

Coming of Age in the Arab Diasporic *Künstlerroman*: Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013) and Nada Awar Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* (2016)

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Abstract

This study explores the *künstlerroman* from an Arab diasporic viewpoint. It aims to illuminate the first years of the formative process that the Arab diasporic artist undergoes in *The Corpse Washer* (2013) by Sinan Antoon and *An Unsafe Haven* (2016) by Nada Awar Jarrar as Arab diasporic *künstlerromans*. The article traces the childhood of Antoon's Jawad and Jarrar's Anas as young aspiring Arab artists against the backdrop of the novels' socio-political contexts, which include religion, family, and the political conditions in the protagonists' countries. Since Arab diasporic writers relocate the genre into an Arab transnational setting, this study draws attention to the violence and suffering in the lives of artists as children and the fact that they are brought up in an Arab household that does not feature in the traditional genre plot. It as well explores the environment the characters grow up in like social class and religious milieu and expounds on the way each character has seeds of artistic sensibility from a young age. The Arab characters face the issue of generational conflict about art as a proper career choice. Their parents play a role in the suppression of their artistic aspirations since they assume that they have a better-planned future for their children. Due to family expectations, religion, and political unrest, the characters have their future planned for them by others. The article concludes that the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* provides alternative coming-of-age stories where the artist of Arab descent faces more challenges than his counterpart in the traditional genre.

Keywords: *künstlerroman*, Arab, diaspora, artist, childhood

1. Introduction

The unrelenting rise of globalization, transnationalism, and political turbulence has transformed the modern world into a theatre for both physical and cultural border crossings. As a result, providing assurance and stability to the migratory individual has evolved into a challenging task in and of itself. Such ambiguity and instability beget identity formation stories that are more challenging and intriguing. The Arab diaspora acts as a crucial culmination point for this challenging state of affairs. Since the situation in the Arab countries has become exceedingly fragile and changeable as a result of the intersection of national, regional, and international politics with their cultural, religious, and political existence, it is important to dwell on the earliest years of consciousness of the world that the young aspiring Arab artists experience.

Since its rise in the nineteenth century, the *Bildungsroman* genre has laid out, mapped, and in some cases shaped a plan for the creation of the individual subject in literature, including the formation of his identity and social relations. This explains why it often features a main conflict between the main character and society, in which, typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist as he is ultimately accepted into society. Dealing with a diasporic subject as the main focus of a *Bildungsroman* supports Franco Moretti's (2000) contention that in the transcultural world of today, the *Bildungsroman* enters a period of revival and transformation and becomes a powerful and relevant form for the negotiation of complex questions concerning identity, nationality, education, the role of the artist, and social as well as personal relationships since these issues are in the forefront of a transcultural tale of growth more than anything else.

Finding a commendable social role becomes even more challenging when the *Bildungsroman* traces the journey of becomingness of the diasporic artist since the journey of individuation is now coupled with that of apprenticeship. Discussing the connectedness of the two journeys, J. H. Buckley (1974) sees most of the English *Bildungsroman* novels of "youth or apprenticeship" as a type of *künstlerroman*. Interestingly, Castle (2003), in his early discussion of *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man* as a *Bildungsroman*, lists the term *künstlerroman* under the term *Bildungsroman*. Following suit, Weldon Thornton (1994), also deems the distinction between the *Bildungsroman* and *künstlerroman* inconsequential, finding no noteworthy disparities between the two terms in his reading of *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man*. A *künstlerroman* is a journey that an artist takes in which he or she encounters social obstacles and conflicts, matures, and forms oneself accordingly by transforming into a different person capable of giving voice to the true artist that resides within them and creating something new. The adult who emerges from the journey is more powerful than the child who initiated it.

In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990), the term *künstlerroman* refers to a novel that "describes the formation of a young artist". The term is also used in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* to refer to "the artist's novel" (Moretti, 2000, p. 271). Moreover, in the article "Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* as *Künstlerroman*: The Politics of Art," Lorsch (1982)

points out that a *künstlerroman* is a *Bildungsroman* that is “concerned with detailing the growth and self-discovery of the artist and his resultant conflict with society” (p. 384). Furthermore, the *künstlerroman*, as a variant of the *Bildungsroman*, has allowed for the opportunity to “translate disempowerment into narratives of survival, even if survival meant descent and, ultimately, exile” (Boes, 2006, p. 237; Castle, 2003, p. 670). Similarly, in her article “My Father and Myself: J. R. Ackerley’s Marginal Modernist *künstlerroman*,” Helena Gurfinkel (2008) contends that primarily the genre is about an artist’s understanding and fulfillment of his or her artistic mission. For her, the contentious relationship between an artist and a figure of parental authority is the central narrative thread of the modernist *künstlerroman*, a story of an artist’s growth and pursuit of a creative calling. The artist is perpetually stifled by a powerful parental figure, and conditions mature sexuality and artistry on the demise of such a figure.

The *künstlerroman* has entered a period of revival and transformation with the shift to the transcultural and the transnational. In the Arab diasporic context, the *künstlerroman* comes to examine the growth stories of artists by treading the margins and silences previously overlooked by the European model. Another addition is the quest and development of a non-white artist figure from different social classes through an obstacle course to creation located in the interstices of Arab and western cultures as depicted in Anglophone Arab literature. The Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* thwarts the artists in a hostile environment of diaspora where they have to fight against the grain to become artists. In this way, the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* veers away from the traditional tendency of giving uncompromising race, gender, and class growth stories.

In a typical *künstlerroman*, the protagonist starts in a condition of confinement, frequently as a child with their horizons constrained by their family life or the influence of others around them. Though there are still self-confidence issues and battles to achieve, they manage to flee to a place that is far from their original surroundings and more conducive to their aspirations and chosen careers. They acquire knowledge along the way from several sources, albeit frequently these teachers take the form of two opposing forces: one that fosters the artistic profession and one that stands in the way of their unavoidable success. They eventually achieve a benchmark of success, frequently at the expense of their own moral or physical well-being (*The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990). To further support this, Anniken Telnes Iversen (2009) designates a few characteristics shared by all *Bildungsromans* including the *künstlerroman* which pertain to the characters in this study. The main ones are the protagonist’s relentless fight for freedom from the people on whom he/she has relied as a child, their values, and their plans for his/her future; conflict between the inner and outer worlds; intervention of fate and chance; constant attempts to exercise free will; learning through pain and loss; development from false perception to self-awareness; and character development at the end.

In this article, we shall be discussing the childhood of Jawad and Anas, two Arab diasporic budding artists in *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon and *An Unsafe Haven* by Nada Awar Jarrar. There is a need to examine the early stage of identity formation of Arab diasporic artists. The first formative years are traced with a focus on the socio-economic situation of each character’s respective Arab country. To build on that, the home life, social class, and religious upbringing of the Arab diasporic artist are also examined in light of the wars and ensuing displacement that the characters experience. In the midst of all this, the first signs of artistic inclination and struggle for freedom from family come into play as characters feel alienated from their surroundings. In addressing how the Arab diasporic individual grows up in an Arab household, a sort of generational conflict arises as Arab parents disapprove of art as a proper career choice. This altercation prompts the young character to move away from home seeking proper artistic education. Anglophone Arab writers add to the genre by following the formation of the artist in an Arab transnational setting. In a study that combines the genre the *künstlerroman* and fiction of the Arab diaspora, Al-Khayyat and Awad (2020) explore Rabih Alameddine’s novel *The Hakawati* as an appropriation of Joyce’s *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*. Both novels are considered a *künstlerroman* since the central character is a developing artist. The developing poet, Stephen Dedalus, and the budding musician and hakawati (traditional storyteller), Osama Al-Kharrat are compared through the lenses of childhood, obstacles, and becomingness.

German philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey (1985) claims in his book *Poetry and Experience* that the *Bildungsroman* and by extension the sub-genre *künstlerroman* depicts a young man of their time. The artist enters life in a blissful state of naïveté seeking like-minded people, friendship, and love. Then, he comes into confrontation with the hard realities of the world, and how he develops to maturity via varied life experiences to find himself. At last, he realizes his mission in the world. Arab diasporic coming-of-age novels usher in a new perspective to Dilthey’s claims. For one, Arab diasporic coming-of-age novels following the formation of an artist of Arab descent do represent a character of their time but it is a timeline rife with changes. Second, located in transnational Arab settings, the time depicted begets multiple heterogeneous formation processes since the circumstances differ from one character to the other as they come from different Arab countries. Third, the socio-political unrest sometimes hinders characters in the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* from living a healthy happy childhood. Fourth, the process of becoming and belonging inherent in a *künstlerroman* is further complicated by the tethered socio-emotional development which in turn creates struggles in the relationships the characters make. Fifth, Arab diasporic writers do not necessarily consummate their formation tales with success and finding a vocation in life.

This article tackles the early formative years of Jawad and Anas, as characters of Arab descent. While the former does not leave his country, he is alienated from his family, kinsmen, and neighbors. On the other hand, Syrian Anas is forced to leave his war-torn country and live in neighboring Lebanon. Thus, the former is metaphorically displaced while the latter is literally uprooted and dislocated. Each is more or less portrayed as “a child of some sensibility” with “constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon his imagination” and “after a painful soul-searching” he can make “the sort of accommodation to the modern world” (Buckley, 1974, p. 17). The protagonist’s struggle against multiple obstacles to find his rightful place in society is not always successful as Arab diasporic writers like Antoon and Jarrar introduce

multiple factors mirroring the reality in different Arab countries where the loss and learning through pain characterizing the coming-of-age genre is more disturbing especially if one takes into account that these characters grow up in an Arab household/community as opposed to their counterparts in the Western prototype.

In its fictional tracing of an individual's development, the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* takes the spiritual and emotional formation of the artist as its focal point. Although the facts of the character's external world are as important to the progress of the journey as the inner workings of a young mind coming to grips with his identity, it is not to say that all formative processes in the diasporic Arab novel are hopeless and destined to failure but rather that the cultural, political, and social contexts of literature affect the way readers perceive certain genres. And the diasporic *künstlerroman* narrative is an example of a genre whose traditions have been transformed by the contemporary Arab writers in the diaspora. As Awad (2016) succinctly puts it, "Arab authors in diaspora straddle two cultures and skillfully blend their Arab cultural heritage in their writings" (p. 298). By appropriating and adapting the European genre of the *künstlerroman*, Arab writers in diaspora promote "a common ground that bridges the gaps between cultures" (p. 298). They simultaneously illustrate to Western readers the hardships and perils that Arab artists encounter in a volatile region like the Middle East.

2. Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013)

Sinan Antoon is an Iraqi poet, novelist, translator, and scholar. He was born and raised in Baghdad. He left for the United States after the 1991 Gulf War and was educated at Georgetown and Harvard where he obtained a doctorate in Arabic Literature in 2006. He has published three collections of poetry in Arabic. He also published four novels: *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (2006), *The Corpse Washer* (2013), *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017), and *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019). In *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon segues from the norm of the genre by portraying the growth of a character against the backdrop of a war that has affected the fate of generations. The novel constitutes an account of post-war Iraq narrated by an Iraqi aspiring sculptor by the name of Jawad Kazim. The protagonist's formative years are depicted throughout an episodic plot recounting the traumatic period of the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which was soon followed by the 1991 Gulf War and later by the 2003 American invasion. This novel is about the formation of Jawad who is the youngest member of a traditional Shiite Iraqi family who has been washing corpses for generations. As a child, Jawad is confined at home as the youngest living in his older brother's shadow and his father's interference in his life choices.

Jawad's story begins with death. Besides the fact that his family's business which has provided their livelihood for generations is shrouding the dead, Jawad's elder brother is killed during the Iran-Iraq War. This is in contrast to the typical *künstlerroman* where life begins with a quiet domestic life where the protagonist is cocooned in a protective provincial safe setting. Jawad is born and raised in the city of Baghdad, deviating from Buckley's (1974) typical male trajectory of a suffocating rural setting. In this novel, the city proves to be as restrictive to Jawad's artistic temperament as Buckley's view of the closed-mindedness of the countryside. Baghdad is depicted as one massive outdoor prison patrolled by militias. Even though the events take place entirely in the city, the pomegranate tree which is the original title of the novel in Arabic is crucial in telling Jawad's story. The pomegranate tree that has drunk from the water of washing the dead in Iraq holds firm and gets bigger every day despite the violent attacks is a symbol of resistance against invasion and a spectator of violence (Sadouni & Abu Amrieh, 2022). Mark Firmani (2018) argues that Antoon is one of the few authors who provide a counter-account to the prevailing American cultural portrayal of the war in Iraq discarding its primarily featured "myth of the trauma hero" (para. 2). Antoon instead depicts the coming-of-age story of an aspiring artist living in a complex crippling position.

Due to the unstable socio-political situation in the Arab countries, the Arab diasporic authors depict young diasporic individuals who are more likely to witness the death of a close member of their social circle at a very young age in comparison with their counterparts in the traditional genre prototype. The Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* discloses the violence, both physical and emotional, that the character undergoes because the term diaspora frequently allows for a substantial analysis of collective movement interrupted with violence, which inevitably plays a crucial role in the coming-of-age of the young individuals who encounter it (Quintana-Vallejo, 2021). These writers use the coming-of-age genre while challenging its most widely held notions of the ideal child citizen since these expectations are hard to uphold in a war-torn country where people are constantly in survival mode (Quintana-Vallejo, 2021). Jawad is not given enough time to act as a child maintaining his naivety and innocence about the atrocities of the real world. However, Antoon contrasts the terror of the Iraqi existence with the protagonist's tenacity to perceive beauty in his broken surroundings as he struggles to live.

Jawad starts drawing as he waits for bodies to come to his father's *Mghaysil*. His first sketches are of his father and his workplace. He even sketches the face of a dead person, but his father is displeased so he reprimands him for violating the sanctity of the deceased. Characters in a *künstlerroman* receive education from a variety of sources along their journey, though these teachers frequently take the form of two opposing forces — one that nurtures the artistic career and one that acts as an impediment to their success (*The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990). At the beginning of his journey, Jawad shows a serious interest in art, thanks to Raid Ismail, the high school devoted art teacher who sees natural talent in him. He teaches the students that art and life are intertwined from the start and that anything can be the subject of art, even death. Comparing his father's absolute opinion about art and his teacher's willingness to listen to their views even if they seemed ridiculous Jawad says, "Mr. Ismael told us that life is the eternal subject of art and that the world and everything in it is constantly calling out: "Draw me!" He never said that death and the dead were outside the bounds of art" (Antoon, 2013, p. 30). At this point, Jawad starts to form inclinations that are different from what his father wishes for him.

By the end of high school, Jawad decides to become an artist as he declares to Mr. Ismail that he wishes to be like Jawad Salim the artist who designed the Liberty Monument in Liberation Square. His teacher encourages him to keep drawing because talent is not enough without

constant practice. Jawad's decision to pursue art as a profession creates friction between him and his parents, especially his father. And this disagreement creates a trope characteristic of the coming-of-age genre according to Buckley (1974) who delineates that the child's family, especially his father, remains steadfastly opposed to his artistic tendencies or flights of imagination and antagonistic to his ambitions. This indicates that Jawad's tale of formation also includes the generational conflict characterizing most growth stories. His brother Ameer is the only one who supports him in his decision and keeps the peace between him and his father. It all changes when his brother dies in the war with Iran; Jawad's alienation from his family deepens because of the void his brother has left.

The war changes the family structure by taking the member who keeps things together since as long as he is alive Ameer veers the pressure of their father's expectations away from Jawad and allows him to invest his time in art activities as he desires. Jawad's father represents the figure of the teacher which hinders the artistic development of Jawad at this point for he starts as his apprentice who has to follow in the steps of his ancestors' craft of shrouding the dead which is quite dissimilar from sculpture. The father prioritizes worldly interests above the aesthetic interests of his son. Jawad recalls how his father has always rebuffed his desire to become a sculptor with the question "So you think painting or making statues is better than my honorable and rewarding profession?" (Antoon, 2013, p. 103). Jawad hopes to escape death and break away from family pressure. In retaliation, Jawad begins his studies at the academy of fine arts just as the Iran-Iraq War breaks out. Ammouy is the only one who has tried to understand his artistic tendencies and decision to study sculpture. He believed in his talent and defended him against their parents' criticism (Antoon, 2013).

Besides his supportive brother, Jawad's teacher, Isam al-Janabi, a world-renowned sculptor, is another formative influence on him who deepens his love and his commitment to art. Well-known throughout the Arab world, Professor Isam is a fifty-year-old accomplished artist with several exhibitions and published critical essays under his belt. Jawad finds Professor Isam's lecture on art and life to be poetic. Professor Isam skillfully uses quotations to clarify the topics of his lectures or to illustrate the concepts he explains. In the first lecture on the history of sculpture, Jacob clearly remembers the lasting impression two quotes have had on him. The first one is that "Pythagoras says that there is music in stone" an idea that professor Isam says was borrowed by Goethe who says that architecture is frozen music. The second one belongs to Picasso who declares that "Art is the lie that represents truth" (Antoon, 2013, p. 43). Professor Isam is also the first to introduce Jawad to his favorite sculptor of all time Giacometti and to provide him with a book about all the works of the artist.

Jawad's father, on the other hand, objects to his studies because he believes they will not equip him with practical skills. He believes that his profession as a corpse washer is more respectable and useful to society, but Jawad has no intention of continuing in the family tradition by learning his father's skills. Since his father is of a different generation and comes from a poor family, his persistence in his career choice is quite reasonable because art does not provide a stable income, especially after Saddam Hussein's leadership and the economic sanctions of the 1990s which devastated the socioeconomic fabric of society. Jawad resists the pressure of reality and connects with Isam because he too comes from a poor family and his parents wanted him to be an engineer, not an artist.

In his environment, Jawad's investment in arts stands at odds with everyone's conception of what is valuable. There seems to be a stigma surrounding the Arab male artist deeming him less of a man since aesthetic inclinations do not fall within the social conception of masculinity. In high school, Jawad is bullied by one of his classmates who calls him and Mr. Ismail gay because he perceives the teacher's interest in Jawad's artistic abilities as homoerotic. Before Mr. Ismail came to their school, the art class was ignored by teachers, and students spent it playing sports (Antoon, 2013). The relegated status of art and artists is magnified because of the socio-political circumstances of the war with Iran which led the school to drop the art class because Mr. Ismail was called for military service and the school did not assign a new teacher as "energies and sources were channeled into more 'serious' subjects" (Antoon, 2013, p. 29). A similar thing happens when the Americans occupy Baghdad. The libraries are burned, and the Academy of Fine Arts is turned into a strategic target; among all the buildings on the campus, it is the only one bombed. The novel tragically captures the experience of an Iraqi everyman who has lived through the wars, but the narrator so happens to be an aspiring artist willing to be the type of "artist [that] transcends the immediate. Transcends the here and now. Transcends the madness of the world. Transcends terrorism and war" (Zinn, 2009, p. 2). The degree of Jawad's success to achieve his dreams seems to diminish as the story progresses. However, he does not simply dream of creating works of art, because as an artist in progress, he is also a citizen and a human being. He represents the many untold stories of aspiring Arab artists whose ambitions and gifts are trampled and dismissed. Arab diasporic writers bring forth the struggles of artists of Arab descent, highlighting the particular circumstances that shape their formative processes quite differently from that of the protagonists of traditional *künstlerromans*. Ironically, Jawad's situation proves to be the opposite of what Buckley claims about the education that the young artist receives in *künstlerroman*. Jawad's first schooling which is practically washing the dead, even if not satisfactory, could be vexing for him; however, within the context of rampant deaths throughout three Iraqi wars, it may suggest the only option available to him in his present setting, unlike Buckley's claim about the formative process of a white male in the traditional genre type. Being raised in an Arab household, at quite early age, he cannot leave the repressive atmosphere of home, to make his way independently. Besides, Jawad's desire to move away from home to Jordan is driven by his wish to have better training as a sculptor which appears almost impossible to achieve in his war-torn Iraq.

3. Nada Awar Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven*

Nada Awar Jarrar was born in Lebanon to an Australian mother and a Lebanese father. She published four novels that portray different aspects of Lebanon's contemporary sociopolitical and cultural tensions. Her first novel, *Somewhere, Home*, was published in 2003 and won the Commonwealth Best First Book award for Southeast Asia and the South Pacific in 2004. Her second novel, *Dreams of Water*, was published in 2007. In 2009, her third novel, *A Good Land*, appeared. Jarrar's most recent novel, *An Unsafe Haven*, was published in 2016.

Jarrar's novel is another work depicting the gruesome reality of war affecting the lives of several Arab diasporic characters. The novel depicts the effect of the Syrian crisis and the subsequent influx of refugees into Lebanon. Jarrar's meticulously chosen title efficiently encapsulates the intricacy of how these Arab characters identify with home and belonging being caught in the crossfire of war in the Arab world. Like Antoon, Jarrar draws attention to a specific issue from various perspectives which is the refugee dilemma that plagues the Arab world as a result of continuous socio-political upheavals. It also ponders on the feeling of estrangement and displacement that Arab diasporic characters undergo as they move between their countries of origin and the host land. She writes,

There are different ways of being a refugee, different expressions of displacement and dissonance, depending on the point at which we begin our experience of dislocation, the point at which our lives are first disrupted by the violence imposed on us by events that seem outside our control (Jarrar, 2016, p. 77).

One of the storylines recounted in the novel is that of the character of Anas, an aspiring painter, and sculptor from Syria who represents the reality of the Arab diasporic space. His formation process is not portrayed in a linear timeline as in a traditional *künstlerroman* because the narrative has multiple voices and points of view recounting the stories of several Arab diasporic characters and is infused with newspaper articles' excerpts. At the beginning of the story, Anas is described as being emotionally overwhelmed due to what his friend Hannah calls "hav[ing] the sensitive soul of the artist" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 5). Peter, his American friend, and Hannah's husband has a similar impression of delicacy about Anas as he silently observes that Anas is "an extraordinarily handsome man. He has the brooding features characteristic of many Arabs, [...] but in him, they are softened by luminous eyes. And a palpable softness of spirit" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 6). Thus, like the rest of the characters in this study, Anas is a child of sensibility (Buckley, 1974) possessing this quality of being able to appreciate and respond to complex emotional or aesthetic influences which accentuate his experiences as an aspiring artist throughout the novel. Anas has grown in Damascus; at first glance, he seems to have a childhood adhering to the typical trajectory immanent in the traditional genre prototype. Anas is "a member of an established, middle-class Christian community in Syria" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 113); he has a normal childhood because he grew up before the war. Besides, he grew up in the city; therefore, he has had a privileged upbringing as he admits despite his departure to study abroad and the voluntary exile of his family later on. Anas begins his life in confinement, as his first moments of awareness of the world around him are defined by the constraints of his home life. In the following excerpt, Anas ponders the way he is raised depending on all the family members being the youngest and only boy. His recollections are a mirror to his inner life as a child explaining how,

Growing up, he had had the comfort of knowing that whatever the challenges, whether it was anxiety over schoolwork or rejection by friends, whether he got disapproval from strangers or simply felt disconnected from the world around, whatever the break these experiences caused him, there would always be someone or something to put him together again. His mother making his favorite sweets and the pleasure in her eyes as she watched him eat them; his sisters, both older, helping him with homework, often doing it for him while he went out to play; his father insisting, at the end of the school week, that he walk down to the old souk to help with shopping (Jarrar, 2016, p. 12-13).

Anas is brought up in a loving environment where his emotional and physical needs are met by his parents and sisters. However, it seems that it does not leave him with enough head space to learn how to be an independent individual in his own family. The theme of generational conflict present in most coming-of-age novels is also apparent in this Arab diasporic *künstlerroman*. In an Arab household, children cannot have the level of independence from their families seen and encouraged in Western societies even after they become adults. Family is sacred and Arab parents are possessive of their offspring especially the boys because they carry the name of the family. Thus, the individuation process of characters of Arab descent is stifled by interventions of social customs and the reversal of the parent-child relationship as the parents grow old. The reason for that is that Arab parents interfere in their children's career choices and view their subsequent success or failure as an extension of their achievement and family image in society. As a father, Anas intends to raise his children differently and to avoid emotionally suffocating his children the way he has been by giving them the freedom to be who they want:

Anas drives his children to school every morning, stopping the car to let them safely out, ... watching them walk away, his heart leaving with them, the tug of separation lingering as he drives on to his studio... With Marwan and Rana, he has tried to cultivate a quietness that had been largely absent in his own childhood, in which his parents' love had been too intense at times, too enveloping to allow him breath (Jarrar, 2016, p. 12).

Anas is very fond and protective of his children, but he does not want to overstep into their personal space. He tries to be a good parent by breaking away from the patterns his parents have followed while raising him.

In his article "Variations of a Species: The Bildungsroman," François Jost (1983) explains how stories of the exploration of personal development from childhood to maturity should not contain a lot of suffering, and that the protagonist's struggle for selfness rather than his outward exhibition of selfishness is an important aspect. This, however, is not the case in the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman*. First, the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* contains suffering to reflect the troubled situation of characters coming from different countries of the Arab world and reveal the truth about the experiences that only anglophone Arab literature could unearth. None of the characters' tales of formation progresses without a painful experience. In comparison with the characters in a traditional *künstlerroman*, Anas suffers more in his adulthood than in his childhood. Second, Anas, like Jawad, struggles to attain a sense of self as he begins to separate himself from his caretakers once he realizes the pleasure of having a space of his own. These sensible Arab aspiring artists feel the guilt that comes with the territory of selfhood formation and start to obtain personal preferences and values because they are usually in disagreement with those he has internalized as a child. It is not selfish of the children to want some time for themselves; Anas recollects those moments as little

escapades because, despite the comfort he finds in being coddled all the time, he

Had felt stifled by this closeness at times, and recalled occasional moments of aloneness that stood out as bright and exceptional: the sun on his back as he bent down on the terrace to play, undisturbed, with a new toy, the joy in that anticipation, or at night, a little while before sleep, shutting his bedroom door and sensing in this instantaneous, temporary solitude the opportunity to be utterly himself, feeling the relief in that, the release. He has always understood that it is this ability to disengage, with fluidity and without notice or regret, that makes way for the artist in him, that defines his deepest being (Jarrar, 2016, p. 13).

Evy Varsamopoulou (2020) accentuates that artists frequently feel isolated from the common lot of men, even to the point where the most basic mandates of life impact their devotion to art. Analogous to Jawad's journey, Anas faces the problem of family expectations and societal pressure to choose the appropriate field of study; nonetheless, "Anas is aware that in defying his parents' plans for him as the only son in a traditional Arab family, he becomes stronger and more determined to succeed as an artist" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 14). In the following passage, Anas remembers how his parents wished for him to be a doctor or a lawyer because these careers are traditionally associated with prestige and financial security for a man. These hopes of his parents come from a place of goodness and care, but they are also goaded by pride which does not serve Anas's best interest as he recalls,

Their expressions of hope for his future – medicine perhaps or law, they advised him – and then their disappointment when he had refused, their despair that he would be willing to give up the opportunity to elevate his standing and that of his family in a watchful and highly critical society (Jarrar, 2016, p. 14).

The realization of artistic calling for Anas comes entirely from within because he does not have an external influence like teacher Raid Ismail for Jawad. Therefore, wanting to escape the demands made upon him, by sheer willpower, he flees to a place that is far from home and more conducive to his aspirations and chosen profession in art (*The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990). Anas needs to rebel and distance himself from his family to show that he is serious about his choice and to be able to physically detach himself from the familiar society and take the trip necessary for artistic development. The following passage depicts what James Joyce in *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man* (1975) describes as the "call of life to his soul" (p. 124) that accompanies Anas' revelation of artistic vocation,

But the urge in him to create, to portray in shape and color what defined his essential being was too strong to ignore, and for several years, during which Anas and his parents hardly communicated, he had taken on menial jobs that allowed him to pay occasional classes and materials, until the day he was able to announce to them that he had won a scholarship to study art in Germany and their resolve was finally broken (Jarrar, 2016, p. 14).

Anas manages to move from the Arab world to Europe to receive proper artistic education, but in doing so, he is not running away from his roots or severing his familial ties because he comes back to Damascus since "the city [i]s a major source of inspiration for his work" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 113). The Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* stages its social critique and reveals the truth in the Arab world through the stories of these aspiring artists who represent the manifold untold similar journeys of individuals who come from the same backgrounds. In her book *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime*, Evy Varsamopoulou (2002) expounds on how the *künstlerroman* usually depicts the artist as an individual who resists being "socialized" as an industrious socio-economic provider who simply blends into his community; he strives for another world and attains it, not in religion, but in art, which he undertakes with religious fervor (p. xii). Arab diasporic writers forge characters like Jawad and Anas who resist the easy way of being accepted by their families and society by turning down the respected jobs of the corpse washer, the doctor, and the lawyer. However, in the long run, things prove to be more challenging especially for Jawad because the prospects of making a decent living as an artist do not look promising. Jawad is eventually forced to take on the family business as a corpse washer as the victims of the war in Iraq keep piling up, while Anas is tragically killed in an explosion instigated by the militia. Aspiring Arab artists follow their dreams but the price they pay is a bit higher than their counterparts in the western model.

4. Conclusion

The Arab diasporic *künstlerroman* introduces a budding artist with a challenging childhood. The characters of Arab descent cannot overcome the restraints of social class and home life easily. Being raised in an Arab household has its perks; culture is dominant, and everyone must adhere to a set of customs and a belief system. Therefore, the degree of the development does not only concern the characters themselves in an Arab diasporic context. The parents usually pre-plan the life of their child which does not usually include encouraging artistic skills. Locating the stories in an Arab transnational setting further complicates the situation when the child decides to pursue an art career. The generational conflict emerges when the Arab artist sets his eye on his goal. One of the parents proves to be quite antithetical to the child's artistic aspirations. Early in the journey, the diasporic Arab aspiring artist encounters mentors that inspire him to attain better education in art and move away from home. In the Arab diasporic *künstlerroman*, the troubled domestic life sits parallel to the socioeconomic instability in the Arab world. Via that, Anglophone Arab writers draw attention to the violence and suffering the Arab artist undergoes as a child which does not usually appear in the traditional genre.

Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* and Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* are two examples of Arab diasporic *künstlerroman*. In Antoon's novel, Jawad, an aspiring Iraqi sculptor, is forced to quit his passion for arts, turning to his family's traditional job of washing and shrouding corpses as the raging sectarian violence in his country claims the lives of thousands of innocent civilians. Jawad's dream of leaving Iraq and showcasing his sculptures in international art galleries vanishes into thin air due to a non-stop cycle of suicide bombings and deadly clashes that wreak havoc in his hometown. Similarly, in Jarrar's novel, Anas' promising career as an artist comes to an end when violence erupts in Syria. Forced to leave his country and live in neighboring Lebanon to pursue his boundless passion for arts, Anas's dream turns

into a nightmare as his marriage nearly collapses. Eventually, Anas is killed in a car bomb explosion while returning home. Ironically, in both novels, death conquers the arts. As artists, Jawad and Anas are crushed by relentless and ruthless powers of chaos, anarchy, and destruction. By depicting the experiences of Jawad and Anas, Antoon and Jarrar, two Arab diasporic novelists, highlight the dilemma of Arab artists who, on the one hand, strive to keep their dreams of success as artists alive, and on the other hand, they endeavor, sometimes with little success, to navigate wars and armed conflicts. The Arab *Künstlerroman* is, hence, a genre in which passion for arts entwines with deadly events and socio-cultural tensions that detrimentally curtail an artist's progress and advancement

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