

Like Mother Like Daughter: Hydrofeminism and Postmemory in Zoulfa

Katouh's *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* (2026)

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Abstract

This research examines how Zoulfa Katouh's novel *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* (2026) represents water as a medium through which maternal memory and diasporic belonging move across to belated generations. It investigates the mother-daughter bond through a combined hydrofeminist postcolonial framework. This study uses qualitative close reading to analyze passages dealing with the ocean, the sea, jellyfish, and Jihad's recollections of her mother in the novel. The paper argues that oceans are not merely a symbol of exile, but a character archiving history in a fluid manner, transmitting nostalgia, identity, trauma, and patriotism in literary spheres. The analysis aims to highlight the daughter's connection with her dead mother through the shared love of water, inheriting all of her past deeds. The ocean becomes a hope rather than a boundary; being most of the planet, it reaches further lands and symbolizes international continuity. The findings show that the novel demonstrates that oceans are ambivalent: they are the enemy that causes alienation for many displaced Syrians around the world, and a link that permits inherited and archived memory to travel beyond human bodies and be stored in a myriad of media. In this sense, water speaks all of the stored feelings and stories back to the daughter in an intersubjective relation. The novel does not magically heal the mother's loss of her country nor the daughter's loss of her mother, but like mother, like

daughter, belonging is inherited from one generation to another, with oceans functioning as an archive.

Keywords: Exile, Hydrofeminism, Motherhood-Daughterhood, Oceans, Postmemory, Zoulfia Katouh.

Introduction:

“Hundreds of years ago, water wasn’t referred to as water, it was called The Waters” (Austin 2024).

Veda Austin, in her book *The Living Language of Water*, claims that water is both alive and conscious, able to store memories, and even ready to speak in its own language (2024). Linking this very stance to literature often unravels every fictional story that embodies water as a human entity, either in fantasy or realism. Steve Mentz introduced the term Blue Humanities in his book *Introduction to the Blue Humanities* to label works of the humanities that refer to water. He believes that

The aims of watery criticism, to adapt a phrase, include both describing the complex workings of water and imagining ways to change our relationships to it ... the sub-disciplinary modes of cultural and literary studies in the early 2020s mostly gather themselves together under the banner of the “blue humanities” (Mentz 2023, 1)

This “blue turn” in literary studies over the past two decades reveals a shift in literary criticism away from terrestrial attention toward a more dynamic focus on water. However, some authors used to symbolize water, the ocean in particular, as this massive entity that puts dreams to a halt, or an obstacle standing between people and their homeland in literature on exile, being “a place beyond borders” (Cahill 2020, ii). Thus, an “oceanic turn” was needed to reposition

the ocean in more of a transcultural fluid sphere and to check if it has the power to transmit memory rather than just wash it away.

This shift remarkably allowed the study of displacement and memory in postcolonial studies through various perspectives. Border, homeland, and territorial loss have been privileged in narrating identity and collective memory mostly because of their static nature. Blue ecocriticism, in combination with literature, challenges the exclusivity of land in identity, proposing an aquatic alternative that is not only an enemy but also a fluid medium that channels memories and preserves them as strongly as land can. Thus, the field of humanities is studying water in literature rather than mainly focusing on land. Consequently, nostalgia can also be reimagined through the ocean, through what the ancestors once termed “The Waters”.

Zoulfa Katouh, the Canadian Syrian author, expressed her bond with land and narrated the story of those wrecked by nostalgia away from their hometowns through her novel *As Long as Lemon Trees Grow* (2022). The author announces a comeback in June 2026 with a novel identified as a “blue turn” in her writing, *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue*. The story narrates the judged, misunderstood, and depressed Jihad as she goes through a colorless journey of art and struggles, keeping her high hopes on oceans and jellyfish that can once be a channel to her mother’s memories. Throughout the narrative, the Pacific ocean has been symbolized as a route reaching the Mediterranean and bringing comfort to the teenage girl going through bullying only because of her beliefs, her religious choices, and Islamic deeds. Her refuge was in how marine creatures could capture her memories and transport stories back and forth from the homeland she had only heard of: Syria.

The novel is freshly released with very little academic work on it, yet it highly examines family loss, land loss, identity loss, acceptance loss, and oceanic hope. The ocean, in this sense, has to be examined as an epistemological and ecological archive that represents a different dimension of remembrance and belonging. Attention to blue humanities and contemporary

Syrian diaspora literature remains underexplored. Hence, several interrelated questions arise in relation to this Syrian novel. How does Katouh reconceptualize memory through the ocean? How is the mother-daughter relationship portrayed through the Pacific-Mediterranean link? These questions lead directly to a vague compound question: does water have a language and memory? And is it possible for water to channel feelings rather than halting them?

Such inquiries highlight the individualistic concerns of contemporary American-Arab authors in finding different ways to convince the world through their existence. The paper investigates both the blue turn in fiction and its role in celebrating oceans rather than fearing them. It examines Katouh's novel and its orientation through a different stance that portrays reality and manages to keep up with new studies in blue. It transforms the concept of the sea and the ocean into transnational waters that dissolve all the geopolitical borders and preserve history. Together, these elements classify the novel into blue literature.

Literature Review:

Pre-print version

In public discourse, truth and memory are believed to no longer stop at the water's edge. Back in the 1940s, Senator Arthur Vandenberg advised partisans by assuring that "politics should stop at the water's edge" (U.S Senate 2023), where national internal conflicts should vanish the minute politics become international. His statement addressed the privacy of a nation and permitted the fact of writing a nation's own memory and decisions without interference. In contemporary times, following such a "slogan" became impossible as media transmit both across water and through the air. Thus, blue humanities reveal the power of water in transmitting both truth and memory, especially since the waters store a historical archive of wars and waves of migrations. Mentz suggests that oceans have long acted as archives of colonialism, indigenous resistance, and climate precarity as water narratives "emphasize disorder, disorientation, and rupture" (2023, 5). The narrative field also embodied the same approach and started narrating conflicts beyond the water's edge.

Linda Kingery, in “Water and Equity”, believes that the water is a living entity with its own individualistic consciousness and “a unique entity that should be cared for and respected” (Kingery 2019, para 4). Mentz agrees with her in his book *Shipwreck Modernity*, where he states that “water is an archive of trauma” (2015, 34). In this sense, water has a mindset and mental abilities that store memories, both euphoric and traumatic. Oceans were present from the initial works on the mind; Freud’s “Iceberg Theory” represented the mind as an iceberg in a liquid ocean, referring to how early representations of the mind and its memory were linked to water. Along with collective memory, which is transmitted through words, books, monuments, historical events, and many other media, water can serve as a channel holding this memory and passing it throughout the lands.

The blue humanities emerge more as a critical intervention challenging anthropocentric narratives of the sea, repositioning water as a relational agent that helps the construction of lived experiences (Oppermann 2023). Oceans function as dynamic archives that transcend Eurocentric terrestrial frameworks, serving as a “witness” to colonialism (Flannery et al. 2025). This oceanic archival potential is linked to the fluid mobility of memory, where water serves as a route for transgenerational accumulated trauma (Rahmatullah and Hossain 2026). The sea, then, acts as an extension of the body in exile, challenging the hybridity and loss of identity among refugees through the persistence of oceanic memory (Craps et al. 2025).

To understand how memory travels across generations and oceans, Marianne Hirsch’s concepts of postmemory and transgenerational transmission of memory and trauma are needed. In “The Generation of Postmemory”, she positions the Holocaust’s genocide as a case study, where she believes that despite the silencing and the collective oppression, what happened in Auschwitz still reaches generations today because of what she terms “belated memory” (2008, 105). Belated memory is everything that the second generation inherits from narratives and stories they did not witness, yet felt their damage or strength. These memories feel more of a

burden to be kept hidden or marginalized, and end up being narrated in contexts often categorized in genres that start with the prefix “post”, either “postmemory” or, in this sense, even postcolonial, referring to their belatedness.

Ethnographic work on Syrian patriotism and kinship shows how second-generation Syrians hold Syria within their memories. Despite the distance and diaspora, intergenerational gaps are filled with homeland culture, mortality, hope, and historical values. As memories are passed down to children, in a time of more visual proofs, parents engrave the horrors of Syrian totalitarian regimes and outsiders’ attacks into their children through word of mouth and narratives. The Syrian legacy has “memory and connection between past and future through narrative discourses and the process of narrative building” (Gani 2022, 402). Hence, successive generations navigate attachments to homeland within their memories, practices, and whatever seems to be a possible channel. Oceanic routes may embody postmemory when distant, serving as a link to the land-based inheritance.

Samar Yazbek, a Syrian author, decided to construct a collective memory through applying bell hooks’s theory in her recent memoir collecting war survivors’ testimony. hooks, in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, opines that truth should be centred on the voices of the marginalized, which would also work as a space for healing “an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (hooks 1994, 207). In her book, *Your Presence is a Danger to Your Life*, Yazbek finally fulfils hooks’ theory by collecting memories of the marginalized in one memoir.

It occurred to me that the whole world had come to this: missing body parts, people with amputated limbs, half-bodies living on the margins of life like remnants of a bygone age. I felt like we were on board a ship hovering in mid-air, suspended within a destiny

of impotence and loss, among delusions and ghosts I couldn't quite make out. (Yazbek 2026, 1)

With the rise of genocides and the repetitive wars unravelled by the veil of peace, Yazbek feels as if the whole world is scarred, physically and, inevitably, psychologically. She even compares these contemporary cruelties to being on a ship floating in the air, out of its right place, above water.

Mentioning ships, back to the waters, recognizing ecological systems as repositories of history pushed the notion of memory beyond humans. Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* reminds us that human beings are all made of water, so from bodies of water, flipping the dichotomy resonates with the rise of the term "Water of Bodies" (Neimanis 2017, 3). Waters in this case function as reservoirs of memory that travel beyond terrestrial territories. The Ocean holds billions of memories of catastrophic shipwrecks, bombing, chemical traces of wars, body parts, and many emotional tears. However, the ocean also holds memories of hope, survival, routes of migration, laughter, and healing.

Contemporary literature attempts to embody transoceanic memory, narrating aspects of diaspora and the subject of "belated memory". Syrian war has been narrated mostly through social media or documented by narratives of displacement that centre dangerous Mediterranean crossings towards a vague Atlantic ocean. Syrian women writers, amid the alienation and hybridity of the new lands, often highlight themes of resilience and survival. Katouh, who debuted with a terrestrial narrative, *As Long As the Lemon Trees Grow*, no longer stops at the water's edge and has released her second novel, *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue*. The main gap in studies on this novel is that it was recently released in June 2026, with few works addressing how water links America to Syria.

The novel goes beyond what Mentz termed "The Tornadoed Atlantic" (2023, 117), as most of the studies picture the ocean, the Pacific in particular, as a monster. Katouh, in her

novel, links together all of Veda Austin's stances on how marine life has a strong memory (2024) along with Neimanis's belief that we are made of water (2017, 3), so water is similar to us and conscious enough to have a mind. These links result in what Hirsch's termed a "postmemory of a second generation" (Hirsch 2008, 103), narrating stories of an ocean and a sea away, yet still valid and so authentic.

Methodology: Hydrofeminism and Mother-Daughter Memory

A mother-daughter relationship is the product of an intersubjective journey of deeds and teachings; however, some mothers never live long enough to engrave all of their memories and channel them to their daughters. The fact that a girl and her mother were once one body explains how the bond is both physical and psychological; especially since both of the entities are females, it adds more understanding and strength. Yet, as Neimanis stated, bodies are made of water, and water can still channel this bodily link of a mother and her daughter even if the former is dead: "a body, remembers, and is defined not only by its capacity to be affected, but also by its capacity to affect" (Neimanis 2017, 62). Thus, water in the given literary text must be thoroughly examined.

From the scope of blue humanities, a lens zooms out to the field of hydrofemenism where mothers, daughters, oceans, and memories belong under one term. As a hydromaterial process, this family-oriented narrative of Zulfa Katouh, along with its symbolic genealogy of waters, requires an interdisciplinary approach to study the semiotic denotations of each time the Ocean is mentioned. Water is, then, not analyzed as an aesthetic metaphor embellishing *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue*; it is a medium symbolizing maternal memory and how it is stored, transmitted, displaced, and alienated through Water (Bezan and Neimanis 2022, Ferwerda 2024). The analysis is based on questioning the use of water and its commonality beyond the human skin, being mutually shared with other subjects, nature, lands, and histories.

The focus here is on how water separates and links lands in the postcolonial sphere. Alienation plays a basic role, as diasporic Jihad is a second-generation girl who tries to fit in her country, the USA, without being emotionally detached and exiled because of her Syrian origins. The analysis moves closer to water, where a hydrofeminist close reading is needed. It studies where water appears in different forms and how it chains the female before liberating her. The scenes can go beyond only fluids to a permanent trace, ecological pressure, and silencing space. That is as far as it concerns the hydro part; as for the feminist urge, it highlights maternal absence, daughterly return, and intergenerational confusion. Linking form, language, affect, and material environment helps study the novel from a focused perspective. The focus lies on how environmental racism is symbolized via water asking which nonhuman lives are treated as humanly alive in the text.

Analyzing the memory mapping linked to blue humanities is also crucial. Here, the paper examines how maternal memory is inherited even through silence. It moves between past speech and finds its confirmation in historical violence that colonized countries suffer from. Thus, living under pressure while expecting refuge is a channel passing the mother's muted voice by colonization to a daughter's silenced voice by unacceptance. All linked by water, which represents both of them, and still stands for hope. Studies of motherhood and daughterhood often represent how the patriarchal and racialized systems split maternal bonds, yet the latter is found in everything around, as a vessel of communal memory (Almaeen 2024). As stated earlier, water has been a vessel for the unconscious mind in the iceberg theory, and as much as fluid memories can be, water is analyzed in relation to memories and how exactly it stores them.

The contextualization of these stages in blue humanities is then possible. The analysis places the mother-daughter link based on textual relation within colonial, hydrological, and feminist memory. As Das and C.B claim, the ocean is one of the central accounts in water-

centred criticism, so rather than treating it as a neutral universe, it should be positioned in the centre (2025). Watery memory is therefore considered through both art and family bonding. The mother's body can be found in the body of water; even if not collapsed into one another, the fluidity of memory can be combined in their contact zones, and the past converges.

This study uses a qualitative textual selection in which passages of the novel targeting the ocean in the context of memory are selected. As the narrative foregrounds the story of Jihad after losing her mother, it deals with the passages where she tried to find her mother again, mainly in water and among jellyfish. The researcher selected passages that are relevant to the research questions and that relate to the major concepts of the study. The qualitative analysis follows each passage, aiming to meet the research objectives. The selection is, then, based on both the credibility of the information and its reflexivity to the problematic.

This approach is a reflexive method that follows the recent works on the hydrocommons which frame human-water relations beyond the symbolic level (Blackmore 2025). It does not, though, claim that maternal memory is reflected only through water. Rather, it examines how the selected passages managed to portray water in general, and the ocean in specific, as a channel for reading memory between mothers and their daughters. It conducts a close reading of water scenes in order to underline the maternal voice the daughter tries to recollect and fill in her memory gaps.

Inherited Remembrance:

A postcolonial lens reveals parts of *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* where the text relocates exile from land to water. Therefore, displacement is figured not as a complete rupture but as a movement through transnational fluid relations. The element of narrating "mama's story", as Jihad calls it, to the jellyfish until it reaches the Mediterranean, reveals how the ocean is considered a route, and its ability to bypass any borders and checkpoints. Although the hostland is San Fransesco, and the ocean is the Pacific, its fluidity and strength assure that the

memories passed are going to travel through the Indian Ocean, passing by the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, reaching the Mediterranean Sea, and Syria as the homeland. This proves what many postcolonial viewpoints already clarified: the fluidity of water shapes both memory and history beyond lands (Allahyari 2023). The ocean in the novel represents hope rather than a “prohibitive line” and challenges the territorial logic (Allahyari 2023, 370).

Colonial trauma is also present in the text. Although Jihad did not directly witness war in Syria, she inherited the collective trauma as “belated” memory through generational memory inheritance. Her trauma is even intensified as she felt alienated in the USA, where her colleagues at school did not accept her religious beliefs and refused her choice of wearing hijab. Despite hope, trauma remains highly present in the text, especially after losing a caregiver, yet Zulfa Katouh does not permit shock to exhaust meaning. Still, displacement is seen as entanglement in some parts where the protagonist explains how the past is wrapping itself “around my arms and legs like twine” (Katouh 2026, 167). This line highlights the hardships of fragmented identity and hybridity for those who are forced to be exiled and no longer fit anywhere; the ocean interferes as their last hope.

Adding more postcolonial hope, the narrative describes the aesthetic even in the middle of a catastrophe. As part of the “postmemory of a second generation” (Hirsch 2008, 103), Jihad narrates one of the harsh memories channelled to her, projected on media, but she never witnessed it in person: the destruction of houses in Homs. What she remembers from the whole scene is how a beautiful frame of a painting of the Ocean, with many shades of blue, survived the destruction. The painting is art, and for Katouh, art survives; art holds memories within and maintains hope for reconstruction. As if the frame speaks to the owner that it is still preserved to be hung on the walls of a new house, no matter how long it takes to wait. “The painting persisted even with all the pain” (Katouh 2026, 167), as much as any type of art can persist through pain, namely postcolonial literature.

Concerning the mother-daughter link, the hydrofeminist view is applied. Although Jihad is color blind, the condition that worsened right after losing her mother, the idea of her relationship with her mom helped her see the world differently. Absence taught her how to sense colors rather than seeing them, and how to enjoy the sea and ocean and celebrate their power to maintain hope. Simultaneously, she can sense her belonging to the land she has never been to. When Jihad says “Mama described the Mediterranean” (Katouh 2026, 214), as Bezan and Neimanis (2022) suggest, whatever comes after is a certainty passed by her maternal memory and sensory inheritance. The daughter feels as if she has been to Syria and the sea through the memories of the mother. As an act of remembrance, this very intuitive product confirms how daughters form emotional patterns from intergenerational remembrance.

Hydrofeminism is, then, revealed through this very inheritance as it transmits through water, past memories, and future hopes rather than through discourse and speech alone. The statement, “Maybe parts of the Mediterranean are here. They are linked like mother and daughter” (214), echoes hydrofeminist accounts of water representing and connecting human and even nonhuman bodies across distance (Cahill 2020, ii). Katouh, in the acknowledgements of this novel, dedicates this work to oceans, saying “I’m made from you because there is salt in my blood” (Katouh 322). Paratextually, this statement backs up the idea of how embodiment is oceanic; it stands aligned with Neimanis’s confirmation that we are bodies of water, never fully discrete (2017, 3). As made of water, the mother and daughter share a strong bond when near water; just like parts of the Mediterranean are in the Pacific, parts of the mother are engraved in Jihad, as mother and daughter.

The last phase combines the postcolonial hydrofeminist parts of the work under one umbrella of memory. In this case, the ocean operates more than a channel, or hope, it functions as an archive. Despite her struggles, Jihad kept repeating one line: “The point was Mama ... The point was the stories that died with her. The point is her story” (80). Soon after, an insistence

throughout the narrative emerged that water can receive stories, hold them within, and store them to be told again (Rahmatullah and Hossain 2026). Jihad believes that as people fade, water remains the same co-living with too many generations: “the sea speaks to me, tells me the stories hidden under his depths. Of the drowned and the lost. Of what was stolen and taken. Of last breaths and tears becoming one with him. Mama, I hear the voices of our ancestors.” (18). Jihad insists that her mother’s story is also stored somewhere across the sea. Another argument she holds onto is that marine life and creatures aid the ocean in storing memories and bringing them back to different generations, where her mother advised her to “call the jellyfish” (217) to know more about Syria. Ecological and postcolonial studies describe waters as living archives that preserve all of the marginalized and silenced histories as remnants of warships, their riders, and exiled people who did not make it to their refuge, who are still at the bottom of seas and oceans (Teichler 2024).

The mother’s turn toward the water to narrate all of her stories to, in front of her daughters, was not an illogical or fantastic attempt; it was hope.

I will get a part-time job in San Francisco and move into an apartment that’s near the ocean. I will tell the jellyfish there about Mama, and they’ll pass her story all over the oceans and seas until it reaches the Mediterranean. Her story will reach her home. (Katouh 113)

It is a medium she used as an alternative archive her daughter would later use when no one speaks her language anymore. The faraway sea, linked somewhere to the ocean, loosens Jihad’s tension. It is her healing process, the frame she can once again use when reconstructing herself. The ocean is no longer a representation of loss and catastrophe; it is big enough to contain pain and ease, and the salt within it can mould the wounds together and disinfect the body from stored trauma (Gani 2022, 402).

Selecting water-related passages from this novel allows you to spot the use of repetition as a technique. Ocean, Mama's story, Syria, and the color blue are repeated throughout the narrative. This repetition as a literary technique mirrors repetition in psychotherapy. Jihad repeated "ocean" as a goal until she could achieve it and "water" as an archive until it revived her memories concerning her mother's stories, and blue until she could see it again. Even selecting the Pacific in the novel to be a channel to Syria is not random, as the word "pacific" itself refers to peace, hoping to end all of the postcolonial conflicts and avoiding alienation.

From the Pacific to the Mediterranean:

In this study, the findings have important theoretical implications for understanding postcolonial hydrofeminism, as they suggest an interdisciplinary approach to shed light on the still marginalized; Syrian second-generation females in this case. Through the interdisciplinary method, the textual exploration helped answer the main questions. At the postcolonial level, the novel dislocated identity from land to beyond its edges, to water, refusing the standard geometry in which land only constructs and secures identity. In this novel, Jihad could find herself in blue, her memories in water, and hopes in a frame: "maybe the ocean water would paint me blue and the sun's rays would make me glow like gold. Maybe my body will become translucent, and I will take in every color" (Katouh 65). From the very first pages, she holds faith in the blue of the ocean until she cracks one eye open realizing that: "the ocean zooms in and out of focus, the blue glittering under the sun's rays. My limbs relax a fraction, and I open my other eye to take it all in". Thus, the ocean is granted an epistemological force that revived Jihad.

Katouh embodies the ocean as a vessel holding knowledge and storing memories in several ways, as Kingery describes it as a living entity (2019). Her stance starts from the point that the sea is also part of home; the Mediterranean is also part of Syria, with a coast linked to the waters resembling both a sensation and a transit. From this marine portal, the protagonist started her imagined route that maintains a circulation of journeys permitting Syrian stories to

live (Craps et al. 2025). This is possible through bell hooks' theory (1994), where stories should be heard from survivors themselves, who find the sea their only way out, a political refuge to be safe and sound, alive enough to narrate their story, just like “mama’s story” in the novel. This fact mirrors how silenced individuals in Syria could finally voice their suffering after becoming refugees and crossing seas far from the totalitarian regime.

This postcolonial lens soon becomes gendered and intergenerational. As the daughter unravels her fears in an alien space where she is marginalized more and more by revealing her Muslim identity, inheriting her national memory was her last hope. Feeling connected to her homeland’s history was more possible through the unexplained mother-daughter interrelationship even after the absence of the mother. Diaspora in this regard, and Katouh, show how memory transmission is possible through water, speech, and even silence, as daughters contain the ability to carry emotional histories they did not directly live. This leads us back to hydrofeminism that Neimanis explains biologically, in “Bodies of Water, Human Rights and the Hydrocommons”, by reminding us how human beings are made of water, and through water they “reconnect” (2009, 28) . Another argument is that the daughter shared the same body with her mother as she floated in liquids inside her womb, and that now oceans provide her with the sense of being carried and protected, as if by her mother.

The mother, repeatedly standing before the ocean, portrays her silent access to her past trauma mixed with nostalgia for her home in Syria, and the ocean became a common place where Syria is remembered even by Jihad that has never been there.

Maybe if the cancer caught up to Mama in Syria, it wouldn’t have been strong enough to try to kill her. Maybe even if she passed away, I’d have seen her ghost. I’d have painted her back to life. I’ve had a life taken from me. A life I’ll never know in Syria. (Katouh 2016, 81).

The ecosystem is alive enough to be considered a subject with an identity that permits intersubjectivity to prevail whenever the place stores similar memories. The daughter accepts to receive every memory the place, the ocean in particular, archived for her to imagine, narrate, and recreate once again into a secondary indirect, yet powerful, witnessing. Her mother's story makes her feel the bond between her mother and her homeland to the point that she imagines her mom's ghost somewhere in Syria. This leads us back to classifying Jihad as a "Postmemory generation" receiving the belatedness of stored histories ancestors went through.

Water does not become merely a metaphor, and the Pacific not only a false hope. Hydrofeminism clarifies its thoughts in the logic of continuous relation and exchange. The Pacific has always been linked to the Mediterranean through the fluidity of water, which has no boundaries or obstacles like land does, especially because of political borders. These two fluid territories are also linked to lands, just like mother and daughter, before and after birth. Triggers do not only remind us of trauma; sometimes, simple water can trigger the mind to think of an ocean. This happened as Jamie, Jihad's best friend at school, used to send pictures of Lake Michigan to her, which is not "the Mediterranean" (297), as he is fully aware, but it still looks like a sea, and he knows this idea comforted her enough. The mother-daughter bond is therefore neither purely symbolic nor just psychological; it is physical and figured as a watery continuum in which memory links lands, souls, pasts and futures all together.

Memory and archives are also briefly revised in the results. It has always been thought that winners narrate history, and what is national may remain away from the water's edge, as Vandenberg once advised; however, reality is different. Diaspora literature and criticism have shown that generational memory sustains continuity. The novel casts marine life and waters as characters as well, who can store memories even better. Jihad, by the end of the story, when she finally visits Syria, talks to the sea after greeting it "Salam Alaykom, Mediterranean" (2026,

297) as if it would answer back, and introduces herself as Zaina's daughter as if the sea would directly remember.

It took so long for me to come here. I'm Jihad. Zaina's daughter. She knew you when she was growing up here in Arwad and Tartus. She told me how you welcomed her into your waters, and the jellyfish were her friends. She's not here with me today. She passed away in New York four years ago." I close my eyes, murmuring a prayer for her soul. "I know she would have wanted to be buried here. In her home. But I'm here, and I'm hoping we can be friends (Katouh 2026, 297)

This epiphany, concluded by Jihad at the end, moves hand in hand with theories believing in aqueous archives and nature being a witness, especially that the environment has always been the main victim of wars, holding scars and traces of violence and maintaining survival. Yet, Oceans and seas are traumatized in one way or another, being polluted by war, containing chemicals from nuclear bombs, bearing billions of body parts of soldiers or refugees, and losing those who admired swimming in their waters.

The Homs frame is a painting that confirms how oceans survive and embodies survival to the daughter, being natural, pure, and still too powerful to be destroyed. Art becomes the medium in which human memory, wars, survival, and the oceanic archive gather. As Veda Austin confirms, water has its own language, maybe more heard and sensed through art as they speak the same language. And what stores memories eventually speaks them out to voice every silenced, oppressed entity. Jihad archived her inherited love for the sea in a sketchbook that rendered drawing as alive as possible. "I'm more of a visual learner. Learning through splatters of paint and charcoal drawings. I draw and paint to remember." (Katouh 2026, 42) Jihad informs us that art, similarly to water, helps her learn and remember what her mother taught her before she passed away.

What finally distinguishes these passages from *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* is their urgent demand that continuity is not sameness, and distance is not discontinuity. The Mediterranean does not reach California, and that is a fact, yet “parts” of it can still be found there, maybe through marine life, or through human beings who live in California but have swum all their childhood in a Mediterranean coast. It is a glimpse of hope that inherited words persist even through neglected fragments, underrated continuities, and liquid connections, achieving a diasporic reconstruction. As Jihad finally connected with the sea in Syria, her tears fell, linking her directly to water, dissolving right there, while water heals her grief by bringing jellyfish all around her. After saying “we finally meet”, it seems as if she has finally reunited with her lost identity.

In this hydrofeminist work, the Ocean could indeed paint Jihad Blue. It could remind her of who she is and help her see colors again, from a faraway home, through a postcolonial memory and maternal inheritance, to grant her strength and heal her wounds. Yet, the main question here is how intergenerational memory of colonizers and racists can be washed away to stop carrying bullying genes that transfer to children. If water reminds one of home, it can still remind land seekers of colonialism, and children similar to Jihad, from all different minorities, can still be suffering from not being accepted. Back to *The Waters*, maybe blue humanities is another chance to highlight how water, in its different forms, is still our water.

Conclusion:

Zoulfa Katouh’s novel *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* marks its participation in the literary blue turn by shifting memory, identity, and belonging away from terrestrial exclusivity toward an aquatic sphere. Beginning from the belief that water is not passive, but a living medium capable of carrying emotions, history, and memory, the analysis has shown how Katouh reconceptualizes the ocean as an alternative archive. In this narrative, the ocean does not merely separate the protagonist from Syria; it functions as a fluid channel through which

inherited stories travel. Thus, marine creatures such as jellyfish are portrayed as human carriers of remembrance, ensuring that memory is not confined to human beings; it may circulate more effectively through ecological systems.

Second-generation Syrian females experienced their country, Syria, through the stories of their mothers; these stories of maternal memory challenge the dominance of a land-based identity. Their homeland is sensed through water in a Pacific-Mediterranean connection. After the loss of the mother, the protagonist is allowed to inhabit two homelands at once when she starts observing the ocean as an archive instead of a boundary. She lives in the USA, actually, and in Syria, memorably. It is a relational medium challenging diaspora and displacement by implying home and continuity.

This reconceptualization of memory allows the emphasis on hydrofeminism. Postmemory and generational belatedness are both reflected through the fluidity of water. As bodies that are made of water, water revives parts of bodies, mainly memories. Hence, silence, absence, and even collective trauma all shape the protagonist's entity, which Katouh framed in a more complex way through maternal transmission and intersubjectivity. The ambivalence the character suffers from, and the alienation imposed on her by her school peers, form a part of her that insists on discovering and inheriting Syria to feel a sort of belonging despite her wounds.

In a plethora of ways, water speaks in this novel. Katouh does not craft a plot where fantasy makes water a magical element that voices out its inners and utters conversations, yet, the magical nature of water allows her to portray it as a channel. The way the Pacific moves, carries travelers, witnesses wars, embraces tears, and stores laughter all speak to those who are willing to listen. The water carries traces and wounds that are significant in postcolonial studies in general and in hydrofeminism in particular. Following three stages of highlighting the postcolonial, underlining the memory, and circling the female generational link in a text, along

with examining the role of water in relation to the three of them, offers a way to read marginalized female diasporic experiences beyond land-centred narratives.

The *Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* aligns with strands of the blue humanities that insist on celebrating, rather than fearing and shaming, the sea. The novel demonstrates that the ocean is not an adversary and cannot be reduced to a symbol of loss, grief, trauma, or terror; instead, it is rewritten as a zone where hope, memory, and futurity can still be imagined. Reading the narrative on this basis invites a shift in approaching oceans; they are an archive, a speaking entity, alive enough to function as a relational medium that transmits meaning across time and space. For refugees, Syrian young women in this case, specifically motherless teenagers, the sea does not threaten to swallow bodies as they drown; it carries fragments of heritage and ancestral connection beyond the terrestrial edges. By reactivating an ancient sacred understanding of water and relocating hope in what ancestors called “The Waters”, the novel reframes the ocean as a living archive that welcomes the protagonist every time she reaches for it, washing away erasure and loss.

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