

“Things” and Recovery From Trauma in Joukhader’s *A Map of Salt and Stars*

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Abstract—The present article explores the impact of “Things” on the healing journeys of the characters in Syrian American author Jennifer Zeynab Joukhader’s novel *A Map of Salt and Stars* (2018). It highlights the role of certain “Things” in Nour’s family’s healing process from the traumatic experiences of the Syrian war. The article also sheds light on the war’s reshaping of the objects and the individuals’ relationship with them. The objects that this article investigates are as varied as mundane utensils (a shattered plate), cherished souvenirs (Zahra’s bracelet), and even magical objects (Nour’s stone). Particularly, the article examines the establishment of the close association between the characters and these objects and the impact of this association on the family’s journey towards safety and recovery. For this reason, the present study is situated within the theoretical frameworks of the “Thing” theory and psychological trauma. This article argues that the close association that the characters establish with certain “Things” accompanies them during their grief and traumatic experiences, and subsequently initiates and facilitates their recovery.

Index Terms—Joukhader, things, thing theory, Diaspora, trauma, war, recovery

I. INTRODUCTION

Wars are among the most traumatizing events that individuals and groups may experience. Its scarring effects obstruct the continuity of an individual’s life since during wars, people are not only faced with the death of their loved ones, but they also lose the sense of safety they are used to. Part of this loss is also caused by their dispossession of their belongings and homes; this material dispossession is an important factor in the traumatic experience of the individual since, as it is argued in the psychoanalytical tradition, an object is a vital part of a person’s self.

The novel that this article analyses is Jennifer Zeynab Joukhader’s *A Map of Salt and Stars* (2018). Joukhader is a Syrian American author who recently received the 2021 Stonewall Book Awards for her latest novel *The Thirty Names of Night* (2020). In a recent online conversation, the author holds that the focus of *A Map of Salt and Stars* is not primarily the war in Syria or the refugees’ crisis; rather, it is about returning home and to one’s roots especially for someone who was born in diaspora and who has neither the sufficient knowledge about this original “home”, nor the required skills to cope with life there. By this she is referring to Nour, her protagonist. Nevertheless, Nour’s so-called homecoming, if it should be called so at all, is complicated by a war that deprived her and her family of their homes and objects. The novel shows that this deprivation has a deep influence on the characters. Throughout the novel, they establish close associations with different objects that serve an important role in their journeys towards safety and recovery. This relationship between humans and physical objects is at the heart of the theoretical enquiry called the Thing theory. Consequently, this article examines the way the Syrian War re-defines the human-object relationship in the novel. At the same time, it investigates the impact of this relationship on the characters’ coping with, and healing from trauma.

II. TRAUMA AND THINGS

The study of psychological trauma has its roots in the work of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot on hysteria, which was considered the earliest form of psychological trauma to be studied (Herman, 1992, p. 9-10). Freud credits Charcot with the change of the sarcastic attitudes towards hysteria and its patients “for Charcot had thrown the whole weight of his authority on the side of the genuineness and objectivity of hysterical phenomena” (2001c, p. 19). Prior to the work of Charcot, hysteria was considered an incomprehensible disease that specifically infected women (Ellenberger, 1994, p. 142). Charcot was the first to argue that the symptoms of hysteria are psychological since “they could be artificially induced and relived through the use of hypnosis” (Herman, 1992, p. 11). By the mid-1890s both his followers, Freud and Janet, came to the same conclusion that the cause of hysteria is psychological trauma (p. 12). From that date, the study of trauma occupied a pivotal position in the psychological endeavor. Many theorists that came after Freud dedicated their work to the study of the causes of trauma and the ways to deal with its consequences.

In their research on hysteria, Freud and Breuer (1893) argue that “any experience which calls up distressing affects—such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain—may operate as trauma of this kind; and whether it in fact does

so depends naturally enough on the susceptibility of the person affected” (2001a, p. 6). In this way, Freud and Breuer, distinguish the causes of hysteria into two sets: the first has to do with the nature of the experience that the person encounters, while the second has to do with the level of his/her resilience. As far as the incident encountered is concerned, trauma is not necessarily limited to its being severe, or life-threatening; in some instances, “an apparently trivial circumstance combines with the actually operative event or occurs at a tie of peculiar susceptibility to stimulation and in this way attains the dignity of a trauma which it would not otherwise have possessed but which thence forward persists” (p. 6). They hold that the memory of the trauma, rather than the traumatic encounter itself, is the generator of the hysterical symptoms, while recollecting that memory and vocalizing its affects ends the symptoms (p. 6). It is safe, then, to argue that repression plays a major role in many psychological disorders, while the journey of recovery starts with facing the disturbing incidents and memories that the person locks away from his conscious.

The recollection of the traumatic memories is not a simple straightforward process. It is often manifested in the form of new symptoms and behavioral changes which the American Psychiatric Association acknowledged in 1980 as part of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). This disorder includes “the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes” which are delayed and which “takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event” (p. 3-4). Cathy Caruth is of the mind that the recollection of the traumatic event and narrating it is not possible since it was not fully grasped when it happened; hence, it cannot be recovered as a memory (p. 153). She further argues that these recollections recount a history “that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” and that for the sake of both “testimony and cure” integration is required (p. 153). Recollection, then, is crucial to the healing process and one’s ability to tell one’s story.

Recovery, then, is a whole process with a set of stages and conditions that are agreed upon by psychologists, with slight differences in the names and number of these stages and conditions. In line with this idea, Levine, for instance, explains that “to move through trauma we need quietness, safety, and protection” in addition to “support from friends and relatives, as well as from nature” (1997, p. 35-6). In his argument, Levine puts together both animate and inanimate entities on equal grounds in the process of recovering from trauma. This sheds light on yet another dimension of the relationship between humans and things, and how things constitute the lives of people, a question that lies at the heart of the study of physical objects as things.

In accordance with this idea, many researchers have contemplated the influence of objects on people’s feelings and thoughts, and their holding power over them. Consequently, a set of names were suggested to describe these objects. For instance, Turkle calls them evocative objects; the term stands for the idea that thoughts and feelings are inseparable from things and that physical objects accompany our emotion and evoke our thoughts (Turtle, 2007, p. 5). These objects are gaining an increasing importance in the field of psychodynamic psychology as this field focuses on how humans make objects part of themselves (Turtle, 2007, p. 10). Turtle further argues that objects are companions of humans’ life experiences (p. 5). This includes trauma-provoking incidents, and as it is explained earlier, association plays a great role in the meanings that the objects acquire, be it a positive association resulting from a joyful experience, or a negative one resulting from a distressing experience.

In line with this argument, Cowan, Laird, and McKeown (2020) contend that evocative objects are psychological stabilizers; hence, they are therapeutic in nature (p. 4). This, somewhat new, significance of the objects for the person’s healing process is at the heart of a new psychological enquiry called Therapeutic Object Dynamic which, although it specifically deals with museum objects, emphasizes the close relationship between objects and people’s well-being and recovery from trauma (Cowan, Laird, and McKeown, 2020, p. i). The power that these objects exert over humans is what makes them things. It is not the humans who make objects parts of themselves, or choose certain objects to heal themselves with; it is the objects which force their way into, and constitute the humans’ lives and experiences. In other words, a person has no role in choosing which object captures his/her attention; it is the object which performs this function. After all, the things’ “long association with us seems to make them custodians of our memories” (Schwenger, 2006, p. 3) and essential parts of the subject’s self.

This intricate human-object relationship is fundamental in the study of “Things” through the perspective of the Thing theory. In his pioneering article “Thing Theory” (2001), Bill Brown builds on the work of Martin Heidegger who introduced the concept of the Thing as different from, if not opposed to, the object. He explains that when an object becomes self-supporting and independent, it stops being considered an object and becomes a Thing (1971, p. 164). For Brown, this happens when the object exceeds its physicality and materiality to denote something else: “the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names something else” (2001, p. 5). This something else is what is referred to by him as well as by previous critics as the “thingness.” Brown elaborates:

You could imagine things [...] as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects - their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems. Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects) (2001, p. 5).

This thingness develops around the object when it interrupts the course of peoples' lives; only then people start paying attention to its physicality and looking at what it discloses (p. 4). So, the change of the naming as well as of the perspective regarding objects is a manifestation of "a changed relation to the human subject;" the "Thing," then, names "a particular subject-object relation" (p. 4) that affects both the subject and the object. This article examines the impact of this thingness on the characters' journeys towards recovery from war trauma.

When a subject-object relation is established, the object changes from being a possessed property to a possessive entity, a thing that is pregnant with ideas and power which are triggered when it interacts with humans. For this reason, the separation of the subjects from the things they are attached to has psychological impact, and so does the association with things that are relatable to one's past and experiences. The tie between a person and an object can be distressing and even traumatizing when severed, as it can be therapeutic when (re)established. Consequently, the person's journey towards coping with, and recovery from trauma can be achieved with the help of Things. This is true of the trauma that the refugees face due to their dispossession of their homes, objects, stories, and identities. This case is presented in Joukhader's novel *A Map of Salt and Stars* (2018) which this paper deals with. This historical novel depicts intriguing psychological connections between the characters and a set of objects and their importance in their healing journeys and psychological well-being.

III. HISTORICAL FICTION: THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Recording history and past events has always been an intriguing activity. In the past, as it is still the case in the present, written historical incidents appear in two different kinds of texts; historiographical accounts produced by historians, and historical fiction which is produced by literary authors. These two forms of history create a long debate about the credibility of the accounts introduced in each of them, especially those presented in literary works. For instance, in his book *Poetics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the historian and the poet through arguing that while the historian writes what has happened, the poet recounts "what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity" (1999, p. 18). This makes the literary text open for different versions of history; however, unlike the historians' rejection of those accounts, Aristotle praises poetical historical texts for their universality and philosophic nature (p. 18). Ever since, scholars have spared no effort debating the significance of the historical fiction and its relationship with real historical events.

The historical novel, according to Lukács, started in the early nineteenth century when events like the French revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon and the different wars in Europe made history a public concern, or as he puts it "a mass experience" (1955, p. 23). It was due to the richness of this period with changes and upheavals that made the people dismiss the earlier ideas of "natural occurrences" and to see the impact of these changes on individuals' lives (p. 23). To use Lukács' exact words, historical fiction arose from "the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them" (p. 24).

Through this claim, Lukács moves the scope of his argument as far as to assert that the present has its explanation in the past, in history. For him, the French historians' work was to show that the modern society arose from the struggle between the nobility and bourgeoisie, a struggle that has its roots in the Middle Ages. In other words, history is no longer a heap of past events that are limited to the period in which they happened and which require no further present inquiry or thought; people can make sense of their current situations and events through looking back to that history. It then becomes an integral part of the present.

In recent theorization about history and history writing, the postmodern stand has been the focus for its revisionary definition of and dealing with history. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that in writing a postmodern literary work about the past, the author does not only state historical events and figures, he blends them with fictive and imaginative elements and characters. Even more than this, the author revises the so called "historical facts" which have been taken for granted as accurate and true (2010, p. 89). Consequently, the reader will have as many versions of historical accounts as the writers are willing to produce. This change gave the opportunity to marginalized groups and even societies to write their own histories and to come to terms with their present situation. This is especially true of people in diaspora.

The past as it "originally" was is inaccessible; nevertheless, there remain traces of it in the present. These traces, physical or otherwise, signifies that the past still "occupies a place in the present" which means that they are the proofs that the past will always be significant in/for the present (Robinson, 2014, p. 4). The past is commonly viewed through present situations (p. 5) but is it possible to do the opposite and view the present through the past. With the rise of poststructuralist and postcolonial theories, the content of the past changed and expanded to include marginalized groups; the shift was from social history to cultural history.

Writing one's own history, then, is the way to secure one's identity as Robinson explains: "identity politics [...] encouraged many groups to seek to legitimise their standpoint by reconstructing its history" (p. 6). Writing history then is not merely about recording the "real" events of the past; it holds within it the dynamics of one's identification of oneself in relation to others. For these reasons, historical fiction is crucial in the formation of the nations' historical narratives. These fictional texts then can be "read within a nexus of entertainment, imaginative journeying, and pedagogy, as audiences turn to them to find out about eras and understand particular periods" (De Groot, 2009, p. 14).

Consequently, many authors found themselves driven to recreate, fictional or “real”, historical moments and to explore them from personal, subjective point of view, introducing personal histories that are played against the general screen of the collective history.

These arguments show the intermingling of the past, the present, and the future. Many Arab authors in diaspora produced historical narratives that serve as ways of coming to terms with their current situations and to comment, both directly and indirectly, on the geo-political forces that inform their own as well as their countries’ current conditions. The novel that this article deals with blends the present plot which depicts the Syrian War with a historical one that represents the struggle between the different Islamic states in the twelfth century and their impact on individuals. The author does so in order to shed the light on the suffering of the Syrian refugees who lost their homes, loved ones, and sense of safety as a result of this war.

IV. “GRAVITY SPOTS”: WAR, TRAUMA, AND “THINGS” IN *A MAP OF SALT AND STARS*

The connection between people and culture is undeniable; however, people in diaspora are faced with the challenge of choosing between two cultures; their original culture and that of their host countries. This cultural diversity complicates their situation in diaspora since it forces them to create a balance between the two cultural extremes. Similarly, Arab authors in diaspora face the same challenges; nevertheless, they attempt to come to terms with their situation through their fiction. In line with this argument, Awad (2012) states that Arab writers in diaspora “straddle two cultures” and that “[t]hey skillfully blend their Arab cultural heritage in their writings” (p. 12). In this way, these authors adopt a position that promotes a common ground that bridges the gaps between cultures (Awad, 2012). This entanglement between culture and the literary production of the Arab authors in diaspora stresses the need for contextualizing a critical approach that takes into account the cultural, social and political factors that informed this production.

In addition, Awad argues that the Arab authors’ “different geo-political contexts have greatly affected their creative writing”; consequently, “reflect[ing] the heterogeneity of Arab cultures and the intersectionality of class, gender, race, religion, political affiliation and ideological stances” (p. 37). Building on Awad’s argument, the host culture is an undeniable element in the literary production of these authors since they are positioned in a hybrid space that situation as Arab authors in diaspora entails. This blending of cultures is an important factor in these authors’ attempts to deal with, and finally, reconcile themselves with their situation in addition to bringing to light the challenges that other people in diaspora face.

In her debut novel *A Map of Salt and Stars* (2018), Joukhadar tells the story of the twelve-year-old Nour and her family and their journey to find refuge during the Syrian war. Simultaneously, she tells the story of Rawyia and her journey with Al-Idrissi, the renowned Arab Muslim geographer and cartographer, to make the most accurate map of the world as a favor for his friend King Roger of Palermo in the twelfth century. Joukhadar makes the connection between the two plots through the similar events of the two journeys as Rawyia adventures to accumulate fortune and return back home, and Nour travels perilously towards safety. Joukhadar even makes Rawyia’s story Nour’s bedtime story that her father used to tell her before his demise. Joukhadar’s novel shows that the refugees are traumatized partly due to the material dispossession they undergo due to war. At the same time, the novel depicts how by clinging to certain things, refugees take a pivotal step towards a long healing journey.

Nour is the narrator of her story; she was born in the United States but had to move to Syria after the death of her father. While in Syria, she establishes a close relationship with her father’s friend Abu Sayeed, a Syrian geology teacher. Nevertheless, before she and her family comes to terms with their grief, they experience the trauma of the Syrian war when their house is bombed, and they have to leave it along with their objects to seek refuge. On the one hand, the novel deals primarily with the trauma that the individual suffer from as a result of war; on the other hand, it also provides an account of the close association between materiality and emotions. The earlier manifestation of such a connection is through Nour’s synesthesia which makes her see voices and smells as colors. This association is further explored through the thing theory which deals with the objects’ thingness which is created through their connection with the novel’s characters, and which plays a major role in their recovery from trauma.

While in Syria, Nour’s home is bombed and her sister, Huda, is badly wounded and is in need of urgent medical intervention. From then on, the family starts a long and dangerous journey to seek refuge. It is through this journey that the author depicts the atrocities of war; huge numbers of refugees, people with permanent disabilities, and more deaths along the way on top of which is Abu-Sayeed’s death when their ferry to Egypt is bombed. This war changed the relationship between the characters and their “Things:” the mother with her broken plate, Zahra with her father’s gift, the bracelet, and Nour with Rawyia’s half stone that Abu Sayeed talked to her about and which she found while they were fleeing the war. This stone proves important in Nour’s dealing with the trauma of losing her father and the one caused by the atrocities of the war.

Ali Thurm’s review that he wrote for *The London Magazine* praises the author’s choice and empowerment of female protagonists who took it to their hands to survive and achieve better lives. In another review Suzanne Joinson asserts that Joukhadar’s novel is mainly about the connection between people, maps and knowledge, a connection that is “ancient, and sometimes mystical.” Joinson explains that what Joukhadar does in the novel is showing the interconnectedness between America and Syria and between people on a general scale; that they have in common more

than that which divides them. In addition, the novel explores the traumatic impact of war on Syrian people's lives and provides an optimistic view of the possibility of their recovery.

The Syrian war came as a result of the so-called Arab Spring which is a term that was often used to describe the uprisings of the citizens in many Arab countries against their rulers. This war broke out in 2011 following Syrian people's protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian, Vincent Bernard argues "helped to revive the spectre of the Cold War" (2019, p. 866) since the conflict was no longer limited to the Syrian people and their government; rather, many great powers became involved in it. These new actors "support the two opposing sides in a rather balance way" (Šterbenc, 2018, p. 14). This balanced support did not give privilege to any of the warring factions, hence, contributing to the prolongation of this conflict.

This war is one of the cruelest conflicts that the Middle East experienced. It is somewhat impossible to obtain the accurate statistics of the damage; however, the estimated numbers introduced by many organizations such as the UNICEF are terrifying. According to a UNICEF report of March 2018, nearly half the pre-war population were forced to flee their homes among which around 5 million people have sought refuge abroad, while a *New York Times* article reported the death of some 470.000 people since the outbreak of the war in 2011 (Bernard, 2019, p. 865). These people are left with severe traumas that they are not allowed to recover from due to the unfinished war. In line with this idea, Chung et al. explain that this "the ongoing war could serve as a daily reminder of traumatic events experienced during the war" (2018, p. 55). This situation may result in "a retraumatizing process and act as a personal reference point from which meaning is attributed to existing beliefs, feelings, other experiences, and future expectations" (2018, p. 55). This is a rather terrible outcome of the war since the traumatized person is not given the opportunity to cope with and recover from his/her traumatic experience.

War causes people to lose their objects; both the most cherished ones and the ones they used for their mundane daily use. One may argue that in such cases people's lives and safety take precedence over their material possessions; nevertheless, psychoanalytic research proves that losing an object is distressing and, somewhat, traumatic. According to Freud, the loss of a loved object leads the person to mourning and even melancholia (2001b, p. 243). It is important to explain that in Object-relation theory, the term object does not stand solely for the material possessions; rather, it may refer to "a person, place, thing, idea, fantasy, or memory invested with emotional energy (love or hate or more modulated combinations of love and hate)" (Hamilton, 1999, p. 7). This rejects the possibility of easily dismissing the physical objects as secondary, meaningless, utilitarian tools. They stand on equal grounds with humans, and their loss is no less traumatic than the loss of a loved person.

This idea is shown in the novel when Nour's house was bombed. Suddenly, she is faced with a new reality as the life she is used to is slipping away. She meditates:

I don't move at first. I stare through the table, like maybe if I keep my eyes on something familiar; everything else will be the same too. But the broken plate doesn't look how I thought it would look; the porcelain isn't smooth the whole way through. It's crumbly and white on the inside, chalky like a broken bone (p. 56).

Nour had her first experience of loss when she was six when she lost the doll her grandmother made and sent her in her fourth birthday. She became immensely attached to it that when she lost it two years later, she was inconsolable since "that was the first time I knew something was really gone for good. That's how I feel now, looking at our street. This street, like all the streets I saw in Baba's Polaroids, [...] is really gone" (59). War severed her relationship with things; for this reason, she experienced loss: "an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss" (2001b, p. 249) since, the person identifies himself with the lost object as Freud maintains (p. 249). This is a pivotal idea in the study of things as Peter Schwenger (2006) maintains that "things reveal us to ourselves in profound and unexpected ways" (p. 3). For this reason, Nour and her family's loss of their things traumatizes them due to the close association between things and people.

The family's new situation is foreshadowed in the broken plate that the mother contemplates: "the shard of broken plate. She holds on to that piece of broken plate like it's her rosary or Baba's misbaha. She stares at it, mouthing something. I watch her lips. *The sfiha*, Mama says. *The waste*" (p. 59). The mother is not sad about the wasted food or plate; she is distressed by the state of loss they are put in because they lost what Nour calls "gravity spots." When they were in New York, she used to think of the gum spots on the sidewalk as the gravity spots holding them to earth; however, in their placeless situation as refugees she lost them: "I seize Mama's hand and scan the sidewalk for stray gum spots. But there aren't any, not the big black ones we had in New York. A startle of fear comes like a stubbed toe in the dark: there is nothing holding me down, nothing between me and the corkboard where God stuck the stars" (p. 196). Nour's subsequent reactions is filled fear and awe: "I drop to my knees. I cling to the concrete with my fingernails" (p. 197). She does not want to be floating aimlessly in the air as she does not want to be lost.

Besides, the author's equating of a mundane plate with spiritually significant objects, the misbaha and the rosary, proves that the war adds meaning and changed signification even to those everyday objects that people take for granted. These things become symbols of safety, continuity, and peace; however, their destruction throws their owners into loss and despair. This happens not because the owners of these things understand them as such, but because, as Spinoza maintains, "it is the thing itself that affirms or denies, in us, something of itself" (p. 82). Nour is eager to go back to the life she had prior to the shelling of her house; to her mind, this is manifested when the house is fixed and their objects are restored; when "God spreads super glue on the splinters of my bed and on Mama's cracked dinner plates" (p. 94).

The solution that Nour imagines is not one where her family moves to a safe place and obtains beautiful new furniture and utensils, it is one where their old, familiar, objects are fixed so that they can pretend that the bombing had never happened. This shows that their clinging to their objects is rather clinging to the familiar world that they lived in with their things before the war destroys it. The change that took place after the bombing of the house has not only transformed the shape and state of the objects, but it also their significations and their former selves before the war.

This is manifested through the defamiliarization, to borrow Viktor Shklovsky's term, of the familiar, otherwise taken for granted, objects. On their way to the hospital, Nour notices the strange combination of a couch's arm with the remains of a burnt mattress. This estrangement of the familiar matter allows for the rise of what Bennett (2010) calls vital materiality (p. vii). This vitality is the effect of the rupture in the subject-object relationship that is bound in the capitalist culture; in other words, the thingness of the objects. In this novel the rupture is highlighted due to war, as it disrupts the peaceful, mundane life; and as it plays a major role in stressing the thingness of certain objects, it objectified some other things through commodification.

In the novel, the author dramatizes the suffering of the refugees through the sacrifice of their things to save their lives; the ones that were kept as souvenirs and memorandums of the lost ones, i.e, through throwing the things back into the production cycle as commodities. This is shown through Zahra's gold bracelet which was a gift from her dead father. Unlike Nour, Zahra was not vocal about her grief over the loss of her father that Nour thought she did not care. Throughout the novel, the bracelet captured the attention of Nour; nevertheless, she thought it is just a piece of jewelry that manifests Zahra's selfishness and shallowness: it "makes her look haughty and grown-up, like a rich lady" (p. 198). Only when she learns from her elder sister, Huda, that the bracelet is their father's gift for Zahra's birthday that she realizes that this bracelet is not a piece of jewelry to her sister; it is "a gravity spot" (p. 199); something that prevents her from getting lost and accompanies her in her grief over the death of her father. The author highlights the atrocities of war and the painful journey of the refugees when Zahra is obliged to sell her bracelet in order to pay for their transit to Algeria and then to Ceuta, where they hope to find refuge and establish safety which is the first step in their healing process. Securing their lives took precedence over securing their memories and past; hence, they lost their connection to the past with the lost thingness of the bracelet.

In the historical plot, Khaldoun prevents this commodification process of the silver planisphere that Al-Idrisi spent years making for his friend king Roger, along with a map and a book that he entitled *The Roger Book*, by hiding it on the Sicilian desert island of Ustica where it can forever be guarded and "safe from selfish hands" (p. 307). It is "a two dimensional representation of the curved surface of the earth with all its cities and rivers and seas, inscribing these features upon a disk of solid silver" (p. 258). After King William, Roger's son, accedes to the throne, a coup erupts to overthrow him, and in the process the rebels turn into looters. For this reason, Al-Idrisi decides to leave only with the planisphere since, as Rawyia rightly explains to him, that all the rebels will only see is its silver, while Al-Idrisi takes it as "all I have left of Roger" this "wonderful object" as King Roger calls it stands for different things: the culmination of fifteen years of labor and travel; a token of the friendship between Al-Idrisi and King Roger, a bearer of the stories of each place that Al-Idrisi visited, the King's life work and his "heart's desire", a thing that, as Rawyia believes, is keeping the sick, old king alive. This claim is a confession of the thingness that the planisphere acquired as a result of its relationship with both Al-Idrisi and King Roger.

This connection with the past is manifested in the stone that Nour found in her way to Egypt. It is the magical stone that Abu Sayeed told her to find, and it is the same stone that once was half the eye of the roc, a mythic bird, that Rawyia fought. After hitting the roc, his eye came out and turned into a stone that changes its colors and has the ability to connect the living with their dead loved ones. After possessing it, Rawyia was able to hear her father's voice and even to see him "around the curve of an olive branch, the morning smell of the sea. *Didn't I tell you?*" (p. 150). The stone freezes the grieving and healing processes. It shelters the person from the necessity of facing and, consequently, accepting the death of the loved person and what it entails. This half stone has the power to manipulate the person holding it; it links itself to his/her feelings and acts according to what they miss. In this way, the stone is endowed with power of its own; however, it is one which is triggered only when it comes in contact with a grieving person. This is how a thingness of the object is developed; through this interaction between the subject and the object, the latter becomes a "Thing" and acquires new signification.

Throughout the novel, the atrocities of the war and the constant fear that Nour lives through pushes her to keep remembering the traumatic sight of her dead father's body. This cycle of pain and memories obstructs the traumatized person's natural personal healing process (Levine, 1997, p. 34). The stone in this case, both for Nour and Rawyia, evades these memories through providing them with an alternate reality. It serves as a haven where they escape the constant pain over the loss of their fathers; their real journeys towards recovery start when they realize that they cannot just ignore the facts; rather, they have to face them. Both then decide to stop listening for their dead fathers' voices; they should deal with their reality. For this reason, Rawyia shifts her attention to her living mother who is waiting for her instead of her dead father, and Nour drops the stone into the sea without listening for her Baba's caramel and oak-brown voice: "I open my hand and drop the stone into the sea. It sinks slow. It seems to pulse, like I had dropped in a heart" (p. 350). This gives allusion to the heart she imagined, or rather hoped for, in the sea that pumps warmth and compassion. This living stone then has the potential to spread comfort to other people like it did to Nour and Rawyia.

Another importance of the stone is that it connects Nour with Rawyia, the brave girl from her father's story. At the beginning, Nour knew Rawyia as a fictional character although her journey took similar routes to Rawyia's that she compares herself to her and, being ashamed of her helplessness, she resists the idea that she is Rawyia. This happens when her mother cut her hair: "I shut my eyes. I'm not Rawiya. This isn't an adventure. A yellow wail bubbles out of me" (p. 139) Nour is struck by the seriousness of their situation. Due to the half stone, Rawyia becomes real in Nour's mind and so does her bravery, strength, as well as her grief over her dead father and being caught in the struggling forces of the Islamic caliphates, and most importantly, the possibility of overcoming these difficulties the way Rawyia did. She realizes that her connection with Rawyia is an empowering one. Indeed, the link between the two girls, facilitated by the half stone, plays a crucial role in Nour's recovery.

In line with this idea, Herman (1992) holds that "Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (p. 133). Nour came to realize that the relationship she needs to establish is not with her father, but with Rawiya. In the beginning she refuses the similarities between herself and Rawiya because she detests her own helplessness in the face of her sister's offenders; that is why she feels a certain level of self-loathing that she manifests in her denying that she is Rawiya: "'I am not safe, and I can't keep anybody else safe either. I am not Rawiya'. I repeat it over and over: 'I'm not. I'm not'" (p. 164). In other words, Nour is distraught by her inability to react and to have her revenge on the boys who took advantage of her injured sister and her own weakness and young age, as well as, on those who blew their house and forced them to flee. Accordingly, Freud and Breuer hold that the reaction to the traumatizing event is the way to free the memory from the affect attached to it (2001a, p. 8). That is why Rawiya becomes not just a person, but a set of qualities that Nour detests not having.

The author manifests the change in Nour's perspective and perception of her self through the color-coded map that only Nour can read due to her peculiar condition, synesthesia, which allows her to see the sounds of the letters as colors. With the help of this map, she decides to take the matter of reaching her uncle's house into her own hands and leads herself and her older sister to safety, hence, initiating her recovery from the trauma of war and that of her father's death. At the beginning, she blames her state on the death of her father because if he was still alive, she "wouldn't have to be brave" (1p. 99). The stone brings Rawiya and her journey to life; in other words, since the stone is real, then so is Rawiya and her bravery, pain, and victory. This magical thing leads Nour to discover her strength that when she reaches her uncle's house, which once was her parents', she does not answer his question with her real name; rather, she introduces herself as Rawiya; the name that now stands for courage and the ability to overcome the obstacles, even if they were as severe as a fully-fledged war.

The way humans and things constitute each other is manifested in the way the mother made the map. She used colors instead of letters to name the places on it in order for her daughters to reach their destination safely. Beneath them, however, she wrote poems that summarize their stories. Only when they reached Ceuta that they discover that their stories are not lost, the map is guarding them. These stories are necessary for them to keep their sense of identity and what they are coming from, why, and their destination. The map provides the answer to their fear of losing who they are. The parts of their journey are scripted except for Ceuta; the mother left it blank for her daughters to fill with their new beginning.

The interaction of the refugees, in this case, with "Things" tells the story of who they are; their past and what they hold up to. Parkin holds that these objects are "minimal reminders of who they are"; especially in case of immediate departure so that when they resettle, they tell their identities to others (p. 313). In the case of Nour and her family, their interaction with the things is what tells them about their identities after their traumatic experiences, besides they are their gravity spots so that they are not dispossessed of their identities.

Abu Sayeed is a case in point. When they go to the rubble that was once his house in order for him to fetch his car and anything that he can use in the upcoming journey of refuge, he takes his collection of stones. He is the one who told Nour that stones tell stories and speak to people if they are willing to listen. These stones, like the map, are able to keep the stories of what happened through their cracks and blackened surfaces as a consequence of war. Through this interaction, the person can re-establish control over his self, what Van der Kolk calls self-leadership, which is the emblem of recovery (2014, p. 203). It is no wonder, then, that when Nour finds out the truth about the map she decides to hang it in her room, so that it keeps reminding her of her story and helping her re-establish her sense of self during her healing from the traumatic experiences she went through.

V. CONCLUSION

Joukhader's *A Map of Salt and Stars* suggests that there are intriguing relationships between the characters and certain objects. They serve as a catalyst of their struggle to survive the consequences of the Syrian war and to keep their sense of self despite the challenges they face in their journeys to seek refuge and safety. As it is discussed above, preserving the sense of self is an important aspect of recovery from trauma; in the novel, it is preserved through the characters' connection with "Things." Depriving Nour and her family of their things, traumatizes them, and as a result, they lose their sense of self. Nevertheless, the recreated relationship between them and the things discussed above leads them to rediscover and re-establish their selves.

The objects that Joukhader introduces in her novel become things due to the changed relationship between them and the characters. This relationship is complicated by war and the resulting trauma from the material dispossession of individuals. The author represents the situation of the refugees through their relationship with things. As it is discussed above, the objects served as a tool to maintain continuity and stability in the characters' lives; nevertheless, with their destruction, the characters established an intense relationship even with the most mundane of objects, or rather their shards. This new dimension of the subject-object relationship is a pivotal factor in their healing process.

The close association between people and Things is an important factor in fostering the formers' sense of self and well-being. Nevertheless, armed conflicts and wars cause material dispossession for individuals, severing and, at the same time, altering their relationships with their Things. This article has explained the traumatic consequences of this dispossession as a result of the Syrian War. In addition, it has shown the healing and remedial impact of the thingness of some objects. In Joukhader's novel, the half stone is the "Thing" that triggers Nour's healing process as this "Thing" help her to deal with her traumatic experiences and sets her on the long journey of recovery.

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