

## Excerpts taken from the book by Mai Ghossoub *Leaving Beirut: Women and Wars Within*

London: Saqi Books, 1997

I was lucky. I had the possibility of leaving. Many were stuck in the war and didn't have the luxury of avoiding involvement in it. But the bliss of amnesia seems to be short-lived, and the desire to ignore my own responsibilities was a flimsy subterfuge against guilt. The most difficult thing for me to acknowledge is that I blinded myself deliberately for such a long time. It took the ripped and torn body of my brother to release me. What right do I have now to blame those who continued indulging in the abnormality of war?

I attempted a total transmutation. I had to move into a brand new setting, come to foreign lands and hear a different language before I could realize how terrible and absurd his whole thing had been. I needed to cross thousands of miles to see what it was like to live once again outside this orgy of violence and death, and to realize how terribly cruel our cruelty was. (p. 19)

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The terrible thing about wars is that they turn individuals into mere members of groups, be they nations, gangs, militias, or some other kind of tribe. This may be why, when justice is done, it often looks absurd, for the criteria applied are those of a normal modern society, in which individuals are deemed responsible for their own actions. This is why, in an epoch where one's sense of justice abhors the tribal approach in which all are punishable as one and for one, no decent person can claim to be right in the punishments they are calling for. This was the dilemma of Hannah Arendt who, after pressure and passionate pleas from various quarters, agreed to edit and cut her courageous reporting of Eichmann's trial. This was also the genius of Ismail Kadari in writings such as *Broken April*, where he has us share the feelings and dilemmas of the individual whose emotions are in collision but are also inextricable from the demands of his society. His *Broken April* is a fresco of the sad fate of one human who is obliged to take revenge for his group even though he has no personal grudge against the person he is about to murder. This is perhaps why we sense a frustration seeping through the words of Hassan Daoud, when he sees people still acting as groups and making as much loud, anarchic noise as did the bullets and artillery of the fighters in the times of war. (p.32)

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Here I am, standing silently on my Beirut balcony, puzzled and confused by my memories. And the unease remains. It is definitely not easy just to walk away and forget. Images of violence haunt me like the eye that haunted Cain. I identify with Cain. Like him, we were compelled to move from one country to another. Like the unwanted children of a happier humanity. (p. 32)