

The Question of Contextualized ‘Frozen Memory’ in the Self-Narratives of the Aged: A Gerontological Reading of Jamil Gammoh’s *If Only Time Could Tell*

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Abstract—In the Arab ethos, the older generations occupy a significant place as subjects of reverence and respect and as repositories of acquired wisdom. Arabic fiction too is replete with characters in this age category, who project personalized and holistic truths of either a war-torn homeland or a time and context that no longer exist as they feel foreign to their present surroundings whether it is in diaspora or the postmodern present. For the younger generation specifically, the only source of truth are such stories with their details told by a withering generation. However, from a prevalent theoretical perspective, reliability on frozen memories as sources of truth is questioned if these memories are projected as romanticized and exaggerated as they take on a repetitive pattern. This study employs a gerontological approach in Jamil Gammoh’s collection of short fiction *If Only Time Could Tell* in order to highlight the significant role that the older generation plays in recreating their memories of a better, simpler time lived, as experienced socially and culturally in the past against their sense of loss, alienation and confusion toward the drastic change in social attitudes accompanying the technological advancement of the present. The study will also look at the possibility of understanding ‘Frozen Memory’ away from its diasporic context to include the older generation’s sense of presencing in the foreign postmodern age, by highlighting the notable similarities in the urgency of narration given the substantially different circumstances driving them to do so.

Index Terms—frozen memory, Jamil Gammoh, literary gerontology, narrative gerontology, self-narratives

I. INTRODUCTION

Away from its originally medical understanding, gerontology has, especially since the late 1980s, formed a more profound scholarship of its own within the literary corpus focused on matters of representation and reception of the process of aging. Scholars who engage in the development of the discipline seek to understand what growing older means from social, cultural and political perspectives (Kribernegg, 2015, p. 839). They are found to follow the method of exposing hidden socio-cultural ideologies on aging and simultaneously attempting to allocate methods of departure from such dogmas with the objective of debunking them. This process is better described by Felski (2015) as a process that attempts to “demystify, destabilize, denaturalize” and then “to recontextualize, reconfigure, or recharge” (p. 17). However, the method has long been adopted from Jacques Derrida’s ‘Deconstructionist Method’ and employed in different fields of study, namely Feminist Literary Criticism and Postcolonial Studies. The onset of literary gerontology then similarly aims at demystifying the stereotypical assumptions formed over time about older people and instead empowering them with a unique character of their own as an essential category in society. According to Swinnen (2023), literary gerontology “aims to clarify cultural meanings of aging, negotiating and subverting them in a world characterized by structural and everyday ageism” (p. 136). Yet throughout her academic engagement with the interdisciplinarity of literary representations of aging and later age in “literary texts to photography, film, television and performance”, Swinnen expresses discomfort toward the limited and unrealistic literary corpus thus far produced pertaining to the disconnection between the images of age, aging and later life portrayed in fiction and the reality that older people experience (p. 137).

In reality, the cultural reception of older people has chronologically developed over time to suit market-oriented reform policies and socio-economic orders such as those employed in Neoliberalism and Consumerism, whereby older people were projected as mere statistics that reflected negatively on the productivity of society and the welfare of the state according to Katz (1992). Such policy-driven ideologies negatively influenced notions of alarm, forming resentment toward people of old age as early as the second half of the nineteenth century continued through the first half of the twentieth century. However, starting the second half of the twentieth century, Gilieard et al. (2013) argue that a slight move away from the depiction of old age as a problematic category developed with the shift in cultural ideology pertaining to prolonging productivity as long as possible.

Interestingly however, Narrative gerontology has a more personal approach to debunking stereotypical images of old age when older people are viewed as subjective and active agents involved in the telling of their own life-stories. Whether it is considered a conceptual trend linked to critical gerontology (Biggs, 2004, p. 50), or identified as a separate path

within critical gerontology (Katz, 2003, p. 19), or even as a “recognized discipline” in its own right (Phoenix et al., 2010, p. 1), the one interest it looks into is the story-telling of older people and the circumstances surrounding their told narratives. It remains a scope within gerontology that cannot be contained within the limitation of a definition, as it may be employed for different purposes (Randall, 2004, p. 50), as it has, thus far, been “examined as a research method, a description of ageing ... and as a form of therapy [for the story-teller],” offering an amalgam of means by which to study older generations in their later life (p. 50). Its use then, as an approach to fathoming the urgency of narration that older generations have in different contexts opens space for consideration of different possibilities for both aged people and the receptive younger generation. On the one hand, ‘story-telling’ has a subjective character for the aged teller when built on “the recognition that life can be thought of as an actively constructed text that must be part fiction. Just as stories in novels are made up so we ‘make ourselves up’ when we relate the substance of our lives” (Swinnen, p. 12). In other words, all aspects in lived life are personalized and viewed differently depending on individual experiences of it; when narrated, the teller’s perspective necessarily gives him subjectivity as the story would depict his own view on the world, simultaneously adding an individual imprint to his existence in the timeframe and events of the story being told.

To this end, the repetitive mode of narration that characterizes aged people, when viewed from this perspective, distances its reception as a form of loss, confusion and dislocation from the undesired present on the teller’s part, and instead may be received from a more constructive lens as a form of affirmation of the aged-teller’s presencing, subjectivity and a continuation of his mental activity in later life. On the other hand, story-telling of the older generation serves a pedagogical purpose for the recipient, as “the act of reading lives is similar to the act of reading novels” (Swinnen, p. 12). In other words, similar to the aged-teller’s sense of activity experienced when telling their story, the recipient will likewise process the narrated events from their own perspective, experiences and positioning in the world, in addition to placing the narrative within an ethnic time-frame they connect to as part of their heritage and identity-construction, be it within the context of receiving the story in diaspora or in a postmodern present disconnected from a simpler past. The two aspects of gerontology, the literary and narrative, are crucial for the study, whereby literary gerontology deconstructs and reconstructs different articulations of old age in society, while narrative gerontology offers creative means by which to subjectify people of old age not merely as individuals with stories to tell, but rather as stories themselves to be unraveled, thus, deeming both aspects most significant for the analysis of Jamil Gammoh’s semi-autobiographical work of fiction, *If Only Time Could Tell* (2019). The collection of short stories under examination projects the author’s personal experience of the past that he reconstructs amidst the much technological present as told in his aged characters’ self-narratives. However, it is pertinent to commence with an understanding of the contextualization of ‘frozen memory’, since it is thus far merely employed within the realm of diasporic studies.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the flourishing of Arabic literature has created space for a collective of unique voices to share their stories and to shed light on the diverse experiences that they undergo in identifying with a homeland alongside their identity crises. This state of innovation that Arab scholars call for is reflected in their literary corpus. Whether they speak from within their homeland or as members of diasporic communities, they are found to articulate various accounts of nostalgia through their self-narratives. Those narratives are the stories of their lived experiences of the homeland, based on their different socio-cultural, political and historical backgrounds. In order to better place the study’s theoretical framework within the context of the literary work under consideration, a clear understanding of what is intended with contextualized ‘frozen memory’ is deemed pertinent. The study’s objective however by no means looks to undermine the specific circumstances aligned with the diasporic experience as we understand it. It rather aims at examining certain similarities shared through experience, attitude and narration from a gerontological perspective that may be found in ageing-people’s reactions toward their surroundings in the two contexts, diaspora and the homeland.

As the majority of diasporic fiction is fixated on the narratives of older generations, a single pattern may generally be detected unifying their self-narratives. Respectively, a diasporic experience commences with the urgent move of the subject from his homeland into a foreign country. The subject’s nostalgia for better times lived in the past before leaving the homeland is also aligned with his difficulty or even refusal to assimilate in the country of residence, and rather chooses to limit his interaction to the diasporic community. This is mainly because he has already formed a still image of his homeland based on his past experiences of better times lived there, frozen in his mind, leading to a state of confusion toward current experiences in the land of residence. What remains constant though, is holding on tightly to past experiences and memories associated with the homeland, mixed with the wish of return (Clifford, 1994, p. 304). These nostalgic memories of a homeland that once was, are repeated over time as an outlet to the lack of experience-development into the present, caused by the individual’s forced removal from his natural context. Viewed in this light, these collected memories are frozen within a specific timeframe, and can only be expressed by means of narration. Over time, the more the memories are repeated, the more romanticized they appear to be, as they are mixed with nostalgic feelings of a wish of return to those times. It is significant to point out then that ‘frozen memory’ in the literary corpus has thus far been solely associated with studies of diaspora. However, and from a gerontological perspective, this study stands out with its examination of ‘frozen memory’ away from its normalized diasporic context to include the possibility of its consideration as a condition becoming of all aged individuals.

Similar to the older generation living in diaspora, in the context of one’s homeland and from the standpoint of the present, aging people are found to express a certain alienation from their surroundings with the rapid advancement of

technology over time, to the point of projecting notions of resentment toward the sophistication of their present surroundings, and experiencing a form of mental retreat onto the framework of a certain past, when the rhythm of life was slower, life altogether was simpler and less complex. Nostalgia for those better times that no more exist mixed with a constant wish of reliving them are found to manifest themselves through frozen memories, that, similar to the context of diaspora, are seen to be romanticized and narrated repeatedly. In this sense, 'frozen memory', as the study argues, may theoretically depart from its standardized diasporic connotations and be construed as a necessary mental condition of later life whether there is political urgency or not, the one unifying factor being the feelings of alienation that aged people experience caused by their resentment toward or even rejection of their current surroundings mixed with nostalgic memories and a constant wish of return. In other words, the discourse of memory and the perception of home are the two axes encompassed in the narratives of aged people. In addition, whether they are conscious of it or not, aged people affirm their presence with the repetitive mode their narratives follow.

Memory then is "understood as a complex relation of personal experiences, the shared histories of communities and their modes of transmission" (Baroinan et al., 2007, p. 11) is seen as one of the fundamental factors in shaping the identity of any individual. Shurken (1991) states that memory "forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self" (p. 1). This illustrates that memory is a primary factor in defining the aging condition. For the older generation that experiences life either in their homeland or in diaspora, the discourse of nostalgic memory in the original homeland or/and the past is significant in shaping their longing for it as well as asserting their fixed presence by means of recreating the past in their self-narratives. Put simply, they preserve the memories that they have of the past and project them into their current lives. Therefore, their memories force them to identify with a single home; one that denotes their place of origin in the context of diaspora and their sense of presence and subjectivity in the context of the past.

II. AUTHORING NOSTALGIC MEMORY

The late Jordanian author, Jamil Gammoh (1941-2021), published many collections of short fiction, some of which are characterized as semi-autobiographical, and fixated on his personal experience with the past, in addition to the self-narratives of the older generation he had encountered growing up. In his fiction *Trials of Time* (2014), *Memoirs of a Burdened Man* (2015), *If Only Time Could Tell* (2019) and *The Virtuous and the Wicked* (2022), his representation of nostalgic memory and the homing experience for the older generation are overpowering themes that he lays out through the self-narratives of his aged characters or his fictionalized younger self's account of the past.

For Gammoh, memories of the elderly as depicted in his fiction are treated as alternate archives. Every single memory stands testimony of the homing experiences in the past (Hirsch et al., 2002, p. 10). In this sense, personalized and collective memories play a very significant role for the elderly as they serve to unveil the untold insider's experience of history, to project the lost truth of their time otherwise deformed by the drastic shift in societal attitude amidst the rapid rhythm of time and technology. The recording of these memories, thus, becomes a means of "representation [and] interpretation" (p. 5), authenticated by its subjects, and representative of self, home and history. Gammoh's understanding of memory includes the socio-cultural and political heritage of the older generation to satisfy their nostalgia and longing to be in touch with their ancestral history, hence, the representation of their 'Real home', that is their place of residence in a simpler past, with specific fixation on Al-Salt city in Jordan, the inspiration for many of his settings. The constant invasion of cultural symbols in the novel such as folkloric music and local food enhances the sense of pride for the aged characters, whose self-worth has been eroded by the socio-economic shift that accompanied technology (Baronian et al., 2007). Memory is specifically treated in this study as a performative, figurative process rather than a secure space of identity in itself (Douglas, 1975). It cannot serve the younger generation of the present day as a substitute for identity, especially that the memory in question would not ideally be theirs, but rather that of their parents and grandparents; the sum of lived experiences of a different generation. Nevertheless, memory does serve as an incentive for young individuals to embark on their own journey for identity-formation in their present state of confusion with the blurriness of postmodernity, without which they would not be able to create their own self-narratives in turn.

Gammoh's fixation on memory in the semi-autobiographical work of fiction under study serves two purposes: on the one hand, he engages his personal childhood memories of his birthplace to give life to the now considered a historical site in Jordan through his thorough and vivid description of the original houses, streets, and narrow roads during their thriving time of glory, before the original stones were changed, and old houses were abandoned. He is, on the other hand, drawn toward recreating those memories either personally experienced or as told by the elderly residing in Jordan, much like the role that the metaphor 'life as story' plays in narrative gerontology, by means of viewing story-telling as "a lens through which to view the aging process, a unique way of seeing what aging involves" (Kenyon et al., 1999, p. 1). Gammoh (2019) states that "a story-teller's gift of oral narration is an author's art of forming into a novel, and the difference between them remains in the annihilation of the former from one's memory, while remaining immortalized in the latter" (p. 8). In other words, his treatment of the older generation's memories of the past is grounded and projected in an ontological discourse, one that fathoms human beings as "storytellers and story-listeners" as not mere agents that tell stories, but rather as stories themselves (Kenyon et al., 1999, p. 1). In this sense, Gammoh's approach in voicing the memories of the elderly then serves the purpose of recreating lost fragments of their earlier lives, as a form of subjective reconciliation between their active past and what they feel is a static present, as they find themselves alienated from their surroundings with time

pausing for them with the advancement of technology. On the significance of memory in self-narrative, Gammoh (2022) states,

My thoughts wandered back into the past that remains forever unconciliated with the present, no matter how closely intertwined they were, the past could never be retrieved ... with its social and economic conditions, and the many lives of the forefathers from whom we descend ... I found it to be a copious past worth revisiting and forming reflections of; the generation that endured the taste of sour grapes so that the present generation would enjoy the ripened ones ... it is a past that transpired a bit before my childhood. My imagination drove a desire in me to transform my articles into a collection of short stories, all in one book ... and a single imaginary thought was then shaped by the documentation of the lived reality of those who came before us and are today no more. (p. 7)

The widened gap formed by the change in 'social and economic conditions' over time may only be filled through the personal memories of the older generation that he fictionalizes, intertwined with the socio-economic reality of the society they had lived and experienced as documented in Gammoh's articles, thus allowing the older generation to narrate their own experiences and ascribe meaning to them. Although the majority of his fiction gives voice to the elderly's untold stories of a forgotten past amidst the relentlessly fast-paced present, in the semi-autobiographical story "About Life" however, Gammoh (2019) illustrates through his fictionalized 'I' how he personally does not allow himself to be lost in the folds of time as age takes a toll on him. The nameless protagonist states:

Some men pass through life adapting to its different stages passably, and others remain forgotten in the folds of time ... overlooked like ancient history. We allude to those adjustable to life-changes of reminiscing over a past lost in the bends of time. Those we consider worthy do not allow the long years to separate them from today's rising youth. They meet in their view on life, they live their era, they learn from their past and live their present, shorten the space that separates their generation from that of their children, meeting their children's intellect and thoughts, converging with life's modern tools, evolving and not reproving the conceptions of their present day, they live the reality of today's youth and do not feel alienation from them; unlike those obscured by time for inaction toward current requirements and ramifications. (p. 110)

His conscious understanding of the mental shift between differing generations, in addition to his observation of the older generation's sense of loss and alienation from the much changed present allow him to make the required adjustments to his life so that "not a day [would pass] in bad conscience or under-action" (p. 110). In fact, he argues that he would never allow his day to wear him down "so long as [his] blood runs through [his] veins, and [his] heart beats in [his] chest, and [his] soul is capable of letting out [his] breath, in spite of the betrayal of time [... his] will remains relentless" (p. 111). In addition, Gammoh (2019) is seen in many instances positioning himself as a member of the older generation and envisioning his life as an immortalized story. He opines:

If my time neared its end, my withering senses would still have the strength to tell my story. I feel I have a destiny to fulfill, a project that never ceases to exist ... one that continues so long as I live. With every passing day, I am given the incentive and hope to continue; you see it has become my mission that relieves me of my worries and life's dilemmas. It is why I never worry from the snares of death ... and steadfast, I remain on the path I chose for myself, with all the strength that God Almighty has willed in me. (p. 111)

His clear understanding of the quick passing of time becomes his incentive to double his exerted effort into his constant metamorphosis which he believes should be effected in order to distance the sense of alienation that comes with old age amidst the unrelenting postmodern present. He also means to be documented in history, and so is found determined to document his subjective presence throughout his life, till he is no more.

As Gammoh employs his fictional characters to give fragments of their lived pasts, a certain fixation on contrasting societal demeanor between past and present is found fundamentally significant, as it appears to be disturbing for the older generation and a substantial instigator for their sense of alienation from and confusion with the present. Their constant comparison is then deemed most significant if they are to effect a subjective presencing for themselves in old age, as the notion of deconstructing the flaws of the present and refurbishing it with the missing values of the past may only be found in their narrated selves.

Contrary to the state of confusion that the older generation expresses toward their positioning with the unfamiliarity of the present, their homing experience is found to manifest itself in a single 'frozen memory' of a simpler past they find comfort in repeatedly recreating. The aged narrator in "Social Rites and Decrees of Life" (2019) gives himself solace as he reflects;

If only time could take us back to a past of purity and clarity, to the captivating nature destroyed by civilization in the name of advancement, to our organic plants before pesticides were introduced, to our clear seas before they were contaminated by arsenic, zinc and mercury ... if only time could tell us stories of a past when souls were pure and hearts immaculate, when a fellow individual's life was considered precious, to tell us about loyalty, love, sacrifice, empathy, amicable relations, collaboration, social solidarity, respect for human relations ... if only time could distance us from the negativity of hypocrisy, flattery, selfishness, expediency, betrayal, gossip and so on. (p. 162)

Much like the mode of hypnosis that the listener goes through in Coleridge's lyrical ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) as the aged sailor is destined to continually retell his story of the Albatross's curse to each passerby, the

silent listener in Gammoh's "Social Rites and Decrees of Life" (2019) also has the old narrator, Radwan, from an adept generation, capture his undivided attention with his fixed gaze as he finds himself forced to tell the story of Jalil, an eighty-year-old man who in turn expresses his discontentment with his present amidst the better past. Jalil explains in dejection that "despite the occasional years of drought befalling them, he cannot recall anyone having met death out of starvation during those years, or even gone hungry, and that the capable did not hesitate from aiding the destitute" (p. 163). He argues that people, with the simplicity of life in the past were simple in demeanor toward one another, as they led a life of social solidarity, without the need to boast that one shines while another remains in the shade. The entire community operated as one body, with every individual assisting with the means possible for him, they all "[shared] their social lives, collaborating in building, farming and harvesting for free" (p. 163). This sense of cooperation was practiced in happy and sad occasions as a form of "spontaneous socialism available to those who asked or did not ask for it" (p. 163). The society operated like "a beehive, each individual well-aware of his duties toward others, in what was known as 'give and take' [...], a simple popular and spontaneous socialism unprecedented by any ideology" (p. 163).

When death befell a community member in the past, Jalil explains how city-folks remained in mourning for forty days, and only after the completion of the period would a wedding be allowed to take place, conditioned to the consent of the mourners. Following the ceremony of death, he attests that no one dared to speak out of respect for the deceased and his family, but when need be, "your words would sound flustered and shaken as they're being uttered out of fear of choosing the wrong words and thus causing a misunderstanding with others. You'd feel people's hearts aching, all decently clothed and grieving" (p. 165). This is so because people used to truly empathize with one another as they came together to share in the weight of each other's plights. In this sense, "the deceased was considered a loss for the entirety of the suburb and city [...] weddings would completely cease as sadness pervaded all, and tongues were tied, merely allowing a necessary amount of words, dipped in the scent of death, to slip" (p. 165).

In "Social Rites and Decrees of Life" (2019), Gammoh's fictionalized 'I' once more employs the standpoint of the older generation reflecting on its alienation and confusion with the present state of humanity. The narrator argues:

People have changed in temperament with this technological revolution eating away at their minds, as they became introverted with the mobile phone occupying the majority of their time. One's world then started revolving around one's self in a similar fashion to that of an electron and a neutron orbiting within the confines of a particle. Social life has shattered within the one family, with mannerisms, sentiments and feelings embodying stagnation and stiffness unbecoming of man or humanity. (pp. 161-162)

In this sense, the aged narrator is seen to reflect on the present-day public attitude and demeanor of able-bodied individuals as gradually degenerating over time with the advancement of technology; an equation he finds puzzling as he describes the basic rules of humanity deteriorate in demeanor toward one another. In contrast with the simpler past, he believes that "human-nature has veered away from the right path onto that of personal interest, selfishness, narcissism and utilitarianism currently controlling societies. Not even air and water are spared from human and country loitering destroying humanity and the environment either ignorantly or purposefully" (p. 162).

Jalil sorrowfully reflects on people's numbness and lack of emotion during the ceremonies and rituals that follow someone's death as he attests; "No one is concerned with others, false and shameful flattery, and the effect one's death has on people is similar to that of a chick" (p. 164). He continues; "the deceased today has no dignity preserved for him, as people's demeanor doesn't match the venerability of the situation" (p. 164). Jalil's shame with today's general demeanor toward one's death is exemplified through his memory of witnessing people as they pay their condolences "conversing over life's dilemmas, children, schools, trade and export, jobs and promotions, politics and news, in relation to each individual concern", that is, beside "the giggles and laughs that occasionally fill the air, even if done coyly, and more befitting an election campaign or a wedding than a funeral", ironically, with the occasional open distribution of wedding invites at funeral halls (p. 164).

As Radwan finishes his account of Jalil's narrative of the past, the younger listener reflects on Radwan's story and concludes;

He then retreated, leaving my heart dejected over the change of people's mannerisms and the degeneration of their values, as the means for life's comforts became available to them, from water, to electricity, asphalted streets, cars, planes, telecommunication and extravagant buildings for many ... while hearts remain distant, full of greed, pride, narcissism, selfishness, and nepotism. I finally attest, nations have advanced technologically and civilization-wise, yet simultaneously degenerating humanely and innately. (pp. 169-170)

The younger listener here, not having experienced the distant past first hand, but rather understood its value through the self-narrative of the older generation, and from his standpoint of the present, he starts to realize that his life too is meaningless and void of true humanity.

The economic factor according to Gammoh has also greatly influenced the shift in societal demeanor. In "The Gray Cat" (2019), the protagonist, a simple employee who comes from a humble neighborhood, has an appointment in the residence of a business man. The vast contrast between the two neighborhoods sets them far apart as though belonging to two different worlds and time-frames, one old and shabby and the other new and modern. The upper-class neighborhood is described as;

an alienated place that left no trace of popular neighborhoods ... a piece extracted from a different world, whereby allusive flattering is almost vanquished, and the accumulating sense of loss is similar to the heaps of

garbage typically found in popular and random neighborhoods. It is in this specific type of neighborhoods that competition tightens its grip over rising assets in bank accounts, companies and the stock market. (p. 141)

However, the cynicism in the story does not merely lie in the contrasting minutely-detailed description of each residence, but rather in the fantastical conversation that occupies the entirety of the story between the protagonist and the upper-class cat. His social status is apparently merely good enough for him to converse with the rich man's pet that, similar to its owners, displays a patronizing attitude and a demeanor of superiority and hegemony over what it claims is an intruder who does not belong in their neighborhood. To the cat's apparent animosity, the protagonist reflects on what the world has come to as he thinks to himself;

Is a creature like this fit to control the animal kingdom? Is this how societies topple one another?! Even mere subordinates are inflicted with this condition! Blessed be Socrates for attesting to the humility and buttering up of the wicked when in need, soon enough to be replaced with arrogance and tyranny when dispensable; an understanding that echoes clearly in this time of ours. (p. 140)

The rhetorical question here indicates the intended use of the cat as a metaphor for individuals unworthy of the positions they reach by means of 'buttering up' and flattery. The sudden shift in social positioning however afflicts these individuals with a certain condition, whereby 'humility' is substituted with 'arrogance' and 'tyranny' toward the rest of society. The protagonist clearly values himself as a hardworking citizen, with the same mental capabilities and potential the upper-class has. He states: "I am a proud man and my sense of loyalty, honor and righteousness in demeanor are not to be taken lightly", with the belief that the only difference separating them is wealth "as it seems to find its way to some to be served on a gold platter, only to be mistaken by them as shrewdness, and it forsakes others who exert tremendous effort and strive, yet are reduced to mere fools" (p. 140). He also wonders how honor is conditioned to wealth, as he believes that it should instead be "conditioned to humility, wisdom, honesty, loyalty, foresight, and benignity and what not, all of which do not go with hypocrisy, flattering, arrogance and beating around the bush" (p. 144).

The suggested implication in the story seems to set wealth, prowess and postmodernity on the one hand, against poverty, simplicity and the withered past on the other, thus, circling the same binary oppositions at work in all Gammoh's stories of the loss of identity and lack of presencing that the old has amidst the unforgiving ruthlessness of the present. To this end, after a long conversation between the two, the protagonist concludes as he leaves;

Likewise is the story of each popular and underdeveloped neighborhood come to such places. No one spares us here, not even the cat that wants us subdued and washed adrift in the wreckage of the fat-whale-current, and so our story is lost amidst high tides invading our hoods. We remain naïve while they perfect their surfing skills [...] And so distances increased and spaces spread between us. (pp. 153-154)

The upper-class residence in this story, set against old neighborhoods, is employed as a metaphor here between a simple past and a ruthless present. However, Gammoh's narration of his childhood home in Al-Salt city does not fall short of accuracy in his attempt to recreate his own safe space existent in a distant past that he gives presencing to.

III. PRESENCING IN THE HOMING NARRATIVE

The question of home is expected to arise in gerontological studies because of the "deep-seated longing in human nature to belong to a place where we can call home ... a safe and supportive place" (Adler, 1938, p. 73). Brah (1996) offers two major definitions for the concept of home; on the one hand it is "a mythical place of desire in the [...] imagination," which addresses the deeply rooted and obsessive wish for return. On the other hand, home, according to Brah, is "a lived experience of a locality, or in other words it is the varying experience of pleasure and pain, terrors and contentment of everyday culture" (p. 192). It may be inferred that the notion of home suggested by Brah is not solely confined to the geographic location to which an individual has a sense of belonging, but may rather include a complex mix of subjectively experienced cultural and personal relations to land as well as to people. For the older generation, these relations are attached to their memory, maintained and continued of the home, experienced in the distant past and projected onto their understanding of life in the place of residence and/or in the present day. Such is the seeming intent that the author projects in his story "The Old House" (2019).

This autobiographical story serves several purposes and works at many levels of consciousness for the author. It recreates the childhood memories of the author's first residence in Al-Salt, Jordan; such memories mark a moment of epiphany for him as he realizes in later life his need to commence with the journey toward his purpose of narrating his life in the old house, its geographic location and the residents surrounding it. From the present standpoint of later life, he looks back at his early years in the house, and feels he had wasted time in heartache when he could have lived in peace had he had his present understanding of life in youth. He states:

There will come a time when we will need to let go of certain people who brought us pain after consuming our emotions, and instead, hold on to those loving souls who provide us with unconditional love and fulfill our needs, with understanding, honesty and purity of heart. This was the thought that sparked a search for a history recollected in memory, narrated by a trust-worthy witness or told by those entrusted with the history and heritage of the old house, in an attempt to bring it back to light from its neglect, before its memory in my mind feebled like fading apparitions desperately holding on to my waning conscience. (p. 122)

The revival of the old house with all its memories becomes the turning point at which he brings himself the subjectivity and presencing his self in later life requires, although the house in its original form no longer exists after its residents vacated it in 1966 (2019).

Having been built before the year 1927, the old house precedes the author's 'existence' (2019). The pride that he shows for the old house does not come from vacuum; its location in Al-Akrad valley in the city of Al-Salt "is testimonial to history, heritage and glory; three pillars anchoring the house, the valley and the city altogether", as ancient as time itself, it may be mistaken for one of those ancient houses out of a fantastical story, whereby one may call out from the threshold "Open sesame ... Oh fortress, do open up your gate and grant us access to the secrets of your making and the lives of your residents, your testimony of history and heritage ... what's the secret behind being the center of gluttony and envy?!" (p. 124). From the very beginning, the high location of the house overlooking the valley made it the center of attention, although "each house had its unique design, but of all, this specific house was considered one of a kind" (p. 124).

The size of the house along with the division of chambers gave it the image of sustainability and self-sufficiency; every detail was well-considered as the house was designed,

[from the huge terrace] centered by a cavity [...] used for storing logs to warm the house in winter [, to the] basement [...] utilized for livestock, cattle and guard-dogs. The house may be considered a civilian-barrack with its residents and animals [...] its enormous repository and aperture specified for shedding light onto the stored wheat and [...] other grains [...] in addition to the containers of barley and hay for the animals [...] it is after all where the winter's supplies are stored until the next harvest. (p. 128)

Its provisions were not merely enjoyed by its residents, but rather "generously available to those in need for them" by the entire valley (p. 128). The power, generosity and magnanimity of the house also echoed its master, Barham Al-Tafesh, the author's father, who was likewise "a power to be reckoned among the men of the neighborhood, the valley and the city", constantly sought for company and advice, and so the house was never empty as far as the author recalls (p. 131). However, as much pride as Gammoh may express toward the location of the old house and high-esteem it held during his years of childhood and adolescence, his self-narrative is more fixated on the memories that embodied strong sensations that awoke in him, surrounding certain events that took place in the house.

What sets Gammoh apart from the self-narratives of the older generation known to him, is his recognition that his 'frozen memory' of the house's image of grandeur will only be complete and closest to its reality, without romanticization or exaggeration of its truth by means of reviving past events through old letters he was able to find (p. 122). On the manner of processing the emotions he experiences manifested in his memory, Gammoh explains:

I felt the beats of my heart skip through its walls. I tried to calm myself and my sense of loss, but revealing the long-kept memories in my chest was of a stronger sensation, exhaling the old house's history poured out my deepest, most concealed emotions attached to it after all the turbulences It had witnessed ... the letters put together forming the appropriately meaningful and expressive words were oozing with life's chronic pains experienced in that house, some of which were mesmerizing, and many other could not be explained. They become painful images when brought together rushing through what I thought were fading memories; with the newly acquired realization that the imagined magical realms we once lived are not real, and that friends we once had are now nowhere to be found. (p. 122)

In other words, beside the memories he already has in the house, revealing the details of old letters he has do not merely bring back memories to him but rather help him relive the original emotions he had experienced retrospectively in the house as the events unfolded then; he is able to relive his past emotions with their past intensities within the 'frozen memory' at hand. This is where he allocates his homing experience, by reliving the same intensity of his past pain and joy, which ultimately bring him the same subjectivity he had lived in his youth. Therefore, the homing experience for Gammoh lies in recreating the intensity of emotions he had originally experienced in his youth, and reliving his original emotions within his memories.

The old house, or rather 'the fortress' as known to the entire valley, is "not mere stone and mud" but rather personified and venerated as "a living being, nurtured by its own residents, guests and visitors" (p. 127). Just like the cycle that the seasons repeat, "[the house too] grows, matures and ages, then rejuvenates like planted seeds and repeats its cycle through those who work hard and labor all year round to sustain a prospering home with which they share an interminable story" (p. 127). In this specific description, the author projects the house as an entity and a medium that documents and voices the daily lives of all the generations that have lived within its walls, a strong bond is formed between the residents and the house over the years to the point of merging all individual memories into one under the same roof, and so the cycle of rejuvenation that describes the house echoes the cycle of rejuvenation that the older generation goes through, as its residents also 'grow', 'mature' and 'age', while the house simultaneously vouches for their history within its walls and testifies to their presence and subjectivity in its every chamber;

They speak and inscribe the letters of their words and effort onto its walls, thus immortalizing their trace in the house. Their connection remains an effective element that leaves its trace on our present; our blood, our flesh and of our fathers and forefathers merge with each fold within the house to urge us to build upon the legacy they left us. (p. 128)

The unbreakable bond between the house and its residents may then be likened to the exchange of roles as pertaining to memory preservation and documentation, which constitutes an interplay between the house and its residents continued

through the generations residing in the house; this bond, as strong and solid as it is, carries their self-narratives to the present day, and becomes the very representation of their story-telling process.

IV. CONCLUSION

It may then be construed that the repetitive pattern that ‘frozen memory’ takes for the older generation is caused by the sense of alienation they feel toward the postmodern present. This repetitive pattern serves the purpose of narrating themselves in a present that feels foreign to them. From a gerontological perspective, transcending societal stereotypical projections requires the operation of both the literary and narrative aspects, if presencing for the older generation is to be reached. In other words, their told self-narratives become the very means by which to demystify and destabilize their perception of themselves and by others in the present as alien, and simultaneously recontextualize their presencing and subjectivity by means of recreating the past. Narrating ‘frozen memory’ also serves a pedagogical purpose for the listener of the narrative in order to form a connection in the chronology of time and assess oneself by means of contrasting societal demeanor between the differing generations and times. Gammoh’s long years and effort exerted in research, critical reflection and mental projections through article-publications finally found their creative release in his semi-autobiographical fiction authored in later life. The story-telling of his self-narrative is exceptional because of his conscious documentation of it. It also comes as a consequence to the accumulation of his life experiences segmented and fictionalized in short stories, each holding a special memory within it that contrasts past simplicity with present complication. His documentation, however, of his personal memory of the old house stands out with his autobiographical account of it because he does not merely depend on his memory of it, but rather different sources of information that either complete his understanding of the unexplainable events he could not fully comprehend as a child, or more importantly help him recreate the intensity of emotions he had experienced in youth and project them onto his present day, thus bringing him the homing experience and presencing he seeks.

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