



THE
MOTHER
WOUND

'Magnificent'

Bri Lee

'Unforgettable'

Randa Abdel-Fattah

'Gripping'

Jess Hill

AMANI
HAYDAR

BOOK CLUB NOTES



ABOUT THE BOOK

'Shattering, unforgettable, beautifully told.'
Randa Abdel-Fattah

'A magnificent and devastating work of art. There is a raging anger here, and a deep sorrow, but at the core Haydar gives us truths about love. This is one of the most important books I've ever read.'
Bri Lee

'Gripping, transcendent, tender and, at times, infuriating. With a daughter's heart and a lawyer's mind, Amani Haydar maps the territory that connects the wars we fight abroad to the wars we endure in our homes.'
Jess Hill

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The Mother Wound is a memoir by lawyer-turned-artist and survivor-advocate, Amani Haydar.

The book begins in a suite at Bankstown-Lidcombe hospital, where Amani is giving birth to her first child – a baby girl. Amani's own mother is not there to hold her hand or guide her through this formative experience. Just a few months earlier, she had been killed by Amani's father in a brutal act of domestic violence.

From here, *The Mother Wound* explores Amani's life leading up to this cataclysmic loss, as she reassesses her parents' relationship. What she had once seen as a deeply unhappy marriage she comes to see as a relationship characterised by emotional abuse and coercive control. Amani not only delves into memories of her childhood home in Sydney and family trips to Lebanon, but stories of her parents' courtship, arranged marriage and migration to Australia. Through these recollections, it all becomes clear: her father's crime was not a shocking isolated incident, but the culmination of a pattern of controlling behaviour.

We also learn about the legacy of violence that compounds Amani's grief, deepening the matrilineal wound from which the book gleans its title. Less than ten years prior to her mother's violent murder, when Amani was just a teenager, her beloved grandmother had been brutally killed by an Israeli drone in Lebanon. It is this echoed pain and intergenerational trauma that would later inspire Amani's poignant painting 'Insert Headline Here' – a self-portrait within which she holds a photo of her mother, holding a photo of her grandmother, 'like a set of Russian dolls' (p 114) – which would become a finalist in the 2018 Archibald Prize.

In *The Mother Wound*, Amani not only re-examines the events leading up to her mother's death, but also documents the years that follow. A lawyer by profession, she combines legal analysis with personal insight and social commentary to critique the response of the justice system, media outlets and the community to both her father's crime and gendered violence more broadly. We see her frustration and disillusionment turn to passion, as she becomes a fierce advocate for an intersectional solution to domestic abuse. Amidst all of this, Amani also



rediscovers her passion for art – a ‘language that comes more naturally’ to her than any other; ‘more naturally than writing, more than mothering’ (p 322).

A harrowing story, beautifully told, *The Mother Wound* is as insightful as it is timely. It joins the likes of Bri Lee’s *Eggshell Skull* and Jess Hill’s *See What You Made Me Do* in an urgent call for change – to better protect women from abuse, and better serve justice to those who have experienced it. As an Arab-Australian woman, lawyer, artist, advocate and survivor, Amani Haydar brings a vital intersectional perspective to these issues. Through her own story of tragedy, trauma and resilience, she illuminates the stories of so many others, so that others may experience the light.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR


Amani Haydar is an award-winning artist, lawyer, mum and advocate for women’s health and safety based in Western Sydney.

In 2018 Amani’s self-portrait titled ‘Insert Headline Here’ was a finalist in the Archibald Prize. Since then, her writing and illustrations have been published in *Arab Australian Other*, *Sweatshop Women Volume Two*, *SBS Voices* and *ABC News Online*. In 2020 Amani was a Finalist for the NSW Premier’s Woman of the Year Award and was named Local Woman of the Year for Bankstown in recognition of her advocacy against domestic violence. Amani serves on the board of the Bankstown Women’s Health Centre and uses visual art and writing to explore the personal and political dimensions of abuse, loss, identity and resilience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the term ‘mother wound’ evoke for you? What kinds of ‘unhealed traumatic experiences’ (p 333) do you think might be passed down matrilineally? Are these ‘wounds’ innate, or are they learned via mothering?
2. The sisterly bond between Amani, Nour and Ola is powerful. What can this tell us about the fortifying strength of sisterhood?
3. Amani has found an outlet for her grief in art. Visit her Instagram page (www.instagram.com/amanihaydar) and select one of her paintings to discuss.
4. Watch this short clip of Amani appearing on ABC’s *The Drum* and discussing coercive control legislation: www.facebook.com/abcthedrum/posts/4428722740535031. What benefits do you see for creating the ‘language’ and ‘mechanisms’ that Amani describes? Do you see any potential risks or downsides?
5. The term ‘coercive control’ first came to prominence with the publication of Evan Stark’s book *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Everyday Life* back in 2006. When did you first hear the term? What is a behaviour you would describe as an example of coercive control?

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6. Consider the phrase ‘the personal is political’ in relation to the deaths of Amani’s mother and grandmother. Both women were brutally killed in devastating acts of violence – one in the home (personal), the other fleeing war (political). What links can you draw between these two violent acts? How might the personal experiences of women reflect or reinforce the treatment of women at a political level?
 7. Amani recalls discussing the work of Clementine Ford in early 2015, remarking to her friend Gumneet, ‘Look, I agree with what she says but I don’t agree with the *way* she says it’ (p 57). Do you feel that tone is important when it comes to discussing challenging or divisive issues? If so, why? If not, why not?
 8. ‘I didn’t know for sure if I was a feminist but had always believed vehemently in equality’ (p 58). What does feminism mean to you? What about gender equality? Are they the same, or different?
 9. On page 66, Amani describes confiding in a schoolfriend the treatment of her family in Lebanon. Her young friend’s response – ‘I’m sorry, but isn’t that just what happens in war?’ – lacked compassion. What do you think leads to this kind of insensitivity? Could it be ignorance, prejudice, desensitisation?
 10. On page 92, Amani references feminist journalist Jane Gilmore, who is best known ‘for “fixing” sexist headlines about gendered violence’. Head to Jane’s blog at janegilmore.com and select one of her ‘fixed’ headings to discuss. Consider any article headings you’ve encountered on news sites that you think may need to be similarly ‘fixed’.
 11. ‘Suddenly my growing belly felt fragile, like it had been blown from glass’ (p 88). Amani’s writing is as beautiful as it is unflinching. Select a line from the book that you found particularly evocative and share it with the group.
 12. On page 152, Amani details a profoundly frustrating encounter with Centrelink regarding Parental Leave Pay. In what ways can bureaucratic experiences like this exacerbate the trauma and suffering of victim-survivors?
 13. ‘Don’t confuse justice with the law’ (pp 209, 261). What is your interpretation of this mantra? Do you agree with the sentiment?
 14. Read Justice Garling’s verdict, as relayed by Amani on pages 224 – 226. From what you know of the case, do you agree with all of his conclusions?
 15. In Chapter Thirty-two, Amani delves into the role of ‘remorse’ in the courtroom. Do you think there is any objective way to measure remorse? If so, should this impact sentencing?
 16. ‘If we’ve witnessed racism or cruelty from [the police] towards people who look like us, can we really feel safe in their presence when we are vulnerable or traumatised?’ (p 290) In what ways do you think fear of prejudice might affect a victim’s willingness to work with authorities?

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17. On page 291, Amani asserts that ‘self-advocacy through storytelling provides a powerful tool both on a personal and political level’. Discuss *The Mother Wound* as an example of this. What are other examples you can think of?
 18. ‘When Mum was murdered, Islamophobes wrote articles that ignored the reality of violence against women in Australia and reduced the incident to a caricature’ (p 303). Consider the high-profile cases of men’s violence against women in Australia you’ve witnessed in recent years. Compare, for example, the reporting on Adrian Bailey versus Bilal Skaf; in what ways were they portrayed differently?
 19. On page 304, Amani describes the ‘double-bind [that] Muslim women survivors and activists’ find themselves in, caught between Islamophobia and patriarchy. How might this dilemma restrict or silence women who wish to speak out?
 20. Conservative journalists and political groups often incorrectly categorised the murder of Salwa Haydar as an ‘honour killing’. How might this be othering for the Haydar family, or other Muslim or Arab families?
 21. Examine the excerpts from Dr Judith Herman’s seminal work *Trauma and Recovery* on page 268. What do you make of her assertion that it is ‘morally impossible’ to remain neutral as witness to conflict between a victim and a perpetrator? How does doing nothing default to siding with perpetrator?

SUGGESTED READING

See What You Made Me Do by Jess Hill

Eggshell Skull by Bri Lee

Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman

Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Everyday Life by Evan Stark