



**Bellehumeur-Allatt, Tanya. (2021). Peacekeeper's Daughter: A Middle East Memoir.
Saskatoon: Thistledown Press.**

Reviewed by: Kyle Langford, MacEwan University

Tanya Bellehumeur-Allatt's book, "Peacekeeper's Daughter," is an account of her experience of the Lebanese Civil War as a twelve-year-old child. She tells of her family's journey as they follow her father, a Canadian Armed Forces officer, from his current posting in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, to his new posting with the United Nations in Israel and then to Beirut. The family navigates this change by attempting to continue living as they had in Canada in this new, foreign, and war-torn country. Her method of writing intends to be gripping, and she states that it "is not a journalistic work" but that some elements have been simplified and streamlined (p. 349). Through writing about her experience, Bellehumeur-Allat explores themes which are pertinent to the study of sociology. She uses a narrative memoir to present key themes of belonging, family and the effects of war in an accessible, relatable, and historically based way.

Bellehumeur-Allat explores the themes of belonging and fitting in as her family transitions to living in the Middle East during the war. Having a sense of belonging is a natural desire for society; with a sense of belonging comes a feeling of greater security and comfort. Tanya is no exception; as a young girl still learning to understand herself, she greatly desires to fit in and not stand out. After her family moves to Israel, Tanya's desire to fit in is apparent, primarily in how she dresses. The local females are notably more modest than the Canadian standards Tanya is used

to. During their trip to Damascus, Tanya experiences “whistles and catcalls and stares” (p. 151) that contribute to her sense of “shame” (p. 65) in her comparatively scandalous Western way of dressing. Her mother’s desire to retain her cultural standards and her belief that Tanya should not change how she dresses directly contrasts with the daily messages Tanya receives. While her mother asserts, “Their rules don’t apply to us” (p. 68), Tanya responds, “I don’t want to be different...I want to fit in” (p. 68), speaking to the extent that Tanya struggles to belong.

The stark difference in opinion between Tanya and her mother demonstrates the acculturation gap; Tanya is more forthcoming in accepting the new culture, while her mother wants to maintain their Canadian lifestyle. While Tanya gains a sense of belonging by altering the way she dresses, Tanya’s mother gains a sense of belonging in the community of UN peacekeeper’s wives in her reluctance to connect with the locals. As they continue to move, and other families leave to return home, Tanya’s mother becomes more isolated. As plans continue to change based on where Tanya’s father is posted, her mother’s outlook shifts based on who she would already know in each location. When he is to be posted in Ottawa, Ontario, her mother is ecstatic about being somewhere she already has friends (pp. 301-303) and would immediately belong, but when this changes, and they end up in Sherbrooke, Quebec, her disappointment is evident (pp. 313-314) as it still feels foreign without a previously established community.

The institution of the family is a prevalent theme that Bellehumeur-Allat examines in her memoir. She reflects on the changes in familial interrelationships she experienced as a child and now interprets as an adult, many years after the events. These include changes in parenting style and gender roles, as well as inter-relational changes and family cohesion.

After moving to the Middle East, Tanya and her brother experience a shift in parenting style, as their father is often away. This shift reflects the cultural norms of the Middle East, which tends to be more patriarchal, placing greater value on men than women, to which her father reacts. Tanya's mother takes on a more traditional role, consistent with parental gendered roles; she cares for the children, cooks, and does the housework while the father works. As the family adjusts to their new cultural reality, Tanya perceives her mother's identity shifting and even reducing: "This had become her new identity: the major's French-Canadian wife. Good cook. Pretty and vivacious" (p. 261). Instead of being recognized for who she is, she is identified according to her husband, following more Middle Eastern standards. Likewise, the identification of "good cook" and "pretty and vivacious" are reflective of cultural values.

Tanya's father's reaction to Middle Eastern culture also impacts his relationship with his daughter. This shift is primarily seen by her father giving her less attention than her brother, a noticeable change from when they lived in Canada. This increases the value she places on her interactions with her father and her desire for closeness with him as she states, "I wanted to be father's chosen companion, and keeper of his secrets" (p. 76). As he adjusts to the current cultural standard, he expects Tanya to act according to different cultural standards. During a vacation in Greece, Tanya's father essentially offers to pay her to join in a dance despite her not wanting to (p. 279). After being dragged into the dance against her will, she feels "humiliated and betrayed" and "[her] father ignored [her]" (pp. 280-281). As each family member navigates their existence in varying cultures, their cohesion as a family unit is challenged, and shifts begin to occur within relationships. However, despite opportunities for Tanya's family to return to Canada without her

father, they continue to follow him despite the growing risk involved.

The effects of war exacerbate both themes of fitting in and belonging, and family; in Bellehumeur-Allatt's life, her father's stationing during the war was a root cause of issues around fitting in and belonging, and changes in family dynamics.

Bellehumeur-Allatt demonstrates the effects of war on the individual through her brother, Etienne's character. His character drastically changes after his teacher takes him and his class to the American Embassy, which was bombed moments prior, and they witness the aftermath (pp. 246-247). Etienne retreats into himself, not involving himself in the world around him, and becomes reluctant to interact with the rest of his family. PTSD, directly resulting from the war, puts further stress on the already stretched familial relationships.

Bellehumeur-Allatt also explores the effects of war on the individual with her own experiences. Her father being stationed in the Middle East was a direct impact of the war that resulted in Tanya losing contact with friends from home. Being a foreigner, Tanya already struggles with belonging, as discussed above, and the war creates another barrier to making new, local friends. However, she overcomes this by making a local Israeli friend, Efrat. After Tanya tells Efrat that her family is moving to Lebanon, this relationship soon dissolves because Tanya will be "living with [Efrat's] enemies," and any letters "could cause problems for [Efrat's] family" (pp. 118-119).

In her writing, Bellehumeur-Allatt artfully returns to the state of mind of her twelve-year-old self, recalling grenade-like memories (p. 345) that drive her story. Her writing and her inclusion of situational details make it highly accessible to an audience unfamiliar with the state of affairs during the Lebanese Civil War. She has an honest writing style that does not always paint herself

in a positive light but realistically reflects her thoughts and feelings, even when negative. Including relevant pictures at the end of most chapters, with family members at the current location in the book, makes it easy to pick up and relate to. She does not appear to have intentionally sought an academic audience; if she had, she would have cross-checked each event with other sources, confirming their factuality. However, her book is a valuable addition to sociological discussions of family, cultural differences, and childhood development. She demonstrates an honest depiction of her family's experience with acculturative stress, making her novel a valuable tool for sociologists, psychologists, and those interested in cross-cultural childhood development. In times of war, children's perspectives can be lost amid the experience of others with more direct roles, as she suggests as one of her reasons for writing, "the war, the peacekeeping mission – had always been my father's story, not mine" (p. 340). Bellehumeur-Allatt shares her experiences as a child and a foreigner attempting to discover her role and place. "Peacekeeper's Daughter" shines as a teaching device for understanding and learning about how children are affected by experiences like hers. Likewise, it is a springboard for further historical learning about the Lebanese Civil War and the state of the Middle East. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in modern history, cross-cultural interaction, or intrafamilial relationships.