

Losing Homes and Making Homes: Reflections on Jean Said Makdisi's *Teta, Mother and Me*

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Introduction

In the recent book-launch of the Arabic edition of Jean Said Makdisi's *Teta, Mother and Me*, in Cairo (22 May 2024), the author shared with the audience the question that led her to writing the memoir: "Why didn't Teta have a home of her own?" It is the question that draws attention to one of the central themes in the memoir, namely, that of homes – lost and made. These homes are not limited to the concrete houses inhabited by the three women and their families; but they refer to the homes re/constructed by the author via the workings of remembering, researching, reading, imagining, and narrating. *Teta, Mother and Me: An Arab Woman's Memoir* first appeared in 2005, published by Saqi in England; then an American edition was issued by Norton in 2007, with a slight change in the title *Teta, Mother, and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women*. The first Arabic translation of the book came out in Cairo in 2023, published by the Egyptian National Center for Translation. The title of the Arabic edition combines the titles of the two English editions (*Jaddatī wa Ummī wa Anā: Mudhakkirāt Thalāthat Ajyāl min al-Nisā' al-'Arabiyyāt*; *Teta, Mother, and Me: Memoir of Three Generations of Arab Women*).

Makdisi's book is a personal narrative, a historical chronicle, and an ethnographical account of the lives of three women who lived through times of great upheavals. Teta, Munira Badr Musa, was born in 1880 in the city of Homs in the then Greater Syria under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. As a young woman, she moved first to Beirut where she was sent by her family to a school that would prepare her for work as a teacher. After marriage, she moved with her husband to the city of Safad, then to Nazareth in Palestine where she lived and raised her family. Munira witnessed WWI which marked the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the French and British colonialism in the region – particularly in Greater Syria and Palestine. She later lived through WWII, and the establishment of the State of Israel on her land. Mother, Hilda Musa Said, was born in 1914 in Nazareth, growing up in Palestine under the British mandate, followed by Lebanon under the French mandate. After marriage, she joined her husband who worked in Cairo, where she settled down for many years before moving to Beirut. It is during her youth that Hilda witnessed the fall of Palestine at the hands of the Israeli occupation and the loss of her Jerusalem home forever – the home where Jean (Said Makdisi) was born in 1940.

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Cairo Studies in English – 2024 (1): 206–218. <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>
DOI: 10.21608/CSE.2024.297807.1174

Makdisi grew up in Egypt under the British occupation, then witnessed the July 1952 Revolution against the monarchy and the occupation, and the rise of Arab nationalism, especially after the 1956 Suez War. She also lived through the 1967 War, followed by the Civil War in Lebanon, about which she wrote her book *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir* (1990). After spending a few years studying and living in the United States, Makdisi moved with her husband and children to Beirut where she has been living since 1972, working for many years at the Lebanese American University. She identifies as an Arab feminist, and is actively involved in the Lebanese feminist movement through her founding membership in *Bahithāt*, The Lebanese Association of Women Researchers. Jean perceives her life as an extension of the lives of her mother and grandmother who have all experienced the repercussions of major historical transformations, marked by constant dispossession and dislocation.

This paper is centered around the representation of Arab women's lives in Jean Said Makdisi's memoir, *Teta, Mother and Me*, through the motif of homes as the location of the family being the smallest unit of society. Specific attention is paid to the stories involving losing homes and making homes across generations – in Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon. The study recognizes the text as belonging to the memoir as a literary life-writing genre that combines elements of auto-biography, historiography, auto-ethnography, via the workings of memory and the imaginary. The paper is therefore divided into several sections, starting with a theoretical discussion of genre, situating the memoir at intersections with other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences under the umbrella of life-writing. The following two sections rely on the memoir itself in tracing the experiences of Arab women in relation to their homes, specifically with relevance to the homes lost due to historical upheavals and those made as locations of culture. The last section addresses the main issues that emerged during the translation of the book into Arabic, with particular emphasis on the process of collaborative translation, and the book's relevance to the current war in Palestine.

From Auto-Biography to Auto-Ethnography

As the title implies, *Teta, Mother and Me* belongs to the literary genre of feminist memoirs, combining personal experience with history and ethnography. Hence, the division of the book into four main parts: "In My Own Time;" "Teta in History;" "Mother's World;" "Women Together: Mother and Me." The narrative is framed by an introductory "Prelude" and concludes with a "Postlude" – a form and content emphasized by the author's statement in the opening paragraph of the book: "I was going to write a loving double biography of my mother and grandmother from the vantage point of my own unsettling experiences as a modern Arab woman. The book, I thought, might take fictional or semi-fictional form, and would be, somehow, like a musical offering, a song of memory and sadness" (2005, 10). These lines establish the connection between the three generations of Arab women, whereby the author's project emerges as one that connects and expands on the lives and experiences of the grandmother, mother, and the self. At the same time, these opening lines challenge

the traditional boundaries of fictional narration and life writing. *Teta, Mother and Me* is a memoir – but a specifically original one, not only in the stories it tells, but also in the interplay of the narrative imagination with history, culture, and memory.

The author states that her initial intention was to write a biography of her mother and grandmother from a personal perspective. Therefore, the book consciously blurs the established generic boundaries of biography and autobiography. In *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson provide a list of elaborate definitions of autobiographical genres and subgenres, all connected by the notion of life-writing. They acknowledge Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' which understands genre from the point of view of the reader, proposing that "the autobiographical text establishes a 'pact' among narrator, reader, and publisher" whereby the reader is assured of the identity of the author as both narrator and protagonist (2010, 207), the memoir predominantly uses the first-person method of narration. This is slightly modified in the case of biography, where the author is the narrator, but writes about the life of someone else, using the third person method of narration. This, in turn, may be confused with such literary genres as the *bildungsroman*, which is a subgenre of fiction that provides "the life stories of fictional characters" (10), or in a way the biography of an imaginary protagonist. Within the text itself, it is 'referentiality' that guarantees the representation in the narrative of actual people, places, and events which "are distinguished by their relationship to and claims about a referential world" (10). Smith and Watson, therefore, define life-writing "as a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject" (4) and use it as an umbrella term for over sixty auto-biographical subgenres.

Makdisi's *Teta, Mother and Me*, with its subtitle variations in the Saqi and Norton editions, problematizes genre by asserting it as a memoir in the first edition and then suggesting life-writing in the second. In theory, "memoir" refers to "a mode of life narrative that situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant" (Smith and Watson 2010, 274), focusing more on the socio-cultural and political context than on the life story of the narrator him/herself. It also gives prominence to the role of memory and remembering as well as the awareness of failing memory and processes of writing that lead to what Max Saunders describes as "generic fusion" (Smith and Watson 2010, 322), while at the same time underscoring "the strategies of feminist life-writing," the first of which being "to write autobiographies of women" (327). As Makdisi weaves her life with those of her mother and grandmother, against the socio-political history of the region, the book moves beyond the limitations of auto-biographical writing and emerges as a feminist life-narrative. The feminism is not merely a spontaneous outcome of writing about women by a woman, but is rather a reflection of the ideology that guides the author in her narrative pursuit. *Teta, Mother and Me* is, after all, about women in history, about women's everyday lives, and specifically about women's education and culture.

Teta, Mother and Me is an inquiry into women's lives in the Arab region, through tracing the lives of three generations of Arab women. Set against major political events and regional upheavals, the book can be understood as a form of informal historiography, or "history from below" as proposed by radical historiographers along the lines of Chris Harman's *A People's History of the World* (2008, iii). Yet, it is specifically about 'women in history,' as implied in the second part of the book entitled 'Teta in History'. More distinctly, however, it is a book about women's culture and women's lives within their communities, and especially inside the smallest social unit – the family and home. Makdisi is interested in charting the genealogies of her maternal as well as paternal lines, but she is, clearly, focused on the women in the matrilineal extensions. *Teta, Mother and Me* does not only go up to Jean's great grandmother Laila, but, even down to her own children and grandchildren, to whom she has now become a grandmother herself, as she states at the end of the book: "I am now a Teta to a new generation" (2005, 397). This last chapter, "The Postlude", connects the three women together:

This book began steeped in a felt reality, as a direct inquiry into my mother's, my grandmother's and my own womanhood. It derived from our real and practical experience in the Arab Mashreq. ...

As I worked and read, I arrived at a complex re-reading of the condition of women, not a simplifying one. It was as though I had viewed the lives of my ancestresses through a prism, whose many sides were composed of my life, my thoughts, my view of history and feminism. (397)

These lines emphasize several points. First, the author's center of attention has been 'womanhood', which can be identified in the details traced and imagined about women's lives in the Arab region across generations. Second, the author foregrounds 'experience' grounded in reality and everyday practicality. Third, the author highlights the process of writing the book, which extended for years, and even decades since its conception.

Teta, Mother and Me as "the self told through the lens of culture" renders itself to an approach that looks at it as a form of writing where "we use our experience to engage ourselves, others, culture(s), politics and social research" (Adams et al. 2015, 1). It also involves research and reflexive analysis as the author becomes a researcher who "uses tenets of autobiography to do and write autoethnography" (Ellis et al. 2011, 273). It is therefore possible to see the memoir as expanding into the realm of auto-ethnography, which is classified and defined by Smith and Watson as "collectivized and situated life writing in which the *bios* of autobiography is replaced by *ethnos* or social group" (2010, 258). In this case, the social group is the family, which represents national identity and women's cultural history, relying on memory – both personal and collective. All in all, I argue that in its reliance on the workings of memory, *Teta, Mother and Me* emerges as primarily a memoir (a family memoir). Hence, as a family memoir, it can be seen as providing space for 'generic fusion,' held together structurally by the central motif of women's experiences of losing

homes and making homes, which I wish to highlight, giving prominence in the following pages to the narrative itself and Jean's voice.

Losing Homes and Narrating National History

In the first chapter of the memoir, entitled "Jean," the author remembers the house of her childhood in the following lines:

I remember the house in Jerusalem, with its wide marble staircase and its garden, where I used to play with my siblings and cousins. I remember walking home from school in 1946 or 1947, and seeing the English soldiers at the sandbag barricades they had erected in the large empty circle. I believe it was Salameh Square. I did not know its name then, but I have now identified it from one of the many books dedicated to the memory of our Jerusalem as it was then, before the war. (31)

The process of remembering here reveals a fascinating reworking of personal memory and national history. Jean's description includes her individual and perhaps familial attachment to a house with its actual details as manifested in the details of the staircase, the garden, and the road to school. This is however intertwined with the collective Palestinian memory of the British mandate and the experience of dispossession of Jerusalem, and more generally Palestine, "before the war." It is moreover a memory consolidated by historical documents and sources about the city, its landmarks, and their Arabic names before their appropriation by the Zionists.

Makdisi, the memoirist, is aware of the firm connections between individual memory and national history as she remembers her past and narrates it in the present:

My memories of Jerusalem tie me to my past, and into the heart of history. To be from Jerusalem and to have lost it, is to be attached to the struggle of Palestine, and therefore to the heart of Arab history. And since I have often felt left out of the political struggle, I cling to these memories, feeling that in preserving a lost time and place I am after all making a contribution, however infinitesimal. (32)

Her attachment to the Palestinian struggle leads her to a specific form of storytelling as peaceful resistance, whereby her "contribution" to the Palestinian cause is via recounting the past through narrating her personal memory of loss and thus "preserving a lost time and place" and, hence, simultaneously reclaiming her national history of the loss of her homeland.

Makdisi concludes this chapter by an explanation of the immensity of the experience of dispossession as a painful legacy passed on from one generation to the other:

In 1948 the heart of our family was torn out, and the centre of our existence was broken. It was as if the constellation by which our family had navigated through the rough waters of our history had eclipsed. It is only recently that I have come to understand how deeply affected we have all been by the Palestinian experience, how we have lived our lives in its shadow. Most of all, though we have lived well and done well, and accomplished much, though we have made many deep friendships throughout the world, since 1948 we have been outsiders – not only my parents, but their children, and, I fear, their children’s children as well. (35)

The power of these lines does not only lie in the force of the lived experience and its conceptualization, but it is further reinforced by the metaphorical expressions of the violence, darkness, and disorientation that come with the loss of the home and the homeland.

The story of Jean’s loss of her Jerusalem home, and its consequences on Mother’s life in Cairo, are both an extension of the history of Teta’s loss of her home in 1936 at the time of the Palestinian revolution against Zionist expansions in Palestine: “She was able to keep her home, and her place in it, until the 1936 revolution. By the time the strike ended, however, she had lost whatever income she had, and with it whatever independence. She had to close down her house, and from this time until the end of her long life, she had no home of her own” (333). This, again, is not the story of Jean, Mother, or Teta alone, but the history of the Palestinian people, which Makdisi subtly interweaves in her memoir. The loss of Teta’s home is followed a few years later by the loss of Jean’s Jerusalem home, where she was born:

Surrounded by anxiety, uncertainty and danger, the family moved to Jerusalem as usual in the summer of 1940. And I was born there in September. Though both my younger sisters, Joyce and Grace, were born in Cairo, Jerusalem continued to be the family centre until the disastrous war of 1948, when the creation of the state of Israel sent hundreds of thousands of Arab Palestinians into exile. (334)

Makdisi’s narrative combines both national history with personal experience; as the family is in a way a representative of the nation: “Until 1948, and the Palestine war, our family moved regularly between Jerusalem and Cairo. For Palestinians, the year 1948 was a time of movement, of scattering, of families breaking up and moving apart. It was a time of breakdown, of entropy” (32). Having been living in Cairo before 1948, it was the family’s role now to receive relatives, as their home in Cairo replaced the lost state:

The year 1948 was for Mother a year of domestic retrenchment. She was a busy mother of five children – the eldest a teenager, the youngest a toddler – and was running a large household. The plight of those relatives

and friends who kept arriving one after the other, and the anxiety for those who did not come and with whom they lost touch, must have brought her to a high level of political awareness. In spite of that, her domestic duties, elevated in her mind to the level of a vocation, must have created a barrier between her and the outside world. (32-33)

Makdisi here relies on her own as well as her mother's memories, where she is not merely recounting events but also their consequences on Mother's life, and interweaving what she remembers with what she imagines. These lines shed light on the roles of women at times of war, whereby the domestic sphere provided shelter and help to the dispossessed, and perhaps even protected Mother from the collapse that could come with the realization of the extent of the political catastrophe.

Making Homes and Preserving Palestinian Culture

The stories of Teta, Mother, and Jean are not only about the homes they lost but they are as much about the homes they made; not only within the history of Palestinian dispossession, but also within the prevailing culture of domesticity. As critical as the author is of the burdensome values of Western modernity, she is as proud of all the traditions related to Arab women's domesticity, represented in their total control and management of the household. Against the background of historical events, and in resistance to loss and dispossession, *Teta, Mother and Me* is also a story of women's perseverance. In the case of Palestine, Makdisi shows us that with the loss of the Palestinian state, the home became the alternative location of national identity preserved by its women:

The household was to be like a cocoon, a protecting, sheltering place. The more dangerous the world outside became, the more thoroughly was it shut out. Home was, self-consciously and deliberately, a place for comfort, for the dressing of wounds, for peace. Home was also the place of female power, female expression: femaleness, women, wives, mothers and housekeepers were all cultivated here, like bees in a hive. (67-68)

Yet, together with the 'protection' and 'comfort' offered to the members of the family, there came the responsibility placed on women, as the home made by women "makes it an agreeable, emotionally rooted place, but also a burden" (68). This starts at a very early age with all the domestic teachings given to girls until the end of their lives. In addition to all the skills and duties laid on the shoulders of women all over the world, traditional and modern alike, Makdisi underscores "the broad and binding inheritance of Arab hospitality" (67), which definitely gains supreme importance among a dispossessed nation.

Writing about Teta, the author finds out that she had never asked her grandmother about the details of the house where she was born in Homs. Therefore, the author seeks historical sources that describe the houses and living conditions of families of

Teta's background at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, combining historical information with scattered memories from Teta's and Mother's stories, Makdisi uses 'the imaginaire' in recreating the homes and the daily lives of the past – of her grandmother's childhood and education, as well as her great grandmother's life. This is a creative process which the author is aware of as she describes Teta's house in Homs: "As I reconstruct it in my imagination – because this, as so much else in the family history, is undocumented – the parsonage in Homs was a two-storey stone house" (160).

It is worth noting that Makdisi points out the fact that women left their family homes to join their husbands and make homes of their own, tracing these journeys back to her great grandmother, Leila:

Approaching Homs, my great-grandmother must have been full of anxiety. Like Teta, who moved to Safad after her marriage; like Mother, who moved to Cairo; like me, who moved to Washington, Leila was starting her married life far away from home, far from her mother, from her family and from that continuity and social tradition that makes a new life somehow less frightening. (154)

Teta, like her mother before her, was married to a pastor, with all the additional duties this held for her: "The pastor and his wife worked hard. She took the ladies of the congregation to her house for Bible lessons; she taught them hymns as they sat together doing their embroidery and sewing. Teta was to do this when she became a pastor's wife" (160-161). The house itself had to be spacious enough to receive guests, and modest enough to represent a pastor's family – though marked by the cosmopolitanism that characterised the household.

Upon her arrival in Cairo as a young wife, Mother realises that the house to which she has moved does not represent her own image of her own home, as she found that the household followed the system placed and imposed by her husband's servant during his bachelor years. The first step, therefore, towards making her own home, is to put an end to Abdou's control, and take full responsibility, as expressed in the metaphor of independence, protection, and authority indicated in the following lines:

When Mother had dismissed Abdou, and deliberately taken over the housework, she had done so to practice and master the domestic lessons she had been taught, and to take control of her own environment. I believe this act can be considered political in nature; in this secure corner of the world which was her own private home, and around which she gradually constructed protective barricades, she was to create an independent province over which she reigned supreme. (320)

Jean was raised by such a Mother in such a household, where the education she received was not limited to the schools and college she attended, but was rather

grounded in the education provided at home -- the values and manners of both tradition and modernity rooted in the family as a social unit and domesticity as a cultural value. In a chapter entitled “A Kind of Education,” Makdisi explains this ‘kind of education’ in the following terms: “I was taught how to handle and differentiate between the myriad mysteries and nuances of modern cosmopolitan, idle-class domestic life, to which was added the broad and binding inheritance of Arab hospitality” (67).

Although the above statement appears in the first part of the memoir, where Makdisi writes about herself, the ideas of domestic tradition and modernity come up again towards the end of the book, where the author reflects on her own life vis-à-vis that of her mother’s and grandmother’s: “But surely, the kind of housekeeping and mothering I was involved in has nothing to do with ‘tradition,’ and much more to do with being ‘modern’. The kind of life I and others of my class have led is linked with the ‘modern’ nation-state, and with ‘modern’ capitalist society, with modern schooling and education, and with the modern bourgeois household” (399).

Collaborative Translation

Teta, Mother and Me is a direct outcome of an indirect collaboration between Jean Makdisi, her mother, and grandmother, in the production of the text. Although Jean is the author, they remain collaborators in the creation of the narrative. Collaborate authorship has been identified in texts across history where several people take part in producing a text, including multiple authors, as well as editors, publishers, if not even family members and friends (Cordingley and Manning 2017, 10). I wish to add the translator to the list, as in the case of *Teta, Mother and Me*, further collaboration can be identified in the translation of the memoir into Arabic, which extends the role of translation from mediation into collaboration. Yet, in this case, the process is not only about the translator’s collaboration towards the production of the text in Arabic, but carries further dimensions related to the translation process itself, due to the author’s knowledge of the target language.

In her introduction to the Arabic edition of *Teta, Mother and Me*, Makdisi reflects on her relationship with Arabic language in the context of her ‘modern’ schooling and education. One of the central values passed on across generations in the Badr, Musa, Said, and Makdisi continuum is that of education; as all the fathers and mothers have invested in the best education available to their children – girls and boys. It is, however, a memoir about life in the Arab world, about the life of Arab women in the region across generations, about homes lost and made. Therefore, the text is naturally replete with references to Arab history, culture, and language. Hence, I started (especially after January 2011) to translate parts of the book to share excerpts of the book with my own students at Cairo University, and with young feminists whose limited knowledge of English could prevent them from a deep understanding of Makdisi’s story, reflections, and feminist commitment.

As a translator, I had the great privilege this time of dealing with a source text whose author knew the target language. I was, therefore, reassured by the fact that I

could always resort to the author when in doubt. However, as a feminist translator, I was also aware of my role as a mediator and producer of feminist knowledge in Arabic, whereby translation ethics would require the most conscious reading, interpreting, and rewriting processes involved in translation. Yet, soon, with my constant queries and requests to Jean to read the manuscript, the whole process acquired the characteristics of what is known in translation studies as “collaborative translation,” defined in terms of “translations made, and usually signed, by more than one person” (Cordingley and Manning 2017, 15). This definition, in turn, has expanded in the contexts of political dissent and the digital age to involve visible as well as invisible collaborators.

I have explained my translation strategies in my introduction to the Arabic edition. These involve several methods that can be summarized in the following. First, as for the feminization of the text, I was very careful in my use of the Arabic equivalents of pronouns and nouns in their generic forms which are predominantly in the masculine form. So, for example, the source text referred to the word ‘teachers’ without contextual evidence to their gender, and I would go back to the author, especially in the context of women’s education at the turn of the century. It usually turned out that the reference was to women teachers, which enabled me confidently to use the equivalent grammatical form (the feminine) in Arabic. Another similar case was the translation of the word “aunt” where I often had to check with the author whether the word referred to a maternal aunt, a paternal aunt, or women relatives and acquaintances – each of which has its cultural equivalent in Arabic.

Second, the names of towns, villages, churches, and schools were actually translations in English of their Arabic original forms in what seems like back translation (or reverse translation), with attention to the historical context. This is, also, connected to the names of feasts and rituals as well as customs and traditions, such as for example Easter, which has more than one equivalent in Arabic. Similar to this was my conscious attempt to assert the Levantine cultural/linguistic presence in the text, exemplified for instance in my attention always to include the names of months as known in Egypt (Gregorian calendar) together with the names of the months according to the Assyrian calendar as used in the Levant and by Jean herself in her everyday life. So when referring to events that took place, for instance, in May, I would always translate the month as *Mayū /Ayyār*.

Third, the details related to the domestic sphere were among the most significant challenges that I faced, as I had to deal with the names of items of furniture, textiles, ornaments, jewelry, in addition to plants, herbs, pots, jars, utensils, dishes, and foods, among many others. It was not merely about finding the equivalents of these specific words, but to envisage them to begin with, as I occasionally came across an item or a word which I had not met before, neither in print nor in reality, and where I had no idea what it referred to, especially those pertaining to a distant time and location. Yet, this was perhaps the most enriching part of the translation process, as in our Skype ‘meetings,’ the author would often provide further explanation and the equivalents in Arabic as used by her family in their household, carrying through Teta and Mother, and across Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt, layers of meaning and

versions of expressions. I was therefore very careful to use the equivalents as used by the author, rather than the ones familiar to me – hence the occasional predominance of Syrian and Palestinian in items from Teta’s world, and the *mélange* of Palestinian, Lebanese, and Egyptian dialects in both Mother’s and Jean’s worlds.

I wish to end this section with one last example of what I consider feminist collaborative translation, namely, a translation decision and formulation that is the outcome of a serious discussion between the author and translator in the context of feminist translation (which implies a feminist text, a feminist author, and a feminist translator). The formulation of the title in the Arabic edition is a case in point. There are three points related to the translation of the title: a literary dimension, a feminist position, and a cultural consideration. The title in Arabic can be translated backwards (back translation method) as “My Grandmother, My Mother, and I: The Memoir of Three Generations of Arab Women.” First, the literary aspect of the translation lies in the inclusion of the genre (memoir) in the Arabic title as can be found in the Saqi edition of the source text. Second, the phrasing of the subtitle, that emphasizes the collective dimension of the project (the three generations), as expressed in the Norton edition, rather than the individual sense implied in the earlier one; hence stressing the diversity and multiplicity of women’s experience, instead of the sense of exceptional individuality. Third, the challenge of translating the word “Teta” into Arabic, where we chose to opt for the more formal equivalent (“grandmother”), taking into account the degree of formality culturally implied in Arabic. Being a memoir about three generations of women, we feared that the use of the informal term “Teta” in the title would situate the book within the marginalized narrative forms relegated to women’s storytelling – with the threat of moving the text from the realm of history into that of fairytales.

Conclusion

Written along many years, and published in two editions (2005, 2007), followed by the recent Arabic translation (2023), *Teta, Mother and Me* continues to be relevant to the present moment. Not only does it maintain its actuality in the extent of the theoretical and intellectual reflections that it provokes, but also in its connection to the lives of women living through “extraordinary and unsettling times” (Makdisi 2005, 19). The Arabic version, unwittingly, was published in August 2023, only two months before the beginning of the war on Gaza. It has, therefore, received significant attention as it helps us today to understand the historical roots of the plight of the Arab world, and its repercussions on nations as represented by families. It also sheds a clear light on the long-term consequences on individuals, and specifically women, when they unexpectedly find themselves fighting the battles of losing homes, and engaging in the processes of making homes and hence preserving national history and culture. It calls upon Palestinians to continue their cultural resistance through documenting and narrating their everyday lives.

Teta, Mother and Me is one of those books that provides new insights upon every reading. In my earliest reading of the book upon its publication, I argued that it was

a feminist autobiography, and more specifically, “a feminist memoir of personal inquiry and historical research” (Kamal 2007, 82). Reading it again in the light of the theoretical developments and the expansion of the humanities into the social sciences, this memoir clearly lies today at the intersection of feminism with literary studies, historical research, autobiography and life-narrative, together with elements relevant to ethnography and politics. Its translation into Arabic further opens up areas for investigation within the context of feminist translation studies, apart from the production of knowledge about Arab women and the preservation of women’s voices in Arabic. One of the most fascinating aspects of this narrative is the author’s awareness of the writing process and control over the narrative; whereby she repeatedly manages to tell a family story from a personal perspective, while at the same time preserving the voices of the women involved in the situation. The author also manages to maintain a critical perspective, by recounting experiences then reflecting on them critically, at times verging on providing a cultural critique of social phenomena and cultural practices. Jean Said Makdisi, hence, emerges as author, narrator, and protagonist, as well as researcher, critic, and historian. *Teta, Mother and Me* is truly an individual imaginary of collective experience.

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