
The Setting and Being in the Novel, During the Arab Spring the Lebanese Novel “Hay Al American”, an Example

Salma Michel Atallah

Arabic Language Department, Faculty of Humanities, Notre Dame University, Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon

Email address:

sabdallah1962@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Salma Michel Atallah. The Setting and Being in the Novel, During the Arab Spring the Lebanese Novel “Hay Al American”, an Example. *International Journal of European Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 2021, pp. 37-47. doi: 10.11648/j.ijes.20210502.11

Received: December 5, 2020; **Accepted:** January 4, 2020; **Published:** July 2, 2021

Abstract: The setting creates meaning in a novel when the novelist turns it into a tool to express certain positions on the world. “Hay Al American” (Americans Neighborhood) novel by Lebanese novelist “Jabbour Al Douaihy” is quintessentially a place centered novel; made clear by the actions and characteristics of this place, setting a ripe ground for terrorism and radicalism... Among these characteristics: Applying poverty to a place that was closely related to violence and the flourishing of fundamentalist movements, which were searching for these places where they can find fertile grounds for choosing followers and for the consolidation of extremism in their minds. As well as the frustration that dominated the place due to war, explosions, deaths, the spread of pollution and the disappearance of green spaces ... Which made the setting unable to cater to the aspirations of its residents who either chose to abandon it or continue to live in it in despair. The state and parents’ negligence also contributed in fostering radicalism, as parents were often absent from the reality of their children and what they were facing, which made it easier for religious leaders to swoop down on the youth after having distorted religion and exploited it to achieve their own agendas. The state was also absent from the setting, confining its role in suppression, surveillance, and arrest, far from embracing, protection, initiative, planning and reform... This setting made the self-flounder in total loss, separating it from its reality and true authenticity. However, in a split of time, it was able to embrace its being and find its authenticity even for a brief moment...

Keywords: Setting, Terrorism, Extreme Religion, Deprivation, Frustration

1. Introduction

The novel, in general, “is a prose, a narrative, imaginary sometimes realistic text about characters involved in an important event, a representation of life, experience and knowledge acquisition” [15]. Thus, it has become obvious to say that the novel has gained an important status unchallenged by any other expressional form, to an extent where even critics took interest in it. “Dr. Laurence” even describes it as “the only radiant book of life” [11].

The importance of the novel coupled with its wide spread similarities over our Arab world, made me choose it as basis for my work. I chose “Hay Al American” by “Jabbour Al Douaihy” only after having grasped the novel’s close relevance to our current situation in the Arab world dubbed “The Arab Spring” when in fact it’s a cold, stormy and devastating winter... The novelist recognized life in its true colors in this novel. And having also experienced existential

angst himself, incorporated it in the novel by recounting people’s angst and loss in daily fatal illusions, taking them further away from their authenticity and true being... Throughout the novel, he revealed his view of the world, his position and true existence. Henceforth, this study revolves primarily around the setting and its role in the novel especially from an existential factual aspect...

The setting here means “The narrative work space, its field. This narrative space includes all places (with everything happening in it) mentioned in the novel and presented by a systematic description as part of a motion leading to a narrative configuration; in other words, the motion of action in the novel”. As “Gerard Genette” says: “places and happenings can exist without motion but not vice versa, and this systematic existence of the motion represents the narrative space” ... [14].

The notions of the setting were never a subject of concern in old critical theories, and the connection to it was never an

adopted parameter in presenting literary texts and showcasing their aesthetic value. However, referring to this novel in particular, we can clearly say: "the setting is integral to every novel" [9]. The novel increasingly emphasizes the setting, especially the Arabic novel, for we as Arabs, live in an age where we have lost the place rather the foyer, in these times of destructive wars, immigration and displacement... thus, "we notice a regression in favor of the setting considered to be the novel itself" [9]. The setting also "creates meaning within the novel though it may not be relevant, seeing that the novelist can sometimes turn the element of location into a tool to express certain positions on the world" [11]. The setting, in the novel, "is considered a scene of events, and the space where the characters of the novel move and live, and the mutual relationship between the place and the characters is established, and where the novel is given its specificity... Every successful narrative text has its spatial connotations, which are the first thing that attracts the reader." [1] This makes the novelists, especially the creative ones, "choose their places with deep awareness, which contributes to the production of a different text with coherent elements linked to interact with the place." [1]

In the novel "Hay al American", the title clearly states it's quintessentially a location centered novel. The novelist diligently depicts the setting in such a way to give himself, in its narrative configuration, a primary essential role. He, therefore, embodies a light or reference or symbol through which to communicate. So how is this setting portrayed in this novel? What is its role? How was the novelist able to convey the meaning? How does the relation between himself and the setting and between himself and the being manifest? These are the main questions tackled in two parts in this essay: the first addresses the setting and its relation to the outer social life; whereas the second concentrates on the relation between setting and being.

My essay is therefore, based on the existential methodology according to the analyses of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre and their views of the being and existence. As well as the narrative semiotic methodology, an in-depth descriptive analytic method of reading the novel's text, which rarely resorts to outside facts. This calls for a sense of content in the narrative of the novel i.e. the story, in concentrating on the setting, its importance, relation to the narrative context, the interactions of the characters and the development of the meaning.

2. The Setting in the Novel and Its Relation to Outer Social Life

The characteristics attributed to the setting in this novel give it a specific quality; which makes it "different". And this was illustrated by the actions in the novel, because "the visualization of the narrative configuration is not possible without the visualization of the story's motion" [14]. Not to mention the description intended by the novelist in different parts of the novel, neither used for aesthetic reasons nor as preparation for

events to come, but to convey the narrative meaning expressed by the story; making it closely correlated and capable of introducing a fact equivalent to reality.

Although this novel never exceeded the limits of a clear geographical area - most of its occurrences are restricted in "Hay Al American" (one of Tripoli's slums), another more upper neighborhood, and some are centered in Iraq and Paris - the novelist tried to express the geography and history of pain in this part of the world, the Arab world... He also tried to describe the situation of the Arab world and third world countries in general and "Hay Al American" in particular.

"The mention of places and happenings in detail gives the impression of reality and is known as "the realistic impact". Some of these places only aim to create that impact while others accomplish other different objectives" [14]. Remarkably, all places mentioned in this novel (Tripoli, Hay Al American, Bab Al Hadid, the square, the old train station, port of Jounieh, Lebanon, Al Yarmouk camp in Damascus, Shatila camp, Baghdad, Al Mahmoudyah garage, Syria, the Jordanian border, Paris...) are mainly places of residence, transportation and work thus, restricting their meaning to monotony, ordinary and familiar... This is the cadre that brings us to the real picture the novelist was trying to draw. Although the "inner literary referential does not correspond to the outer social one, because writing is linked to the imagination, in other words, a world conceived by the imagination according to a certain perception of life, since people see the world surrounding them from a social position i.e. an ideological position or from a distorted consciousness irrelevant to a certain reality or visual and in contrast to other perceptions (or other consciousness of this reality) or this visual itself..." [9]. The imaginary setting here designates another setting complimentary to the real one set by the novelist in such a way to keep the reader anchored to reality. The setting, "as a cosmic reality that a person perceives during his daily life, did not stop at being a visual perceptive static" [2], as it had "its social dimension that makes the cosmic space of the setting human spaces specified with social features that make it truly a social personality with its distinctive and different features from others." [2] Therefore, I will focus on the real reference in my work on this literary text, all the while making sure not to isolate the text from the human pool living and prospering in it. Although this setting is the fruit of the writer's consciousness, however, it is set as a language to all that is referential.

The social, economic and political dimensions of this setting make it a symbol; and create a social text about poverty, defeat, neglect, ignorance and estrangement in this setting, in both neighborhoods: the slum and the high class neighborhood; through which we notice a marginalization of a group of people and pictures taken from a true tragic reality in all sense of the word. A novel "can't be void and empty of a purpose and an intellectual, civilization, historical, political and social background".

The referential impact of the neighborhood in form and meaning is clear and gave it different characteristics that transformed it to a real part of the world. This is mainly due

to a pure objective description adopted in the novel, that “reveals the meaning solely and is referred to as the creative description” [14].

The setting is present in the novel but language elevates it to speech level and gives it connotations deluding to reality; language, therefore, transformed the setting to worlds of death, despair and deprivation... and so, the setting emerged in the text, even took away attention from the main characters and was an element in developing the events. Another sign of the importance of the setting in the text is the title of the novel itself: “Hay Al American”, which delves it even more into social roots.

The main cause or the big notional structure of the novel is represented in the loss of the setting / cradle depending on many characteristics:

1. Poverty clenching over the setting.
2. Frustration controlling the setting.
3. Parents neglecting their children in the setting.
4. Presence of radicalism in the setting.
5. Absence of the government in the setting.

2.1. Poverty Clenching Over the Setting

The novel’s setting uncovers the financial and social reality of a Lebanese family living in “Hay al American” in Tripoli, north of Lebanon, and gives out some of its details, described as “the misery of its current state mixed with its past before poor residents of nearby villages flooded it” (page 6). This neighborhood’s poor residents eagerly wait for the election season “to receive fifty dollars from a candidate’s agents and erect wooden scaffolding on which a huge portrait of the said candidate is hanged” (69). They live in poor houses stacked on top of each other reachable only by a flight of stairways hard to climb. They even share rent and residence. The streets of the neighborhood are dirty, as if a cloud of gray dust has sweep across them and settled over everything (92). Beggars, drifters, wooden tents and wheelbarrows towed by poor strangers all line these streets (12). Here, we find a women carrying a sick meager baby eyes closed shut, beseeching passersby and waving him around like a ragdoll... and there, a merchant calling himself the “father of the poor”, spreads a sea of used goods (93) ... These streets are also full of garbage bins filled to excess, which stench mixes with the smells of the river and tobacco... in the suburbs, there’s a deep water basin, in which naked children take a dip and come out reeking of sewers spilling in the basin from villages located on higher altitudes (68). What makes this place even worse is the increasing number of strangers flocking to it, who live in abandoned houses, roam the night streets and fill the place, young and old, men and women, besieging all passersby, clinging to them and begging... (24).

This setting made residents and visitors alike feel uncomfortable and mentally uneasy; here’s wealthy “Abdel Karim” returning home, after visiting “Hay al American”, “shoulders down like a wounded bird” (93).

According to the novelist, this severe misery in the city’s old neighborhoods is directly related to violence and rise of

fundamentalist movements (24). “The psychological, mental and physiological factors are not the only determiners of Human behavior because it can also be affected by social status, cultural formats and economic patterns” [10]. The novelist is absolutely right in this observation, considering that need plagues one’s life until he’s ready to do anything, adopt any notion or ideology if it feeds him, clothes his meager body or gives him a sense of ease and sufficiency. Terrorists and fundamentalists target these poverty and misery stricken places for being ripe ground to choose followers and cultivate an ideology of radicalism.

2.2. Frustration Controlling the Setting

Although the novel’s setting is divided into two locations: the first is “Hay al American” and the second the city where “Abdel Karim”, son of the “Azzam” family (one the wealthiest families in the city), lives. However, the latter was not in a better state despite the geographical distance from “Hay al American”. This city was an unfamiliar and unfriendly place to one of the main characters in the novel “Abdel Karim”. For it was no longer the city that “once combated the French Mandate, manifested in solidarity with the Arabic cause, for the Algerian revolution and against the Baghdad Pact... the city which streets flooded with protesters when “Jamal Abdel Nasser” resigned and a leader amongst them led the Palestinian revolution in 1948”, rather it had turned into a godforsaken city. The “Mirs” then shared control over its neighborhoods, backed up by Sheikhs traveling in armored cars, fond of fiery speeches and gun displays... (45), a city engulfed by the flames of war and explosions claiming the lives of dozens, piling their bodies in hospital morgues, stacking them on sidewalks in Nylon bags to the point where the air filled with their unbearable stench leading city officials to enumerate the bodies of the dead and lay them to rest in graves for the anonymous... A city that obliged its own, including “Abdel Karim”, to move away without hesitation and travel to France (46). It became “a dead city waking up late and turning into a city of ghosts after eight in the evening. It became idle where rich people, who amassed their fortunes in questionable ways, buy the votes of the poor during the elections” (94) ... A city “Abdel Karim” returned to once to attend his father’s funeral (46 - 47) and was forced to return to one last time after losing his girlfriend in France. Upon his return that time, he found it even worse... a barren land deprived of the greenery that once embraced it from all three sides (99). He found it lit at night by faint bulbs over faltering lamp posts... stricken by numerous atrocities; and the only scattered smells he could sniff out were the fumes of taxis fuel oils, and the only voices he could hear were those of the generators. When listening carefully, he could hear the sound of cicadas from the remains of orange fields still lost between the growing numbers of buildings (90). A city deprived of an essential fraction of the population, after Christians sold all their belongings and left... (146).

This is where “Abdel Karim” experienced frustration, alienation and idleness... when he got there “he spent the

night laying down transversally on his bed, fully clothed with his shoes still on and feet crossing the edge of the bed, the way he used to do when he had temper tantrums back as a teenager". When he woke up late, he turned on his back, laying there in complete darkness not knowing where to start or why. He spent days in that place "motionless in total silence" (20), addicted to other worlds that transport him far from time and space, like the world of alcohol, daydreaming, women's voices echoing through the house and trimming Bonsai trees (19) and refused to leave. This addiction was daily therapy that took him back to years of bliss he lived abroad, an escape to comfort whenever he felt lonely or had a sudden shift in mood (96, 95, 90, and 18). In any case, he never knew stability or happiness, in that place, but defeat and frustration, until it became more of an estranged exile than a welcoming home to him...

The only window of hope that was open in this impasse of negativity was the fact that "Abdel Karim" never tolerated religious extremism, in that place in particular; which made him give up on his only convivial companion "Intisar", "Ishmael's" mother. "As if the day she succumbed to her son's wishes and entered the house in that loose heavy brown garment, she became invisible to him, so he chose to shun her and draw a line between them" (21) ... This fact asserts the previous equation, that poverty is the perfect environment for the growth and development of terrorism, whereas it seldom affects the rich and well off...

2.3. Parents Neglect to Their Children in the Setting

Family, "is one of the most important sources of values in the Arab communities" "it's considered the first educational institution for future generations preparing them to live and work in society by forming individual personalities and views" [10]. Family is also considered "an auxiliary system and regarded as a smaller example of the national community as much as it fulfills its duty" [16]. In contrast, the family in "Hay al American" is non-existing in the scene of events, or is negatively present which devastated the lives of other characters.

"Bilal Mohsin's" family didn't meet the minimum requirements of a functional family. The father is taken by another world, away from his children in an attempt to escape his paternal obligations. He never portrayed the father figure that cares, nurtures his children and guides them towards goodness, integrity and personal fulfillment. He used to leave home days on end, telling no one of his whereabouts. If ever he returned home, is to have sex with his wife, (10).

The mother, as for her, was occupied with securing a livelihood for her children. She spent most of her days in the "Azzam" family house cleaning and tidying up, making her completely oblivious to what her children are doing, facing or dealing with. Her son "Ishmael", for example, disappears without a trace (9), and whenever he leaves home, she yells: "they took him!" (22), because she definitely doesn't know who took him or where... or she fears mentioning their name... When "Ishmael" was expelled to the stairways of the neighborhood and its alleys, he joined "Awlad al American"

gang where he was put through a series of tests to flex his muscles like relighting discarded half lit cigarettes and harassing girls (65). He spent his nights sitting on the stairways with the members of his gang in a position similar to that of his father, where he used to cross his legs in front of him and embrace them with both hands, exchanging insults with his friends or planning evil deeds together (67), among which robbing one of the elders (68) ...

The second son is sent to work in a repair shop only to be covered in grease and oil and hang with bad crowds (11). As for the younger son, he went to internet cafes, where he spends his time playing and watching pornographic pictures, whereas, his sick younger brother sits behind him, watches him and learns vice from him (9).

The children of this family were deprived of someone who can guide them in the right direction and protect them from many evils surrounding them and imposed by their circumstances. Their parents (mother and father) and relatives (the uncle addicted to alcohol (65)), were distant, totally oblivious to the setting and chain of events... which made things even worse, but much easier for religious leaders to swoop town, attack their poor pray and lure them into their traps...

2.4. Presence of Radicalism in the Setting

The 'Sharia', in Arabic language, is the source of the verb "Sharra'a" (legislate), and it refers to two meanings, one of which is the straight path... In terminology, it defines what God has legalized for his servants of laws that will reform his people in this world and the hereafter. [3] As for the Islamic law, it was set to protect human rights, and protect people from their own whims and lusts... [3]. However, in "Hay al American", the same law is used to spread an unfamiliar ideology, a destructive instinctive one, to destroy men and infrastructure and attack heritage, customs and traditions... This leads us to the fact that the problem is not religion itself, as we must always separate between religion and the political exploitation of religion. [4]

This way, the setting, in the novel loses its old authentic image and puts on a new fake one dominated by imported unfamiliar faces; thus, becoming a lure to strangers flocking to it spreading ideologies and religion unfamiliar to that place and its inhabitants. A Sheikh returning from Pakistan, for example, roams the neighborhood's alleys, instigating. On one hand, he says that any imagery portraying the soul is taboo for it matches God's image, whilst on the other, he criticizes the process of buying votes, calling for a boycott of the elections and claiming it contradicts the regulations of the Islamic Nation. The young listen to him and some of them, like "Ishmael", get excited and spend all night planning, until they shred most of the candidates' portraits by dawn... (69). Whereas, another Sheikh, hailing from the Comoros Islands, teaches that "Jihad is no longer a collective duty but an individual one, in view of the hostilities endured by the Islamic Nation in Iraq who is unable to fend it by itself; which help in spreading a sense of duty in all Muslims from the nearest to the farthest ones" (114). As well as a brother

from Algeria and another from Somalia (120) ... Religious organizations are established to achieve these goals. "Ishmael" plants an explosive device in a Buddhist temple (108) and hides with his accomplices in an Islamic association called "Al Hidayah" in "Hay al American" (109), that gained instant reputation and was allegedly well funded (115) ... Thus, the Mosque became a center to recruit young boys and send them off on Jihadist missions (111).

Religion changed the face of that place and obliged those who want to go out at night or simply invite some friends over for dinner, to do so in neighboring Christian towns. Those who wanted to buy a new suit had to go all the way to the capital and missionary schools left the city as the population of Christians dwindled down. The setting became a fertile soil for terrorism giving rise to fundamentalism and violence and sustaining them... "violence is one of the oldest phenomena known to Man throughout history, even gained momentum in certain ages. But what is disconcerting that this phenomenon is witnessing an alarming increased rate all over the world", especially in our modern Arabic societies in a clear way. Violence, as defined by Arabic linguistics old and new chiefly "Ibn Manzour" means violation, trespass and is anti-kindness. Violence and ideology are linked in many aspects of modern violence which is given the names of some of these ideologies. As for the word terrorist, it is linguistically defined as the person who resorts to acts of terror or intimidation. He is "the terrifying person, the one who carries out one-sided killing that terrifies people. And one of his characteristics is that he kills people with premeditation, with one goal in his mind, to kill the largest possible number and spread terror in the neighborhoods regardless of the intention." [12] The concept of terrorism can be viewed as one of political violence's problematic. If we take a closer look at the background of terrorism and dig through some of its related theories, we find that it's modern in concept but as old as time in practice. The concept of terrorism was mentioned for the first time in 1798 in the Academy of France's dictionary in conjunction with the establishment of the new state governed by determined sociological and political laws and associated with nihilistic violence. Terrorism opposes modern countries and aims at destroying those using extreme forms of violence. We can highlight here, the famous book of philosopher "Hannah Arendt" "On Violence" in which she clarifies the most important points of difference between violence and terrorism and points out that it's similar to that between dictatorial terrorism based on tyranny and totalitarian terrorism aimed at the closest to it; as was seen in recent years in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon...[5] Religious terrorism is the most wide spread form of terrorism in the Islamic world nowadays, which despite being mostly totalitarian in nature, it's a phenomenon particular to developing societies, adopting new secular ways, in other words societies looking for material or moral change. If violence is regarded as an informal behavior restoring to force in settling disputes, then terrorism is its desperate version to those associated with it; because terrorism

violence is closer to revenge and retribution. [6]

In "Hay Al American", terrorism brewed and violence grew when extremists took control over Mosques and expelled orators who refrained from any call to Jihad no matter the circumstance. They dressed their women in black, charged with infidelity and imposed prohibitions; they threatened women's hairstylists, forbade male doctors from examining women, told off those who break their fast in public, hunted down those who drink alcohol by setting checkpoints on the city's entrance and punished the doubters after sniffing them out. They accumulated wealth in personal bank accounts and rigged their posse of bodyguards with weapons; they sent youngsters to fight in wars they do not come back from by naming them without their consent after recruiting them to Jihad directly, online (117 - 118) ... or by choosing them from associations... "Abu Mussaab", for example, used to choose boys for Jihad from centers like the Islamic association "Al Hidayah" to be recruited in an affiliated association called "Jound Al Sahaba" (127).

This unfamiliar religion to "Hay al American", stole its victims' will and turned them into prisoners mesmerized by its teachings and leaders... this religion considered every Jihadist a martyr and wrote on signs and walls: "the hero martyr Ishmael Mohsen", "we are all Ishmael" (135), "with our blood, with our soul, we sacrifice ourselves for you o martyr!" (142) ... It also honored the mothers of martyrs by way of remunerations (152) ... This, of course, spoiled the meanings of nobility and dignity for martyrdom.

Like "Ishmael", there were dozens of converted boys from "Hay al American" and those who immigrated to it, like the Mauritanian who was ready to die at any given time, he was even excited and awaiting that moment. All he did was sleep, keep to himself, wait and read the Qur'an in a low voice... He went out on a lovely spring day, rode his motorcycle to a lavish wedding hosted by Kurds in the town of Toz Akroun near Khanaqin, where he blew himself up and massacred everyone (123).

This extremist religious inclination had a strong hold over the setting, and no one dared cross or condemn it. The only opposing voice was that of "Sheikh Abdel Latif" who dared not raise it but whispered to trusted people cautioning that men with long beards are regression itself and that the biggest Jihad is the one we wage against ourselves... He added that Islam's biggest and most destructive enemies are some Muslims in a clear indication to "Al Hidayah" association (110) ... However, this lonely voice was unable to shut all the cacophony around it, but was silenced along with all liberal religious views...

The open-ended story (not knowing the fate of Ishmael after he ran away from the "Azzam" home, and his unwillingness to openly admit relinquishing the Takfir methodology) demonstrates the persistence of these extremist terrorist ideologies, sustainability through history and openness to the future... It's a concept steeped in evil looking to overcome good, it calls upon the instinct of existence and survival through religion, the instinct of the fittest and strongest. Terrorists see their cause as bigger and greater than

themselves, therefore, one that is worth dying for. That's why they're ready to sacrifice their lives for the Islamic Nation at any cost. As long as the setting remains the same, actions, ideologies and dogmas will follow suit. [8] I wonder, when will "ethnic religious and sectarian diversity become a source of enrichment and immunity, not a cause of discord and weakness for a new nationalist thought" [13] And when will we have an "alternative Arabic project away from the regional and global projects that have been blowing into the Arab countries for a decade?" [13]

2.5. Absence of the Government from the Setting

The government is never mentioned in the novel, except in a disciplinary, oppressive way, where it observed, arrested, apprehended and tortured prisoners (113) ... But it never embraced, protected, planned, engaged, reformed or built... "Hay al American" was named after an abandoned evangelical school that became the hub of activity for a feared branch of the aerial intelligence which took over the dilapidated school grounds (5). It was also the hub of an intelligence cell that monitored Intisar's phone logs and other informants who tracked "Ishmael's" news... and set an around the clock surveillance over the "Azzam" family home (148 - 149).

Neighborhood residents felt like enemies of the state or even unworthy of its citizenship. They felt like the government opposed them from the beginning (137 - 138). Murders happen in this place for no obvious reason: two bodies thrown in a river; two boys covered by blood stains were swept away by the river current to a small stream until their bodies finally found rest under bridge (41).

The government was totally oblivious to young boys brought from both inside and outside the country to be assembled, brainwashed and fed extremism, then sent to "Ain Al Helwe" Palestinian camp south of the country, an island outside of the government's control. These boys received military combat and terrorist training like the Maghreby, as they called him, who chose to fight in the field. So they sent him as backup to the city of Fallujah besieged by American Marines (124).

This was a general view of the relation between the setting and outer social reference and ways of expressing it. How will the view of the relation between setting and existence and reality be? How will the self be in that setting? This is discussed in the second half of this essay.

3. The Setting and Its Relation to the Being and Existence

Existence is "to be" whereas, existing is "everything we say, think and react to, it's what we are and how we became to be". One's awareness to his existence is the window to being. "Heidegger" built his theory of reality around Man's existence, describing his everyday life because he's the only creature that ponders his existence as an individual and existence in general. This part of the essay will therefore

focus on this characters' everyday life, to review their existence and reality [7].

Seeing that "the literary text is an indicative system, a linguistic structure; the language is self-explanatory, even, explains everything outside of it according to its view of things", and seeing that people's problematic in that setting is an existential problem of self-awareness to their existence, potentials and rights; it was imperative to study the relation between the self and setting and the way it shapes its being. Also look at the phenomenon of awareness that determines the relation between self and surrounding, self and self and deduce the meaning of existence in that situation, condition and in social, intellectual, political dimensions as well as other important dimensions... when "the novel's setting becomes a personality, it gains a language, role and function, maybe even, an essential one" [14]. And "when the language combines the object, the setting, the universe, the being, the enabler, and the places all into one linguistic root, 'a universe', it supports this convergence." [2] The word 'was' in Arabic, that indicates the being in its etymological connection with the setting, and their departure from one substance "universe" expresses the relation of the setting, as a locus, with the human being in the first place. [2]

Judging from the description of the setting, in the novel, and the actions of the characters, this setting can be divided into two locations: first, "Hay al American" and the upper class part of town (the city of Tripoli) and second, Paris and Iraq. The first location is different in atmosphere, landscape and quality of life. It is narrow, closed and unable to distinguish the characters and give them an authentic being in which they can fulfill themselves kindly and brilliantly but gave the impression they were leading a life of imprisonment... this, of course, can be attributed to essential reasons related to the characteristics of the setting, mentioned before. The second location was open, free and able to bring the self to understand its being even for a little while, depending, of course, on the actions carried out by the self.

3.1. The Setting Drowns the Self in a Fake Existence

As long as one expresses himself in his all even in one's smallest tendencies and shallowest ones, therefore no human hobby, whim or action is unrevealing. In studying the actions of a group of characters, we noticed they were marginalized in life, beyond its authenticity, unable to fulfill any objective as they have not understood their existence or even tried to do so. "One can't fulfill his main objective in life unless he understands existence" [7].

These characters seem to be silent in their closed existence, refraining from any action, deprived of any desires which made them practically non-existing. One's existence depend on action, therefore the absence of action means ceasing to exist. In case the action isn't a determined movement, it should be defined by intent. Action exceeds the facts to get to a chosen or required result [7]. Choice, then, is the choice of the self, the way it is presented to existence, the existence of the world, the world itself, because there are no accidental actions.

"Abdul Rahman Bakri" is "Bilal" and "Intisar's" neighbor, which means he is a secondary character in the novel. In spite of that, the novelist designated a good space in the novel to introduce us to this kind of relaxed and irresponsible character living in "Hay Al American". "This man had no goals in life; therefore, he led an unexceptional life, because establishing an ultimate objective is what characterizes one's existence" [7]. He is the eternal couch-potato (10) watching women's wrestling matches and models strutting on the catwalk on the fashion channel (10). He sits all day on his behind and recounts (117). He leaves the house days on end without a reason (8). Even his nickname "Al Machnouk" (The hanged) is synonymous to death, and what is worse is that he was given this nickname for family reasons that were now long forgotten (5).

This man did nothing to build himself, he "was in a state of constant conflict between being lost in daily vulgar, banality and gossip avoiding any confrontation meant to fulfill his authentic existence, because routine deprives his existence of identity and personality". He never sought change but became a slave to a daily habit that took control over his life when he bought a large colored mobile phone, to a point where his wife thought that only death can separate him from it (5). He forgot the remote control in his jacket's pocket on purpose and joined it later to his house keys (7); "freedom is being free to change". This made his existence fake, naïve and marginal; Heidegger defines "unauthentic existence by a person who doesn't have a sense of burden or responsibility... [7]"

"Bilal Mohsen" is "Ishmael's" father and "Intisar's" husband. He's no different from "Abdul Rahman Bakri" in leading an unaware, inactive and inefficient life. This comes as no surprise with a man chained to his fragile past void of any accomplishment, deed or objective. One can't build consciousness as long as he is dwelling in the past: consciousness is only built by denying the past (the thing consciousness represents) in one's self according to "Sartre" and fake existence according to "Heidegger". "Bilal Mohsen" wasn't constantly thriving to build himself, nor was he worried to do so "because worry is one's consciousness to build a future different from the present". "Sartre" deduces Man's nature based on his concept of freedom which is "not to be what I am, but what I'm not". The present only holds meaning in the future and the past is indispensable in making future choices given what should be changed. Between the past of "Bilal Mohsen" and his future lay a present chained to the past, trapped in nothingness and obsession over the past; a present deprived of identity, lost in a lack of accomplishment and absence of a goal or objective. "Sartre" claims: "I am nothing but a personal objective behind a certain situation". Man is a representation of his own goals that are a combination between what is in him or fakeness and what is for him or authenticity. This is a combination between a fixed being and a shifting existence. It's a present lived in constant conflict between being lost in daily vulgar, banality and gossip avoiding any confrontation and getting rid of any worry meant to fulfill one's authentic existence [7].

"Bilal" was unemployed and urged his cousin to take him to "Bab Al Hadid" during the last chapter of bloody conflicts, unaware that it was coming to an end. Rebels, there, were in desperate need of man so they recruited every volunteer. "Bilal" was never charged with a specific assignment. He used to lie down on the ground, like everyone else, smoke nonstop and listen to bearded "Sheikh Imad's" instructions (52) ... He frequented a charitable organization where he worked in exchange for nightly accommodation in a small room... had no friends... roamed around, head down, until he bumped into "Intisar" (59), in every sense of the word from the frivolous choice of marriage to actually getting married and engaging in this important project in life. His wife pointed out his failure every day. He never proclaimed his constant state of bankruptcy by showing her his empty perforated pockets, he never spoke nor made excuses, he only yelled, raises his hand on her (73), slept outside or ran away (7).

He never even paid attention to his looks, he strolled all day disheveled and half shaved. His looks, clothes and miserable features reflected the tacky places he stood in for hours contemplating traffic or the river's current (60).

"Abdul Karim's" father "Abdullah Al Azzam" was no better than "Bilal Mohsen". He only had one desire in life, which is to become a member of the parliament but never achieved his goal (28). He resorted, then, to moaning over his failure, stopping time and going back to the past over and over again to recall his father "Mostafa Azzam's" glories. He sat his son "Abdul Karim" on his lap and mentioned his grandfather to him in laudatory terms... told stories of his heroic battles against the French army (36) and flipped the thick pages of a pictures album (34 - 35); until he became the living memory of the family; especially, after a rival family shot him in the right knee, in the market, and left him disabled (36).

Through these specimen characters, the novelist wanted to shed light on the Arabs state of being past and present, summed up by the glorification of the past and lack of effort towards uplifting the present and making it up to par and date. The only thing they are good at is gossip which holds them back from true being and authentic acts... the novelist wanted to express his revolt over this state of being and desire to change current Arabic times, by shedding light on the matter...

As like all the other characters, "Abdul Karim Al Azzam" constantly recalled his past, a place where he lived a love that changed his life during a short period of time, especially since he felt lost in his current world.... He was haunted by the places of the past in Paris at a time when he was living in the places of the present in Tripoli. "To be free is to be free to change" [7]. But "Abdul Karim" never knew freedom because he was never able to change or revolt over the past and begin a new chapter in his life; he preferred to stay captive of his past and dwell on it. "Abdul Karim" totally ignored the past and tried to restore it fantasizing about staying in it. Subsequently, he didn't try to build his conscious or set a meaningful goal in life, rather spent all his

time listening to music and taking care of little shrubs he brought with him from Paris.

It is essential, here, to point out the importance of the setting in building and eliminating this man's being. He regained his being, in Paris, when he fell in love with dancer "Valeria", because of whom he was cured (81) and experienced a change in behavior: he looked real and fresh and the nervous grimaces on his face disappeared once he showed his true nature (81). He let go of his weird behavior and dark side... his face lit up and he became efficient in his job (83) ... However, after she left him, he was in denial... He began locking himself up in the studio where he would repeat some of her dance moves and try to copy her, then water the shrubs and wait for her. He would wait for the phone to ring and as soon as it did, he would get emotional... He was frequently absent from his job. He upheld his girlfriend's routine as if she was still around, spying on him and testing his attachment to her... as if she was going to return at any given moment... He replaced her with things, fought until his body gave up on him... and had to be rushed to hospital (86 - 87). He was consumed again with feelings of despair, emptiness and estrangement (87). He unwillingly, tried to depend on himself to earn his living, but quickly found out that he won't excel in any productive job. When the money transfers came to a stop and he received a warning, he realized that the past is over and his life is insignificant after "Valeria"; as if he entered a dark tunnel with no light at the end (87).

He never found his being in Tripoli also, the place where he lived a strange state of loneliness, despair and failure throughout his childhood. His mother felt sorry for him seeing him sink in silence and despair (37) while his father feared this state of despair plaguing the "Azzam" family household generation after generation (42) ... Every once in a while, his sensitivities, macabre feelings and melancholy came over him, he would isolate himself in his parents' house and refuse to receive visits from his friends... signs of sudden depression manifested in him... he even frequented the library, every day, where he would sit alone ... He went through a strange suffering, alternating between an unknown feeling of frustration making him sob and mixing his sorrow with readings (40). He got married but ruined it from the beginning. Relatives and acquaintances began believing the bride's parents version of accounts which hints that "Al Azzam's" son who never loved their daughter, isn't into women all together. They asserted this fact by claiming they had proof, which plunged "Abdul Karim" in his original state of loss... this brief marriage left him with tired memories of a fat girl barging into his bedroom (43) ... He was weird during his childhood, and came back even weirder after his long immigration (17). On the first day of arrival, he laid in his dark room not knowing where to start or why. He didn't take a shower or bath to prolong his body's stay in the scent of his life abroad (90). He arranged the shrubs according to "Valeria's" order in her apartment and put her skirts in a locked closet in an adjacent room (91 - 92). He lived alone and placid in that place; either he closed the windows, pulled

the curtains down, closed his eyes and threw himself on the couch, blasting tunes of his favorite singer (18) ... or sat by the window under the crawling rays of the sun, drinking his coffee in never-ending sips, then shifted all his attention to one of the shrubs he carried with him from Paris (19) ... He drank wine in excess before going to sleep (78) ... isolated himself in his apartment (79) ... living off the memory of his love through music CDs, opera songs and caring for little Bonsai trees entrusted to him by his girlfriend.

"Abdul Karim Al Azzam" categorically, refused the present, to the point where he returned from his visit to the city shoulders down like a wounded bird (93). When his cousin visited him, he seemed tense, having difficulties closing his eyelids and baring neck muscle cramps (95). As soon as he left, he would clean the air behind him with the voice of desperate lover "Montserrat Cabalet" from "La Traviata" (95) and whenever her voice echoed throughout the house, his mood would go somber again (95). His addiction to resounding women's voices around the house and obsession with caring for Bonsai trees from the effects of the aerial trip became his daily therapy, taking him back to years of loving bliss... He kept clinging to a faint ray of hope that the phone would someday ring and it would be Valeria on the other end... then, he would sell the family house and run back to her (95-96).

In short, "Abdul Karim" was banished from his own places the way he was banished from the lives of the people whom he cared about (96).

As for "Intisar", "Bilal Mohsen's" wife and "Ishmael's" mother, almost the only women who has a part in this novel, was no better than the characters mentioned before. She was the example of a bad woman although she tried her best to provide for her children by working at the "Azzam" family home. Her role was limited to making a meager living for her family regardless of providing them with a higher purpose in life elevating her and her children to higher standards. The only trait she saw in herself was her body and worked incessantly on improving it, as if it was her only weapon or as if it was the only thing others see in her. Every act associated to her was centered around her beautiful figure that attracted the attention of men even after having birthed four children (13): she was an easy woman confusing between naughtiness, kissing older boys and permitting men to fondle with her (59)... She found delight in taking her time to paint her nails after her bath when she got the rare opportunity of being alone in the house with her body (9). When she was finally free of the religious pressure her son Ishmael imposed on her, discarded of her garment and returned to wearing tight jeans that define her figure (158); for she's still a body in its prime (102). She never rebelled, got angry or refuted her husband's disdain and ill treatment to provide a better reality, but tolerated his yelling, pushing and taps on the shoulder (73) ... Thus, "Intisar" was marginalized to a corner of existence she made for herself detached from her true being.

In a strange, threatened, cold and quiet setting like this, the social and personal dimension dies and gets canceled, to

where life is reduced to biological functions. As for the rest of the movement, it's troubled, free, makes no profit of time but walks in emptiness... in a setting like this, men's only choice is to adapt and fall into a state of coma leading to its destruction. In such a setting, the self-suffers, gets lost and is constantly overcome with the feeling of void with existential tendencies. This is not strange in an Arabic society, "where its present day has produced the crisis of confidence in the Arab self." [13]

3.2. The Self Revolts Against Its Fake Existence Detached from the Setting

The setting is required for an effective existence, identity and freedom. How can a place like "Hay Al American" then, make the existence of a young man like Ishmael an efficient, free one; an existence that allows him to form his identity and true being?

In this place, he used to bump into his father "Bilal" on the stairways of "Hay Al American"... in this place, like his father, he was expelled to the neighborhood's stairways and alleys and became a gang member where he was put through a series of tests to flex his muscles like relighting discarded half lit cigarettes and harassing girls (65)... in this place, He spent his nights sitting on the stairways with the members of his gang in a position similar to that of his father (67)... in this place, he was mostly absent from attending his courses at the technical school he was enrolled in (66)... he used to take steroid pills with his friends and go out to rip all the billboards featuring women in underwear (115)... in this place, he shaved his head, implying indifferently that he is the angel of death (66 - 67) to where he was accused of doing things he didn't (70).

In this place, "Ishmael" experienced a radical change in his reality all the while, staying true to his weak being and unauthentic existence. He shifted to a state, imposed by others and totally contradictory to his former one. He became a devout to the point of extremism, to the point where he became a stranger in his own eyes "a fleeing thing and an elusive gaze" (72) ... This change also showed in his behavior that became like a widespread disease: he started pacing the streets alone head down... he abandoned his friends one after the other as if he was older than them, he only talked to them to ban them from doing things he used to do himself when he was with them... became diligent in performing all five prayers... woke up early for ablution and kneeling... postponed growing his beard upon the Sheikh's advice that preferred he would wait until it became dense so he promised himself to couple that with wearing the traditional garment... refrained from shaking women by hand... and bought his mother traditional garments (71). He got irritated with coddling and gave short answers to his mother with a stern voice from where he stood without turning to look at her... stopped joking and laughing... endured his friend's mockery and everything else... sat alone in his bedroom gazing at the emptiness of the wall (72) ... He did not tolerate any alcohol in the house menacing his father with eternal condemnation in hell and listing his bad deeds

(74). His sole desire centered on dying in Jihad for the sake of "Allah" and the Islamic Nation (122).

In this place, Ishmael was not free, he was nothing, he was a feather carried by the wind... he was a kid being fed his existence either by ill-mannered friends or by clergyman.

However, when Ishmael distanced himself from that setting, he felt for a moment in time that he was missing something and realized that what he chose or what he was isn't the right choice. Man is the only creature able to recognize this lack in his existence and that sense of constitutional association with it. Thus, he constantly sought to exceed himself toward what he lacks and fulfill a desired special existence [7].

Away from that setting, "Ishmael" felt like he wanted to reject his past and refuse what so many conspired to involve him in. And because desire is a lack in existence, it directly leads to a lacking existence. Hence, "Ishmael's" desire managed to depict another existence for him, one where his humanity manifested itself in all its glory. Away from that setting, the critical event that initiated the transformation from an imposed existence to a free one is him. In a moment's decision, away from that setting, he regained himself back in revolting over the familiar and daily routine represented by terrorism and killing innocent people in the name of Islam. The human being regains himself and this self makes its existence alone. In a moment's decision, he created a real existence and existing means choosing him, and choosing is not a matter of selection rather a process of finding oneself meaning that a Man's existence is his freedom. Whereas the intent is to choose a purpose and whereas the world is revealed through our journeys in life; therefore, it's revealed to us according to the chosen purpose. The choice is then, a choice of self and the way it's presented in existence and to existence in the world. There are no random actions but actions that serve a certain purpose. Man expresses himself in its entirety in every inclination or tendency or path or action. Experimental psychology limits Man with his desires, and considers them the fruit of his consciousness with their meanings confined to it. "Sartre" considers these desires consciousness itself in its enacted arrogant structure where consciousness is the awareness of something. In this context, the act of throwing away the explosive belt was not a random act but an intentional one and a real manifestation of the true choice Ishmael ended up making; the choice that freed him from the shackles and restrictions of others [7].

So, away from that setting, "Ishmael" crossed from a fake existence to an authentic one, an existence that can feel destiny and the stroke of fate alone. The novelist changed "Ishmael" with this crossing, he changed the current Arab self and transformed it, he was able to rescue it from religion's claws and thrust it into the welcoming arms of freedom far from religion and the extremism it is trying to spread. A religion that produces terrorism and imports it to other places, prepares youth tired of poverty, neglect and frustration to be immersed in terrorism and become suicide bomber projects killing innocent people regarded as enemies

to Islam and the Islamic Nation.

In this moment of transformation from fakeness to authenticity, from the incomplete meaning to the complete one which is "me", we notice a return to the root, source, the place of origin i.e. nature, family and mother. "Ishmael" was asked to bomb himself in a bus mostly full of families going to "Al Mahmoudiyah" in Iraq, in a bus stop usually crowded with travelers (129). In the bus, he saw his brother in a little boy and his mother in a woman (151). Amid his hesitation and worry, he kept seeing his mother's face calling him (147) ... Suddenly something awakened him, got off the bus and walked caving his belly in to separate his body from the nails, he got the belt off in a restroom... threw it over the bathroom wall in a space no one can get to in the near future (130 - 131) ... Nature as well, when "Ishmael" was walking he saw a green oasis calling him so he went in and lay on his back on the tall wet grass. He heard a cicada buzzing in the air and the far deep rumbling of passing trucks. "Ishmael" slept at ease next to a bunch of wild yellow daisies; he saw bursts of his childhood dreams, a selection of the good old times (145). In this moment, he smiled for the first time in months (144).

Thus, the novelist made "Ishmael" unwilling to kill in the last moments, which means that... the setting did not destroy his humanity totally. The novelist also emphasizes that "Ishmael" embraced his authentic existence again because life triumphed in the end (155), he returned because the traces of humanity dormant in him woke up and stopped him from going onward with the suicide mission... This shred of humanity stood in the way of extremism and death, it remained the essence "Ishmael" can have recourse to in order to regain his authentic and true being, if only he found someone to help him accomplish that. Here, the big part of the responsibility falls on the neglecting and absent parents lagging in fulfilling their role, as well as on the government lingering in its unawareness and lack of understanding of its preventive role in avoiding such tragedies, criminal and deviant acts.

Humanity triumphed in the last minute, but this victory is a flagrant exception, because in the world, especially the Arab world, many such explosions took place where humanity never even woke up for a brief second in the mind of the bomber.

Alas, the rounded structure of the setting that leads "Ishmael" back to "Hay Al American" got him lost again in its absurdity, when he became a fugitive from the government that never recognized his authentic act. He got dizzy, confused like a cat in front of a bright light. He found himself against an impasse again (148) ... and realized that in the end, he had nowhere to go once he leaves the "Azzam" home and that his life will come unfolding in front of him when he does. Despite all this, when he finally escaped from the "Azzam" home to dodge the intelligence forces pursuit he said: I'll be back... I'll be back to take my tree (157). But he never came back, and the story ends in the unknown, in the absence of a setting and actions...

4. Conclusion

The setting helped narrate the story and made it more realistic, authentic and able to convey facts, events, feelings and conflicts of the soul. That was especially true in a deliberate mention of things, places, plants and animals, as they are in reality, presenting more accuracy in evoking places and defining them with description and depiction.

From both facets, the setting gained such an importance that made it a symbol or icon carrying many notions all contributing to clarify the meaning. The self got lost in this place and lived a kind of conflict between staying and leaving, familiar and strange, warm and cold, death and life, authenticity and fakeness...

Hereby, the setting, in this novel, transcends the geographical frame to a psychological existential one, adhering to the self and building the being and existence or destroying it... It represents the setting role, all the role intended by the novelist in his novel, until it became everything, it became the novel and the concealed and intended meaning. It was the project's aim, in which features desire dwelled and the self lived its existential conflict. This made the novel of "Hay Al American" a novel of setting in time, characters, language and life that spread throughout it... It's the story of a setting that abandoned its insignificance to become a part of the world's greatest events. The story of confusion between authenticity and fakeness, between embracing the being and abandoning it...

As Arabs, how long will we wander away from our true being, victims of loss, displacement, hatred and resentment? How long will we burden our settings with them? How long will our youth be victims of ignorance and bigotry? When will this vortex end? When do we realize that we produce terrorism and allow it to form? When do we draw a line on what we perpetrate in the midst of our ignorance and neglect? When will we restore religion back to what it's supposed to be, aiming at the good and righteousness of mankind?

The time has come and we should act... We should regain our authenticity and being; we should save ourselves and countries from a terrorism that has defiled our existence and destroyed our souls... it's about time we go back to being a united nation where we boast about loving our lands and cities; belonging to them... and if a constitution is indeed required to foster this love and this belonging, let us put aside all religion that governs our lives and take other countries east and west as examples to us...

References

- [1] Al Alawy, Safaa Ibrahim, *The Aesthetics of the Setting in the Novel*, (May 19, 2019, alwatannews.net).
- [2] Al Dabe', Mostafa, *Strategy Of the Setting: A Study of the Aesthetics of Setting in the Arabic Narration*, (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 2018).
- [3] Al Fatlawy, Suheil Hussein, *Human Rights in Islam*, (Beirut: Dar Al Fikr Al Arabi, 2001).

- [4] Al Jabery, Muhammad Abed, *Problems of Contemporary Arab Thought*, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 8th Ed, 2019).
- [5] Al Sissi, Ayman Mahmoud, *America and the Political Islamic Movements Since September 2011*, Cairo: Al Arabi Publishing and Distribution, 2018).
- [6] Aloush, Muhammad, *ISIS and Its Sisters: From Al Qaeda to the Islamic State*, Beirut: Riad Al-Rayess Books, 2015).
- [7] Ayoub, Nabil, *The Text of the Different Reader (2) and the Semiotics of Critical Discourse*, (Beirut: Librairie du Liban Publishers, 2011).
- [8] Choueiri, Youssef, *Islamic Fundamentalism: Revival, Reform, and Extremism Movements*, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2019).
- [9] Eid, Yumna, *Art of the Arabic Novel Between Characteristics of the Novel and Distinction of Speech*, (Beirut: Dar Al Adab, 1998).
- [10] Haidar, Fuad, *Social Psychology: Theoretical and Applied Studies*, (Beirut: Dar Al Fikr Al Arabi, 1994).
- [11] Lahmadani, Hamid, *Structure of the Narrative Text*, (Casablanca: Arabic Cultural Center, 2000).
- [12] Shahrour. Muhammad, *Drying Up the Sources of Terrorism*, (Beirut: Dar Alsaqi, 2017).
- [13] *Where Do the Arabs Go? The Vision of 30 Intellectuals on the Future of the Arab Revolutions*, Various Writers, (Beirut: Arab Thought Foundation, 2012).
- [14] Zaraket, Abdel Majeed, *Building the Lebanese Novel*, (Beirut: Lebanese University Publications, 1999).
- [15] Zeitouni, Lateef, *Lexicon of Literary Criticism Terms in Novels*, (Beirut: Librairie du Liban Publishers, 2002).
- [16] Zima, Pierre, *Social Criticism*, (Translated by Aida Loutfi, Cairo: Dar Al Fikr for Studies and Publishing, 1991).