especially in relation to migration both internationally and in Australia. Moreover, I also highlighted discourses around Arab identity by providing historical context as well as social and ethnic analysis. The latter allowedfor a discussion about Arab women in existing research. Indeed, chapter two is a review of the existing research literature about various dimensions of Arab migrant women and the role of memory studies especially for migrants.

Chapter three, four and five focus on the findings of this study. These three chapters demonstrate how memories of homeland help migrant women create belonging in Australia. This is done by focusing on the notion of home and its meanings for the women in chapter three, which offers theoretical and empirical understandings of

home. Chapter four explores the way in which Arab women create belonging. Following a framework developed by Ghassan Hage (2010), a Lebanese-Australian academic whose anthropological work focuses on the Lebanese and Middle Eastern community in Australia, the chapter discusses the various ways the womennegotiate belonging. Hage's framework is originally developed through his study ofthe Lebanese community in Sydney. In his article, *Migration, Food, Memory, and Home-building,* Hage examines the processes of home-building which he defines as 'the building of the feeling of being 'at home'' (2010, p. 417). In other words,Hage's definition also refers to one's attempt to create a familiar and a comfortable space that does not necessarily equate to a physical house.

Hage's framework has been used for this study due to a number of reasons. First, in his article, Hage is studying the Lebanese community which is part of the Arab region. While my study includes women from other nationalities including Lebanese; Lebanon is part of the Arab region, and many Lebanese refer to themselves as Arabs. Second, Hage is examining the Lebanese community in anAustralian context. Similarly, I am analysing participants in an Australian context. Finally, both Hage's articles and this thesis are studying the concept of belongingfor migrant communities. It is in this sense that Hage's work has been used in this chapter where I examine Arab women's strategies in creating belonging in Australia. In chapter five, I focus on Arab identity highlighting the intersections of gender, race, religion and nationality. I also highlight how the women arenavigating the negative public discourse about Arab identity and its stereotypes.

The findings in these chapters highlight the role of memories of home in creating belonging and recreating home. In addition to that, it also sheds the light on other strategies used by the women to create belonging and familiarity. Moreover, the anaylsis highlight the highly complex histories ofthe Arab region demonstrated in the way women reconstruct their identities in new social environments. Gendered identity is at the centre of this study through the women's narratives that dismantle the taken for granted ideas about Arabness and articulate a renegotiated identity in a different context.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Memory Studies

Glynn and Kleist, both academics interested in the nexus of the fields of migration and memory studies, state "Memories can carry their own legacy, but may override historical facts" (2012, p. 2). This statement summarises the essence of memory studies. The latter is concerned with the various ways the past is remembered, and its expressions in our present lives. It emphasises the process of remembering and recollection of the past rather than a set of facts that constitute events of the past. Therefore, memory studies use the perception of the past and make meanings of these perceptions in order to study the present social state.

It is important to note that memory was initially vastly studied by French philosophers and academics in the early nineteen hundreds. This summarises the origins of the field as well as how recent it is amongst English speaking academic circles. Indeed, among English speaking academics, memory studies are not yet fully accepted as a field of its own. Many (Olick 2009, Roediger & Wertsch 2008) argue for and against its legitimacy to exist as its own field of studies as it is related to many other fields. Therefore, some academics do not believe memory necessarily stands enough ground to exist as an independent field of study. Since memory is related to countless disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, neurology, etc, Olick (2009) argues that what brings social memory studies as a field is its focus on collective memory. Roediger & Wertsch (2008, p. 12) admit the complexity of defining memory and view memory studies as "a huge tent in which scholars from many perspectives and fields can find a home, using their quite disparate methods and means of inquiry". Berliner (2005) defines memory as the past as it is lived by social agents. This definition focuses on the impact of the past and its memories on daily lives of people, nations, and cultures.

Social Memory studies originated in the 1920's with Maurice Halbwach (1925, 1941). The latter was a French philosopher and sociologist, who published his path breaking landmark *Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925. However, his work started to become widely studied only in the recent years. Halbwach developed the concept of collective memory, which is central to this research. He also emphasised its dependency upon the social framework within which the act of remembrance is occurring. He clarified that memories are social and are passed

from one generation to another; he also emphasised the importance of the external stimuli to the reawakening of former experiences (Whitehead, p. 126). For Halbwach "memory is not simply an individual phenomenon, but is relational in terms of family and friends, and also societal and collective in terms of the social frameworks and social groups" (Bosch 2016, p. 2).

In other words, Halbwach's concept of collective memory '*memoire collective*' was focused on how a group remembered lived events. The concept did not put too much emphasis on representation and was instead focused on the way people remembered the past. As a result, the concept of '*memoire collective*' depended mainly on the group of people who are making the act of remembering. Thus, the concept resulted in a problematic when the group who does all the remembering disappears, then collective memory returns to depend mainly on history.

In the following decades the notion of collective memory expanded to include social groups' representations of the past. This resulted in a conflict between theoretical and methodical knowledge as opposed to subjective understanding and representation; which led to a bigger and deeper question of knowledge legitimacy and what makes up history (Rosoux 2001). Another paradox that resulted from Hawlbwach's notion of social memory is around the nature of the action of remembering itself. Remembering as an action is of highly individual nature, as opposed to the notion of group and collective remembering. In other words, a group as such is uncapable of remembering, only a person is able to remember; yet memory depends on social processes that allow the act of remembrance. Saint-Laurent (2018) states in order "to study people's memories of the collective past, then, one had to study the collective memories of the past" (p.149, 150). Haas & Jodelet solve this issue by considering collective memory as a social representation that is shared by the group and also adopted by individual members (Haas & Jedelet, cited in Saint-Laurent 2018, p. 150). Wretsch, on the other hand, reconciles personal memory with the communal one by suggesting the notion of collective remembering. Bardlett (1995) focuses on remembering as a process; thus, he considers remembering a process that allows for rebuilding and reconstructing memory.

For Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (2002), both originally professors of literature who have introduced new concepts in the field of memory such as post-memory, cultural memory, which can be represented by heritage such as texts, celebrations, objects, rites etc. According to them, memory"emerges

out of a complex dynamic between past and present, individual and collective, public and private, recall and forgetting, power and powerlessness, history and myth, trauma and nostalgia, conscious and unconscious fears and desires" (Hirsh &Smith 2002, p. 5).

They suggest that the process of remembering is fragmented and state that acts of memory are acts of 'performance, representation and interpretation'. In other words, acts of remembrance can easily be influenced by external factors such as environment, age, class, gender which highlight a different version of home depending on the environment and community. As a matter of fact, Hirsch and Smith mention "cultural memory…can be best understood in the juncture where the individual and the social come together" (2002, p.7). Thus, the intersection of individual's experiences and social environment are extremely crucial for studying cultural memory.

In her study of gender theory within the study of memory, Chedgzoy (2007) reveals "the gendered nature of the most fundamental issues concerning the cultural nature of memory: who remembers? How are their memories communicated, to whom, and with what consequences? What authority do they play?" (p.217). This highlights power issues in remembering and exposes whose narrative is more important and whose stories are actually shared. The undeniable link between memory and gender power results in a one-sided narrative.

Marianne Hirsch (1997) is responsible for the development of the concept of post memory. Hirsch (1997) focuses on the positioning and cultural memory for second generation and descendants who grow up dominated by traumatic narratives such as those of Holocaust survivors. She emphasises the hierarchical relation and rather privileged position of remembering and memory. This also explains the complex relationship of women and memory practices,especially those women who have been silenced and undermined for so long.

Valerie Smith on the other hand focuses on how African-American women's memory in the development of North America and how they are being remembered. Both Hirsch and Smith focus on the "uneven development" of feminist studies and memory studies by insisting on the politics of what is forgotten as well as what is remembered and focused on (Hirsch and Smith, cited in Chedgzoy 2007, p. 217). This aims to enable a revision of the past and its legacy; a revision that allows for a deeper analysis of whose narratives are being remembered and even

celebrated at times. This reconsideration would also allow for an analysis and an explanation of the focus on particular memories as opposed to others, and whose benefits these narratives and memories serve. One also cannot deny the heavily political nature of this work which highlights the political mode of cultural memories as it negotiates not only women's memories and remembering, but rather power and placing in society.

Memory Studies in Australia

In Australia, the field of memory studies is characterised by "bricolage, eclecticism, innovation and originality and by its testing of the claims of accepted approaches" (Kennedy & Radstone 2013, p. 241). Indeed, international Australian memory studies is not identified with any particular theory or approach. On the other hand, memory research in Australia is characterised by its transnational links and colonial history. Kennedy and Radstone (2013), for example, argue for the legitimacy of Australian memory studies since memories and any related dynamics of remembering are certainly and obviously transnational fields. Furthermore, a great amount of work related to memory studies in Australia traces the dynamics of transnational remembering, such as the scholarship of these leading academics in the area: RosanneKennedy, Jacqueline Lo, Tessa Morris, Maria Nugent, Maria Tumarkin and Christina Twomey(Kennedy & Radstone 2013).

In other words, Australian memory research is heavily influenced by Australian colonial and violent history especially against Indigenous communities (Kennedy & Radstone). Numerous essays such as those by Collins and Radstone (2017), Rosanne Kennedy (2013, 2016) and Maria Nugent (2009), Ross Gibson (2013), Jacqueline Lo (2013), Christina Twomey (2012), and Katrina Schlunke (2015) have been produced in an attempt to seek justice to a past characterised by violence.

Indeed, Australian memory studies is not connected to any particular theory, tradition or approach, but is, rather, connected to both fields of migration and memory studies. The study of memory however is dominated by themes that correspond to local geo-political conditions, and is illustrated by diversity of theories used by specific academics (Kennedy and Radstone, 2013).

On the other hand, memory research in Australia has been interested in studying sites or places. In this context, places have rather a larger and subjective meaning; as stated by Kennedy and Radstone (2013) "place refers not only to the actual geographical site but also to the embodied location of the investigator – the location, physical or geographical, felt through the senses imagined or remembered-" (p. 240). For instance, Dellios' (2018) study 'It was just you and your child': Single migrant mothers, generational storytelling and Australia's migrant heritage', focuses on the importance of sites to altering existing heritage discourse in Australia. Thus, the site and location here become the focal point to studying discourses related to heritage.

Other studies that have been conducted about migrant women in Australia concentrated heavily on transnational memories and hyphenated identities, such as Tsolidis (2001) study of second-generation Greek women in Australia, Canada and Greece. Tsolidis' study focuses on cultural reproduction of a homogenous group, and argues that cultural reproduction is both a dynamic and a complex process where women play a central role.

In this research project, I emphasise the individual nature of the act of remembrance by focusing on how individuals belonging to a particular cultural group are navigating memories of their homeland. In doing so, the research also navigates the complexities of identity, and perceptions of imagined communities. The latter is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson (1983) in his book *Imagined Communities*. In this ground-breaking work, Anderson argues that nations, as we know them are not 'natural' but rather a modern concept, comprising of people that perceive themselves as belonging to the same group. The study also adopts Bartlett's theory of reconstructive memory, where remembering becomes a process to rebuilding memory (Wagoner, 2013). The study highlights it through the way women use their memories of home in order to navigate their current environments as migrants. It also further extends it by exploring to what extent remembering as a process is allowing the women to rebuild and reconstruct not only their memories, but also their identities as well as reclaim their stories in order to make sense of their current state and create belonging in a new setting.

Memory Studies and Migration

In the nexus of migration and memory studies, home and its memories play a crucial role in forging migrants' identity. In this process, understanding the type and motivation of migration is vital to the memory of home. The latter plays a central role and holds an array of meanings for migrants; especially those who experienced migration later in their lives as adults.

In his article 'The sweet memories of home have gone: displaced people searching for home in a liminal place', Murcia (2018) thoroughly discusses the notion of home and explains its complexity, especially for those who fled home because of conflict. Although migrants leave home physically, many usually carry the notion of home within them. This notion usually feeds from experiences back home and in the host country. Murcia (2018) states "when reflecting on where home is, research participants ascribe value to experiences of home in both the place left behind and the places they have inhabited following displacement" (p. 2).

Therefore, it is suggested that home is neither a fixed place nor a conceptual idea. Easthope, on the other hand, explains home as a significant place or space in which one experiences strong social, psychological and emotional attachments (2004, p. 135). Ratnam (2018) disagrees and provides a description of home as an "affective construct" that encompasses "a combination of security, familiarity, comfort, and belonging" (Hage 2010, p. 1). These explanations stress the fluidity of home and negates the assumption that home is static; moreover, it challenges the connection between cultural identity and place.

Memory and Homeland

This research study is dedicated to studying the memory of home, thus the notion of home and homeland is central. Home is studied as a fluid notion that encompasses home as both a geographical territory and home as an "affective construct" and a nest for feelings and emotions (Brah, 2005). Indeed, the concept of home for migrants is very emotional and intimate. Therefore, home can hold different meanings. While Fortier (2001) describes home as both the origin and the destination, he puts emphasis on home as a notion of 'comfort' and familiarity'. Jacobson (2012), on the other hand, describes home as a process of 'interpersonal exchange'. She believes that this exchange is what allows for an understanding of one's home. These different perspectives of home highlighted by different scholars will be used to make meaning

of women's narratives about memories of home and their significances; thus, allow for an analysis of how these perceptions of the notion of home can impact its memories. Furthermore, it would also permit for an exploration of how memories of home help shape different experiences of belonging for the women participants.

Home building is an integral and crucial part of migrants' life and the memory of home plays a fundamental part in this process for migrants. Hage (2010) argues creating home consists of security, familiarity, community and a sense of possibility or hope. He argues that migrants who achieve building these feelings are capable of creating a sense of home and belonging. Boccani (2017) argues that feeling at home can be achieved by engaging with the wider community. He believes that migrants try to create home by tapping into memories of home, identities, values and traditions; therefore, using these memories to engage with the wider community can help create a sense of belonging. Finally, Ratnam (2018) states "feeling, 'at home', for migrants, involves understanding how memory and identity were weaved through home-building processes" (p. 3).

He argues that the process of building home and belonging for migrants is what allows for a better understanding of one's identity and home memories as they are seen in a new setting and from a different perspective. As a matter of fact, creating a sense of belonging is a unique and individual process for migrants since the new environment unravels not only new and foreign experiences about their new home, but also new understandings of their memories and past experiences. Memories of home do play a key role in this process, but the belonging journey is not always simple or easy. The journey of recreating home and creating belonging is not a simple one and does require a study that takes into consideration the individual experiences of each woman including but not limited to home memories.

One cannot discuss memories of homeland without shedding the light on the concept of Nostalgia. The latter originates from the Greek word 'nostros', meaning a strong desire to return to home, and 'algos', referring to suffering (Basset, 2006). Nostalgia developed as a concept back in the late seventeenth century by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. This explains why initially nostalgia was perceived as a medical condition (Anspach, 1934). Today, Nostalgia remains to be an evolving and transforming concept (Chase and Shaw, 1989), (Rubenstein, 2001), (Agnew, 2005), and (Wilson 2005). The concept is attached to the

individual memories of home in a particular time and space. Hence, every individual or group experiences feelings of nostalgia differently as those feelings reflect personal experiences, and depend on how the memories are remembered.

Arab Identity

There is a complex and multifaceted rapport between home, homeland and identity. In the case of this study, examining Arab diaspora requires understanding what makes up Arab identity. The latter is rather a rich and complex notion defined by geo-politics of an unstable region. Any attempt to define an 'Arab' homeland leads to studying not only the historical, but also political, ethnic and linguistic condition of the region. The first challenge that faces any researcher when working with Arab communities is to define the notion of "Arabness". Historically the term "Arab" has evolved in reaction to historical events to include various communities and "races" (Webb, 2016). Today, Arabs are neither a religious group nor a 'race'. Contrary to assumptions, there is a large number of Arab non-Muslims, and a significant number of groups that trace their blood lineage to various races in the region such as: The Amazigh of North Africa, the Assyrians and the Armenians in the Middle East. In fact, defining who an Arab is has always been a complex mission as stated by Watt and Cachia (1976):

> Modern Arab intellectuals are well aware of the difficulty of defining an Arab. As long ago as December, 1938, a conference of Arab students in Europe, held in Brussels, declared that "all who are Arab in their language, culture and loyalty (or "national feeling") are Arabs" (p. 20).

The definition above stands out for being rather broad. However, there are a few interesting notions that arise from it. First of all, it defines an Arab as someone who speaks the Arabic language. Yet, the Arabic language is a Lingua Franca, which means it has no native speakers since in the Arab world every country speaks a different dialect of Arabic and Arabs have to go to school in order to learn the Standard Arabic language. Another trait of who an Arab is, is culture, which is rather rich and complex since it varies depending on where one is in the Arab region. Finally, loyalty and national feelings can also define who an Arab is. The issue of loyalty is rather confusing and vague but the historical context of when the citation was produced can offer some clarification. The conference referred to in the citation took place in the late 1930s, which coincides the peak of Arab nationalism.

The seeds of the Arab nationalism movement came as a reaction to the deficiency of the Ottoman Empire in the late 1880s (Breuilly 2013, p. 2, 3). Fuelled by political circumstances in the region such as: the creation of Israel and Nasser (ex. Egyptian President) as a charismatic leader, in mid 1900s Arab Nationalism spread into popular culture through songs, movies, literature and media. These historical circumstances explain why someone who is loyal to the Arab region and to 'the national feeling' can be considered an Arab. It was a mixture of cultural, linguistic, historical, religious and political circumstances that constructed this community.

Until today, a lot of people in the Arab world still feel the belonging to this community (Owen, 2012). These feelings of belonging are only strengthened by the latest events of Arab spring (Owen 2012, Ramadan 2011). Indeed, listening to songs from that era can still evoke a range of feelings from pride to deception. Even though Arab nationalism has decreased today, it is still alive in the collective memory of Arabs.

In his book *The Idea of Nationalism*, Hans Kohn (1944) describes a nation as a place of common and unified consciousness and self-sacrifice for the greater good. In the context of the Arab region, this point is debatable. From a political perspective, one can argue that the various nations that construct the Arab region have multiple political problems, crisis and at times wars against each other. One cannot deny the Syrian role in the Lebanese civil war; the Algerian Moroccan conflict in the seventies; Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in the nineties; and most recently the 2009 deep political rupture between Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the one hand, and Qatar and Syria on the other. These few examples disguise fundamental political and ideological divisions in the region.

Yet, a strong sense of unified Arab identity is still alive until today. This can be stemming from the shared factors of history, language, pop culture and media. It also finds reasoning in theories of nationalism; in which Anthony Smith (1995, p. 120) argues that ideologies such as pan-Arabism construct the notion of 'border guards' that offer "a new panoply of symbols and myths, memories and values, that set the included national states apart" from those surrounding them. He also further argues that pan-nationalism flourishes when people feel under threat, as they turn a blind eye to differences and bind together towards a shared ethno-history and heritage. Thus, pan-Arabism in this case plays a protective and defensive role (Smith 1995, p.145). Indeed,pan-nationalism is another avenue to understanding the notion of Arab identity.

The latter is usually correspondingly present as national identity, and at times, transcends national identity to become the dominant representation of self and identity. All in all, one cannot study cultural identity in isolation of political and religious identity/ies especially in a region that underwent and is still undergoing political uprisings, civil wars and foreign invasions.

Popular culture and media also depict the complexities of Arab identity. In his articles 'Border Guards of the "Imagined" "Watan": Arab Journalists and the New Arab Consciousness', Pintak (2009) sheds the light on the role of modern Arab media in shaping Arab identity. He argues that Arab media "is helping to craft a new Arab consciousness that co-exists with – and in some ways supersedes – national borders and religious divisions" (p.192). With the rise of internet and tele-communication and the significant increased freedom of speech in the region, Arab channels and Arab journalists have gained greater impact. Movies, series, tele-films and pop culture also indicate an increased direction towards regional identity. As a matter of fact, many pop singers from different nationalities within the 'Arab' region have collaborated in songs. What once was dominated by Egyptian media and pop industry, has become now a diverse and multi-national sphere that accommodate for the whole region under the canopy of Arab identity.

Movies and tele-series with actors from different Arab countries, each speaking their national dialects have also been produced in the last few years. These productions have also been filmed in multiple destinations in the Arab region, and have been extremely successful as they cater for the whole region and promote for a common and regional Arab identity. Moreover, television programs similar to 'The Voice', 'Arab Idol'… also started attracting participants from the whole region; thus, spectators from the whole region. In Australia, as well, movies such as 'Ali's Wedding' have discussed the notion of Arab identity but from a different perspective. The movie depicts the diversity and complexity of Arab identity through intertwined stories of migrant families from various national backgrounds in the Arab region.

It also demonstrated the multiple layers of Arab identity through the love story of the protagonists whose families are from two different national backgrounds. While community and family relationships are depicted as peaceful and diplomatic prior to the young people's potential love relationship, the dynamics change once the young people show interest in each other; and all of a sudden national identity takes the front seat and becomes the driving force

behind the families' decisions. This example depicts the layers and complexities within Arab identity. Recent publications discussing Arab identity have also been released lately. Books such as *Arab, Australian, other, Stories on Race and Identity* (Abdel Fattah & Saleh, 2019) shed the light on Arab women's experiences growing up in Australia. The book consists of a number of articles about Arab women experiences living in diaspora. This highlights a recent shift within Australian context where the diversity and complexity of Arab identity is finally coming into the surface in order to, hopefully, offer a different narrative to what has been circulated in public discourse.

Arab Identity in Diaspora

Arab identity in diaspora has proven to be rather complex and immensely influenced by Western public discourse in the last few decades. Abdul-Jabbar (2015) argues that,

> Arabs in diaspora...often find themselves in a position where they have to subvert the colonial gaze that constantly views and defines them in an interrogative mode that lacks positive assertion (2015, p.64).

In other words, according to Abdul-Jabbar the Arab community in diaspora views itself through the lens of the Other, which is often negative. He states that,

> Arabs in diaspora seem to dwell in that uncomfortable space of the antagonised ethnic minority, which objectifies doubleness as a seemingly self-imposed condition that effaces any attempt to capture the authentic self, forcing the internalisation of foreignness (Abdul-Jabbar 2015, p.64).

Furthermore, Al Abed et al. (2014) argues that senior Arab migrants in Australia face tremendous issues when accessing the health system, and he attributes this to the negative portrayal of Arabs in the media which, in his opinion, has led to prejudice and racism (p.259). Batrouney (1998) summarises Arab struggle to integrate into the Australian society throughout the different phases of immigration policies and argues that Arab Australians constantly desired to "make an early commitment to settle in Australia and accept the prevailing public mores and government policies" (p.62); however, he also notes "the complex relationship between immigration, citizenship and identity – and argues that – citizenship was not seen as a simple

indicator of assuming a given Australian identity" (Batrouney 1998, p.62). He further asserts that:

> Arab-Australians have sought the best of both worlds: to become formally attached to Australia through taking up Australian citizenship and, at the same time, to retain those valued elements of their cultural heritage. In doing so, they are embarking on a familiar journey which will lead them to become not Arab-Australians nor Australian- Arabs but simply Australians" (Batrouney 1998, p.62).

In Australia, Arab diaspora has been studied in a limited context; usually religion or nationality would be the common framework through which this community has been regarded. One of the main articles about Arab and Muslim diaspora in Australia analyses the subject matter under the light of the current political situation as well as public discourse in the media (Ozolins, 2008). Through his in-depth study, Ozolin (2008) identifies "significant interactions (or lack of them) between local and 'homeland' identities". He also highlights the importance of understanding the receiving state and its response to migrant groups as itself assisting in shaping an Islamic identity which can express itself not politically but also far more diffusely culturally (p.219).

In other words, Ozolin (2008) emphasizes that host society's reactions –especially negative-can be a deciding factor for the diasporic community or individual to adopt certain religious or cultural traits of identity. El-Zein (1998), on the other hand, reflects on his personal journey as a migrant himself upon his arrival to Sydney, and discusses notions of longing and belonging. While El-Zein begins his article by comparing migration to mutilation or amputation, wondering what a migrant loses in the process of moving from one place to another, he goes on to discuss the process of belonging and compares it to betrayal. El-Zein (1998) states,

> Familiarity is a two-way process, going much faster in one direction compared to the other. And if we resist a place, refusing to let it define our identity and become part of us, even as it opens its arms to us, it is because we feel –rightly or wrongly- that this unevenness is a threat to our older allegiances. Belonging, is as much as it is voluntary, becomes a form of betrayal (El-Zein 1998, p.230).

In both instances, the researchers analyse the dynamics of connections to homeland, community and collective memory. In studying Arab women's experiences in creating

belonging, I am also exploring collective and individual memories that influence the process of fostering belonging in diaspora. This allows to differentiate between individual memories, cultural and national memories; which also permits to further analyse the current state of Arab identity.

Arab Women in Research

This research project focuses on studying Arab women's experiences of migration. It is specifically concerned with how memories of home influence the process of creating belonging for these women. To achieve that, the positioning of Arab women in research and academia must be considered when looking at past studies of this cohort. The complexities related to this research study and the cohort being studied are intensified by the researcher's cultural and religious background; thus a clear methodological framework would enable a balanced analysis that excludes individual biases.

Edward Said (1994) states,

> no-one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind…Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities (p,336)

Said's quote challenges orientalist depictions of women from the 'East' as 'weak' and'passive'. It demonstrates the complexity of human condition, and the fluidity of one's identity. The complexities of Arab identity are exposed in this study through the narratives of its women participants. This study explores the intersection of various factors such as politics, religion, media and popular culture, and their influences in the shaping of Arab women's multi-faceted identity.

Most of the work produced about Arab women in diaspora tend to follow a National focus or a religious emphasis. While Scott Poynting (2009), one of the key writers about Arab women in Australian contest, investigates young Arab women's integration in Australia, he focuses only on Muslim young women from Lebanese background. On a different note, when examining the formation of Muslim women's identity in Australia, Britain and the United States of America, Nahid Afrose Kabir (2016) emphasises the diversity of Muslim women; therefore, her participants come from various cultural backgrounds, but all share the same faith.

Moreover, even though, in his article about Arab identity in diaspora, Abdul-Jabbar discusses diversity in faith and race amongst Arabs, he uses Arab and Muslim interchangeably (2015).

Arab women have long been described as 'passive' and 'submissive' by western writers. As a matter of fact, Hasan (2005) states "orientalist representations of women… have all along been intended to convey a particular impression of them as passive, incapable of raising their voice, and always wanting for westerners to advance their causes" (p.30). This notion has been debated for decades and refuted for its weak and generalist arguments by prominent academics such as Edward Said. However, it has survived against all odds. Supported by geo-political events, Arab women seem to be yet again in a vulnerable condition inside and outside of the Arab world. Layla Saleh (2016), in her article "Women in Need of Empowerment", analyses the western, namely United States, political discourse and its portrayal of Arab (Muslim) women. Saleh (2016) sheds light on one of the stark contradictions between the actual state of Arab women and the active role they played recently during the Arab spring, and the American political discourse about Arab women. Saleh (2016) states that "the construction of what I refer to here as the "Muslim" women in need of empowerment builds on and utilises the western orientalist archaeology of knowledge built over centuries" (p. 81, 82).

Tara Povey (2009) analyses Arab women's activism in the Australian context. In a similar vein to Saleh, Povey (2009) argues that "in post-Cold War era the idea of non-Westerners and particularly women as passive victims in need of rescue has gained further impetus through the rise of humanitarian and human rights discourse" (p. 67). She further points out that Muslim women are presented with two choices: assimilation or patriarchal violence (Povey 2009, p. 67). In her article, "Arab-Australian women's activism", Paula Abood (1998), argues that Arab women face countless issues in the public domain. She gives the example of Geraldine Brooks' book on Muslim women *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Muslim Women.* Abood (1998) states that,

> Brooks had easy access to mainstream media, with reviews and articles in the main broadsheets and magazines, as well as all the marketing and promotional exercises masquerading as serious interviews on supposedly reputable programs like the ABC's *Late-Line* (p. 169).

She further argues that "in Brooks' world, Arab women are once again reduced to two-dimensional non-speaking figures: as either the exotic other or the oppressed victim behind the

veil" (Abood 1998, p. 169). Due to the constrained context Arab women find themselves into, in the West in general and Australia in particular, this study analyses the fluid nature of Arab identity by analysing women's perspectives of Arab identity and how they understand, approach and live as 'Arab' women in Australia. It also sheds the light on how their perceived identity fluctuates and changes in order to navigate through systematic constraints the women find themselves in. This theoretical approach allows to analyse the different techniques used by Arab women under the current geo-political & cultural environment in order to reconstruct identity and belonging in diaspora.

CHAPTER THREE: ON HOME AND ITS MEMORIES

The notion of home triggers profound feelings and memories. Usually related to experiences of comfort, security, nostalgia and commonality, home memories impact our lives significantly. For migrants, the meaning of home and its memories take different shapes and forms; thus, their impact intensifies and takes new and more profound dimensions. This chapter studies the notion of home amongst first generation migrant Arab women; examines memories of home, and analyses how these memories are helping the women generate their own narrative about their experiences of migration, and the way they create belonging in a foreign land. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Arabic speaking women. The participants came from different national backgrounds and represent two different religious groups, Muslim and Christian Arab women.

This chapter contains three sections: home, its meaning and representation to participants, memories of home with a comparison of communal memories as opposed to individual ones; items representing home and the way these artefacts are being used here in Australia. These different sections all feed into each other through analysis of how memories of home, and narrative(s) of homeland are influencing the process of creating belonging for first generation migrant Arab women. In the analysis, it becomes apparent that individual perceptions of home are heavily influenced by life experiences of each participant. Therefore, the understanding of home is extremely personal and is influenced by experiences and circumstances that surpass the experience of migration. In other words, migration is not the only factor that shape one's understanding of home; individual memories of home that took place prior to migration influence greatly how the women perceive home. As a matter of fact, in many instances the fluid nature of the understanding and meaning of home was exemplified by an ambiguity that results with home meaning both the country of origin and the host country.

Moreover, memories of home were also indicating individual stories and histories. Furthermore, the selective remembrance process highlights complex relationship between home memories and the state in which the women are, their aspirations, their dreams and a sense of fulfilment. It also is an indication of life choices and decisions. As a matter of fact, memories of home heavily impact the women's experiences of migration and belonging. This impact is symbolised by the items representing home which are not only used to embody the meaning of home but also as a way to relive home experiences and memories, recreate familiarity as well as pass them on to future generations.

On Home and Homeland

The notion of home has been overloaded with meanings; especially in migrationstudies. The different theoretical approaches to the notion home discussed in this chapter serve to highlight the diversity within the existing literature, and also tomirror the diverse experiences of the participants. Rapport and Dawson (1998) define home as a place where a person is capable to become the best version of themselves. They also describe it as a cognitive state that does not necessarily include a physical place. In his study of children's literature, Marviz Reimer (2011) notes that 'home' refers to multiple meanings of "world, village, homestead, dwelling", but he also highlights that home signifies "the quality of feelings associated with that place" (Reimer 2011, p. 106). Hage (2010), on the other hand describes home as "a space where one possesses maximal communicative power…and where one knows that at least some people -family or friends- can be morally relied on for help" (p.419). For diasporic communities, according to Brah (2005),home surpasses its linkages with its geographic location and its perception is associated with the notion of return; he explains,

> on the one hand, home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination.In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit thegeographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand,home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day… (p. 192)

In fact, according to Brah meanings of home exceed geographical locations to aspace fueled with migrants' imagination. This makes home inaccessible regardless of possibilities of visit. Therefore, home becomes a place of no return.

During the interviews conducted for this study, most women spoke openly about the notion of return. Returning home came across as a notion seducing recent migrants'
imagination, but also at the same time an obstacle to belonging. In many instances, participants spoke interchangeably about home as both the geographical territory they grew up in and came from, as well as the place where emotions and feelings ofcomfort and commonality are found. The distinction between perceiving home asgeographical location or feelings of comfort and commonality is extremely important since the way home is perceived

makes a significant impact in the waythe women related to the notion of return.

This initially blurred distinction became clearer in the interviews when women spoke more about home and the way they perceive it. Whenever women spokeabout home as a geographical location, the idea of return became more present intheir narratives. However, when women perceived home as a feeling of comfort, the notion of return became distant as the idea of recreating those 'homely' feelings becomes more realistic and possible. Thus, home becomes a place that can recreated and not necessarily returned to.

Home can be perceived as both a geographical location and an emotion at the same time. As a matter of fact, when Zahra, a thirty-five-year-old stay at home motherfrom Morocco, speaks about home during an interview conducted on 18 January2019, she always links it to feelings of calmness and stability. Zahra spoke a lotabout her feelings of confusion during her early days in Australia. She also pinpoints the consistent idea of returning home that haunted her back then. She even entertained the thought of moving at least to a 'closer' destination to home such as,in her case, Europe. She describes herself during those early days as lost and unstable as she was constantly unsure about remaining in Australia or moving 'closer' to home. She says "*at the beginning, I was not stable, I always thought of going back home. or at least live in a country closer to back home. I used to think that if I were in Europe, it would be better" (Zahra 2019, interview, 18 January).*

The urge to return home meant a relief from an unseen pain and discomfort; however, it is interesting that even the proximity of home provided a sense of relief for her. For Zahra, home also means the lived experience of "family, being together and traditions". Once Zahra was able to create this experience in Australia, being

geographically closer to home became unimportant. She further explains "…*but now that I live as myself with my traditions, I feel more stable, I feel more comfortable*" (Zahra).

One can also argue that the idea of return can be a cause of pain, as Ghazala, a doctor from Sudan expresses "*I know a lot of foreigners that hold back in their lives. They don't feel happy, they are always miserable because they feel they are here just fora short time. They keep thinking we need to go back home, we need to have a houseback*

home…" (Chazala 2019, interview, 24 January2019). Ghazala expresses that the idea of return causes instability and regresses feelings of belonging. This constant feeling of instability results in not only psychological pain, but also a lack of motivation to invest in one's future here.

Clara also agrees with Ghazala and Clara states during an interview conducted on 27 June 2019 "*I have some friends, women and men, they don't accept being here. They don't love it here. They have their families but everything in them is back in Lebanon. They don't accept studying, they are living a sad life because they can'tlive here but they can't live over there neither*" (Clara). Thus, the person experiencing these feelings becomes stuck unable to lead a fulfilling life neitherback in their countries of origin, nor in their host countries. This leads to theunderstanding that summarising the meanings of home to a geographical locationdisturb one's ability to recreate home.

Contrary to the geographically limited understanding home, Zahra describes homeas 'a lived experience of a locality'. Therefore, her vivid memories of home allowher to feel at home when she is in Australia. This is best described by her depiction of Dandenong Market. Zahra says "*whenever I walk to Dandenong Market and I see the sellers screaming for buyers to approach their stalls, it reminds me of backhome. The huss and buzz takes me back home. The food stalls and the nuts all take me back home*" (Zahra). Through this description, it is obvious how Zahra's perception of home and the memories retained are helping create familiarity here in Australia, and experience feelings of belonging.

In many instances during interviews, the notion of home was accompanied withambiguity since participants referred to their countries of origin as home and to Melbourne as home. In this instance, not only is home not limited by a geographical location, it also refers to more than one location at the same time. This aligns with Fortier's (2001) descriptions of home being both the origin and the destination; except that the process for the destination to 'become' home requires a drastic change in one's mindset and perception. Indeed, Fortier (2001, p. 2), in his study of queer migration which can be considered forced migration as it is driven by thequest of freedom, describes home in the context of a space 'comfort' and 'familiarity', as both origin and destination.

Fortier's article relates to this study through the concept of forced migration whichis

an important theme in the migration stories of many participants. Fortier's description of home puts emphasis on home as a space of 'comfort' and 'familiarity'. In almost all interviews, participants describe home as a space of 'comfort' and 'familiarity'. When speaking about feeling at home in Australia, Zahra mentions,

> *because when I got used to life here, and my life and future are here; my kids' future is here. When I go back home, I feel like they are different. I don't really laugh at their jokes like before. I don't feel entertained by the things that used to entertain me before. Even the family changed; especially after the death of my mum and dad. I started to feel like Australia is home. Morocco is just to visit acquaintances and siblings… (Zahra)*

This change towards the way participants view home could come from external or internal factors, or a mixture of both. In Zahra's case, the fact that she had children here and lost her parents back home caused a drastic change in her perception. Moreover, with time Zahra was also able to create a routine and some familiarity with the new home.

Experiencing the notion of being the other has helped many women establish an understanding of home. As a matter of fact, Jacobson (2012) thoroughly examines the notion of 'home' from a philosophical standpoint. Starting with the biblical interpretation of home, Jacobson analyses the usage and understanding of home from different angles. In conclusion, she claims that understanding the notion of

home requires experiencing exchange, in which one experiences difference and otherness. She elaborates that home is "the experience of interpersonal exchange, where 'exchange' is understood as a necessary mediation with others in which we work to establish who we are with and through other people, with and through what is other to us" (p. 181).

The notion of otherness is generally experienced through exchange which informs one's understanding about themselves. For many women, experiencing exchange and identifying otherness has allowed them to experience home. For instance, many of the participants interviewed expressed their experience of home by comparing it to an external agent, in this case it was the host country. As a matter of fact, Chaima, a forty-one-year-old migrant woman who came from Iraq over 20 years ago always mentioned home in a context of comparison.

Chaima migrated to Australia to join her husband and his family. When she speaks about her early days in Australia, during an interview conducted on 3 March 2019, Chaima

mentions "when I settled in, I said oh my God! They are not up to date. I realised the clothes and the things I saw in the shops here were infashion two years ago back home in Iraq" (Chaima). Comparison was the way Chaima made sense of her new environment. she was able to establish understandings of her new 'home' by experiencing feelings of 'otherness' here, andby establishing comparisons to what she perceived back then as the norm.

Moreover, Ghazala who came to Australia eight years ago from Sudan, to join her husband, also experienced home through the notion of otherness. Her memories of home became more important as they allowed to establish comparisons and reflecton practices. While sharing her story of migration to Australia, Ghazala mentioned "*there are no neighbours, no social life. It was hard because people don't tend to belike back home. Someone new comes in the neighbourhood everybody wants to know them, and approaches them. But here it is not like that" (Ghazala).* The traits identified in these two cases as examples of difference strengthen the notion ofotherness. Be it fashion styles or social life, they have been perceived as obstacles initially; however, they are the agents that are enabling these migrant women establish 'otherness' and experience home.

The notion of home and its perception gets more complex in cases of forced migration. In forced migration-home nexus, Murcia (2018) differentiates between different notions of home; namely, 'home being a physical shelter or a specificgeographic place'; home as 'a material asset or physical place'; and home as "the place left behind'. Murcia (2018) argues that "conflict and displacement make the location of home ambivalent. Thus, rather than being located 'here' or 'there', home becomes a contested site which may need to be renegotiated over time and space"(p, 2).

In fact, for those participants who came to Australia as a result of war and/orpersecution the notion of home was challenged by memories of persecution in the homeland, and narratives of acceptance from home. Susan, who migrated to Australia over forty years ago from Jordan, is now sixty-seven years old. Whenever Susan mentions home, she is overwhelmed with feelings of nostalgia, anguish, and anger. However, for Susan home is neither in Australia nor in Jordan. When asked about feeling home in Australia, Susan asserts, during an interview conducted on 1 August 2019, "*I feel I am relaxed in Australia, I feel I am happy. I don't have anything to complain about living wise. But you know no matter how comfortableyou are here, you are confused between the two cultures*"

(Susan). When Susan speaks about Jordan, it is usually related to memories of discrimination, for example, Susan elaborates,

> *we left there because when we were young my brothers used to play with the neighbours' young boys' football in the street, they would make a cross with their hand and spit on it if they beat them. That's the memories you remember, and that's a very sad thing (Susan)*

Therefore, Susan feels secure here, and really appreciates the rule of law; yet doesnot feel fully at home in Australia. This has been argued by Hage (2010), who believes that to feel at home the following attributes need to exist "security, familiarity, community, and a sense of possibility or hope" (p. 418). Therefore, even though Susan feels a strong sense of security, it is not enough to feel at home; as Hage further explains "home is a place governed by what we consider to be 'ourlaw'. We can feel secure where the law of the other rules, but we cannot feel at home" (2010, p.418).

On the other hand, Moore (2000) argues "home can be a prison and a place of terror as well as a haven or place of love" (p. 6). Especially for those forcefully displaced, the notion of home and its memories can be an overwhelming, and an ever-changing narrative that's renegotiated over time. However, it is crucial to note that home can also be experienced as both a negative space and a positive one at the same time. Sawsan, a sixty-year-old professional who came to Australia from Lebanon fleeingthe civil war says during an interview conducted on 7 March 2019 "*the things that used to bug me about my Lebanon are still the same things that bug me today. Thereare certain elements, and a lot of things that I love. But there are things that I disliked when I was there and I still dislike them now*" (Sawsan).

Therefore, home is almost never a fixed place where a person fits in and feels at ease. It is best described as "a particularly significant kind of place with which, and within which, we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments" (Easthope 2004, p. 135). In other words, home is neither a physical structure, nor a natural environment. It is the incorporation of social, psychological and spatial approaches.

The perception of home for those who experience connections with multiple homelands is complex and multi-faceted. While one can argue that the women interviewed did express to a certain extent transnational tendencies, there are cases where transnationality and deep rooted connections with multiple homelands influenced heavily their experience of

migration in Australia. Schiller states (2012)"the term transnationality can more usefully be employed to signal the simultaneous sociocultural, economic and political processes of local and cross-border participation, sociality, membership, connection and identification" (p. 23).

In other words, transnationality refers not only to feelings of belonging or memoriesof multiple homelands but also to active and concurrent participation and cross border activities and connections. This active participation came across very clearlyin Sanae's interview as she describes her experience. Sanae further explains her memories of home, and the way they are impacting her feelings of being home here in Australia. In fact, Sanae was born in Algeria and moved to Canada in her early teens. Sanaa moved to Australia four years ago while her nuclear family is still in Canada, which she visits regularly. Sanae's extended family, with whom she keeps strong bonds, are in Algeria; and she also visits them often. Sanae also holds both the Algerian and Canadian passports, and actively uses both of them. When discussing the notion of home with Sanae, the latter speaks about both Canada and Australia interchangeably. Home was always used to describe both Canada and Australia.

Furthermore, she also refers to memories of both countries describing them as memories of home. She later on explains that home mainly means family to her, but when describing how she feels home in Australia, she describes it in terms of her home(s), both Algeria and Canada. In fact, Sanae borrows depictions of both Algeria and Canada in order to create home here in Australia. When Sanae explains how she feels home here in Australia, she states,

> *yes, the weather definitely makes me feel at home. So for me, obviously I was born in Algeria in Africa, so I have an attachment there. I am a 100% Canadian so I love Canada. So when I came to Australia, it was for me the mix of both, so I just straight away felt at home. For example, visuallyspeaking, there are no antennas in houses in Canada. At the beginning, itwas so weird for me to see antennas in a developed country, but then it took me back to Algeria. So those little things, like the architecture here is a bit different. It is more European style. So it is similar to some of the architecture in North Africa, in Algeria; it was taking me back home. Visually speaking for example eucalyptus trees; so I was born in Constantine and I grew up there where there are eucalyptus trees everywhere. So in terms of smell the experience of physical place, at least I felt at home (Sanae 2018, interview, 16 December)*

It is evident that Sanae's memories of home include both Algeria and Canada. Interestingly,

the combination of memories of both homelands Algeria and Canada allowed Sanae to instantly build a connection with her new homeland, Australia.Sanae was referring to memories from Algeria and the way they allowed her to connect to the Australian landscape. At the same time, she was speaking aboutsimilarities between the Canadian system and the Australian one. Her unique transnational memories helped Sanae create almost an instant connection and create some kind of belonging in Australia.

Moreover, whenever Sanae speaks about home, she refers to both countries, Algeria and Canada. When describing her house here in Australia Sanaa says

> *if you come to my house in Australia, you have a mini Canada and a mini Algeria. You will find maple syrup; sometimes I make French toast with maple syrup and that's not Algerian at all; that's Canadian. But at the same time I can cook a North African Tagine (Sanae)*

This duality in belonging creates evident transnational memories and shape an understanding of home that transcends physical locality to an "affective construct" (Hage, 1997) which translates into practical habits performed in the host country.

Memories of Home

Memories, as an act of remembrance, are a constructed and fluid process. Said(2000) argues that "memories of the past are shaped in accordance with a certain notion of what 'we or, for that matter, 'they' really are" (p.177). Therefore, memories are a reflection of the person, or people we have become today and the context in which they are being remembered. In addition to that, Hoelsher & Alderman (2004) highlight the selective process in remembrance and forgetting when negotiating memory. This process delicately relies on the geographical andtemporal context of remembering. Nora (1989) suggests that the loss of the geographical and temporal contexts reframe discussions of the past in the shape of individual and collective memories. As a matter of fact, in her article Ethnicity and Memory, Kearney (2013) developed the notion of 'present memory' which "involves a conception of memory in a temporal framework that is not dependent ona referral to the past, but rather is intimately linked to the present and what lies ahead" (p. 136).

This fluid nature of memories and their strong link with the present and futureintensify their impact on migrants and their belonging experience in the host country. In other

words, memories of home strongly contribute to shaping migrants' experiences, and explicitly mold their futures. In the interviews conducted for this

study, the women participants differentiated between personal and communal memories with the wider community. While personal memories expressed the women's individual and unique experiences shared at times with family and close friends, communal memories provided a sense of belonging to a larger group, and a sense of a unified identity.

For many women, their personal memories of home, memories of interactions with family and community helped them cope with various experiences here in Australia. Clara, a fifty-seven-year-old stay at home mum who came to Australia from Lebanon twenty-five years ago to join her husband, explains that her memories of home are extremely important to her and the person she has become today. Clara says "*I learnt everything over there. Even though I am here, I got my roots from there and I am experiencing them here. Like raising my kids, dealing with friends, how I deal with the world*" (Clara).

For Zahra, a migrant from Morocco, her memories of home provide a sense of identity and a moral compass. Zahra says "*it is what I was brought up with. They 'memories' dictate the way I live my life here. I don't feel lost because of them, I feel like I have an identity. I don't feel like I am imitating others. I live as myself and my traditions, I don't just feel lost*" (Zahra). Personal memories of home allow Zahra to create a balance in her life between her traditions and what she was brought up with, and life here in Australia. Those memories inform the way Zahra navigates life in Australia.

For other women, particular memories of home were emphasised and accentuated during life changing experiences, such as motherhood. Chaima, a professional originally from Iraq, explains

> with kids, when they were born, I was a young mum. Twenty years old and I had a daughter. I remembered my mum and what she was doing with my siblings. This is one of the memories. You know the song she was singing to them. Back then, I didn't know any songs in English, so the memory just came. You know, I never thought of myself before I gave birth to my daughter, that I am going to sing this song that mum used to sing. I used to make fun of her when she used to sing it to my sister (Chaima)

Huda, a thirty-three-year-old stay at home mum originally from Jordan, came to Australia more than ten years ago. Huda explains how her memories are helping her as a mother, and says "*when something happens, for example with my kids, I try and remember how my*

family solved those problems with us. How I can process this approach, and apply the good side of it to be appropriate for life here in Australia" (Huda). Similarly to Chaima, Huda's memories of her upbringing inform the way she navigates problems she faces with her own children in Australia

In some instances, memories of home can trigger melancholic feelings of old self, the person one used to be prior to the experience of immigration. These feelings were expressed by Huda when she was comparing her status of a mother here to the one of a working woman back in Jordan. The memories of the old successful self are rather a reflection of a present situation where Huda gets to remember who she used to be (Said, 2000).

Huda shares her memories about herself in Jordan and says "*I started my professional life there. I worked as a primary teacher. Since the main language in Jordan is Arabic, I studied my college degree in Arabic. So career wise, I had a good one there. But when I came to Australia, all of this was halted*" (Huda).

Sharing her husband's experience, Huda added

> *he worked as a programmer back home. But here, of course, he could not find any job opportunities because he did not speak the language, and he did not have any experience with the Australian market, lifestyle and environment… after a year, he could only find a job as a garbage man. He collected waste from sites. This was a huge downgrade for him. He went from being a manager in a company to a garbage man. He has to compromise and make many sacrifices (Huda)*

These memories might not be important in themselves, but it is the process of remembering them that is crucial. In this case, though the memories create a nostalgic feeling to one's old and ' successful' self, the process of remembering also plays a role of reminding one's self of their achievements and the potential of opportunities in Australia. As suggested by Hage (2010) who argues

> the aim of this remembering, whether by oneself or by others, is not to go back. By fostering these homely intimations, migrants provide themselves
>
> with a better base for confronting and launching themselves into life in Australia: by them, they build a shelter from 'social and cultural crisis' , and also find a base from which to perceive and grasp Australian opportunities(p. 423).

Indeed, these memories serve as a base to measure one's advancements in life and a way to progress in the future.

For those seeking refuge in Australia due to a war or an unrest in their homelands, memories from home have played a crucial role in creating a bond with the new homeland. For Susan, memories of religious persecution made her appreciate morethe rule of law and the legal system in Australia. On multiple occasions, she mentioned how thankful she feels to be in a country that is ruled by law, and in which such incidents of discrimination are rather unlikely to occur. Memories ofhome also influenced her social connections as well as political views. Socially,Susan mentioned that she does not interact much with Arabs from the Muslim faith because of their upbringing and the way they use a religiously loaded language. Politically, Susan also questioned why people complain about Islamophobia. She said,

> the Muslim people always complain but they don't say what we face when we go there. So they are going to know if they say we have Islamophobia? What about when we go down there and we get all this, what we call it? Christianophobia? (Susan)

Thus, for Susan, memories of home symbolised by traumatic memories of discrimination not only have shaped her belonging journey here in Australia, butalso influenced her lifestyle, social networks, and shaped her political opinions. It is rather interesting, that this is still the case even after over 40 years of living in Australia. This demonstrates the strong impact of traumatic memories, and to which extent they shape many aspects of one's life. Thus, memories of home especially for those who have experienced war, unrest and persecution can have a stronger impact in the way they relate to home while in a host country, as well as the way they create belonging and interact with others in a host country.

Some of the communal memories amongst many of the women interviewed in this study highlight strong national discourses. Many of the communal memories shared by the women interviewed were based on national memories that are shared bywomen from the same nationality. In this case, the communal memories were mainly those of war and displacement. Pierre Nora argues that collective memory is found in the discourse of national identity (Whitehead 2008, 150); it has also been expressed by Aisha, a forty-eight-year-old professional who grew up in Lebanon during the civil war. Aisha came to Australia more than fifteen years ago, andbelieves that memories are individual rather than shared by the whole Arab community. Moreover, Aisha considers that communal memories are mainly shared with people from the same nationality rather than

the wider Arab community. She elaborates

> *some people are more traumatised by the war, say like the civil war inLebanon, but there was no civil war for example in Morocco, or another country. So I think maybe the most common one that they will remember are family gatherings, food, gathering around food, gathering with the neighbours. So this I think is more common across all Arab countries because they like to feed people, they like to gather, they like to celebrate so these are common actions (Aisha2019, interview, 21 february)*

Rana, a fifty-nine-year-old professional, who arrived to Australia more than twentyfive years ago also confirms the impact of communal experience in creating collective memory. Furthermore, Rana's interview specifically highlights the role of traumatic experiences, in this case the civil war, in shaping collective memory. As a matter of fact, Rana feels that she does not share enough with those from theLebanese community who migrated to Australia prior to the war, as opposed tothose who came here because of the war. Rana states in an interview conducted on21 December 2018,

> *none of the people that I met actually came from the same place where Icame from -specifically the city of Beirut-. So, no there is no similar experience of what ...probably is war, yes. Probably I can see the war is the only thing we can share. That's the only thing we can share about. Most of the people who I met when I first came 1987, most of them, like eighty percent, they were here before the war. So also we can't share this experience with them (Rana)*

Expanding on the experiences she shares with the people who survived the Lebanese civil war, the participant adds,

> *we can share things about study with no electricity, so finishing my highschool on candlelight, or no water to have a shower so you have to wait for your turn to have a shower every three days. Things we used to eat duringthe way, like no cooked food for a few days. You eat tea and bread only or jam and bread only (Rana)*

Similarly, Huda from Jordan, believes that communal memory is mainly shared with people from a similar national background. She claims,

> *you are talking about a small community in Jordan, you are all similar. But here in Australia, the Arab community is vast. It includes countless countries, and each one of them you have different characters and personalities. So the difference is huge. If what you mean is the language, sure we can understand one another. But sometimes when they are talking to their own country mate,in their original tongue, you won't understand a word. Even if the countries are similar in dialect like Syrians and Lebanese, there is a point where the language becomes a barrier. With this, I mean colloquial language or slang.So the language is different. Also,*

the characters. For example, in Jordan no matter what you find, you are all almost alike. Yes there might be slight differences, but at the end we are all the same circle. The cultural difference between us as Jordanians and other Arab nationalities is huge. What we see okay with us, is not for them and vice versa (Huda)

Thus, these participants argue that in spite of minor similarities amongst the wider Arab community, significant commonalities are based on national memories and identities. Huda highlights in the quote above the linguistic and cultural differences amongst people from different Arab countries. Though communication is still possible, the major differences can be seen as a hindrance to creating a feeling of being at home with the Arab community.

When Aisha expands on the war memories, the selective process of remembering becomes apparent. Similarly to Said (2000), Maurice Halbwachs emphasises the importance of external stimuli in the process of remembering rather than solely to internal processes (Whitehead, 1971). As a matter of fact, when speaking about war memories, Aisha highlights how she prefers not to remember the war time unless it comes up in conversations with friends. She says,

although we grew up in a war zone, we try not to remember, what I missed, being displaced, then it is depressing…so when I am sitting by myself, I don't remember the war or bad things that happened during the war. Sometimes it
comes up in conversations with friends and I remember what happened (Aisha)

Thus, Aisha actively suppresses war memories as she finds them 'depressing', but the choice of ignoring these 'depressing' memories is disturbed by an external agent, in this case friends who experienced the Lebanese civil war, therefore, Aisha participates in the process of remembering.

When sharing war memories, the women participants individually reflected on how those memories have shaped their identity and affected their lives here in Australia. Aisha shares how the war influenced her habits and says,

I feel like definitely -the war- affected my identity. I was more aware about what's happening. So now I am in Australia, and I am always listening to the news, but not just in Lebanon. I want to know what's happening in the Arab world. Some people would live here, and don't want to know what's happening internationally. I think because of the war, I can't just live in an asylum being this individual who does not care about what's happening around. But I need to know what is happening at least 10% of what's happening around the world. This – the war- will shape you because that's how you grow up. When you grow up in a war zone, you know who are the big players, and what they are doing. You are more aware of

them and you keep having interest in reading and learning more (Aisha)

Rana also believes the experiences of the war have equipped her with life skills that helped her in Australia. In this practical example, Rana explains how those skillscame handy in an emergency situation, she says,

> *it -the war- gave me a good experience how to live and survive in any situation, like one day in Victoria; I think it was in the nineties, Victoria actually lost gas. There was no gas, so no hot shower, no cooking. The only thing left in each Victorian house was electricity. So you had to manage actually everything with just electricity. At that time, everything, all the houses were actually based on gas, heating, cooking, hot water, everything unless you lived in a flat that's fully electric; but all the houses were fully dependent on gas. So for ten days I think, I can't remember exactly, there wasno gas. For some people, they were panicking; for me, it was annoying of course, but I managed with no gas because this is what we learnt during the war, like you have a bucket of water and you have to finish the shower with half a bucket (Rana)*

Indeed, memories of home, in this instance the war, can be extremely important in terms of life skills that in the case of Rana were extremely important in assisting herduring the gas shortage in Victoria.

Communal memories about the Arab community consisted mainly of cultural practices. In other words, many women reflected on their memories about the wider Arab community in a very similar manner, by focusing on common cultural traitssuch as music, food, celebrations, and art. Sawsan mentions,

> *one of the things that gives me that sense of being homesick every now and then is the music, the songs, the food, the celebrations, the rituals, that's it. Nothing to do with politics or anything, but more cultural things, especiallythe music and the songs, the movies. I just went and saw 'Kafr Naoom' the other day, and I have seen the insults. So the arts and the culture are the best thing…we used to have a lots of parties and celebrations, I used to go to so many to the point that my ears, I was becoming a bit deaf from the music. Inthose days, I also used to smoke a lot of shisha and cigarettes…(Sawsan)*

Aisha also states, "*the most common one -memories- that they will remember is like family gatherings, the neighbours, gathering with the neighbours…*". Chaima alsoagrees about the commonality of cultural aspects amongst the wider Arab community and shares about her life in Iraq "*there was more social life, in the afternoon around six or seven o'clock all the neighbours are out. If there was a movie that's going to come on tv, one kid goes and tells all the neighbourhood that the movie will be on in ten minutes*"

Sanae acknowledges that the commonalities within the Arab community are limitedinto some cultural practices. She further explains,

> *yes, there are -memories- in common with the Arab community, culturallybased. Some of it, in terms of how our parents were strict, or how our grandmothers were loving, or our close relationship with our cousins. Childhood is about family. So in terms of core values, there are shared core values (Sanae)*

She elaborates,

> *we have a shared culture because I do speak the language, the food, the music, the faith… not all Arabs are Muslims, however, the majority of Arabs are faith-oriented people. Christian Arab and Muslim Arab will actually connect when they are out of their context. I would still connect with a*
>
> *Christian Lebanese because I have the language, we do believe in God, the culture, the background, the food, the music and the shared values even if we don't agree on minor details in terms of biblical stories (Sanae)*

It is interesting to note that memories of homeland have played a major role in shaping the women's experiences and molding their belonging journey. Either personal memories or communal ones, they both helped develop their identity and equip the women with useful skills to undergo the experience of migration. Communal memories were mostly based on national identity, especially in the caseof crisis, such as the civil war.

The communal memories shared with the wider Arab community consisted mainlyof cultural aspects especially shared values, food, and festivities. However, the distinction between personal and communal memories can at times be vague and ambiguous, given that individual memories cannot in any way be formed in isolation from the collective experience.

Artefacts Representing Home

Migrants use various ways to evoke memories of their homeland(s). For that purpose, imitations of home can come in tangible as well as abstract ways. The women interviewed in this study have identified different objects they feel represent their homeland. Objects for these women carry strong affective meanings, and unpacking these meanings and connotations requires understanding the symbolism, history, past and present usage of these objects. As Ahmed (2010) explains "to experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what

is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival" (p. 33). In other words, understanding the significance of these objects require understanding the way they are placed and used by the women in their private space or elsewhere, as well as their emotional significance and meanings they evoke.

It is important to note that while many women struggled to summarise the meaning of their homeland in one item, others shared the item and its symbolism without hesitation. To understand the symbolism of these items, one needs to focus on "the connections with memories and material objects that contribute to cultural identities that generate meaning and value in migrants' home" (Ratman, p. 8).

The items the women shared might seem randomly chosen, but they represent a much larger meaning that embodies cultural meanings and collective memories. These items embody the women's memory of home; symbolise its meaning, and summarise their history. Hence, these items allow the women to tap into feelings and memories to create familiarity in their new environment, as Hage (2010) argues

> The feeling of familiarity is generated by a space where the development of our bodily dispositions can be maximised, where we feel in possession of what Bourdieu would call a well-fitted habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as embodied history but, to a certain extent, it is also embodied memory (p.418)

The exhibition and use of these items exceed purposes of decoration, to creating familiarity and connecting with one's home. Moreover, Ratman (2017) argues that these items are "articulations of memory and identity that can provide clues into our non-verbal, sensory, and material encounters with others and attachment to things in the home" (p, 3). In other words, these items express the women's sense of identity and memory of homeland. The items shared by the women interviewed are divided into two main categories, tangible and intangible items. While tangible ones vary from food, to passports to traditional dresses, the intangible ones are mainly songs and poetry.

For many women items symbolising home are an expression of their untold stories. As a matter of fact, for Sanae, the Algerian and Canadian passports do not only symbolise home, but also express her national and individual identity. The meaning these items reveal about Sanae are beyond the traditional function of a passport. The Algerian and Canadian passports, for Sanae, disclose her ancestry, her history, heritage, identity, as well as future aspirations. Sanae further elaborates,

> one passport -Algerian- I got because I was born there, and both my parents are

from that country; it's my country of birth. The other one -Canadian- I got because it's my country of naturalisation. It's my country and it's the passport that allows me to visit and discover so many countries. I love traveling and this passport allows me to be me; the Algerian passport represents my ancestry; my parents and myself. The Canadian passport represents me and my identity as a young Muslim woman who is able to live her dream (Sanae)

It is thought-provoking that Sanae chose both the Algerian and Canadian passports as items representing home. This reinforces Sanae's transnational feelings since she cannot think of home without referring to both countries. Her choice clarifies that home for Sanae means both Algeria and Canada. Moreover, the fact that she uses both of them is also telling about her feelings of attachments to both countries. Indeed, Algerian and Canadian passports, summarise Sanae's transnational experience, her past and where she comes from; as well the woman she is today and what she aspires to do.

For some other women, items representing homeland offer an opportunity to create familiarity in a new context. For Zahra, *Tagine*, a north African clay dish, represents her homeland. *Tagine* takes her back to her family and brings back memories of precious time spent with loved ones. Zahra says "*it reminds me of my childhood. Me and my brothers all eating from the same tagine. We were eight siblings eating from the same tagine, great memories*". Zahra often uses the *tagine* here in Australia, she further explains "*I sometimes cook in it, when I miss my mum*". Whenever Zahra misses her family and her late mother, she attempts to recreate the feelings of security, comfort, and familiarity amongst her nuclear family here by using the tagine. By doing so, not only does she reconstruct those feelings, but she also passes on memories of herhome and family to the future generation being her children; thus, creating a stronger bond with her new homeland.

Similarly, Susan also believes that food is what represents her home and culture. She adds "*you have to know that we have not changed our culture of food. The kids have been brought up on that, and we are still eating Jordanian food, or middle eastern food and my kids love it*". As a matter of fact, Hage (2010) argues

> home food not only provides intimations of security in filling a basic need for nutrition in culturally determined way, it also intimates familiarity in that one must know what to do it with it, how to cook it, how to present it, and how toeat it. It thus promotes a multitude of homely practices for those who otherwise face the unknowable (p. 424)

For Huda as well, Arabic coffee is what represents her home. Huda gave an extensive explanation of the ritual of drinking coffee in Jordan, its meaning and tradition. She also stressed the difference between Arabic coffee and Turkish Coffee. For Huda, coffee holds meanings and significance beyond a drink; for Huda, Arabic coffee also means gathering and being

surrounded by people. She explains,

> *in Jordan, coffee time is gathering time. We also serve coffee in all occasions. We have a special kind of coffee in Jordan, it's similar to the Bedouin one where you have to hold the cup with no holder. It is served in weddings, funerals, and meetings. Coffee is served in any celebration or gathering, it's different than Turkish coffee. it's brewed in the Dallah...it'sthe welcome and farewell tradition in my house (Huda)*

Here in Australia, Huda rarely drinks Arabic coffee with her husband only as it stresses their social isolation and loneliness; therefore, she awaits till she has guests and visitors in order to fully practice the coffee tradition. Huda says "*because there is only me and my husband, it's not always ready. But whenever I have a guest, I always prepare it...*". Sharing coffee with friends and visitors recreate the homely feelings of being surrounded by family and loved ones. The practice of this tradition with friends allows Huda to feel less isolated, but drinking Arabic coffee by herself or solely with her husband reinforce feelings of isolation and estrangement. For Zahra, Susan and Huda, the practice of cooking their cultural food triggers comforting memories of home, create a sense of familiarity that they share with their families and ensure to pass on to their children.

Ratman (2017) states "the multi-sensual site of the home intersects with memory and identity through familiar senses of sound, smell, touch, taste, and sight" (p.7). While Zahra, Susan and Huda 'practice' their memory of home and express their senses of identity through the senses of taste and smell, Ghazala approaches her memory of home via the senses of touch and sight. For Ghazala, *Sari and Henna* are the items that represents her home. Ghazala explains "*growing up as a woman, you just want to wear the sari; and most of the time sari and Henna are associated with each other so much. In that setting you think, I want to get married...so you will be having henna, changing it every week*". The Sari and Henna in this case represent the feminine culture of women in Sudan. Women, especially married ones, are expected to wear henna on a regular basis. Ghazala adds "*they are very important to us as married women, I just miss these things...whenever I want to think about home, or when my husband says you look like a widow...I just do it, when I put it on, I feel like a lady, looking after herself...*" *(Ghazala)*. The meanings related to henna are very symbolic in a culturally complex system that does not fit the norms of the host country's cultural expectations. Ghazala, therefore, wears the Sari and uses Henna solely in cultural celebrations and weddings. This allows her to still practice her tradition and create familiarity in a new environment as suggested by Boccagni (2017), for Ghazala Sari and Henna are "specialised social practices" through which she seeks

to "reproduce, reconstruct, and possibly rebuild meaning home-like" (p.27) environment.

Songs and poetry were identified by many women interviewed in this study as representation of their homeland(s). It is interesting to note that three out of four women from Lebanese background chose the same singer, Fayrouz, as the symbol of their homeland. Fayrouz, a Lebanese singer and actress, is of great fame in the Arab region. Some consider her to be the most famous Arb artist of the twentieth century. Fayrouz, who did not leave Lebanon during the civil war, was accepted by all the various political fractions during the civil war. Her songs "enjoyed a wide appeal, even in Lebanon's at time of very divisive climate" (Stone, 2020). The only common denominators amongst these women are their national identity, and their vivid memories of the civil war in Lebanon. The women, however, represent different religious backgrounds and generations.

Even though the three women identified Fayrouz as the symbol of their home, the memory of the symbol and the way it is being used differs from one woman to another. For Sawsan, Fayrouz represents home, and her songs are still enjoyed by the whole family. When asked about an item that represents her homeland, Sawsan says "*fayrouz, full stop! I listen to her and I am taken to another world. I have got all her CDs, all her songs. Sometimes in the car, sometimes at home with my granddaughter, we put the songs and I teach her some belly dancing*" (Sawsan). Aisha also finds comfort and familiarity in Fayrouz' voice, she mentions "*definitely listening to Fayrouz, this will just take you straight away -home- ... I just like listening to her in the morning... her songs make you feel comfortable like they go straight to your heart..."* (Aisha). Rana also states "*Fayrouz definitely. Anytime, in the car when I feel like I want to have a relaxing time, I always put Fayrouz singing about Lebanon...if I am happy,I like happy songs...*" (Rana). Besides, Rana specifically mentions a particular song that represents her homeland. The song is called '*Ahd el waldaneh*', meaning childhood days, andstarts singing " *sana wara sana, one year after another, your love grows in my heart, you the love of my childhood. Oh dear love, I would never let you go, for all the treasures in the world – that is my Lebanon"*. She finally adds "I still have a lot for my country, of course, but you can't go back" (Rana).

All the women above reconnect with their home through the same singer; yet the way they connect is individual and different. While Sawsan seeks to reconstruct home here by teaching the future generation, about her culture which becomes apparent by teaching her granddaughter the songs and the dance, for Aisha, Fayrouz' songs allow her to feel comfortable and build familiarity. For Rana, on the other hand, Fayrouz takes her back to her childhood memories

which becomes apparent in her choice of the song. These songs allow Rana to reconnect with 'her Lebanon'.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the role of home memories in shaping the women's migration journey. It explores how the women understand the notion of home, connect to it and also remember it. Prior to analysing the memories of home, the notion of home is extensively studied from the point of views of participants. Indeed, the women's narratives about home have highlighted a proven complexity in defining the notion of home. Moreover, their narratives also recognise the fluid nature of the notion of home. Through the interviews, it was highlighted that personal experiences in the homeland, and the typology of migration were the main influencing factors in shaping an understanding of home. While personal experiences include living environment, political conditions, family ties and transnational feelings, typology of migration emphasises the reasons the women migrate for, differentiating mainly between forced and elective migration.Some crucial findings were established in the discussion about the memory of home and the various ways home memories impacted the women's journey in building familiarity in Australia.

The notion of home itself made a huge difference in the way the women attempt to create belonging here in Australia. The notion of return to homeland had a clear connection to the way home was understood either as a physical site or an emotional state. The understanding itself created almost contradicting reactions and realities that influenced the women's migration journies extensively.

This section also featured the selective remembrance process and how memory is being negotiated. In addition to highlighting its role in shaping the women's experiences in Australia, personal memories of home helped the women undergo new experiences, build a connection in the new environment, influenced major life experiences, and helped create a sense of achievement. Practicing the memory of home helped the women create familiarity in Australia. Communal memories on the other hand have emphasised the national identity discourse and communal traumatic experiences, such as the Lebanese civil war. The communal memories also helped distinguish between national identities and Arab identity. The latter was expressed mainly through vague cultural practices.

Memories of home were further emphasised through items representing home. In this section, physical and non-physical representations of home were expressed. It was noticeable both representations were used to help the women create comfort and familiarity as well as pass on their memories of home and their sense of identity to their children and grandchildren.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE JOURNEYS OF BELONGING

While the previous chapter analysed the notion of home for migrant women and the way it shapes their experiences here in Australia. It also confirmed that home and its memories shape to a large extend the way women create belonging in Australia. This chapter, on the other hand, will analyse the notion of belonging. The latter is an important and crucial aspect of the human experience. For migrants, in particular, this notion is loaded with complexities and intricacies. These complexities often stem from the fact that migrants are clearly exposed to the unique experience of multiple belongings. In addition to that, they also experience being in a foreign and unknown place and environment which forces them to go through a process of belonging or at times unbelonging, and many times they experience both states. Finding themselves in foreign lands and environments, migrants are faced with the almost obligatory trajectory of building and constructing belonging. Thus, this chapter is an invitation to discover how the trajectory of creating belonging is travelled and shaped.

This chapter aims to explore the notion of belonging for migrant Arab women. Its objective is to discover the women's journey/ies of belonging, and identify the various layers navigated to construct one's belonging. In this chapter, I argue that the journey of belonging is a unique experience that depend greatly on personal experiences. Moreover, I also stress that memories especially of home and migration process play key roles to creating belonging. While there are existing frameworks to understanding contributors to migrants' belonging, and which offer explanation and guidance, belonging remains a deeply personal journey linked greatly to pre-migration experiences.

This chapter starts with a reflection on belonging by exploring existing theoretical frameworks and linking them to multiple groups and the various layers of belonging a person may experience. In this reflection, I focus on the participants' feelings of belonging to various communities such as ethno-national, Arab communities, and religious communities. However, it is important to clarify that this chapter does not dwell on the respondents' personal identification, but rather it explores the various meanings and experiences of belonging of the women who participated in this study; and their feeling of belonging to Australia as a host country.

The second part of this chapter aims to analyse the various ways migrant Arab women build belonging in Australia. As a matter of fact, the interviews conducted with the women who participated in this study show various strategies in creating belonging, such as recreating home

memories, immersing one's self in one's community... These strategies are analysed in accordance with Hage's argument in his article 'Migration, food, memory, and home-building' (Hage, 2010). In the article, Hage argues that migrants' sense of belonging is generated by feelings of security, familiarity, community and a sense of possibility or hope. In the analysis of the women's experiences in the light of Hage's framework, memory plays a role in fostering some of these feelings but not necessarily all. Therefore, this part is divided into four sections and each section sheds the light on every point cited by Hage and how memories of home help shape these feelings. As a result, the chapter singles out other strategies that do not fall within the categories identified by Hage. In the analysis, the role of memory in creating belonging for migrant communities is also studied.

The third part of this chapter focuses on gender roles and their contribution to the experience of un/belonging. It also analyses the ways traditional gender roles are being challenged by the experience of migration. Furthermore, it pinpoints and analyses differences in men's experiences of belonging as opposed to women's as expressed by the women during the interviews.

The fourth and last part of this chapter analyses the symbolism of items representing belonging. These items and artefacts are identified by the participants, and they symbolise their experience of constructing belonging in Australia. These artefacts, the way they are used, and their roles in the women's lives, are analysed to highlight the various aspects of the belonging journeys of the women migrants, and also the diverse and different ways the women participants understood belonging and how they lived the experience.

Experiences of Belonging

Belonging, especially for migrants, contains diverse and complex meanings. As a result, belonging cannot be analysed in isolation from one's roots. The latter, which are characterised by emotional attachments to a place usually geographically distant but not necessarily emotionally, are not static and do not always manifest in a clear and straightforward way. Similarly, belonging to a new land, environment, home is also an unclear, blurred and confusing process migrants have to face and engage with. Thus, belonging, especially for migrants, holds different meanings and is closely linked to various concepts such as home, language; as well as migration experiences such as typology of migration. Moreover, it is important to note that belonging for migrants can be used in a plural form, suggesting that some participants might have many attachments and belongings (Sicakkan, Lithman 2005). This has

been made obvious during the interviews with the women migrants, who in many instances, have expressed their multiple belongings when speaking about their migration experience. The women were clearly asked if they felt they belonged in Australia; to which they all answered positively. However, as conversations progressed the layers of belonging, the difficulties and challenges started to be uncovered. Slowly as the interviews progressed, belonging clearly started to take its plural form. Aisha, a participant from Lebanon expressed clearly her sense of belonging to Australian society and to her own 'cultural' community. She says, after speaking about feeling part of the wider Australian society,

> *at the same time, we have our little community that makes you feel more comfortable. We just gather, we eat, we dance. You know this will keep you think… you just have this connection to your background and your roots. At the same time, we live in a country which is organised. You know, if you follow the law… we have the combination of both worlds if you like (Aisha)*

This shows how Aisha cherishes interactions in the group to which she belongs. She clearly loves the cultural gatherings and celebrations within her own community, but also really appreciates living in a country that is ruled by law and order. She openly states the benefits of belonging to each group and precisely cites the advantages of having the '*combination of both worlds*'. Aisha's statements reveal a deep understanding of her journey and situation as a migrant woman. They are the result of a journey that Aisha underwent to better understand her feelings towards her own community as well as her feelings towards the host country. Her emphasis on the rule of law stems from her experience in her home country; especially that Aisha experienced the chaos of civil war in Lebanon. This uncovers a deep appreciation for stability and safety. She also understands and appreciates the times she spends within her own community as those times allow her to keep the 'connections with -her- roots'.

Multiple belongings can also occur when a person experiences multiple migration experiences and develops transnational tendencies. Creating belonging is not always linked to only one location. Those who have experienced feelings of belonging to multiple locations have also acquired an understanding of the fluidity of this process. Indeed, "belonging and attachment to a place are not only a state of being, but always a state of becoming, most visible in the adaptations of those who acquire a new sense of belonging in a new place. These ideas, attachments and identities are durable, but never fully stable or secure" (Gilmartin, Wood, O'Callaghan, p. 61). This statement also highlights the fluid nature of the state of belonging, which is ever changing and evolving. For Sanae, who is originally from Algeria but has lived

most of her life in Canada prior to moving to Australia, building a sense of belonging and attachment in a new place is a reflection of her experiences of multiple migrations. She says "*I find it very difficult to say that I belong to one place. I find that I can belong anywhere*" (Sanae).

This feeling of possibility to belong and create belonging indicates an understanding that belonging is a journey that can be recreated anywhere. The various experiences of migration the participant has gone through in her lifetime have allowed her to come to the awareness that belonging is a process that is not tied to a particular place. These experiences have also allowed her to experience belonging in a plural form as she is able to experience multiple belongings to different sites.

Post migratory life requires constant reflection and negotiation regarding one's self, identity, social inclusion and social bonds. These negotiations are also reflected in migrants' relationships and the way they relate to others. Thus, Relationships and social bonds are at the core of the process to developing a sense of identity and belonging (Elias, Simmel cited in Lindqvist & Wettergren 2018, p. 44). Thus, the concept of social bonds (Scheff,1994) that refer to actual relations one has, in the case of migrants, can extend to 'imagined' social relations that migrants keep and create with imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). These relationships are crucial for the women migrants interviewed in this study. Not only dothey influence the process of belonging, but also determine the quality of post-migration experience. As a matter of fact, in Rana's case, the relationships she formed upon arriving to Australia influenced her social circles and later on her social choices. When reflecting on her early days in Australia and the influence of the relationships she and her husband had with theircommunity, Rana states

> *the Lebanese existing social life was very different to us. It was completely different, so we were very confused. We were not actually…unskilled migrants, so we were not able*

> *to fit anywhere because most of migrants at that time in 1987 were coming just to join factory work. Skilled, very highly skilled migrants, we could not really do that; especially my husband. My husband went straight away, to find his way, to find employment and he faced hardships finding proper employment because expectations at that time was, as Lebanese, to have a milk bar or a taxi driver or just go to work in a factory (Rana)*

Rana and her husband came to Australia to join Rana's parents. In the quote above Rana mentions the issues they have faced, which included finding a suitable job for her husband

while Rana was pregnant. The contradiction between the young couple's choices and the community's advice and expectations has resulted in a stressful situation for the couple, and has shaped the relationship they formed with their community. Rana mentions in the quote how the existing Lebanese community was so different to what she and her husband were used to. The community's expectations, especially at the professional level, were also an obstacle for Rana who perceived these expectations as a sign of deterioration of her social class. Coming from an 'educated' and 'professional' background, Rana and her husband perceived the proposed professions of milk bar owner or taxi driver as degrading, and refused to give in to the community's pressure. Instead, her husband insisted on finding a job that reflected his educational level and social 'class'. Rana's experience also reveals the community's perceptions about 'expected' professional paths for migrants at the time.

The community viewed working class jobs to be more accessible for newly arrived migrants, while professional positions to be difficult to access in spite of educational background. The tension between Rana and her community is a result of a perception of class issues that migrated with Rana and her community. This highlights how not only vivid memories of particular experiences shape migrants' experiences, but also memories of certain notions suchas one's perception of self and concepts of class influence migrants' journeys of belonging as exemplified by Rana's experience.

In this case Rana's cultural community did contribute to her experience of 'foreignness' rather than the opposite. Thus, as described by (Elias 1978, Simmel 1981 cited in Lindqvist & Wettergren 2018, p.44), relationships are essential to one's experience of belonging. Similarly, relationships with Rana's community have indeed shaped her experience of belonging in Australia. Indeed, Rana had to make some major decisions to establish solid boundaries with her community and build belonging in her own way. Her journey of belonging in the Australian society has been shaped in a different way than many other Arab women interviewed as she sought belonging here by first isolating herself from her own community.

In addition to social bonds, social context also plays a crucial role in creating belonging. May (2013) emphasises the importance of familiarity with appropriate behaviours and knowing how to conduct oneself in specific social contexts. Migrants often feel more confident once they build familiarity in the new social context. This is supported by Sanae's experience; Sanae stated that she did not find it difficult to settle in in Australia due to her upbringing in Canada. She was already familiar with living in a western society with similar processes. She also did

not face a language barrier as she could already speak English.

Sanae admits that she had to get accustomed to some social manners, but her ignorance of these manners did not necessarily threaten her ability to settle in. Sanae gives an example of this when she described the way people commit to appointments here. She states *"In Canada, if I am committing to an appointment with a friend, that's it you say I will see you on…. -here- I would see people message, are we still on tomorrow? And then for me it was like what do you mean? Are you trying to back out of it? …I did not understand necessarily. This is one of the cultural ways"* (Sanae).

Aisha's experience, on the other hand, was different to Sanae's. Aisha remembers her early days in Australia as being totally different to what she had been used to back home. Aisha remembers how she had to learn new things to settle in here, and states

> *When I came here, I was pregnant with my second baby, so it was a little bit hard… leaving the family and starting… I was not working, like I was working then I came here, gave birth, stayed home… it was like you have to learn about everything. Different lifestyle. I remember I had to memorise the Mileway… you know there was no navigator at that time, you have to know the roads. So this is the first thing we did. We did the driving test, just to get an 'L'. It was bit by bit, you have to learn. They would say something on the news, and you don't know what they are talking about. Like who is this politician? We used to get the newspaper 'The Age' and read to know more. We needed to get educated to know where we are living, and how the rules are…it was not difficult, it was just a new life, like we had to learn everything (Aisha).*

The process Aisha went through helped her understand the social norms in Australia. Understanding social mannerism is extremely important for migrants to be able to confidently navigate the systems of the country they settle in. Aisha used various methods to build familiarity with her new homeland such as learning the streets, driving and the local icons and politicians. Moreover, this familiarity with the social context helps migrants socialise with more confidence with the locals.

Belonging is also not fixed in one place but is negotiated and made conditional by other people (Wernesjo 2015). While belonging is heavily connected to the notion of place, the latter has been perceived as socially and spatially constructed with multiple meanings (Rodman 2003). Thus, these connections with place are either social, such as one's community, or spatial, such

as one's neighbourhood. While Aisha's socially constructed belonging, expressed via her experience with her own community and the activities they do together, Susan's experience, on the other hand, is strongly connected to a place. She mentions

> *Sydney Road Brunswick has a special place in my heart. Because nearly every Sunday, we go and have breakfast there. And one of them is A-1 Bakery. It is a very special place, brings memories. And when you see everybody sitting there having a mankousha or having the cheese pastry that traditionally comes from our country. And how busy this place is, whether it is European or even Lebanese culture, the Arab community all come there. If you stop there, you feel like oh my God, I feel back home. So you have to know that feeling from Jordan and the culture and the meals and to see the people. It just makes you so happy because you feel like I am here between all these people eating mankousha and everything. That means a lot, Sydney road means a lot to the Arab community (Susan)*

Susan's emotional description of Sydney Road as a place, its symbolism and meaning for Susan relies heavily on Susan's memories of home, and reveals a deep connection between her home memories, place and a sense of belonging.

The second part of Wernesjo's argument claims that belonging is made conditional by other people and their reactions. It is evident that people make up the social and spatial aspects of a place. Thus, people and their perceptions are central to the belonging process (Probyn, 1996). Many of the women interviewed for this project expressed that the perception of others was crucial to their belonging journey. To be more precise, the acceptance of others can be central to creating feelings of belonging in a particular place. As a matter of fact, Sawsan sums up the various ways perception of others can be manifested, and states

> *your sense of belonging depends on others and that's what shatters every now and then. How they treat you and whether they make you feel welcome or whether the systems are responsible or not; or whether you are reflected into this or reflected into that; or whether you see yourself in the media; all of these do impact (Sawsan).*

Sanae also elaborates on this and says "*I think that the feeling of where we belong is influenced by how people make us feel as well. If someone is not making me feel welcome, I am not going to feel like I am at home*" *(Sanae).* This strong statement explains the importance of feeling 'welcome' and accepted for Sanae to feel at home in a new environment, in this case Australia. It also further demonstrates the role the perception of others plays in creating belonging in a new environment.

Upon reflecting on her belonging journey Sanae brought up memories of acts of discrimination she had faced in Australia. Her feelings of discrimination and rejection were as strong as her frustration with a society that does not condemn discrimination. Sanae openly discussed society's double standards and contradictions when it comes to speaking about bullying and discrimination as opposed to acting against it. She further explains,

> *I was discriminated against. We are in a society where we are condemning bullying and derogatory behaviour; but when it comes to discrimination, it is not spoken about enough. I feel like as a woman, and being discriminated against because I am a woman and because I am an Arab and because I am visibly Muslim. It is just a lot to handle, and I think that a lot of women would share these sentiments with me. It is part of my identity, of my memories and experience of belonging because would you stay if someone invited you to their house and be like hey you can move it with me and it will be your house as much. But then when you move in to that house, you start paying with them mortgage, bills… but now and then they are insulting you telling you this is not your house, go back to where you came from… that's the issue here! You are contributing positively to the society, and we should never be the scape goat to someone's frustration at no time (Sanae).*

According to Sanae, the intersection of being a woman, of certain cultural background and visibly Muslim has made her vulnerable to racist acts. Many other women interviewed share similar instances of discrimination and how they impacted them. Huda for example said "*I faced so many racist situations, one of them was so bad that I went to the police*" (Huda). Even though acts of discrimination do not necessarily characterise the women's experiences, they leave a mark on their journey. As highlighted by the women, others' reactions are extremely important to the women's journeys of belonging.

As a matter of fact, Sawsan expresses similar feelings when she reflects on her experience working at the fire brigade, she says;

> *There are times when I would feel totally out of place…if I were to think about my job at the fire brigade, I felt totally Arab. Even though I have been here for a long time, but you step into an environment and you think wow. It was really like time travel, you know. They were blokes, all Anglo-Saxons, were not welcoming at all of any one who is different, let alone a woman. So they don't like women, they are resentful, they just…it is such a different culture altogether. And you do not feel welcome, you only feel like you are being tolerated at best… (Sawsan)*

Similarly, for Sawsan, the intersection of being a woman from a different cultural background and being seen as different in 'a hostile environment' that led to feelings of rejection. These negative experiences of discrimination which result in feelings of rejection are heavily caused by other's reactions. In all the examples cited above of Sawsan, Huda and Sanae, the others' perceptions and level of acceptance play a central role. While it is true that others' perceptions influence the belonging journey for migrants, one's belonging journey does not solely depend on those perceptions. If the women interviewed relied mainly on other's perceptions, they would not have been able to establish belonging here and would have probably ended up returning to their countries of origin. Belonging for the participants in this research project took different shapes and forms; and their journeys to creating belonging included a lot of reflection, negotiation and at times sacrifice.

On Creating Belonging

In his study of nostalgia in the Lebanese community in Sydney, Hage (2010) argues that the memory of home and its practices can be an enabling force to home-building practices. He re-defines nostalgia as ""an active insertion of memory in the construction of the present and the future" (p. 417). Furthermore, in order to achieve feelings of home as an effective construct, Hage argues "this homely affective structure has to be built with affective blocks that provide either in themselves or in combination with others four key feelings: security, familiarity, community, and a sense of possibility or hope" (p.418). Thus, this section will be sub-divided into the above-mentioned feelings where data shared by women participants about creating belonging in Australia is analysed accordingly.

■ Security

The feeling of security is a basic human need. It is considered to be linked to feelings of freedom from danger and fear, as well as feelings of satisfaction of basic needs. However, Hage (2010) argues that for migrants the feeling of security surpasses its basic meanings to "a deeper sense of security and homeliness emanates from the space where we not only have but feel empowered to seek the satisfaction of our needs and to remove and exclude threatening otherness" (p. 418).

The women interviewed for this study have linked feelings of security to both the literal meaning as well to the meaning attributed by Hage's definition. Two major themes emerge from data analysed. Thus, feelings of security were described in two major ways by the women

participants. Additionally, the way the women understand and approach feelings of security is strongly linked to events lived back home and the memories of those events. One group focused on the literal meaning of security, and the other one, in addition to the literal meaning, has also experienced a deeper and a more complex sense of security.

All participants who experienced war or discrimination prior to their migration have focused on the literal meaning of security. During the interview, in a description of settling in, Sawsan mentions the feeling of security as one of the helping agents to settling in. she says *"it is a new country, it is a new place, we feel safe here…we are no longer stifled by the war, which stops everything and disrupts everything. So it was good to feel that life can go on"* (Sawsan). The focus on the feeling of security stems from Sawsan's experience of war back in Lebanon. Similarly, Clara, who is also from Lebanon, emphasises the feeling of security and safety and states *"when I came from Lebanon, there was a war. You did not feel like you, if you get old. There is someone to look after you -like- here. But in Lebanon, poor things, they die like no one is looking, and if you do not have money you don't… you are nothing"* (Clara).

In her description, Clara links the feeling of security to physical and financial security. Both of which Clara did not experience in Lebanon during the civil war. Moreover, Susan, who shared traumatic stories of religious discrimination she experienced in Jordan, also adds *"thank God Australia has rules and regulations for everyone, Thanks God. Because in our countries, we do not have that. You cannot open your mouth. They spit on the cross that's it, who cares"* (Susan). Susan links the feeling of security to the rule of law and order as her memories of home are dominated by experiences of religious discrimination.

Other major aspects related to feelings of security expressed by women participants focused on the construction of homely spaces. In other words, they linked feelings of security with the sense of building familiarity in a new environment. As a matter of fact, many of the women participants expressed that family, home and language were major helping agents in their belonging journey. These elements have all helped the women construct familiarity which will be further analysed in the section below.

■ **Familiarity**

According to Hage (2010) familiarity involves the creation of a familiar knowledge. The latter has been mentioned by every woman interviewed in this study, and was manifested in various ways. One major aspect of creating familiarity is learning the language, in this case English.

For Sawsan and Rana learning the English language was an important step in their belonging journey. The ties between language, community and belonging are strong and significant as Anderson (1983) describes as follows:

> What the eye is to the lover – that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made her or her mother-tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed (p. 154)

For the women cited above, learning the language was a vehicle to penetrate the local community and start building belonging. Sawsan, states

> *the language was the main thing for me. I was eager to get to know the language. Having family here helped. I came here with my mother and my brother and I already had a brother and sister here, so that helped. But forming friendships was not easy… (Sawsan)*

in her statement, Sawsan emphasises the importance of learning the language to form friendships. While having established family here helped, forming friendships was important yet hard to achieve. Language, in this case, was the vehicle that would allow to communicate with the wider community and form acquaintances, friends, and by extension a wider sense of community beyond family.

For Rana, learning English has opened many doors. As a housewife and a young mother, Rana spent most of her time indoors. With limited knowledge of the English language and a strong accent, Rana wanted to create change but did not know where to start from. She says

> *I used to know English, but from overseas is different than Australian… so I decided I wanted to learn everything from zero… I was lucky to find a next-door neighbour, who is also a volunteer…I learnt a lot from her… I started going to the Community Centre and this is how I knew about community work (Rana)*

when describing the link between language, community and belonging, Shindo (2019) suggests the captivating power language persistently holds in our understanding of community. He states "language is embedded so deeply in our political imagination that it is taken completelyfor granted as an authentic sign of belonging" (p. 1). As a matter of fact, for Rana, learning English helped her create a social life, learn about the society and also introduced her to her future career. This has created familiarity for Rana and also helped her to transition her life significantly from a housewife to a career woman; as a result, Rana opted for a career in the community sector. Indeed, for both Sawsan's and Rana's cases, language played an important

role in creating familiarity through friendship and community.

In addition to language skills, the women participants built familiarity in various ways. For example, mixed marriage was one of the factors to feelings of familiarity and security. Puschmann, Driessche, Gronber, Putte and Matthijs (2015) argue that "mixed marriages (between migrants and natives) have even been acknowledged as being the best indicator of processes of acculturation" (p. 323). Furthermore, they link marrying someone from the host country to accessing all domains of society. Indeed, Sawsan, for instance, felt a great sense of belonging when she married an Australian man. In her description of her journey of belonging she says *"I married an Aussie, that played a part in a sense of belonging because it kind of was, gave me a foot into the community, into the dominant community" (Sawsan).*

For Sawsan, marrying someone Australian born guaranteed interaction with the wider community. Her husband was her passport and her introduction to a new and, to a certain extent back then, foreign social circle. When comparing herself to other migrants, she adds *"there are Lebanese, if I think of some of my friends and colleagues or whatever, they interact with non-Lebanese in the workplace, but their whole social circle is very Lebanese" (Sawsan).* In this case, marriage was a major factor to build familiarity and common knowledge for Sawsan who was able to penetrate the wider community through her husband. The social capital earned through this marriage influenced the opportunities and experiences Sawsan encountered in her journey of belonging. This sheds the light on the importance of local knowledge and the impact of developing local knowledge for migrant women's ability to build familiarity.

Another major factor to building familiarity, identified by participants, is diversity and multiculturalism. The latter as a political concept has been over-debated; however, for the purposes of this analysis, multiculturalism will be examined in the light of the various meanings it holds for the women participants. For example, when speaking about her experience, Aisha says *"because it (Australia) is a multicultural society. You are not just an outsider; everyone else is. You are a minority and the majority is different too. You feel like when you are walking the street, you just meet many different people from different backgrounds" (Aisha).* Thus, for Aisha being a minority does not pose a problem in a society constructed by multiple minorities. In the contrary, being a minority amongst other minorities is what multicultural Australia consists of; thus, the minorities become a majority. This creates familiarity for Aisha. Similarly, Ghazala also views multiculturalism as a uniting agent. She mentions *"...like everyone comes, there is so much diversity that can be a good thing. It is what*

makes Australia actually beautiful. This diversity does make us unique and it is good… diversity is actually the thing that unites us" (Ghazala).

Ghazala perceives diversity as a uniting tool since all of us (Australians) come from different backgrounds; thus, diversity of background is what unites all Australians. These descriptions of multiculturalism and diversity help the women participants build a sense of familiarity. Although it might be perceived as a paradox when one argues that by accepting our differences and diversity, one can actually build familiarity; but the women participants found that diversity and multiculturalism help them feel less as a minority, and more as part of a mosaic of numerous minorities.

The participants have been able to establish familiarity through learning the English language, marrying a local from the dominating culture and through the concept of multiculturalism. The fact that these techniques are not clearly linked to specific memories of home does not negate the role of memory in creating belonging, but does highlight that familiarity requires exploration of new concepts and ideals in order to acquire local knowledge. For instance, learning the English language as explained by the participants was key to creating familiarity as they could not only communicate through it, but also build connections and friendships. Besides, marrying someone from the dominating culture also features a technique in which some women gained social capital.

Finally, the concept of multiculturalism allowed some participants to feel as an integral part of society, and part of the many different communities that make up the Australian narrative. Thus, multiculturalism in this case is considered a helping agent not to only contribute to feelings of belonging, but also to politically and socially legitimise this belonging.

■ **Community**

For Hage (2010), the feeling of community is crucial to belonging. Community, for Hage, includes living in spaces that are recognised as 'one's own'; where a person shares values and morality with the rest of the community, and recognises that there are people that can be counted on for help (p. 418-419). For the women participants, the feeling of community differed depending on each one's life circumstances.

In many instances, feelings of community were a direct result of developing familiarity in new spaces. Sawsan, for instance, was able to develop a feeling of community where she shares

common values and morality through her experience of marriage. The latter is what allowed Sawsan to be recognised as one of the dominant cultures by introducing her to new social circles and friendships. This opportunity of interaction allowed for a deeper sense of community and belonging.

For Clara, a sense of community depended mainly on religion and language. Being a housewife and a mother, Clara has had limited interactions with the wider community. She describes her early days in Australia and says, *"when I first came here, I needed a friend; I needed someone to talk to because my husband was working and I am home" (Clara).* Her interactions are still very limited to her family and the Lebanese community; which is very different and limited interactions compared to Sawsan who married an Australian. Clara mentions *"I go to a Lebanese Church, I go to Lebanese school, I am surrounded with Lebanese…" (Clara).* Her sense of community is influenced by her circle of interactions, which are mainly with the Lebanese community, and which usually take place in the church.

Aisha was able to create her own and unique understanding of community. The community that makes Aisha feels home consists of her interactions with both worlds: the wider community, and the specific cultural community. Aisha best describes this duality by stating *"we have our little community, we feel more comfortable, we gather, we eat, we dance…you keep this connection with your background and your roots. At the same time, living in a country which is organised, follows the law. We have this combination of both worlds if you like" (Aisha).* This combination of what allowed Aisha develop her sense of community.

■ **Possibility and hope**

The sense of possibility, hope and achievement are central to feeling home. Hage (2015) argues that this has been overlooked in theorisations of home, and there was rather an emphasis of home as a shelter, and a resting place. Hage (2010) states,

> it -home- has to be open enough that one can perceive opportunities for 'a better life'. The opportunity to develop certain capacities and skills, the opportunity of personal growth, and, more generally the availability of opportunities for 'advancement' whether as upward social mobility or emotional growth or in the form of accumulation of symbolic or monetary capital (p. 419).

For Hage, opportunities for advancement and hope for a better life are central for creating home and belonging for migrants.

Similarly, women participants have expressed their hope for a better tomorrow and appreciation for opportunities presented in Australia. This possibility of achievement and life advancement has not only helped the women establish themselves, but has also helped create a feeling of belonging for many of them. For Sawsan, speaking up for minorities rights and creating change is what creates her sense of belonging. Sawsan explains during the interview this feeling and says,

> *being active and creating change is what gives me that belonging. I have rights, I can voice my rights, I can voice my dissatisfaction with something. I can talk about injustice; I can talk about the fact that we do not have enough representation in the media that there is discrimination at work* (Sawsan)

According to Hage's theory, Sawsan would be an example of someone who views possibility and hope not only for herself, but for the whole community and society through creating change towards a better and fairer society.

For Chaima, Rana and Susan, a sense of opportunity focus on 'accumulation of symbolic and monetary capital'. They both expressed their satisfaction with the opportunities encountered to participate in professional and economic life. They also felt that Australia presents a better life for their children. Aisha on the other hand, experienced a sense of hope and advancement via educational activities. When describing how she started developing feelings of belonging, she said *"it started gradually when I started studying at university" (Aisha)*. For Sanae, on the other hand, a sense of advancement manifested on personal and spiritual growth. She states "*the experience I have in Australia is discovering my love for the prophet in a new and different way. My Australian experience helped me strengthen my spirituality" (Sanae)*. It is important to note how the women participants emphasised on the element of hope, opportunity and advancement in life; and articulated in ways that manifest the women's experiences and journeys.

Participants' Perceptions of Gender and Belonging

In order to analyse women's experiences in creating belonging, unpacking the interlocking relation between place and gender becomes essential. Place reframes gender in migrant communities. It helps rethink the inherent ideas and roles migrants have about gender. As a matter of fact, it is debated that the process of migration "sparks major shifts in the roles of women and men" (Andrews 2018, p. 201). This shift is generally attributed to the 'liberating'

cultural and legal frameworks in which western countries operate. While this is true in so many instances, it still does not take into consideration accounts of race, class, political environment, education and the intersection of all mentioned factors. It also does not consider complex cultural community relations that affect many of the decisions migrants make on daily basis.

In the process of reflecting on the role of gender as part of their belonging journeys, this section unpacks the ways participants perceive Arab men's experiences of belonging. The women participants shared many stories about Arab men. The latter were men that the women personally knew. They were men from the community; cousins, husbands, and even fathers at times. The women's perceptions of the men's experiences reflected both an understanding of men's traditional roles, and an ability to analyse these roles in relation to pre and post migration; within one's community and in relation to the wider society.

It is important to note that any discussions of men's experiences are through the lens of the women participants. Therefore, when discussing the men's experiences of belonging; some women focused on the traditional gender roles within Arab families which are still maintained within cultural communities here in Australia. Thus, these roles were perceived as an advantage that allowed the men to receive a tremendous amount of support from their communities. As a matter of fact, Chaima, for example, expressed that men and women have totally different experiences when they arrive to Australia. She says *"I have seen people come in here, as a male, straightaway they take them clubbing" (Chaima);* which would not be acceptable for a female within the traditional cultural practices.

Clara, on the other hand, highlighted the expectation on men to provide for their families. When speaking about her own experience, she states *"I came here, my husband was working here and I did not need to work. But if it is a man, it is different. Like he has to provide for his family… he cannot come here and not work and depend on his wife like I depended on my husband" (Clara).* The traditional roles men played in their countries of origin remain the same in the eyes of their cultural communities. Thus, men upon arriving here do receive more support from their cultural communities compared to women migrants. Sanae expresses the same thought and says *"they (men) will receive the support from the community. Men will try to find a job for that person, help them understand the system. They will have strong support" (Sanae).* This supportis to allow men fulfil the expectations related to their gender roles within their cultures.

In terms of Australian lifestyle, gender categories were perceived differently than in the Arab region. Many of the participants highlighted that men and women either faced similar barriers or men actually struggled more. Chaima highlights that the expectations are the same for both men and women here in Australia especially in relation to employment, and financial independency. When sharing her experience running an Arab women's group, Rana focuses on the similarities of issues faced by the women in the group. She touches on underlying tensions related to cultural expectations, and says *"what I start hearing was that, some of the men, what are you teaching those women? to be against the men? They (men) said don't talk to her, she is a bad influence on you" (Rana)*. Rana describes how she was perceived by the men from her community as a result of the work she was doing when facilitating Arab women's group. By participating in this group, the women were learning more about their rights and responsibilities in Australia, which was perceived by the men as a threat. Sawsan also hints to the power unbalance that occurs within gender roles post migration. She pinpoints that men find it harder to adapt due to the changes that occurs in gender roles. She states *"I think men are having a harder time, specifically to do with gender roles. The fact that they had higher status and here it is less. Women here have got more opportunities and access to be more independent; and they feel kind of their role is diminished" (Sawsan)*. The traditional gender roles are challenged by the migration experience for both men and women in the Arab community. The fact that the men find it harder to accept the 'degradation' of their role as a result of their migration effects their belonging journeys in Australia.

Another significant barrier to men's migration and belonging, according to participants, is the political environment we live in and the perception of 'Arab' and 'Muslim' men in the media. Arab, especially Muslim, men have been portrayed negatively in the western media. Public discourse about Arabs and Muslims in general, and about men in specific, has been full of negative images which led to prejudice and racism (Al Abed 2014, p.259). Thus, men are usually perceived as "a risk, while women are at risk" (Schrover & Moloney 2010, p. 255). This intersection of gender, religion and politics reveals an additional burden for men trying to settle in Australia. Sanae describes this during the interview and says,

> *Women do experience sexism in a daily basis; however, I am going to say that in terms of migration, the discrimination would be the other way around. As a migrant woman from Arab Muslim background, I am more welcome than a male… it is harder for men*

to migrate to western countries. Once they migrate their experience is different. We are in a country where women's rights to a certain extent are more protected than men. So as women we get higher support than men (Sanae).

The negative perception of Arab men did not affect only policy and migration processes in Australia, but also influenced the belonging journey for many men who recently migrated to Australia.

The disturbance that occurs to gender roles post migration, the political environment we live in, the negative portrayal of Arab men in the media…and the intersection of all these factors shape a totally different experience of belonging to men. This resulted at times in men going back to their home countries, or to a divided belonging between home countries and Australia as expressed by Sawsan. She states *"I had a friend who was an artist, he could not fit here. He went back. Left his wife here" (Sawsan).* She also gives another example of her brother and says *"my oldest brother lives six months here and six months in Lebanon. He has cut his sense of belonging in half" (Sawsan).*

The examples of the two men above highlight the difficulty some Arab men experience post migration. Men's sense of loss extends the feelings of losing one's home, community, social connections to a loss of status and power; which explains why some either chose to return to their homelands or spend significance amount of their time between the homeland and Australia.

When reflecting on their own experiences and those of other Arab women, the women participants agree that women are more adaptable and resilient. Ghazala states,

> *I think we as women, we are sort of multi-tasking human beings, we want to look after the family, want to look after the husband, want to thrive in this community, want to be something…when they (women) come here, it is life a mode of survival, she has to survive in this new environment. She gets all of her out, gives everything… (Ghazala)*

In this passage, Ghazala was describing her experience and that of many women from her community. Sawsan agrees with her and says *"I think women adapt. In general, (women) are more adaptive to new environments" (Sawsan).* In many other cases such as Rana's, the women are the driving force to remain in this country. In fact, Rana's husband struggled greatly to fit in in Australia and wanted to go back to Lebanon. However, Rana insisted they remain. Even

though Rana describes this period as 'a big challenge', she still believes it was the right decision. Rana's desire to remain here can also be explained by a strong sense of loss in her home country.

The loss of her childhood house during the war, and the loss of her childhood photos were often brought up during the interview in addition to the experiences lived during the civil war. These painful memories, and her sense of loss can be driving forces behind her strong desire to build a 'safer' and more 'secure' future for herself and her children in Australia. In spite of all the challenges women were faced with after migrating to Australia, participants believe they were equipped better to create belonging in Australia than men from their communities.

Artefacts Representing Belonging

Objects and artefacts, discussed in this section, have a strong significance for the participants in the study. While the objects themselves might not be of value, but the meanings attributed to them carry emotional importance. This section analyses the importance of these artefacts for participants' belonging, and pinpoints their meaning and symbolism. Kasfir, Ravenhill, Pitcon and Hans Witte (1995) argue that objects carry power that is dependent on context and environment. The artefacts and objects shared by the women carry meanings that are subjectively linked to their own journeys of belonging. If taken out of the context of their narratives, these objects would mean almost nothing to other individuals. However, the women put strong meaning behind the object they shared during this study; as these artefacts revealed their journeys of belonging, and disclose a lot about their story of migration, memories of homeland, and journeys of belonging.

Migrants experience belonging in different ways. Each woman participant articulated her journey in a distinctive manner that summarises her pre-migration experience, reason for migration, and post-migration experience in Australia. In an attempt to represent their belonging journeys, the women shared a variety of objects and artefacts. The latter, not only represent their stories of belonging, but also usually shed the light on the reasons of migration, struggles to settle in and to a certain extent their thirst for belonging and feeling at home. While some of the women interviewed struggled in identifying one particular object that represents their belonging journey in Australia, others were quick to highlight them in a clear and concise

way. The objects both tangible and intangible all relate to women's individual experiences of belonging.

Tangible Artefacts

Both Zahra and Rana believe that their houses here in Australia are what represents their belonging journeys. Even though the items of representation are similar, each woman holds a different understanding of the meaning of their houses. For Zahra, her house symbolises her belonging because that is her main source of comfort; a place where she feels she can be her true self. When explaining what her house means to her, she referred back to her home country, Morocco. She specifically used the example of her most recent trip that took place a few years after she migrated to Australia. Zahra confirms she did not feel comfortable, she says *'things were not the same'* like before; referring to pre-migration to Australia. She explains *"when I go back home, they tell me I am not the same anymore. I am not Moroccan anymore. I feel more free here -Australia- than in Morocco. I do whatever I like. I don't feel judged like in Morocco… when I went back to Morocco, I missed home" (Zahra)*. Zahra's perception of comfort and freedom has definitely changed after migrating to Australia. She felt her family's perception of her as a different person has become a source of discomfort and judgement. It is interesting to note though that Zahra mentioned that she missed her house in Australia, but not necessarily Australia. She felt that the only place that provides her with feelings of comfort is her house, and not society. Understanding this paradox requires a reflection on Zahra's story of migration and belonging.

Zahra came to Australia to join her husband. After her initial and brief infatuation with the country and its technological and economic advancement, Zahra felt 'lost'. She tried various ways to feel comfortable and develop a sense belonging here in Australia, first by assimilating, then by strengthening her relationships with the Arab community; but the feeling of being 'lost' was persistent. She confirms by saying *"what I noticed in the Arab community here, they try to belong here and change their ways, I feel like most of them are lost themselves" (Zahra)*. 'Changing one's ways' was definitely not acceptable by Zahra, for whom that resulted in feelings of confusion, loss and desperation. Zahra's description of the Arab community as lost is intriguing since she perceives them as a community that's confused. She believes their confusion is a result of unauthentic changes they undertook in order to 'fit' in. First, this highlights Zahra's personal ideals that value traditions and authenticity. However, this also

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demonstrates Zahra's memories of the Arab community that do not match her experience in Australia. According to Gerovitch (2011) there is a strong association between memory and the various ways people interpret their living realities. Zahra in this case has relied in her memory of the Arab community in her description.

It took a dramatic turn of events here and in Morocco for Zahra to establish belonging here in Australia. First, Zahra's family started growing. Children gave her a sense of stability, possibility and hope. In addition to that, Zahra lost her strong connection with her homeland when both her parents passed away in the span of two months. Zahra experienced a sense of loss back in Morocco, and a feeling of growth and establishment of roots here in Australia. Both events established a foundation to building a strong connection with Australia, and a sudden and dramatic detachment with the homeland. The symbolism of birth and death is what resolves belonging for Zahra. Birth and death symbolise the attachment with a new home, and to a certain extent detachment with homeland, and one's old self. Zahra states *"my life and future are here. My kids' future is here… after the death of my parents, I really felt I belong here" (Zahra)*. Zahra's feelings of belonging are a result of her perseverance to feel stable and secure and to get rid of the feeling of being 'lost'. Feelings of familiarity were also established through her children, but feelings of familiarity were lost back in her country of origin symbolised by the death of her late parents. As a result, Zahra was able to strike a balance that resulted in feelings of belonging and familiarity best symbolised by her house.

For Rana, on the other hand, her house here in Australia carries different meanings, and represents a different belonging journey. For Rana, her house means stability and to a certain extent a collection of memories. She states *"my home, this is my kingdom. Everythinghappened here. Even my grandchild's first birthday, I had it here. Everything happened here" (Rana)*. For her, the house represents a collection of events that took place in her life here in Australia. This is extremely important for Rana who lost her family home during the civil warin Lebanon. However, it is important to note that while Rana's life changed drastically after the loss of their family home in 1982 during the Lebanese civil, what was extremely difficult for Rana is losing her childhood photo album. She explains

> *the only thing I still feel very bad about is my photo albums since I was a baby. I do not have photos of my childhood because they destroyed the house, everything was burnt so no photos left for me… that's something I can't really get back…everything else you*

can recreate, redo, start building something else you like, or you love, but things like
photo albums, no. (Rana)

Thus, for Rana, her house here in Australia represents the collection of memories once lost back home. In Rana's life, a house was a key force behind her decision to leave and migrate, and a house is yet again a key player in creating belonging here in Australia. In this case, the house becomes the symbolism of security. The security which Rana stopped feeling during the civil war and which was the main reason behind Rana's migration to Australia. The house also symbolises familiarity and connection, which were also lost during the war. These feelings were apparent during the interview when Rana spoke about losing her photo album.

Aisha's belonging journey has been characterised by a harmonious duality that she expresses in her everyday life. Aisha has a strong connection with the Arab community, with whom she enjoys celebrating her homeland and culture. However, Aisha has also built strong connection with Australia as she deliberately tries to learn about the history, culture and politics in Australia since she migrated here. In her recent years in Australia, Aisha was making a significant effort to learn about social life and politics in Australia. She says *"we used to get the newspaper just to read to know more. We needed to get educated, just to know where we are living and how the rules are" (Aisha).*

Today Aisha still makes an effort to understand the various layers of complexity of Australian culture and history. This effort to develop a connection and create belonging is best symbolised by an Aboriginal art piece that Aisha displays in her dining room. Aisha points out to it as a symbol of her belonging saying *"if you are living here and you don't have something similar in your house…." (Aisha).* The open sentence uttered by Aisha explains the importance Aisha places into learning about the history of Australia. For Aisha, in order to belong here, she made an obvious effort to learn about the culture and history of Australia, she also keeps strong ties with the Arab community. This balanced duality is what helped Aisha create belonging in Australia.

Intangible Artefact

Songs were popular amongst the women participants. Both Ghazala and Sanae believe that particular songs symbolised their journeys of belonging in Australia. For Ghazala, John

Farnham's song 'you are the voice', is what represents her journey of belonging in Australia. Ghazala mentions during the interview

> *it -the song- gives me motivation…like there is so much diversity that can be a good thing; what makes Australia actually beautiful. This diversity does make us unique and it is good. There are a lot of good people really trying to make it, make diversity the thing that actually unites us …when I hear it, it triggers in me a sense of motivation, a sense of belonging…(Ghazala)*

Ghazala highlights the feelings of inclusiveness and belonging and links them to diversity. She describes diversity as *"a good and unique thing"* that secures a place for everyone within society. This song celebrates of all these meanings for Ghazala, for whom belonging is linked to feelings of being socially included in a society where everyone comes from somewhere and "makes it". The song's lyrics and theme also indicate Ghazala's desire for change and motivation to create it.

Sanaa, on the other hand, named a song called 'Madha Moresque' by Al Firdaus Ensemble as an object that symbolises her belonging journey here in Australia. Sanaa explains

> *The song is written in Spanish but represents my experience here…this poem was written in Spanish by a Muslim in the Andalucía era, and as you know they were persecuted. This man hid this poem in a wall and put a rock, and they recently found out about it as they were renovating the place. The poem is about prophet Mohammed, it is talking about the love of this man for the prophet (Sanae)*

The song highlights an era in the history of Spain when Muslims and Jews, the majority who were living in Andalucia, were persecuted, and many people had to hide their faith in order to survive; it also celebrates the love of the prophet. While Sanae did not experience religious persecution, she did express her discomfort with experiences of discrimination she had faced in Australia. She states "*I was discriminated against…because I am a woman, and because I am an Arab, and because I am visibly Muslim… it -discrimination- is part of my identity, of my memories and of my experience of belonging" (Sanae).* Sanae acknowledges that experiences of discrimination make up part of her journey of belonging, but similarly to the song, she admits that she found belonging in Australia through the spiritual growth she experienced here. She explains

> *After I came to Australia, one of the things that I loved was the strength of the Muslim community in terms of spiritual support. It is an experience that I never had in*

Canada…it was the first time for me to go to a faith based organisation where they talked about health and wellbeing. They were talking about sleep and diet, hygiene, alternative medicine, yoga and exercise linking that to spirituality… the experience I have in Australia is discovering my love for the prophet, in a new and different way. My Australian experience helped me strengthen my spirituality. (Sanae)

Sanae's experience with the Muslim community in Australia has facilitated her belonging in Australia. The holistic way religion and spirituality were discussed was new and fresh for her as they incorporated other important aspects for her such as hygiene, diet, etc. This new way of experiencing spirituality has helped her personal growth and allowed for connections Sanae would not have experienced otherwise.

Both tangible and intangible artefacts symbolise the women's journeys in creating belonging here in Australia. Each in its own context reveals stories and experiences lived that helped the women create linkages and belongings here. At times, the artefacts shed the light on the experiences of the women here in Australia such as (Sanae, Ghazala); in other instances, they summarise the women's journeys (Rana, Zahra); and sometimes highlight their values (Aisha). These artefacts also reveal a lot of about their memories of home and at times the reasons and experiences that led them to migrate to Australia. Undeniably, the women's experiences of home and their memories are strongly present, either directly or indirectly, in their narratives of belonging.

Conclusion

While all the women, who participated in this study, claim feelings of belonging to Australia, each participant in this research study expressed them differently. Some found belonging in the families they founded, children and grandchildren (Susan, Sawsan, Zahra, Huda), others created it by learning, researching and making connections to this land (Aisha, Ghazala). Moreover, the notion of multiple belongings became apparent through the participants' experiences enhancing the fluid and ever-changing nature of belonging.

Unquestionably, feelings of security, familiarity, community, possibility and hope constitute the base for creating belonging for migrants. However, I would argue that some aspects might be more valued than others according to individual circumstances and experiences back home. For instance, the women who have survived war and discrimination back home prior to

migrating to Australia, have emphasised feelings of security and possibility and hope more than those who have not had those similar experiences. While all the participants have mentioned aspects of Hage's framework, some have also highlighted other aspects that the framework does not capture. The main characteristic of belonging not cited in Hage's (2010) framework and shared by the women was the aspect of acceptance by others; mainly the locals. While this conditional aspect of belonging does not override other aspects, but still is an important theme highlighted by the participants.

The women share many stories of discrimination and unacceptance which made them at times question the possibility of belonging in a hostile environment. Obviously, rejection did not drive any of the participants in this study to return back to their home countries; however, it did influence their journeys of belonging and does constitute part of their stories.

Home and homeland play an active role in the women's belonging journeys. When discussing their journey(s), the women usually tend to reflect on memories of home, and usually strongly connect them to the reason that led to migration. Home memories are also heavily present in their discourse of belonging as a point of reference to understanding society's norms. In other words, in many instances memories of home are usually used as the means to understand society's norms and its expectations.

Even when speaking about their belonging journeys, memories of home and pre-migration experiences influence the women's interactions and belonging experiences significantly. These memories are also actively present in the women's symbolic representation of belonging. It is a main part behind the women's choice of specific artefacts and the meanings attributed to them.

CHAPTER FIVE: IDENTITY

The previous two chapters emphasise an extremely important theme for this study; namely, identity. Since this project studies Arab women, identity and the way it is perceived and expressed play a central role in the way the women create belonging and approachthe notion of home.

Indeed, identity for migrants has been studied by many researchers. However, this chapter extensively analyses the theme of identity for migrant Arab women in Australia. The aim is to deconstruct the perception of a unified Arab identity by showing the complex and fluid nature of Arab identity, by analysing the multi-faceted nature of the women's identities; and demonstrating how the women express their identity/ies.

The first section of this chapter studies the theoretical framework around the notionof identity, especially for migrants. This will be followed by an analysis of the women's identities, and the way they perceive them. This section also investigates assumptions about the diasporic phenomenon and the way it is perceived. The second section is dedicated to the analysis of the complex roles that religion and national identities play in the women's identity. In fact, during the interviews, religion has emerged as an influencing factor in the decision of migration for many women mainly due to experiences of religious persecution in their homelands.

It also became apparent that it is sometimes perceived as a dividing force in theArab community. Therefore, this section is dedicated to studying the role of religionin shaping the women's identities. Moreover, national identity was also an important aspect in the way the women defined themselves. However, it was interesting to note how the women used national and religious identities to define themselves in different circumstances. The analysis of the intersection of nationaland religious identity is extremely crucial to understanding the women's perceptionof themselves and the way they related to others.

In the third section of this chapter, the notion of Arab identity is analysed. This is conducted by examining the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of the notion of Arab identity.

Since memory is concerned with studying the current moment, and how memoriesare being remembered, rather than historical facts, this chapter extends on how memories relate to national identities, and Arab identity. Furthermore, these memories are analysed to highlight the women's fluid identities and the way theyare navigated. In addition to the three sections described above, this chapter also analyses public discourse in Australia, and how it shapes the women's experiencesof belonging in an attempt to highlight the juxtaposition between the women's notions of identity, and the way they are being portrayed in the public discourse. Itis also an occasion to study how public discourse impacts the way women perceive themselves and their identities and the way they express them.

Identity for Migrants

Identity is a broad concept which has been understood and studied from different angles and viewpoints. While the notion incorporates personal, communal, national, linguistic, political and historical understandings of self in relation to others, this study is mainly concerned with the individual and personal self-definition. In this context, "identity can be defined as the understanding of oneself in relation to others…-it- is essentially a matter of self-definition" (Rejwan 2008, p.1). Thus, the notion of identity explored will focus on the personal understanding of one's self and their interactions. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fluid natureof the debates and discourses about and around identity. As Hall and Gay (1996) explains

> Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. We need to situate the debate about identity within all the historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures (p.4).

Thus, the concept of identity cannot be studied in isolation of the historical, political, religious and linguistic conditions of the region from which the women participants in this research study come from, namely the 'Arab' region. Moreover, the intersection of the above-mentioned categories is what provides a basis to understanding the concept of identity. Besides, the question of identity must be studied under the light of an intersection of societal factors without forgoing the matter of ethnicity that traditionally was the main lens in anthropological theories to understanding the issue of identity. Grimson (2010) explains identity and says,

It deals with interrelated perspectives on instrumentality, an assumed essentiality, the links between identity, communication and social organisation, as well as border and contrastive processes. Although in a drastically changed form, all of the forgoing, which were forged in relation to ethnicity, can still be useful for comprehending other processes (p.69).

In order to explain identity, Grimson (2010) distinguishes between culture and identity. He also incorporates theoretical notions from the study on nation in his attempt of studying identity, while acknowledging its greatly 'heterogenous' and 'conflictive' nature.

When exploring the notion of identity with the women participants, the women's responses were always complex and multi-faceted. It was never a straight answer. For example, Sanae reflects deeply about the notion of her identity and mentions,

> *Identity is hummm… once I had an understanding of what my identity is. I make it really simple when I get asked if I am an Arab, I say yes I am but ethnically speaking I am not an Arab. I speak Arabic, so people assume I am an Arab. The Arabic culture is part of my identity, but I don't identify as an Arab. (Sanae)*

Sanae's answer can definitely not be fully captured without historical, linguistic, ethnic and societal contexts. It raises multiple questions about Arab identity and how one can answer yes to being an Arab, yet not identify as one. The complexity and fluidity of the notion of identity as described by Hall is best described by Sanae's description of her identity. The intersection of various factors is what defines her perceived identity. Sanae later on would factor in her migration experience and adds,

> *Today, I identify as an aboriginal/indigenous north African, a Canadian who migrated to Australia. I am an Amazighi woman, native north African in terms of genetically speaking and culturally speaking, but I am also as strongly Canadian in my identity. I am in Australia now so the Australian identity is becoming part of my whole.* (Sanae)

Sanae's multiple belongings and transnational experience is reflected in the way she perceives her identity. While she acknowledges her north African roots, she also identifies as a Canadian as well as a migrant in Australia. The way Sanae perceives her identity summarises her experiences but also reveals the fluid nature of her identity.

In the nexus of migration and identity, diasporic identity emerges as an essential field of study and research. Grimson (2010) highlights many assumptions that are worth further investigation in this field. He questions the notion of diaspora and who makes up a diaspora by inviting the readers to re-consider if all migrants can be regarded as a diaspora. He highlights the factor of

typology of migration and how this influenced the concept of diaspora. Indeed, as explored in previous chapters, the typology of migration and the reasons for one's decision to migrate plays an important role in the way they experience belonging and reflect on the notion of home. Similarly, determining when a phenomenon is diasporic depends on various elements. Yelvington (2003) states "we must locate the diaspora in time and space, but dislocate it from 'racialised' bodies and places from which it supposedly irradiates" (p.559).

In other words, the notion that a perceived homogenous racial, or religious community inevitably parallels a shared culture and identity must be questioned if not dismantled altogether. The women participants in this study all somehow identify as Arabs; however, the way they perceive their identities or even what it means to be an Arab is completely different. While a group of the women perceived the Arabic language as the main common denominator of being an Arab, other participants linked being an Arab to specific attributes and values, such as being generous, hospitable, food, certain dress code, smartness, etc. As a result, this perceived homogenous community definitely does not agree on what being an Arab means.

While the Arab cultural heritage shared by the participants can be a means to studying the Arab women's identity, culture is not the only framework to analysing identity. Indeed, despite a common place of origin, or a perceived homogenous origin, visible cultural differences and perceptions became apparent during the interviews. While Grimson (2010) relates these differences to generational changes, in the case of the women participants, it is related to various factors such as age, country of origin, time of migration, reason for migration, life experiences, etc.

Cultural differences are not the only obvious differences highlighted by the women participants. This 'homogenously' perceived group had other major fragmented perceptions of self and identity. While culture is a framework that is traditionally utilised in studying identity, "the relationship between cultural configuration and identitary categories is extremely complex" (Grimson 2010, p.75).

This complexity is an invitation to not only study the various 'unities' and factors that constitute a person's experiences with self and others, but is an incitement to a myriad of constructed complexities and power struggles (Bhabha,1994). In other words, while being a migrant belonging to a 'diasporic' group or having a particular cultural heritage are definitelyaspects that make up a person's journey of belonging and perception of self, understanding identity is a more complex activity that requires historical, political and contextual analysis.

Participants' Perceived Identities

During the interviews, all women participants have shared a version of themselves and a perception of their identity that expresses best their positioning in their journeys of belonging in Australia. The question about identity in the interviews was never asked directly, but was always related to the women's experiences of migration, creating belonging in Australia, memories of home, and feelings of Arabness. The women's responses, however, spoke about their identities openly in relation to their feelings of belonging to their cultural communities, religious groups, and the Arab community. Thus, it is important to stress that scholars agree that "identity is a process" and a continuum (Agius & Keep, 2018). Moreover, it is also significant to highlight that when speaking about identity, the women share their subjective perception of themselves in a relatively new order. The perception shared is a reflection of their momentary understanding of self in rather a complex and transitionary environment. As Agius and Keep (2018) contend,

> When we speak about 'identity', we are not simply classifying but, rather engaging in a complex series of meanings, intersections and possibilities of being, and relating that construct to the fabric of social, political, cultural and economic life. Identity underscores how collectives and individuals interact, their subjectivities, and how they manage complex problems and challenges (p. 2).

During the interviews, these already existing complexities get more complicated when linked to the notion of Arabness or being an Arab or being part of the Arab community. It gets even more intricate under the light of difficult religious relations, and unfortunate historical events amongst the community; as well as a negative and unkind portrayal of Arabs in the media.

In order to analyse the diverse array of the women's perceived identities, it is crucial to share how the women perceived themselves at the time of the interview. Thus, the four sections below outline the women's perceptions of themselves, the intersection of Arab identity with religious and national identities, participants' perception and understanding of Arab identity, and finally how the women navigate western public discourse.

Perception of self

When exploring the notion of identity with the women participants, it is interesting that most

of the participants were aware of the fluid, and constructed natures of their identities. For instances, when Chaima was explaining her perception of her identity, she focuses on how she changed as a person since her migration experience. First, she starts by explaining that she never mentions that she is an Iraqi, especially since most people cannot guess that she is; however, she adds "*the Arab imprint, I think we all have it in us" (Chaima)* referring to her Arab identity regardless of not being perceived as one.

She, then, explains how she learnt new 'positive' habits from Australians such as sharing the bills. Finally, she admits that her experiences here have changed her identity and that she feels Australian as well. In a sum, Chaima admits that to a certain extent she identifies as an Arab even though she believes that her identity has changed and is forever changing due to her experiences living here in Australia.

Sanae also mentions *"I am an Amazighi woman, native north African genetically speaking and culturally speaking, but I am also as strongly Canadian in my identity. I am in Australia now so the Australian identity is becoming part of my whole"* (Sanae). This complex understanding of identity, reveals sanae's constructed identity that heavily relies on Sanae's memories of home. It also exposes historical and personal trajectories of Sanae who was born in Algeria but also migrated at a very young age to Canada and later on came to Australia as an adult. It discloses that the participant is aware and accepting of the fact that her identity has changed as a result of her migration to Australia, and highlights her understanding of the fluid process of identity.

Zahra also says "*my Arab identity did not change. But after seven years in Australia, I feel like other aspects of my identity changed"* (Zahra). Zahra admits that even though she identifies as an Arab, parts of her identity have changed as a result of her migration experience. Moreover, Huda also states *"I became different, my thoughts and ideas are different now" (Huda).*
This shows the extent to which the women are aware of how their experiences as migrants in a new environment are impacting their understanding of themselves. It also indicates their acceptance of the 'natural' changes to their perception of themselves in a new environment.

Another important aspect of the women's identities came across on the way the participants identified strongly with religious affiliation and national identities. Since 'migrating affects interpretations of religion and gender in significant ways" (Furseth, p. 367), when speaking about identity, the women participants focused greatly on the intersection of identity, religion

and gender; while still highlighting the role of national identity.

The participants were aware of the complex and fluid nature of the notion of identity. A number of them highlighted the aspects that had significant meanings for them, and contributions to the way they perceive themselves. Two main factors were identified in these interviews, the strong religious identity some of the participants exacerbated, and the rather solid affiliation with national origins. These two aspects constructed the women's understanding of their identities. However, these constructions of identity were linked strongly to experiences of homeland and migration, and their memories of those experiences.

As a matter of fact, when speaking about identity, it is important to discuss one's subjective perception of self. As Mitzen (2006) says the "subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice" (p.344). This notion of subjectivity encloses all women's experiences and understanding of self which are impacted by global events and trends such as globalisation. It is argued that the latter promotes a desire to reaffirm self-identity (Kinnvall, 2004; Parekh, 2008). Mixed with political world events and complex historical relationships, religious identities and their implications take broader meanings.

Religious Identity

Undoubtedly, religion "gives a sense of power to its adherents in terms of meaning and significance of their lives, activities and relations with others" (Velayati 2018, p. 98). Thus, many of the women participants identify strongly with their religious backgrounds. Women from both religious backgrounds, Muslim and Christian, interviewed in this study identify strongly with their religious beliefs. However, discourses related to religion in general were analysed in relation to the women's migration stories and identity construction. Thus, religion is not the subject matter but rather a significant and at times even essential agent in facilitating identity construction of Arab migrant women in Australia.

When referring to religion, it is noteworthy to stress the role of being 'visibly' religious especially for Muslim women. While religion is not at the centre of this study, and participants are not openly invited to discuss their religious backgrounds or practices, the 'visibly' Muslim women who wear a scarf, *hijab,* often referred to the role of religion in constructing their identities. The term *hijab* is used in this context to refer to a headscarf that covers hair, ears and neck but leaves the face uncovered. It is used interchangeably with terms such as headscarf and headcover. The notion of being visibly Muslim is analysed in the light of its intersection

with the women's identities and the way they are creating belonging in Australia. Its meaning stem from social interactions, and discourses around identity.

During the interviews, even though, countries of origin were mentioned, especially when sharing experiences of homeland, when discussing topics related to belonging and identity, there was more emphasis on religious identity rather than national identity for women participants who wear *Hijab*. This came across differently for each participant. However, religion was at the centre of every conversation about identity.

When speaking about Arab community, Zahra kept referring to religion mainly Islam as a unifying factor. She used the term Arab and Muslim interchangeably. Even when she spoke about the Arab Christian bakery she frequently visits, Zahra mentioned that they sell halal food in her attempt to explain the convenience of living in close proximity to the Arab community. For Zahra, religion and religious festivities were a uniting factor for the community. Identifying as a Muslim and living according to Islamic values were part of what Zahra aspires for. This interchangeable use of Arab and Muslim could stem from Zahra's memories of Arabs being Muslims. For, Zahra grew up in a Morocco, a country with majority of Muslims and a very small minority of adherents to the Jewish tradition. Therefore, Zahra relies on her memories to understand and explain the concept of Arab identity.

Aisha, who also wears *hijab,* identifies strongly with her religious affiliation. Aisha shares her experience as a veiled woman in Australia and says, *"as a Muslim woman, it is not easy for you to fit in, especially… when you are visibly Muslim" (Aisha).* She describes the obstacles faced by visibly Muslim women in Australia and highlights the systematic negative public discourse about Islam and Muslims in general, and about Muslim women who cover in specific. She also emphasises the negative experiences of Muslim women compared to Muslim men who usually go unnoticed because according to Aisha, they can still practice their religion and not necessarily be visibly Muslim. Thus, they do not have to face what practicing Muslim women who wear headscarf have to face on a daily basis.

Huda, who also wears *Hijab*, spoke in length about religion and the experiences she lived here in Australia. She was deeply hurt by the changes she felt obliged to make in order to 'fit' in. Huda had to give up dressing in an *Abaya,* a long usually black, dress, because of the recurrent incidents of discrimination, but mainly and most importantly because her son asked her to do so. Huda explains during the interview,

I took off my Abaya and changed my dress code. It is something I had to do and did not like to do it. I did it after eleven years. But it was something I had to do. I am not happy about it. When I took off the Abaya, I gave up some part of me, part of my identity, just so I could be more Australian, identity wise. I faced so many racist situations. One of them was so bad that I went to the police; and it forced me to take off my Abaya. I took the big decision when my son asked me why I was wearing like this. Even to him, I looked strange. My own son thought I was strange because of what I was wearing. (Huda)

Huda's motives to take this significant decision were not only external in terms of changing her dress code due to discrimination acts she faced, but also internal especially when her son found that her dress code was 'strange'. The deep feelings of sadness and dissatisfaction are obvious in Huda's description, but her desire to belong in Australia, and for her family to feel home override her adherence to the dress code she initially did not want to change. Thus, Huda was willing to make changes to the core of her identity in order for her and her family to 'fit in'.

The conversations about religion were spontaneous and came up during discussions about identity and migration experiences. Muslim women who do not conform to the practice of *Hijab* also identified strongly with their religious identity but did not focus solely on religion when discussing the way they perceive their identities. The focus on religious identity from visibly Muslim women could also be a reaction to the way they are perceived here in Australia specifically, and in the West in general. Indeed, "the media is not inclusive of unveiled Muslim women; therefore, they find themselves negotiating a Muslim identity within very narrow definitions" (Ali 2015, p.141). Since veiled Muslim women were the focus on western media, the women themselves started to perceive the veil and religious identity as crucial in their identity construction.

Moreover, by emphasising their religious identity, the women above are not denying their ethnic and national identities. In fact, national identities are relatively weak but still present in their discourses of home. However, *Hijab* can also be perceived as a liberating agent as it provides the women with a larger sense of identity since they perceive their religious identities to be larger than their ethnic identities. *Hijab* in this sense can also be perceived as a facilitating agent to becoming a global citizen since an instant bond is created with a Muslim regardless of their ethnic background.

By putting their religious identities forward and visible, the women are challenging ethnic and socio-economic boundaries by inviting an instant connection with any other Muslim regardless or ethnicity, class or nationality. One can argue that despite the negative representation of *Hijab* and Muslims in the western media, *Hijab* and religious identity for the Muslim women participants is definitely a helping agent to becoming 'Australian' even when becoming 'Australian' meant having to give up part of one's identity. This complex duality has provided the women who were willing to pay that price an opportunity to create belonging here in Australia.

Religious identity was also an essential element in conversations about identity with Christian Arab women participants in this study. It was brought up in different contexts with Christian Arab women. The latter come from different countries in the Arab region, such as Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The women who focused on their religious identities during the interviews were the ones who have experienced religious persecution back in their countries of origin. Their memories of certain acts of persecution came across as vivid during the interviews despite the long period of time that had passed.

Moreover, it is essential to highlight that the women also experienced a sense of rejection from the community back in their home countries where they were not always perceived as Arabs. For instance, when speaking about her identity, Chaima was hesitant to speak about religion and when she did, she spoke about it as a dividing agent in her life back in Iraq. She spoke a lot about differences between Christian Iraqis and Muslim Iraqis, but focused mainly on positive experiences. However, Chaima expressed how Christian Iraqis were not perceived as Arabs back in Iraq, and said *"now I do not want to talk about religion because in my country - Iraq- they called us -Christians- Americans, I do not know why" (Chaima).*

Chaima expresses how as a Christian, she was denied the Arab identity; and was instead called an American. While Chaima did not further elaborate on this matter, the perception of Christianity as a non-Arab religion was also experienced by Susan.

Similarly, Susan shares her experience back in Jordan and states

> *That is why we left the country because we were always Europeans, because of religion, they always told us you are European. The Arab country even now, you hear it more louder, yeah? I don't want to deny it because everybody can hear it now. They say if*

you are not Muslim, you do not belong here. You have to go to Europe because that's where you belong. So, in Jordan even though the king was very moderate. King Hussein was very Moderate then, no one could say a thing in the streets. But the culture, the neighbourhood, the people were backward. The people whose father said do not play with a Christian because they are our enemy…(Susan)

Susan's traumatic experience of religious discrimination back home has amplified her religious identity; and created a very complex and interesting relation within her 'Arab' identity. While she spoke dearly about the food, the culture, the music, etc, Susan struggled to admit that she perceived herself as an Arab at the initial stages of the interview. While focusing mainly on painful and vivid memories of religious persecution, Susan rejected Arab identity at start. However, as the interview progressed, it has become obvious that Susan's initial rejection of Arab identity stemmed from traumatic experiences of religious discrimination and migration, but not necessarily a rejection of a culture she holds dearly. Furthermore, by the end of the interview, Susan states that she identifies as an Arab.

Indeed, the women who have experienced religious discrimination and persecution back home have put more focus on their religious identities during the interviews. The complex histories of the Christian communities in the Middle East are usually linked to the reasons that led to the women's migration. They have been deciding factors to the way the women constructed discourses about their identities here in Australia. Since religion was and still is an important indicator of one's belonging in the case of the women interviewed for this research project, religious identity has been an indication of the traumatic and difficult experiences lived back home.

By highlighting their religious identities, the women are sharing an important part of their stories as well as history. In this case the women's memories of experiences lived back in their home countries are determining the way their perceive their Arab identity until today.

National identity

Conversations about the national backgrounds of the women interviewed were present in each interview. There is no doubt that "a sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world through" (Smith 1991, p.17). Therefore, the lens of national identity was explored by the women in various ways and to different degrees. The distinctions related to national background were obvious not only in local

traditions and cultures, but also in the dialects the participant spoke. During the interviews, when the women spoke about the different layers that constitute their identities, there was always a focus either on religious identity, national identity or Arab identity. It is important to note that while the participants were asked about these layers of identities, every participant focused on the areas they personally perceived as important. In this context, national identity is not to be equated with citizenship but rather countries of origin and ancestry.

Obviously, home countries were always an integral part of the conversation; however, there were women who even though focused mainly on their national identities, they never exclusively expressed their identities only through the national lens. As a matter of fact, this group of women were from both religious groups Muslim and Christian, and the only common denominator was actually their country of origin, Lebanon, and surviving the Lebanese civil war. I do not claim that all the women from Lebanese background interviewed in this study focused on national identity; but the ones who did, happen to be from Lebanese background.

For Clara both religious and national identities are important. During the interview, she spoke about her social connections that were mainly formed in the church. She spoke constantly about the activities she undertakes in the church and said *"they have a lot of masses, one Arabic, one English…"* (Clara). However, it is important to note that she constantly emphasised national identity even when speaking about religion. For instance, she mentioned that she goes to a Lebanese Church and attends a Lebanese school where she is surrounded by Lebanese friends. Her emphasis on national identity was obvious when she stated that she feels Lebanese Arab rather than simply Arab. Her hyphenated identity stems from a strong connection to her homeland which she left during the civil war. In Clara's case, she was not able to view or communicate religion without an national context. Her national identity clearly overweighs religious identity.

Rana also uses hyphenated identity to describe herself. She defines herself as a Lebanese-Arab-Muslim. During the interview, she indicates a debate within the Lebanese community around Arab identity. A debate that Sawsan, also from a Lebanese Christian background, explains when she spoke about how she was criticised by the Lebanese community for calling the organisation she was involved with as Arab and not solely Lebanese. She also clarifies how different religious groups in Lebanon place themselves in relation to Arab identity and says,

> *I was attacked quite a bit by members of the Lebanese community about why we are calling Victorian Arabic Social Services, why not only Lebanese...they used to call it Victorian Arabic Speaking Community Workers just to please the Lebanese, that is not*

Arabic because they do not think there is a thing called Arabic. We are Arabic speaking, but we are not Arabs. And that is based on the fact that they think that the Christian Lebanese, you know, descended from the Phoenicians are not racially Arabs, like the Arabs who came from Saudi Arabia. (Sawsan)

Even though Rana did not speak in detail about this existing debate within the Lebanese community, she clearly hinted to it. However, when discussing the layers of her identity she mentioned, *"for me as a person, well-educated and have my own political thinking. I always thought of myself as a Lebanese Arab; not just Lebanese, no. Some people think they are Lebanese and finished, for me no I am a Lebanese Arab Muslim"* (Rana).

This debate indicated by both Rana and Sawsan, and hinted to by Clara reveals complex and significant existing discussions around the Lebanese national identity. It also reveals how the different religious groups approach their national and Arab identities in Lebanon and the Middle Eastern Area. The tension was further described by Sawsan when she said *"In Lebanon, there is this tension between the Lebanese who want to be part of the Arabs, all the Arab countries and identify with them. And some who think we are more European" (Sawsan)*. These existing debates extend to the migrant Lebanese community in Australia; thus, the focus on national identity amongst some of the Lebanese women interviewed for this study. These debates further expose the complexity of Arab identity and its reliance on memories of home as well as transnational existing debates.

Arab Identity

One of the most important layers to the women identities is the way they relate to Arab identity. Even though identifying as an Arab is a pre-requisite to participating in this research study, and despite of initially identifying as Arabs, during the interviews, I discovered an array of understandings to Arab identity. Heavily influenced by geopolitics, the term Arab remains loaded with local political and historical events. Exploring the diverse ways the women related to Arab identity is not only an attempt to understanding the women's perception of Arab identity, but also an invitation down the memory lane of each woman's life back in their homeland and their migration story. It is important to state that the women interviewed all agreed on particular common Arab trends such as music, culture and food, but they had different approaches to being an Arab. Three main distinctions were discovered through this research on how the women position themselves in relation to Arab identity. Moreover, memories of home were the driving force behind the women's perceptions of Arab identity.

One group had an extremely complex and problematic relation to being an Arab. While they rejected being an Arab altogether and claimed that they do not perceive themselves as Arabs, they still called themselves Arabs every now and then and did relate strongly to Arab culture, music, and food. They also spoke about Arab history with nostalgia when discussing the current political state of the Middle East. This highlights the paradoxical and complex relation they have with Arab identity.

The second group perceived themselves as Arabs because of linguistic reasons. For, they believe an Arab is a person who speaks the Arabic language, thus, they could call themselves Arabs since they are native speakers of Arabic. The third and last group could distinguish cultural traits of being an Arab as opposed to ethnic identity. They clearly believe they were only culturally Arabs. when speaking about being an Arab, it was not a matter of negation or affirmation, but rather a more complex view of perceiving themselves in relation to their historical environment, and local ethnic background.

Their positioning towards Arab identity and community was fluid as they could navigate these complexities with ease relying mostly on perceived common cultural traits of Arab identity. However, one can argue that all the women agree on the political dimension of Arab identity and have expressed their views towards their identities according to the histories and existing dynamics of their home countries.

In addition to the complexity of understanding Arab identity, another layer of intricacy is added when one's memories of home are tainted by exclusion and religious persecution. This is the case of Susan, who growing up, was always denied Arab identity, and told that she was not an Arab but rather a European. Susan states *"they -the people back in Jordan- always told us you are European. The Arab countries even now, you hear it louder. I do not want to deny it because I heard it now. They say if you are not Muslim, you do not belong here… that is why we came here. I was not an Arab there…you have a passport but you are not an Arab" (Susan).* Her childhood memories of exclusion are still alive today and hinder her from identifying totally as an Arab in spite of her love to Arab culture. She states in multiple occasions,

> *You have to know that we have not changed our culture of food. The kids were brought up on that, and we are still eating Jordanian food, or middle eastern food. My kids all love it. And you give them any other meal, they will not enjoy it as much as middle*

eastern food. That's the thing we carried with us and we are still keeping… when we do weddings, we still do the culture of our country. We go bring the bride from her house to the church. I mean even this, back in my country had stopped but we still carry it because that is what we saw before we left. (Susan)

She adds when speaking about Arab identity,

To say I am an Arab, no I am sorry I am not. I did not practice it over there, but we practice it in our household… Arab in culture because you cannot lose that… we are living with the family having weddings and parties and everything with the family. So everybody is still carrying the culture and we are still using the tradition of food and everything. We are living Jordanian in Australia. (Susan)

Arab cultural food and traditions are still carried on by Susan and her family. She insists in keeping them as part of who she is; yet, she still cannot call herself an Arab with certainty. During the interview, Susan's conflicted Arab identity was extremely apparent. She was contradicting herself by calling herself an Arab at times, and not an Arab at other times. Furthermore, Susan loves to attend Arab community events but avoids Muslim Arab community. Susan's memories of religious persecution back home impact her interactions with the Muslim community here. She states,

There is a bit of difficulty with the Muslim people to enter their community because of their upbringing and the way they talk is completely different than the way I talk. So if you sit with a Muslim lady, saying for example, she will always say peace be upon the prophet Muhammed… always that religion is in the middle of their mouths. It is always addictive. (Susan)

Susan's negative outlook at the Muslim community here in Australia and her rejection of Arabness are mere reactionary acts to traumatic experiences lived back home. It is indeed a rejection of the way she and her family have been treated back in Jordan, and a rejection to some Islamic traditions that she perceives as negative. At the end of the interview Susan admits her true feelings about being part of the Arab community and says, *"I am very sorry because I have big feelings for Arabs even though they cannot identify me as an Arab, because I speak the language, I was born there, I got the culture, I got the food, I cannot say I am not. I do not care about them what they are saying, I am one of this nation" (Susan)*. In sum, Susan's perception of self in relation to Arab identity as a migrant woman who came to Australia forty-eight years ago is conflicted and complex and extremely influenced by her memories of the

experiences she had lived in her homeland. Her memories of home are so strong that they influence her daily living in food, music, language, and also dictate her interactions within the community.

Given the diversity amongst the various cultural, religious and ethnic groups in the Arab world, a group of women participants perceive the Arabic language to be the unifying factor amongst Arabs. Indeed, however one attempts to define the notion of Arabness, "the nation is often associated with language as a marker of its identity" (Suleiman 2003, p.27). Thus, a unified language amongst all the Arab nations can lead to a perception of unity. Moreover, in her attempt to define an Arab, Aisha mentions *"an Arab is a person who speaks Arabic, a native Arabic speaker" (Aisha).* Besides, Rana also clarifies what makes up Arab identity and cites *"it is language, it is culture, and the community itself" (Rana).* Both Rana and Aisha pointed out the role of language in their perception of Arab identity, nonetheless they both elaborated on it differently.

While Rana had a political insight into Arabic language in relation to Arab identity, Aisha spoke about her newly found fascination of the Arabic language. Aisha rediscovered the beauty of the Arabic language only after she moved to Australia. She says,

> *I think when you are living in an Arab country, you do not feel it – the language- as much abroad. There are a lot of things that you take for granted when you are in your country. From a distance, you see things differently. For example, I learnt Arabic at school as a language, but when I came here, I -rediscovered- how great this language is. I just had to teach it to my kids, then I learnt more about the language than when I was in school. The language is really important for me, and I read stories in Arabic now…I think if I was still in Lebanon I will not have the same interest. (Aisha)*

This newly found love and fascination with the Arabic language and the importance of passing it to the next generation is the way Aisha is preserving her Arab identity.

Rana, on the other hand, views language as a political vehicle. She believes that language is the first indicator of identity; thus, the way people and communities use it can be an indication to not only people's backgrounds but also their political positioning. She elaborates,

> *My first language is Arabic, that is very important. I was thinking all the time since I was in high school that the conflict in the Middle East is actually about identity. The identity of Arabs in the Middle East, we are still fighting with non-Arabs. Like the Jewish and some of the Christians who are originally not Arabs. when I came here, I work with people actually who used to speak Arabic, but they were feeling*

disadvantaged, because they were born in places and countries originally ruled by Arabs, but they are not Arabs. They force them to speak Arabic. Just to give you an example; people from Southern Sudan. They were against the language because they felt like non-Arab. Why they have to speak the language just because they are in Sudan… (Rana)

This politicised view towards Arab identity is common amongst the women participants. Ghazala also agrees with the politics behind the notion of Arab identity. She shares her experience growing up in South Sudan, where at the time everyone had adopted Arab culture and way of dressing up. She then compares her upbringing to the current political conflicts between north and South Sudan which led to the rejection of Arab culture and language by people fromSouth Sudan. She further explains, *"Sudan itself as a country is already divided into race, youknow how the people in the west and the south of Sudan see the people in the north of Sudan as Arabs…they look at you, you put a Hijab on and you are this thing, oh she is an Arab" (Ghazala).* Due to political divisions, the notion of Arabness in this case is linked to the Islamic religion. Therefore, certain practices such as wearing *Hijab* are perceived as indicators of Arabculture rather than religious background. In this case again, the strong link between language religion and identity stems from the memories of political and historical events back home, and in the Arab region. These memories contribute strongly to the women's understanding of Arab identity.

The third group of participants perceives the notion of Arabness as cultural. Similarly, in his presentation about Arab identity, Mr Sadek Jawad Sulaiman (2007, p.1), a former Ambassador of Oman to the United States, says

> The Arabs are defined by their culture, not by race; and their culture is defined by its essential twin constituents of Arabism and Islam. To most of the Arabs, Islam is their indigenous religion, to all of the Arabs, Islam is their indigenous civilisation. The Arab identity, as such, is a culturally defined identity, which means being Arab is being someone whose mother culture, or dominant culture, is Arabism. Beyond that, he or she might be of any ancestry, of any religion or philosophical persuasion, and a citizen

of any country in the world. Being an Arab does not contradict with being non-Muslim or non-Semitic or not being a citizen of an Arab state.

Sulaiman's definition indicates that race is not what defines Arab identity; consequently, reveals the possibility of people from different races and ethnic groups to identity as Arabs. He also pinpoints the intertwined relationship between the Arab identity and Islamic religion; which explains the tensions that might arise as a result and the conflicts expressed by some Christian Arab participants.

Both Sanae and Zahra are of North African origins and have both expressed their cultural belonging to Arab identity. Sanae makes a clear distinction between her cultural heritage and ethnic background. She states *"the Arabic culture is my identity… I identify as an aboriginal/indigenous North African" (Sanae).* Likewise, Zahra also emphasises the cultural aspect of Arab identity and says *"hundred percent my traditions and values are Arab, but as ethnicity, I can be Amazigh. I am an Arab by culture and language"* (Zahra). This clear distinction reveals an awareness of regional history, and current political debates in the Maghreb area of North Africa, where Arab identity has been used differently in comparison to the Middle East.

While in the Middle East Arab identity and language have been perceived as a uniting force in their political discourses, in the Maghreb it is rather a dividing agent. That is mainly due to the differences of societal and demographic constituents of those societies. Arab identity and Arabic language in this case have been used as political tools by governments. Suleiman (2003, p. 12) attempts to explain this political dimension in his discussion of Arab nationalism, and states,

> The Arab Middle East, the emphasis on Arabic in the construction of national identity allows the nationalists to create a distinction between their brand of nationalism and Islamic nationalism. This was particularly the case in Arab nationalism, which sought to allocate faith to the domain of private religiosity…this appeal to language in the Arab Middle East is intended to enable the non-Muslims, namely the Christians, to participate in the life of the nation as full members rather than as the members of a marginalised religious community. In North Africa, particularly Algeria and Morocco, the situation is different. It is therefore strategically more prudent to emphasise the ties of faith in articulation of national identity in North Africa.

This highlights the political dimensions of Arab identity that were expressed by all participants (Zahra and Sanae). The local community dynamics dictate how Arab identity is utilised, and which aspects are used in order to achieve unified national identities. The religious diversity in the Middle East led to a stronger presence of the Arabic language as a unifying force behind national identities in that area. However, the ethnic and linguistic diversity in the Maghreb led to a stronger focus on religious identity. As a result, Arab identity though present in all interviews, each participant expressed it from a different angle. This diversity of perpectives indicate   participants' personal journeys, as well as national and religious backgrounds. Moreover, memories of home, of historical and political events are also central to understanding the women's approach to their identities.

In conclusion, the tremendous variety and diversity amongst Arab women and the various possible ways of identification the women highlight in presenting themselves, do not necessarily indicate how the women understand themselves or present themselves in society. They may identify with a particular religion, nationality or a specific ethnic group, or a combination of all of these. They may or may not present themselves as part of the Arab community. Indeed, the way they chose to present themselves may change according to their audience, interactions, social conditions, and personal convictions.

Public Discourse, Identity and Belonging

Public discourse about Arabs in Australia and Western media has been generally negative. "Arab and Muslim communities in 'Western' countries have been positioned in media discourses as threatening 'others' since 11 September 2001" (Dreher 2010, p.85). In Australia, the Arab community has also been linked to feelings of fear and distortion using different techniques such as the repeated images and news reports of asylum seekers from Iraq and the Middle East (Hall et al 1978), as well as framing sexual assault crimes committed by Lebanese-Australian Muslim men as 'ethnic gang rapes'. These actions have placed Arabs and Muslims as 'the new Others' (Green and Jacka, 2003), similarly to other communities in Australia such as the Asian community, who also has been positioned and still perceived as 'others' in Australia. The examples of negative and cliched depictions of Arabs and Muslims where either ethnic, religious or both descriptors have been the main features used to describe the community in Australian and Western media are numerous. Thus, many are rejecting the media's racialized approach to the Arab community.

Moreover, "many Muslim Australians complain of media reporting and common stereotypes which conflate Arab and Muslim identities, or which homogenise the enormous diversity of Muslim cultures into a monolithic 'community'" (Dreher 2010, p. 87).

Public discourse about Arabs has been a focal point during the women's interviews. Every woman interviewed in this study, regardless of her religious or national background, highlighted the negative representations of Arabs in general and Muslims in specific in the Australian and Western media. For example, Clara mentions *"I know that all the Arabs are not like what they put on TV. They show only the bad side...we are not like what they show" (Clara).* Chaima also highlights how after September 11, she and her family received a lot of attention because of the way her mother-in-law dresses. Chaima says,

> *After September 11, people were asking us why? Especially with my mother-in-law. When she is with me I get asked a lot. Because she wears Hijab with a cross. So I get a lot of questions from men women and people in the street. So this is the effect of September 11, oh Arab, oh terrorist. I got told from a guy in a bank, when the bank sees your name is Arabic, they do more checks on you...but I know some people, they had to change their names; especially when the name is Mohammed, they change it… all the Alex are Ali. Michael is Mossa… Some people it affects them. (Chaima)*

Chaima portrays how the repetitive and systematic negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims has affected her life and the lives of other people in the community.

Women who wear *Hijab* have experienced the consequences of the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims more intensely. Aisha argues that public discourse does not make it easy for Muslim women to 'fit in' in Australia. She insists this is specifically difficult for women as they are visibly Muslim when they dress according to traditional interpretations of the Islamic faith. This cohort of the Araband Muslim community are the ones who face most problems with the general public, and who struggle at times to create belonging in a society where they are perceived as the enemy. Aisha states

> *with everything in the media, you have this barrier with people. It happened to me a lot before. They see you and they don't know how to deal with you. Do you shake hands, or you do not shake hand. They will just wait and look at you… some people do not know exactly how to deal with you. I am like I am human, I can talk and then you start the discussion. Or you get, 'oh you speak English?' then they look at me like I come*

from a refugee camp… for them everyone wearing a veil, is someone who is a refugee. Everyone in this one basket, so you are not educated, you cannot speak English and some people would start sign language assuming that you are not going to understand what they are saying (Aisha)

This extremely degrading view of veiled women does not make the process of belonging easy for these women. Sanae also agrees with Aisha and states that the negative portrayal affects her daily life negatively, and make Arab identity less attractive. She adds,

it is not a compliment when someone tells you oh my God you are such an Arab. It is insinuating something negative; such as you are a wag, backwards, loud, lazy, and not educated., bad stereotypes, your cousin probably had a shawarma place and you got married at 12 and you do not know what a university is (Sanae)

These negative and backward stereotypes are a result of the repetitive negative portrayal of Arab and Muslim communities. The intersection of gender, religion and dress code makes the experience more intense for Muslim women who wear *Hijab* but does not eliminate the rest of the community.

The women participants also highlighted during the interviews the limited knowledge about Arabs in general and Arab women in specific. The systematic portrayal of Arab women as uneducated poor and docile was a dominant description of how people perceived the women interviewed. Rana says *"people do not understand, they do not understand what Arab background means… people need to be educated to understand" (Rana);* she adds *"the general public actually does not understand many cultures, not just the Arab. They are not against Arabs in general, they are against different cultures"* (Rana).

Ghazala also explains how her work colleagues could not believe that she is a doctor back in her home country Sudan. Ghazala states that her colleague was *"astonished that as women we are allowed to be a doctor. She thought women are not allowed to go out, study and work" (Ghazala).* The general images of war, extreme poverty and hardship are fixated in people's minds and have become the lenses through which they perceive the Arab and Muslim communities in general and women in specific.

During the interviews, women participants spoke about the negative public discourse and its impact on their lives, but also offered their own criticism of the Arab states. Sawsan offers a political criticism of Arab states and the way they deal with political crisis. She says, *"you always feel frustrated that as Arabs we just never got our act together. We never did anything properly. We let a country like Israel take over Palestine, and we have failed miserably in doing anything about that" (Sawsan)*. Sawsan believes the negative public discourse and the corrupt political, economic, and social life in the Arab world lead some people to deny their Arab identity and states,

> *True some say I am not Arab I am Lebanese, or I am this or I am that. I find it trivial and silly because you know we speak Arabic, we are part of that region and we have a lot in common together with the Syrians and the Iraqis and the Egyptians and all that. I mean it is ridiculous to try and deny that. We all have to try and accept that part of the world. Who knows one day whether we will get our act together, this is just the time of history we are in when we are not on top. There was a time when probably the Arabs were the best thing. It is just not now, but you do not deny that. We are going to pretend to be what, French? (Sawsan)*

Susan also believes that Arabs have failed their people and states

> *sorry to say we have not proven ourselves in the world. We did not, we put our energy in a very narrow path where it is not important at all. We did not let the world know who we are and what we can do, and present ourselves in the right way so people can appreciate us. Sorry to say that we are not that much respected in the world. That is a fact… for example, Saudi Arabia's economy is the best in the world. You give them billions of dollars to pay, and they pay in one cheque no problem. But have they ever invested in universities where some intelligent kids can do new invention? (Susan)*

Women have described their experiences of belonging and claiming their Arab identities in the light of such hostile media environment as difficult and trying. While all the women felt the negative portrayal was a barrier between them and the general public, Muslim women who cover specifically expressed the hardship of trying to fit in. Faced with prejudice first because of visibly looking Muslim, they all shared stories of discrimination and at best intolerance. Moreover, when the negative Western media portrayal is combined with bleak political, economic and social realities in the nations that constitute the Arab world, many women

admitted the lack of desirability of claiming one's Arab identity. Feelings of shame, bitterness and worry were expressed when speaking about the corrupt systems in the Arab countries.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to highlight the narratives of Arab women's participants about the way they perceive themselves as migrant women, and the way they relate to and understand Arab identity. These narratives weave an interesting, complex and at times problematic views around identity in general and Arab identity in specific. At the heart of all the interviews and conversations about women's identities were two main characteristics: the women's awareness of the fluidity of the notion of identity and the way they are placing themselves in a new environment, and the women's memories of home. These memories were at the heart of each conversation about identity. Thus, one can argue that the women shape their perception of themselves not only by navigating the daily living in a new environment, but rather the women shape their daily living here in Australia using baggage from home. This baggage includes memories of wars, and discrimination (Susan), political debates around national identities (Rana, Sawsan, Clara), and intense racial relations (Sanae and Zahra). In addition to memories of home, political debates and public discourse in Australia also play a key role to the way the women construct belonging here, and perceive themselves. All participants agreed on the negative public discourse about Arabs in general and Arab women in specific. They all felt unsettled with the negative portrayal, but also highly critical of life back in their home countries. This situation has increased the complexity in which women perceive their identities in the light of Arab identity.

All in all, the participants' insights about their identities and Arab identity have offered an interesting insight into the complexity of Arab identity. The latter being a common identity that is never perceived in isolation of political, historical and social events in the Middle East and North Africa. The women have highlighted that the term Arab is highly political and holds different meanings to different people. These meanings depend highly on what has been experienced back home and how that is remembered.

CONCLUSION

Migration is a significant experience especially when it occurs in adulthood. Adult migrants come to a new country not only with expectations of better and safer futures, but also with memories and experiences lived in different lands. This study emphasises the role of these memories in creating belonging and constructing identities for first generation Arab migrant women. The focus on women stems from personal interest being a migrant woman myself; professional curiosity having worked with migrant women in the community sector since my arrival to Australia; and a research gap in migration studies which mainly focused on Arab men (Olmsted and Doyle, 2012), and memory studies where mostly men's narratives were shared (Chedgzoy, 2018).

Drawing on intersectionality feminist theories, I outlined this thesis to explore the role of memory in creating belonging and constructing identity for Arab migrant women. This objective was guided by a number of interconnected research questions: what role does memory of homeland play in the process of creating belonging and reconstructing identity for first generation Arab women in Australia? How do the women experience migration to Australia, and to what extent do these experiences shape their identities? To what extent does the notion of homeland effect the process of creating belonging? How are memories of home negotiated, suppressed or accentuated in the process of creating belonging and constructing identity for Arab women in Australia? I have explored these questions in the context of multicultural Australian society, diverse Arab communities, complex discourses about Arab identities informed by historical and political events in Australia, Arab region and the world.

In order to address these questions, I study the concepts of home, belonging and identity through the lens of memory. These three notions make up the chapters where the findings of this study are analysed. Home and its memories are studied through the analysis of the women's narratives shared during the interviews. This chapter showcases how memories made back home are still impacting women's lives in their host country, Australia.

Participants' belonging journeys in Australia have also been studied in the light of the participants' memories of home. While participants attributed different meanings to belonging, these meanings were strongly influenced by memories of their homelands and life experiences. Thus, different approaches were used by the participants to create belonging. Even though memories of home are central to their journey of belonging, data analysis reveals other factors that helped women in their experience of creating belonging. Last but not least, participants'

reflections on their identities rely heavily on memories of home. The women's reflections also indicate an awareness of the fluid nature of identity. Participants were able to recognise identity as a process which can be influenced, and as a result, is prone to change. Discussions about identity constructions were heavily influenced by events lived back in the participants' homeland; however, they are also tinted by international events, and impacts of external agents such as existing public discourse about Arab identity.

Memory of homeland strongly impacts the women's journeys in creating belonging and reconstructing identity for Arab migrant women in Australia. Nonetheless, memory is not the sole agent that shapes the participants' experiences. Findings indicate that creating belonging and reconstructing identity for Arab migrant women is impacted by other factors as well as memory.

Given the research problem and the current literature on the subject, this study focused on understanding and describing how home is perceived and remembered, athe way its memories are influencing and impacting the process of creating belonging, and navigating the layers of Arab identity. To achieve this understanding, multiple strategies wereset into place during data collection in order to ensure diverse data that reflects the diversity ofthe sample studied. Women from multiple national backgrounds, diverse age groups, educational and professional backgrounds were recruited as part of this study. Several strategies have been used to meet the validity criteria of this qualitative research study.

In this thesis, I start analysing the findings by exploring the notion of home and homeland highlighting major differences in understanding what constitutes home. The latter contains different meanings to the participants. A major distinction in the perception of home being a geographical location, or feelings of comfort and familiarity was identified by the participantsin this study. Moreover, this distinction also linked to the notion of return to the homeland. Inother words, the way home was perceived dictated the women's desire of returning to their countries of origin.

More specifically, the participants who perceived home as a geographical location showed interest in the idea of returning home while those who perceived it as feelings of comfort and familiarity did not focus on the idea of return, and rather emphasised on recreating the same feelings. Recreating homely feelings, understanding new environments and situations the participants found themselves in all depended on memories experienced prior to migration.

The women shared how their memories of home contributed to shaping their new life in Australia. When sharing representations of their home memories, as suggested by Hirsch and Smith (2002) complex dynamics of individual and collective memories were exposed, especially amongst women from Lebanese background most of whom shared the samerepresentation of home.

This research study also attempts to study memory through the women's experiences of belonging. The latter held different connotations to the participants. Using Hage's (2010) existing framework to study the women's belonging has helped outline how the women create belonging and also identified to which extent belonging is made conditional by others (Wernesjo, 2015). Memory has assisted in shaping the way women create belonging in Australia. For instance, women who have experienced war back home, focused mainly on feelings of securitywhen discussing their belonging journey. Not only does memory play a role in creating belonging, but also informs women's reactions to dealing with external agents, such as others'reactions especially the negative portrayal of Arab women in the media. The women also highlighted enabling factors to creating belonging such as marrying someone from the dominating culture, learning the language, creating a family and having children and grandchildren, and being part of a multicultural society where the women do not feel overwhelmed by one single cultural group.

Memory was also studied through the way women perceive their identities. Arab identity was studied in the light of historical, political, religious and linguistic conditions of the Arab region (Webb, 2016). Arab identity was also analysed within the Australian context where Arab migrants come from diverse national and religious backgrounds. The analysis of the women's perceptions of their identities has revealed that memories of home, and public discourse shape the women's narratives about their identities. Memories of war, persecution, and historical discourses informed the women's understanding of their identities. Moreover, negative portrayal of Arab women in the western media also influenced the way they perceived their identities as Arab migrant women, and their ability to create belonging and construct their identities.

This research project contributes to a better understanding of the role of home and pre-migration memories in creating belonging in the context of first-generation Arab women. It also contributes to documenting and highlighting Arab women's narratives about their experiences in migration, and recreating home. Thanks to the findings, we have an

understanding to which extent pre-migration experiences, and the way they are being remembered influence the post migration experience for Arab women who migrate as adults. This research also features the complex and multi-layered concept of Arab identity.

The distinct categories of perceived Arabism highlighted in this research rely greatly on the women's experiences back in their home countries. The geo-political environments of their countries of origin have modelled their understanding of Arab identity. Other key contributors to the women's belonging journey also heavily rely on memories of war and persecution. The women's perceptions of home and belonging were heavily influenced by these contributors. Despite the commonalities amongst Arab women, this study also revealed that national identity and religion play an important role and distinction on how the women perceive their identities. These intensify when women's memories of home are tinted with experiences of war and persecution.

In addition to that, women's identities and belonging experiences are highly influenced by the perception of others, and public discourse. Though the women showed great resilience to the negative experiences they had lived post migration, the gaze of the other impacts their process of belonging. Many of them navigate feelings of confusion and rejection by renegotiating identity in new social contexts.

Finally, this study contributes to a better understanding of the experiences of first-generation migrant women from Arab backgrounds. It highlights the complexities and fluidity of an otherwise homogenously perceived group. The future will bring significant changes that will require further research to deepen knowledge and understanding of the role of memory in impacting not only the belonging of first-generation Arab women, but also the second generation. This will highlight how the second generation is impacted by memories of a homeland that they probably never claimed as their own home.

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