

METANOIA

A PhD research Film on the recovery journey of female trauma inspired by true stories

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Post house by Maseera studio and Jazz Films

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

NARRATING FEMALE TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

JOURNEYS ON FILM:

A PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH INTO THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF FILM
THROUGH NARRATIVE AND CINEMATIC DEVICES

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Abstract

This practice-based PhD narrates filmic representations of female trauma and recovery journeys within the context of Arab cinema, while attempting to identify the most impactful cinematic and narrative techniques for representing and reflecting on lived experiences of trauma recovery. Drawing on trauma theory and existing filmic accounts of female experiences of trauma, the project attempts to create a healing narrative that positions the viewer as a witness within a framework that emphasises the redemptive capacities of film. The research project comprises both a written component and an audio-visual component. The written component revisits trauma theory and the various methods of trauma recovery established by Caruth (1995), Kaplan (2004) and Herman (2005). The thesis also examines trauma cinema and the cinematic representation of female trauma within selected local and global contexts. Case studies are used to inform a theoretical framework by which to understand the stages of trauma recovery in film narrative; Correspondingly, the thesis offers a critical analysis of the data collection methods used for the formation of particular films' narratives and discusses the different stages of their production to reflect on conceptions of the auteur director and personal regeneration and their occurrence within filmic development. The audio-visual component is a prototype film called *Metanoia* (beyond fear). The film is based on a collection of healing testimonies shared by Arab women through individual interviews, secondary data, personal recollections and auto- ethnography. This prototype film employs a select range of narrative and aesthetic techniques identified through the research process as part of its practice. The aim is to represent trauma in its different phases, types and symptoms. The overall ambition is to create a redemptive narrative where audiences can share in the protagonists' journeys of working through trauma from a safe witnessing position.

Chapter 1: introduction

This study aims to narrate the female trauma and recovery journeys within the context of the Arab cinema, in an attempt to identify the most impactful cinematic techniques where film can become a catalyst for a therapeutic process. This research study responds to the issues addressed in trauma cinema by Ann Kaplan in her book *Trauma and Cinema, Cross Cultural Explorations* (Kaplan, 2014). Kaplan signifies ‘the fixation of trauma as the ultimate limit of representation’ in contemporary trauma narratives, she also addresses that scholars don’t think about the film impact on the viewer and focus more on its genre (Kaplan, 2004 p. 15). Drawing on trauma theory, Kaplan’s ethics of witnessing and existing filmic accounts of female experiences of trauma, the project attempts to create a healing narrative that positions the viewer as a witness within a framework that emphasises the redemptive capacities of film.

Used to mean an injury inflicted on the psyche, the Greek term *trauma* originally meant a physical wound (Traverso, 2010). In the modern world, trauma has come to mean “a psychological disturbance, a historical catastrophe and a range of personal or cultural symptoms” (Oxford English Dictionary). In parallel, trauma studies have developed into an interdisciplinary field spanning numerous disciplines including literature, historiography, sociology and psychology. The notion of trauma within cinema studies draws on all these fields (Kaplan, 2005 p. 10). This study will draw on a range of concepts from these interdisciplinary debates, including writing on trauma by Sigmund Freud (1895), Cathy Caruth’s structure of dissociation (1995), the “acting out” and “working through” schemes of Dominik La Capra (1999), the tri-phasic treatment of trauma by Judith Herman (1992), trauma in cinema by Janet Walker (1997), and Ann E. Kaplan’s ethics of witnessing (2004). All will be examined and applied to deliver a fiction film with a designated therapeutic content for Arab women.

Broadly speaking, the film follows the foundational framework of the dominant trauma theory articulated by Caruth in her monograph *Unclaimed Experience*, in which she redefined trauma according to the “structure of its experience” and conceptualised it as “an event that is not assimilated or experienced fully at once but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). While her notion of trauma emphasises its incomprehensibility and belatedness, the film adopts the therapeutic approach of Kaplan, considered one of the most significant scholars in relating trauma to transnational cinema, as she explores the impact of trauma on spectators, individuals and entire cultures and nations. In *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, Kaplan establishes various modes for trauma viewing, each with a different cinematic approach. She classifies the viewer’s association with trauma into four positions: (1) “being introduced to a trauma in a film” (in which trauma is introduced and resolved in a distant and concealed form), (2) being vicariously traumatised by a film’s violent content or horror, (3) being a voyeur to other people’s traumas without “any ethical or empathic resolution” and (4) being a witness. She describes the last of these as “possibly the most politically useful position” of the four (Kaplan, 2004, pp. 9–10) and this is the main viewing mode I pursue in this film project. Kaplan holds that situating the spectator in the witness position can unblock a subjective stream of consciousness delivery, or a personal realisation, and can also lead to self-transformation. She defines this witnessing mode as follows:

This position of ‘witness’ may open up a space of transformation of the viewer through the empathic identification without vicarious traumatisation. It is the unusual, anti-narrative process of the narration that is itself transformative in inviting the viewer to be at once emotionally there but also to keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to

the victim by the traumatic process.

(Kaplan, 2004, p. 10)

In my project, I argue that many feminist films in Arab cinema have presented stories of female trauma and successfully reflected socio-political syndromes, but very rarely have these stories placed the viewer in the witness position whereby a safe conscious realisation can occur within a personal and societal context. In this regard, I examine Kaplan's ethics of witnessing and the narrative and aesthetic devices she proposes in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005) to establish the witness mode of the film. Furthermore, I test the cinematic techniques that represent trauma within the witnessing position, such as the use of intrusive flashbacks (Turim, 1989) and the juxtaposition of sound and images (De Bruyn, 2014). I shall also use the three stages of trauma recovery as exemplified by the psychiatrist Judith Herman in her feminist text *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) to frame the working through process of the characters' traumas. According to Herman's method, the characters' therapeutic process should progress in three stages: establishing an atmosphere of safety and stabilisation, processing and recounting traumatic memories, and developing self-reconstruction and integration.

In the design of the film itself, I use qualitative research methods of self-reporting-autobiography to reflect on my personal experience as an Egyptian woman under the same socio-political pressures. I also aimed to be conducting one-to-one interviews through NGOs with Arab women as case studies (mainly Syrian women for issues relating to war and exile trauma and Egyptian women for issues relating to socio-political pressures), to understand how they have overcome their past traumas and continue to cope with their present routine.

However due to Covid outbreak and restrictions, I relied on purposive sampling and domestic ethnography (Renov, 1999) to reach my participants for individual interviews and used secondary data to gain access and insight on survival journeys of Arab women refugees.

Drawing from these women's stories in aggregate, the shared narratives will be analysed and the film's storyline will be constructed within the theoretical orientations attained in the study. I draw on Caruth's (1995) structure of the traumatic psyche to depict the characters' initial stage of acting out of their repressed traumas, Kaplan's (2005) ethics of witnessing to establish the witness mode of the film and to guide its narrative and aesthetic strategies, the flashback technique, which will confront the spectator with the characters' repressed past and traumatic events (Kaplan, 1989), and Judith Herman's (1992) three stages of trauma recovery, which the characters will experience in the film to work through their traumas. By narrating a survival trauma story, the film aims to perform as a therapeutic blueprint for afflicted Arab women, whereby they can recognise their suppressed anchor trauma, work through their traumatic memories, and envision their lives beyond the black hole of trauma. The dissertation ends with a self reflective analysis on the process of filmmaking, the film's outcome and self witnessing, through borrowing Cathleen Rountree's concept of the Auteur director as the wounded healer and contemporary shaman (2008).

1. Background

According to Shoshana Felman, the twentieth century inherited a legacy of violence and traumas, which she labelled "a century of traumas". In *The Juridical Unconscious* she articulates trauma theory within the historical context of the Holocaust, the two World Wars, the Vietnam War, the feminist movement, and the aftermaths of the September 11 attacks (Felman, 2002, pp. 1–2). In the past decade, the compass of trauma has been particularly

evident among Arab societies in the wake of the wave of pro-democracy uprisings known as the Arab Spring that erupted in spring 2011 across several Arab countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Bahrain and Egypt. Although many of these protests succeeded in removing dictators (e.g. in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt), the encompassing strikes ignited vicious civil wars and led to the emergence of Islamist political parties in several regions (history.com, 2018). The traumatic upheavals of these revolts and civil wars have encompassed brutal human trafficking in Iraq, Syria and Libya, escalated famine in Yemen, ongoing massacres in Syria, and violent repercussions in Egypt, all of which have been felt alongside the pressing crisis of mass migration and forced diaspora exile of Arab communities, families and individuals (Ghanim, 2017).

Kaplan also expounds on the role of political events in shaping traumas, explaining that “the political-ideological context within which traumatic events occur shapes their impact, [so] that it is hard to separate individual and collective trauma” (2005, p. 1). Accordingly, the “complex interconnections between the individual and cultural trauma’ will also be manifested in the film, depicting how individual and collective traumas are constantly constructed and reconstructed on each other. Trauma scholar Fiona Clancy examines in *Trauma and the Moral Subject in the Globalized Age* how trauma on film is as much about individuals as it is about collectives; once the symbolic order of individuals is destroyed, the destruction of the communal order is essentially a *fait accompli*’ (Hodgin and Thakkar, 2017, p. 12).

Kaplan (2005) also advocates filming individual trauma as a portrait of the collective, arguing that “though most people encounter trauma through media”, it is the so-called “mediatised trauma” that bridges the individual and collective traumas in a therapeutic discussion (2005, p. 1). She stresses the urgency for witnessing these subjective testimonies – which she defines as

“an ethical viewing to promote a pro-social transformation” – and argues that the impact of witnessing individual testimonies lies in its ability

..to articulate the ethical and dimensions of trauma, to understand it as a communal problem as well as an individual (pathological) one, this focus on testimony is important particularly in lifting the burden of shame off an individual and providing a screen on which to project an understanding of larger social and political forces within an individual has been entrapped.

(Kaplan, 2005, p. 2)

Nevertheless, trauma in contemporary media culture faces a recurring question in representation, and several trauma scholars have investigated how film can represent an experience that is not fully assimilated or acknowledged (Caruth, 1995), how film can revisit the subject of pain without re-traumatising the spectator or exacerbating pain for both the afflicted spectator or the audience, and, most importantly, how film can bridge the gap between the psychological damage ensued by the trauma and the aftermath for the survivor (Kaplan, 2005). While Caruth’s (1995) theory precludes the representability of trauma, the film adopts Kaplan’s (2005) therapeutic approach for trauma representation:

While trauma survival isn’t to be equated with recovery, survival does initiate a trajectory that moves beyond the focus on crisis and trauma suffering...Telling stories about trauma...may partly achieve a certain ‘working through’ for the victim and also permit a kind of emphatic ‘sharing’ that moves us forward, if only by inches (Kaplan, 2005, p. 37).

The film project will focus on survivors' working through of their trauma rather than on their crises and suffering. As such, the next section conceptualises the film's therapeutic approach by examining the relationship between the psychoanalysis of trauma and the intra-personal process of film viewing.

2. Film's therapeutic approach and the psychoanalysis of trauma

According to Sigmund Freud, all traumas the psyche cannot deal with are repressed in the unconscious mind (Blazer, 2013). Caruth reforms Freud's trauma concept by replacing the term "repression" with "latency" to indicate the initial state of denial or the partial "amnesia" of the event (Caruth, 1995, p. 151). Caruth further redefines trauma according to "the structure of its experience" as a "psychological response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive flashbacks, hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event" (p. 4). Caruth suggests that in the formation process of traumatic memories, the subject's mind is in a paralysed state of *dissociation*: a varied degree of detachment from reality that acts as a form of psychological defence mechanism (p. 153). She refers to the ideas of Pierre Janet, the pioneering psychologist in the field of dissociation and traumatic memories, who argued that the dissociated self cannot process the traumatic event because cognitive processing has been locked down. As a result, traumatic memories are fragmented and stored as visceral sensations and visual images (p. 154). Caruth agrees with Janet that "to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image of an event" (p. 4).

La Capra (1998) utilises the main therapeutic context to discern the responses of the dissociated self, asserting that one could be either "acting out" or "working through" the trauma. While acting out is the repetitive possession of the emotional pain with its repressed past and symptoms, working through represents the subject's attempt to break free. Working

through thus facilitates the subject's transformation and relief from trauma.

Kaplan argues that trauma can be viewed and treated as “a debilitating kind of memory” incised on the body that has not been “worked through” or brought into consciousness, but that has “ended up only leaking its disturbing and ambivalent traces in the typical traumatic symptoms of flashbacks, hallucinations, and nightmares” (2004, p. 5). Similarly, film theorist Janet Walker introduces the principle of “disremembering” as “fleeing memories on the verge of release from the trauma's custody”. Walker claims that conjuring up mental images can help the subject to overcome latency and their dissociated self to begin working through the intolerable memories that have long crippled their lives (2005, p. 80). Elsewhere, in studies on post-Jungian theories that claim traumas are repressed in the psyche, Hauke and Alister argue that cinema, with its image vibrations, can function as a site for these intense experiences and memories “to be more accessible and bearable in a similar fashion to therapy” (Hauke and Alister, 2001, p. 2). Furthermore, in speaking to cinema's ability to expose hidden traumas and memories, Kaplan states that depicting trauma in cinema can “be appropriate to figuring the visual, aural and non-linear fragmented phenomena of trauma – to performing it’ (Kaplan, 2001, pp. 204–05).

With regard to performance, this film aims to function as a “memory project for a silenced past” (Khatib, 2008), and to act as a medium through which to externalise and work through the inaccessible suppressed traumas of Arab women, where a protagonist's journey of disremembering and retrieval can guide afflicted viewers to their individuation.

3. Trauma cinema and the position of the witness

A central approach of my project follows Janet Walker's idea of "trauma cinema", which refers to a collection of transnational films from multiple genres and cinemas that mirror the unexpressed issues and tension behind real-world dramatic events (Walker, 2005, p. 19). As Kaplan explains, scholars are less concerned with "developing a new genre of trauma cinema than in addressing how it marks the viewer" (Kaplan, 2004, pp. 9–10). She then describes the four main positions in viewing trauma films according to different cinematic approaches: "being introduced to a trauma in a film" (in which trauma is introduced and resolved in a distant and concealed form, being vicariously traumatised by a film's violent content or horror, being a voyeur to other people's traumas without "any ethical or empathic resolution", and being a witness. She describes the last of these as "possibly the most politically useful position" of the four (Kaplan, 2004, pp. 9–10), and this is the main viewing mode I pursue in this film project.

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For De Bruyn, a narrated trauma in the witness mode is the articulation of the “creative non-victim” as it allows the spectator to “re-structure a deep personal language” and opens a path for self-empowerment. (De Bruyn, 2014, p. 14). Nevertheless, this therapeutic modality (viewer as a witness) tends to be quite scarce in cinematic representations of trauma, because mainstream commercial cinema’s principal interest is in “spectacularising” trauma, and in representing both personal (torture, war, rape, abuse) and collective trauma (war, genocide, natural catastrophes, and so on). This spectacle of trauma films is called ‘virtuoso’ filmmaking (the large-scale massacres of individuals, war scenes, city collapses, etc.) as they hide behind a profit-driven ambition to eventually praise the director/producer for their flattering “restage of terrifying momentous” and historical events (Hodgin and Thakkar, 2017, p. 7). According to Kaplan, these approaches demonstrate that the “fixation on trauma is the ultimate limit of representation” (2004, p. 4). Gilles Deleuze noted that trauma representations should attempt to go beyond the mere spectacle and achieve a balance between form and content that delivers a “cerebral stimulation or the birth of thought” (Hodgin and Thakkar, 2017, p. 8). The “birth of thought” in this film is the shift from the position of the victim to the position of the witness (analogous to De Bruyn’s “creative non-victim”) to draw attention to the healing and self-reflection entailed in the witnessing mode of spectatorship in contrast to the still-current practice of Arab cinema to fixate upon narratives of the agonies of female trauma.

It is also important to remark that female trauma in Arab cinema is still an unexamined area, but one that is worthy of investigation. As Traverso states, “[t]here is an inclination for trauma analysis to focus on representation of European and US historical catastrophes ... [while] ... relatively scarce and critical interest has been committed to media and artistic depictions of third-world disasters, in spite of the fact that the latter often flood global

contemporary media and art” (2011, p. 1). In response to this, my analysis of trauma cinema focuses on emerging feminist filmmaking in Arab cinema to emphasise the gap between representations of Arab female trauma and Kaplan’s witness position.

4. Trauma narratives in Arab feminist filmmaking since the Arab Spring

Egyptian cinema was once considered the Hollywood of the orient. The 1952 revolution had opened the way for a genre of social realism that ushered in remarkable feminist film adaptations marking a golden age for Egyptian cinema (Perez, 2016). However, after denationalisation of the film industry in 1970, the quality of Egyptian cinema dramatically declined as private film producers began to move towards more profit-driven productions. Unfortunately, this commercial system still dominates mainstream Egyptian cinema to this day (Perez, 2016). Egyptian film critic Amir El Emary explains that in the past 20 years Egyptian cinema has become a form of escapism, with the industry dominated by a few large production houses and riven with nepotism (El Emary, 2018). El Emary argues that before the Arab Spring, Arabs were in a complete oblivion, that self-alienation was clearly reflected in film. The long years of escapist films had nurtured audiences’ passive acceptance of tinned comedies or empty commercial films with shallow plots (Taher, 2011).

Nevertheless, alternative independent Arab cinema is now witnessing a slow influx of Arab female directors who have turned to cinema to voice their plights and agonies (Khan, 2018). These emerging feminist films present diverse stories of female plights within the context of the Arab Spring and its aftermath, mixing documentary-style depiction of real events with fictional narratives. While some films show the personal and social impact of the Arab Spring (such as *My Favourite Fabric* (2018) by the Syrian Gaya Jiji), others exhibit the struggle of Arab women with social oppression; for example, *Wadjda* (2012) by the first Saudi

Arabian filmmaker Haifaa Al-Mansour. Additional films depict the lives of female prisoners as social victims (Zeina Daccache's *Shaherzad's Diary* from 2013), acts of female rebellion against oriental taboos (Maysaloun Hamoud's 2016 film *In Between*), and works with political parallels such as those by Syrian filmmaker Soudade Kadadan who explores Syrian collective trauma and identity in her documentary *Obscure* (2017), and her recent fiction film *The Day I Lost My Shadow* (2018) (Khan, 2018).

However, a major concern for these independent films is their lack of accessibility through general releases and online platforms. These films can find their audiences only through international film festivals, being denied the mass exposure of national cinema (Aftab, 2016). I was unable to access these recent films, so I could not examine their narrative approach to Arab female trauma. Moreover, the most part of the films I did examine depicts female trauma using a redemptive theme, nor do they place the viewer in the witness position where self-reflexivity or personal individuation can occur. According to Amal Ramsis, the founder of the Cairo International Women's Film Festival, "Arab women are often portrayed as victims, they are mostly viewed through the stereotypical cap of oppression". She explains that her main goal for founding the first women's film festival in the Middle East was to revise the "negative stereotypes of Arab women in the occidental media" (International media support, 2015).

Recent eccentric films by Egyptian screenwriter Mariam Naoum have focused on reconstructing images of Arab women. Naoum has achieved the unusual feat of reaching a mass Arab audience through television series during Ramadan every year since the revolution with female-driven stories that were primarily free from the mainstream male gaze. Her most notable works are *A Girl Named Zat* in 2013 and *Segn El Nisaa* (The Women's Prison) in 2014.

In *Taht El Saytara* (Under Control) from 2015 she tackled the issue of drug addiction among Arab women, and in *Seqout Horr* (Freefall) from 2016 she examined women's mental illness (Amin, 2019).

A common criticism of Naoum's realist approach is the portrayed grimness and emotional heaviness of her narratives. A huge proportion of Arab audiences still finds her work too agonising to watch or hard to follow (Madamasr, 2016). Naoum argues that the purpose in her feminist screenwriting is "to hold a mirror up to the society's warts and reflect the collective denial of its social ills". By exposing the underlying societal syndromes behind Arab women's trauma, she contests "the patriarchal discourses that have long deprived Arab women of their rights to create their own agency and images" (quoted in Amin, 2019). Kaplan argues that this viewing mode "not only intensif[ies] the desire to help an individual in front of one, but also leads to a broader understanding of the meaning of what has been done to victims can be a component of Vicarious traumatising" (Kaplan, 2005, p. 123). From this, it can be inferred that Naoum's approach to narrating female trauma can be vicariously traumatising to the Arab female spectator inasmuch as it does not aim to cure or work through their traumas, but rather to exhibit their root causes.

In the meantime, Arab women tend to find "a vehicle for traveling through time and space into an ideal Arab world" through television series and films (Georgiou, 2014). The latest figures have indicated that Turkish soap operas have the highest viewership in the Middle East, sweeping through the Arab media market and ravished Arab women's minds of all ages and backgrounds (Hackensberger, 2008). MBC channel reports recorded around 85 million Arab viewers tuning in to the finale episode of *Gumus* (2007) (the first Turkish series broadcast on MBC), about 50 million of whom were women (Gurmen, 2016). Many Arab and western

reports attributed these figures to a combination of a sense of cultural proximity and the fact that this was the first opportunity for Arab women to watch “independent career women, equitable marital relations” and many other forms of liberty that have long been opposed in Orientalist society (Salamndra, 2012). Turkish filmmaker Nina Maria Paschalidou examined the reasons behind the deep connection between Turkish series and Arab women in her documentary film *Kismet* (2019). She found that “series which speak about sensitive topics such as rape, forced marriage and divorce with depicting strong women are inspiring female audiences to assert themselves and break social taboos” (Todorva, 2013). Paschalidou also credits the second famed series in the Middle East – *What Is the Fault of Fatmagül* (2010) – which narrates the aftermath life of a young woman who is gang raped few days before her wedding, Fatma's life takes a dramatic turn when she agrees to marry one of the rapists, Kerim, Viewers discover later that he did not touch her but also did nothing to save her. Yet, he helped her to take her case to court and fight for her rights, and eventually receiving justice on all fronts. Scholar Ouidyane EL Ouardaoui highlights the alarming effects of these stories in her article ‘Romanticizing Rape In The Turkish Tv series ‘Fatmagul ucu ne? And The Female Moroccron Fan’ (2019), she argues that Fatmagul drama doesn’t not just ‘contributes to the normalisation of rape, but also exploits the typical melodramatic ingredients in fiction that are defined by ‘excess, such as loss of consciousness, eavesdropped conversations, last-minute rescues, and unpredictable love stories' (Brooks, 1995) which eventually romanticizes the most extreme sexual aggressiveness directed against women. (Ouardaoui, 2019).

However, many other Arab sociologists and Turkish scholars have criticised the fable-like approach to the trauma narratives of the Turkish series. Turkish film author Sinem Yuksel stated that trauma narratives in Turkish melodramas are a form of social fantasy, and a mix of

ideology, fantasy and drama (Sinecinedergi, 2016). Eset Akcilad (a Turkish screenwriter and film-maker) admitted that screenwriters tell at least two versions of Cinderella stories per year, with specific narrative themes that should ultimately trigger a “communal yearning” for the idyllic society. Pinar Celikel (a Turkish editor) along with Scholars Özlem Arda, Pinar Aslan stated in their book *Transnationalization of Turkish Television Series* that ‘Turkish men are portrayed as more romantic than Romeo, they show people what they want to see but it’s not real’ (Arda & Aslan, 2021, p.89).

On closer examination, I notice that most Turkish dramas that depict the recovery journey following a female trauma, such as *Sen anlat karadeniz* (2018, domestic abuse), *Fatmagul sucu ne* (2010, gang rape) and *Sila* (2011, forced marriages and honour killings), rely on the emergence of a new male saviour who accepts the heroine when society rejects her, and supports her recovery. Sadly, this male hero contrasts strongly with the hard realities of Arab societies. The commonly held view, backed up by social research, is that Arab women who face sexual violence are often stigmatised, blamed and isolated from their surroundings. According to Nazra.org, sexual assault victims in Arab communities suffer a “double victimisation” from the attack itself and from the systematic failure to provide justice or support of any form (Nazra.org, 2013). Furthermore, the happy endings in trauma narratives and Turkish series are heavily criticised in the trauma theory literature. La Capra explains that “the phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity, definitive closure” in trauma narratives can even risk perpetuating the trauma (La Capra, 2001, p. 71).

The extended study by Tamar Liebes on the uses and gratification theory (which suggests that audiences choose selective media to satisfy their psychological needs) suggests that Turkish dramas provide a “false gratification” for Arab women (Liebes, 2003, p. 41) as

they tend to revisit the traumas of Arab women, press on their emotional needs, expand their macho expectations, and yet abandon them to the callous realities of patriarchal oppression in the Arab world. Consequently, I aim in this film project to present a narrative of trauma recovery that transcends the classic whining of trauma narration and that focuses instead on portraying a survival journey that is not grounded in male salvation or spectacularisation, but rather in a process of inner self-realisation, soul awakening and self-empowerment. To this end, I shall examine in the next section the recent socio-political dynamics that have shaped the traumatic identity of Arab women in an effort to detect patterns of crises and root causes from a wider cultural background.

5. Analysis of the socio-political dynamics shaping Arab women's traumas

To begin with, studies have shown that the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with more persistent symptoms is higher in women than in men (Nemeroff *et al.*, 2006). Many other researchers have shown that Arab women are more vulnerable to PTSD because of common gendered violence, war-related dilemmas, traditional patriarchal pressures and forced immigration stressors (Kessler, 2000). More recent research emphasises the rise of PTSD symptoms among Arab women and children since the Arab Spring (Ghanim, 2017).

Recent United Nations figures indicate that “37% of Arab women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. According to a 2013 study by the United Nations, more than 99 % of all Egyptian women have been victims of harassment, nearly four in every ten of all women victims of homicide are killed by intimate partners” (Norris, 2008). Additionally, Arab women's lives are fundamentally dependent on a male guardian (husband or father). As Norris states “More than six in every ten women survivors of violence refrain from asking for support or protection of any sort” mainly owing to the absence of any governmental laws that

protect Arab women from domestic violence or sexual abuse. Hence, it can be inferred that patriarchal systems and male dominance are a root cause of Arab female traumas, although many Arab and non-Arab sociologists have agreed that these family dominions merely reflect the authoritarian political regimes that have dominated the Arab world for decades (Starr, 2017). Kaplan has noted the “complex interconnections between individual and cultural trauma” and that “the political-ideological context within which traumatic events occur shapes their impact, that it is hard to separate individual and collective trauma’ (Kaplan, 2005, p. 1). Her interrelation concept can be easily illustrated by the high rates of domestic violence reports during the civil wars of Lebanon (Usta *et al.*, 2007), the gang rapes of Egyptian women protesters in Tahrir square during the overthrow of Mubarak (Nazra.org, 2013), and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) reports, which reveal that most allegations of rape and sexual violence in the current Syrian war has been committed by governmental forces (Wilpf.org, 2016). These dreadful reports affirm that the gendered violence in Arab societies is perpetrated not just within families but by the predominantly patriarchal and autocratic authorities that systematically violate women’s rights (Wilpf.org, 2016). These factors have led many Arab women to flee their home and country, thus exposing them to a higher risk of PTSD caused by violence in exile and the anxieties of forced immigration such as separation from family, loss of shelter, identity conflicts and economic deficit (Steel *et al.*, 1999).

Stephan Milich, a German scholar in trauma politics and Arabic literature, explains that “Trauma in Arab societies today is not a single past event, but rather a state of emergency that has turned into normality” (Milich, 2018). Milich also notes that “there has been a lack of locally embedded research on trauma and the politics of suffering in this region” and that

“psychological research on trauma in the MENA region has been limited to quantitatively measure the level of PTSD among certain affected groups” while still missing out a comprehensive investigation into the different features of traumas in respect to their regions within academic research (Milich, 2018, p. 10).

Most Postcolonial critics noticed this gap in trauma studies and have criticised trauma theory for being Eurocentric and Western biased, Stef Carps addressed in his book *Post Colonial Witnessing Trauma Out Of Bonds* that the current trauma discourse is failing to “fulfil its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement” (Carps, 2013, p. 21) . Consequently, Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy called for a transformation in trauma studies that would make it capable of engaging with “the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture” and of taking “account of specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced”. More scholars added their voices to this call and worked to construct a thoroughly “decolonised” form of trauma studies (Andermahr, 2015, p. 2). This study responds to this call, as it probes the trauma of Arab women to detect its root causes and survival modes, along with developing a theoretical framework that can identify the most effective forms of trauma representation and schemes of recovery through the context of filmmaking. I shall explain in the next section the project’s theoretical framework for each stage, from the data collection through to the individual interviews, the phases of preproduction and production, and the testing of the film’s impact on its focus group.

6. Methodology through theoretical concepts and individual Interviews

The project uses the qualitative research method to place women’s stories at the core of the investigation within “their larger gendered social context” (Reinharz, 1992). In-depth, individual semi-structured interviews were selected as the means of data collection for this

study because they can individually explore participants' experiences of past trauma (Nay-Brock, 1984). Another important consideration that encouraged my use of face-to-face interviews is the ability to clarify my motives for, and association with, the project as an Arab woman sharing with the participants the same ethnicity and experience of life under socio-political pressures. Thus, the participants would feel more at ease during the interview (Denzin, 1989).

I narrowed my focus group to women from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, as I am personally more attuned to their cultural traumas (being half Egyptian and half Jordanian). I planned to reach the intended focus group through local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, my methodology had to shift to purposive sampling and domestic ethnography due to covid outbreak and restrictions. Drawing on Austin's claim that "traumatic events are never fully assimilated in the present but take time to manifest themselves, often migrating to a different place and a later time to make their impact felt" (Austin, 2009, p. 19). In view of this, I decided to broaden my scope of data collection and conduct more interviews outside the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region to achieve a broader reach for a better resolved trauma experience.

A participant information statement and voluntary consent form were used to gain consent and to ensure participants' anonymity and safety. The semi-structured interview comprised ten main questions to explore different areas of the survivor's trauma experience. Participants were asked to narrate their life story from their own perspective, and to "recite the history of events related to their understanding of trauma experiences and what these events had meant to them over time" (White, 2007). Participants were also asked to describe their trauma symptoms and memories, and, most importantly, their coping strategies, recovery stages

and main turning points.

The next stage consisted of analysing the case study material collected to identify the recurring themes that are “important to social reality” (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p. 5). The narratives were then categorised into the three main types of traumas (acute, complex and chronic) in which the survival modalities could be inferred. According to White, “stories need to be told, deconstructed, reconstructed, not simply heard, to avoid reifying existing unhelpful or oppressive stories” (White, 1990, p. 17). Consequently, the film’s storyline was constructed from fragments of these narratives within the theoretical orientations of Caruth’s trauma structure and Herman’s stages of recovery to create an original trauma survival narrative with a retrieval journey.

7. Defining the film genre

The film’s genre was based mainly on the narrative strategies set out by Kaplan (2005), which is to say that, to establish the witnessing mode for the spectator, a certain cognitive distance must be maintained between the spectator and the events in the narrative. Kaplan describes this mode as “[t]he unusual, anti-narrative process of the narration that is itself transformative in inviting the viewer to at once be there emotionally... but also to keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to the victim by the traumatic process” (Kaplan, 2004, pp. 9–10). Kaplan repeats Laub and Lifton’s assertion that “a deliberate distancing from the subject not only enables the viewer to respond to the traumatic *situation*” but also “promote[s] inter-cultural compassion and understanding”. Such distance shifts the “attention to the situation” rather than “merely the subject’s individual suffering” and thus “opens the text out to larger social and political meanings” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 125). Because the film does not have a single narrator nor does it frame any single character’s consciousness, it allows the viewer to accompany the

unfurling cognitive and emotional journey of each character, and to witness each character's trauma from the narrator's standpoint. As clarified by Kaplan, such process would "accentuate the film's reflexive performativity" and "enable a performative working through" process to occur for both the film's spectator and the film's characters (Kaplan, 2005, p. 22).

However, in assuming the film to be without dialogue (or anti-narrative, as proposed by Kaplan), I came up against a key debate in trauma studies around the expressibility of trauma. Caruth's theory precludes the subject's ability to verbalise an experience that is not fathomed: "The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalised and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and other's knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterises traumatic recall" (Caruth, 1995, p. 153). Indeed, other trauma scholars such as Bessel Van der Kolk and Kaplan criticise Caruth's scepticism towards narration, and Schonfelder describes it as an "anti-therapeutic" approach (Schonfelder, 2013, p. 44). Van der Kolk stresses the necessity for the traumatised subject "to verbalise his trauma experience to survive" (Van der Kolk, 1996). Kaplan upholds Van der Kolk's approach by stating that "[w]itnessing to trauma is a necessarily a dialogic process" (Kaplan, 2005, p. 32). Caruth adds that "Trauma demands a mode of representation that textually performs trauma and its incomprehensibility through, for example, gaps and silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding" (Caruth, 1995, p. 115).

I chose trauma fiction as the film's genre to express a balance between the character's unspeakability as emphasised by Caruth, and the necessary therapeutic dialogue as affirmed by Kaplan and Van der Kolk. In addition, trauma fiction as defined by the literary trauma scholar Anne Whitehead can effectively manifest the paradox of the traumatic event in its absence and

presence “as it articulates the traumatic event through its hunting memories but still resist its representation at the same time” (Whitehead, 2003, p. 7).

8. Defining the representation of trauma – backstory wound technique

Another core tension within trauma studies that configured the film’s trauma representation is what Hirsch coined “a crisis of representation”. Hirsch addresses the recurring questions of how to perform the paradoxical nature of trauma in its absent past and hunting present, and how to situate trauma in a coherent narrative when its memory is denied (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 11, 15). Brand explains that “to witness is to stand in proximity to an event that escapes representation but calls for communication”, adding that witnessing is situated in the gap between an absent event and its representation. For Brand, witnessing does not mean representing the full true depiction of the event, but rather the surrogate for it, which can refer to both the traumatic experience and its impossibility (Brand, 2009, p. 199). Caruth contends that “flashback or trauma re-enactment conveys ... both the truth of an absent event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility” (Caruth, 1995, p. 153). Kaplan also signals the value of flashbacks in establishing the witness mode when she explains that “the struggle to represent trauma’s affects cinematically leads to means other than linearity or story: fragment, hallucinations, flashbacks are the modes trauma cinema characteristically adopts”. She adds that cinema in the witness mode “repeats and freezes its subject to articulate trauma’s ‘paralysis, repetition, circularity’” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 204).

Accordingly, the film’s representation of the characters’ trauma presents a non-linear narrative in line with a process termed “backstory wounds” by Krützen (2004). This is an intra-personal process that delves into a character’s traumatic memory and in which the film confronts the viewer with fragments of the character’s past and brings them the present in the form of

flashbacks, These flashbacks and mental images will “re-enact, reactivate, or re-produce the past traumatising situations” through which the viewer will gradually comprehend the character’s past traumatic events (Elm, Kabalek and Kohne, 2014, p. 5).

9. Preproduction: Theoretical framework of the film’s storyline

b) The film’s theme and the therapeutic methodology

To establish the film’s theme and therapeutic methodology, I utilised the tri-phasic treatment of psychiatrist Judith Herman, as theorised in her classic book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992).

Here, Herman maintains that trauma recovery can take place only within the context of a renewed social connection, in which “a complex mirroring process” can occur (Herman, 1992, p. 94). For this reason, I built an intersection between the film’s characters to mirror each other’s invisible traumas, so that their inner wounds could be exposed only through their friction with each other. Given that each character has encountered a different trauma experience over a different time span, they are able to detect each other’s setbacks but not their own. On this mirroring process, Susan Sontag wrote that “the encounter of two war traumas is more than a mere exchange of past stories however, a therapeutic transference takes place” (Sontag, 2003, p. 67). Psychiatrist Irvin Yalom describes this process as an “adaptive spiral” in which the encounter of these characters will help them break free from the damaging spirals of shame, isolation and victimised self-image (Herman, 1992, p. 155). Psychiatrist Frank Riessman (1965) also described this approach as “helper therapy” – the process of “helping others to cure oneself”. For Riessman, helping behaviour is an essential reward mechanism for any trauma survival (Riessman, 1956). A further analogous approach is taken by Amir who states that:

The capacity to shift between the position of the victim to the position of the witness... enables not only the mere exposure of others' experiences but also a transformation...that allows those experiences to absorb new meaning...Which can finally boost recovery and growth.

(Amir, 2014, p. 1)

I encouraged the film characters to find a commonality in their lives through a certain calling or a gift to lift one another to help them overcome their personal adversities. In this way, the witnessing process between the film's characters and their gradual disclosure to each other of their traumas will trigger their drive to help, and to connect with, each other, and to integrally revise their sense of victimhood. Sontag also refers to this approach as the "transnational practice of listening and regarding the pain of others with the hope of individual and national healing" (Sontag, 2003, p. 67).

b) The film's theoretical framework and the key storyline points:



Generally, the film portrays the structure of the traumatised psyche exemplified by Caruth as “a larger relation to the event which extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing” (Caruth, 1995, p. 208). Consequently, the film’s characters will be initially “acting out” their traumas, which are currently neither understood nor acknowledged by the characters or the spectator. Each character will exhibit traces of their repressed trauma as they access the source buried in their unconscious minds. The repressed

traumas in the characters' unconscious will produce an involuntary pattern of psychological repetition, known as "compulsion repetition" (1995, p. 2). This compulsion repetition will be manifested in the form of self-damaging behaviours or various dissociation modes, where the characters live in a spiral of pain without associating its cause and effect. According to Freud's framework of trauma, there are two main moments in the trauma experience: the original moment, which is the empirical event, and its belated emergence, which is known as *Nachtraglichkeit* (the second event). Freud asserts that it is essential "to recreate or abreact through a narrative recall for the experience to expose the trauma" (quoted in Craps *et al.*, 2014). Once the anchor trauma is exposed, the characters can initiate the process of working through their trauma.

c) The therapeutic process: Working through the characters' traumas

The characters' therapeutic process should advance in three stages: establishing an atmosphere of safety and stabilisation, processing and recounting traumatic memories, and enabling self-reconstruction and integration. Herman affirms that this process is always individualised and non-linear, and can be "oscillating and dialectical in nature". She says that the support group can offer "the needed assistance and enlightenment but not cure", and that each afflicted character should be the "author of her recovery" and initiate her journey of growth (Herman, 1992, p. 110).

The first stage: Safety and stabilisation

Herman stresses that establishing a "safe refuge" will be different for each survivor, but "developing an adequate safety plan, will always include a component of social support" (Herman, 1992, p. 162). The safe refuge in this film will be the encounter between the film's

characters, as they start to help one another regain their sense of security, whether by managing anxiety or eluding old damaging behaviours.

The second stage: Acknowledgement – processing and recounting memories

While for Herman “acknowledgement is about facing and mourning what happened, rather than suppressing grief” (1992, p. 21), Caruth argues that this phase is the most paradoxical for the traumatised characters as they attempt “to express the inexpressible” and “regain faculties of expressivity and connectedness to others” (Caruth, 1995 p. 153). Kaplan also clarifies that “[w]itnessing to trauma is necessarily a dialogic process with the presence of a silent but sympathetic other to whom the testimonial narrative is addressed” (Kaplan, 2004, p. 32). Caruth describes this act of testimony as “a kind of double telling”, which alternates the “*crisis of death*” with “the correlative *crisis of life*” (Caruth, 1995, p. 7). Furthermore, poet Paul Celan describes this kind of double telling as “a desperate dialogue ... to a receptive you... to reconstitute or revivify the self which had been frozen, fragmented or destroyed” (Celan, 1972, p. 22). Lipari (2009) calls this type of dialogue “listening otherwise” and because it allows oneself to be transformed by listening to the other, he describes it as “a transnational practice of listening to the pain of others with the hope of redemption” (Hodgin and Thakkar, 2017, p. 20).

Herman stresses that the survivor (the film character) must not “only recite her story facts in this dialogue” but must also describe her “traumatic imagery and bodily sensations upon the narrative she reconstructs”, as well as explain her resolution to the past traumatic experience (Herman, 1992, p. 126). This explanatory dialogue, a common method in trauma therapy known as the *explanatory narrative*, is the collaborative reconstruction of a past event in an effort to answer the question “Why did this happen to me?” This dialogue should reach a “different perspective of looking back at the traumatic event” and suggest different forms of

justice to resolve the victim's pain. The listener can also advise the victim to consider forgiving the perpetrator to be able to move on in life, while the act of telling a story within the safe relationship with the listener can bring transformative relief from symptoms of PTSD.

Herman also shows how traumatised victims who have witnessed a recent threatening event (acute trauma) often face difficulty in verbalising their experiences. Van der Kolk (2002) calls this dissociative inability of communicating trauma “speechless terror” to refer to the temporal-linguistic gap ensued by trauma. The character's failure to narrate her trauma causes her condition to deteriorate to a spatial dissociation in which she loses her sense of time and presence with her surroundings. Thus, in this film the characters' recovery will be incomplete, but the spectator will comprehend their backstories through intrusive flashbacks and instances of hyper-arousal.

The third stage: Integration and self-reconstruction

This phase, which varies according to the nature of the trauma, centres on reconstructing a new self and a new future. Here, a resolution for a traumatic event can be “conceptualised as a turning point in the survivor's life narrative” at which she considers her painful trauma as an opportunity for growth and a new life (Herman, 1992, p. 145). For some survivors, self-reconciliation enables a revisiting of old dreams and re-engagement with the external world. For others, it can lead to deciding to undertake “a survivor mission” to care for those passing through her past experience (1992, p. 150).

d) Film closure

On writing the film's closure, I took into account the scepticism of trauma scholars towards the possibility of full closure in trauma narratives, especially La Capra's assertion that the "phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity and definitive closure" may risk perpetuating the trauma in spectators or readers (La Capra, 2001, p. 71).

Herman (1992) also affirms that the recovery from trauma is never final, and that the echo of trauma will follow the survivor throughout her life. However, Herman asserts that it should be possible to "recognise a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatised isolation to restored social connection" (1992, p. 110). While these stages were contextualised in the film as the characters' working through their trauma, I chose an ending that reflects the witnessing theme of the film (regarding the pain of others) combined with a cyclic healing process, so that the viewer would leave the film with an image of an unprocessed trauma that yearns to be purged and acknowledged.

10. Production and aesthetic devices

Following Caruth's notion that "trauma demands a mode of representation that textually performs trauma and its incomprehensibility... and the collapse of understanding" (Caruth, 1995, p. 115), the film uses a blend of formal and abstract postmodernist visual techniques to create a subjectivity effect on the narrative structure and characterisation. The visual representation of the character's traumatic flashback is based on the groundwork of Mureen Turim who suggests that cinematic flashbacks are often "abrupt, fragmentary, and repetitive in a way that breaks the film's narrative" (Turim, 2001, p. 207). Janet (1989) also indicates that traumatic memories are fragmented, and stored as visceral sensations (anxiety and panic), or as

visual images (nightmares and flashbacks) (quoted in Van der Kolk, 1996, p. 214).

A recent incorporation of trauma in cinema studies that coincides with these theories is De Bruyn's *The Performance of Trauma in Moving Image Art* (2014). De Bruyn reviewed representative work from European and American avant-garde cinemas in the light of recent neurological research into trauma symptoms – flashbacks, fragmented consciousness, dissociation and repetitious non-linear thinking – and concluded that they are analogous to the successive images, rapid editing and juxtaposition of sound and image found in avant-garde works such as *Alone: Life Wastes* (1998) by Martin Arnold, *Outer Space* (1999) by Peter Tscherkassky and *The Entity* (1981) by Sidney J. Furie (De Bruyn, 2004, p. 21). In this project, I shall adopt De Bruyn's collage techniques and juxtaposition of images to build a reconstituted collage of fragments, sudden appearances and subliminal effects that can be perceived as the character's flashback, disremembering process and PTSD symptoms. I also apply the techniques of Malcolm Le Grice and his use of multiple projections as explained by De Bruyn, to represent any extreme events (for example, sexual assault) narrated by the characters, where these projections can create an illusion of motion from superimposed sweeping gestures. Furthermore, I direct the spectator to the mnemonic value of the traumatic incident and its intensity, while it remains off-screen. I chose this aesthetic technique, rather than the full dramatisation of the traumatic event, to avoid the spectator's re-traumatisation or the vicarious traumatisation of audience.

The film also borrows some aesthetic devices from the film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) by Maya Deren, which was cited as a model for the witness mode by Kaplan (2004, p.10). Kaplan explains that a noticeable feature of *Meshes of the Afternoon* is Deren's use of the subjective and objective camera to convey the character's duality. Similarly, I use mirror

shots with a subjective camera to achieve a distorted self-reflection to depict the fragmented self of the character, as described by Herman (1992, p. 5). Another character is represented through glass reflections with an objective camera to express her multi-layered self and what Herman calls “contaminated identity” (1992, p. 68). The film also adopts Deren’s use of “symbolic objects as visual correlatives for extreme emotions” (Kaplan, 2005 p. 129). I also use symbolic objects from the characters’ past or current professions to serve as visual metaphors for emotional and cognitive processing, such as a never-finished novel to depict the character’s identity loss, a sewing machine to depict a character’s fragmented memory (for a tailor who sewed her wedding dress before watching her fiancé drown), and colourful windmill paper to depict emotional flux.

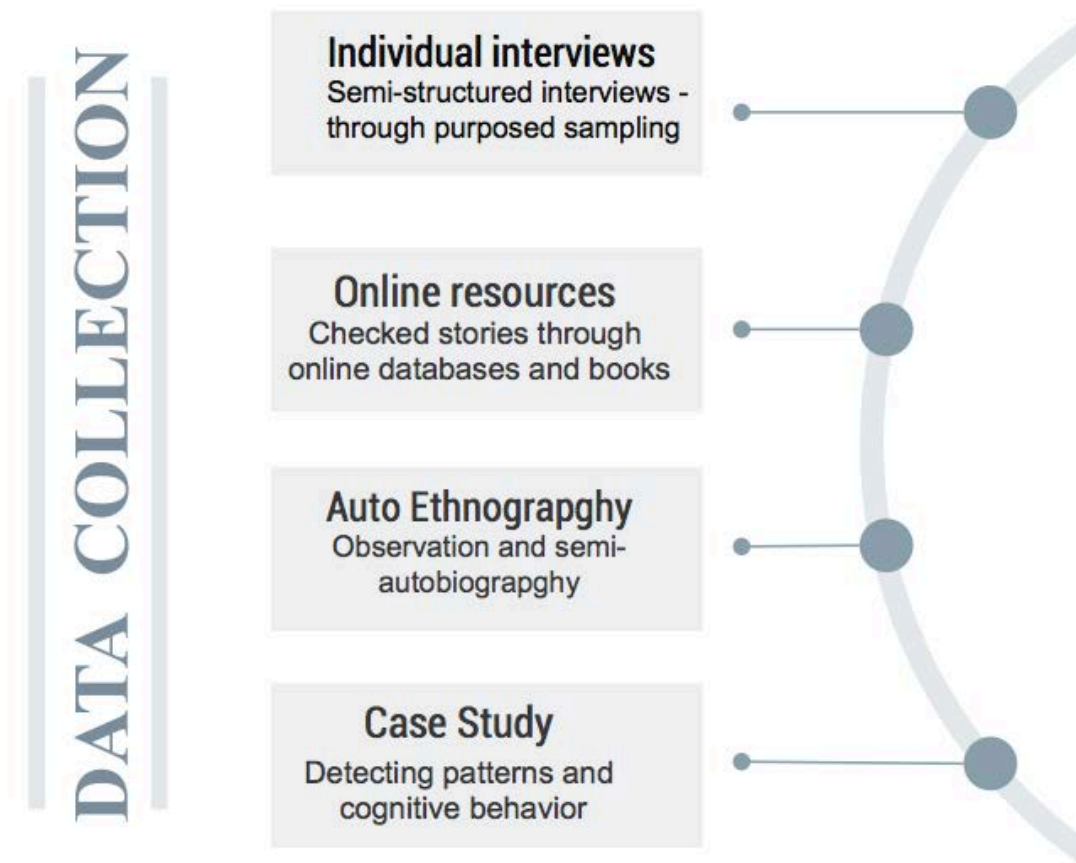
11. Self-reflection

Dori Laub and Shoshan Felman in their book *Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening* (1991, p. 75), explain that the process of witnessing is divided into three levels: the level of being witness to oneself within the experience (in which Laub reflects on “autobiographical awareness as a child survivor”), being witness to the testimonies of others (through interviewing Holocaust survivors and witnessing the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies), and being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. In employing the three levels of witnessing, I shall first be an inner witness through integrating my memoirs and auto-ethnography into the film process. Second, I shall be the witness to the shared narratives during the individual interviews stage. Third, I shall reflect on the overall witnessing process as a witness and a filmmaker for the final film and the overall film production. The self reflection and self witnessing analysis at the end of the film practice also coincides with Ann Kaplan’s concept of witnessing and its impact on the viewer, as she explains in her book *Trauma and*

Culture Cross: Cultural Exploration: that ‘this position of witness may open up a space for transformation of the viewer through empathic identification without vicarious traumatization’ which promotes self reflection (Kaplan 2004, 10).

Moreover, Susan Kerrigan advocated the self-reflection approach in her book *Screen Productions Research* (2015), she explained that self-reflection as a practice methodology allows researchers to “defend their insider’s perspective”, analyse their chosen methods and provide a grounding base in how the film was developed as a research activity. Moreover, the discipline will also benefit from the obtained “knowledge by the process” and the misalignments entailed in the filmmaking stages (Kerrigan *et al.*, 2015).

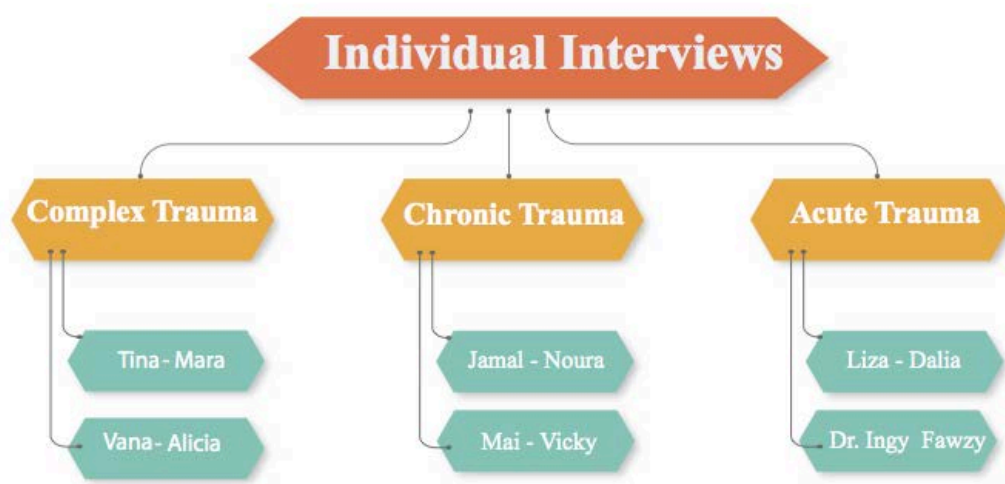
Chapter 2: Methodology



This chapter explains the research methods applied to develop the film's characters, their narratives and their healing process. A data triangulation method was conducted to allow data gathering from multiple sources to be examined and analysed (Denzin, 2006). I used various approaches to reach my sample group and examine their healing schemes. The principal data gathering method was the semi-structured individual interview, while secondary data were constantly gathered from open-source databases and testimonies on the Internet, and auto-ethnography was also embedded and explained in the study. Each method is briefly described in this chapter; this is followed by a discussion on data analysis and findings that are validated

with trauma theory. The next chapter will focus on translating these data in the film script.

1. Qualitative research method: Semi structured individual interviews



The project uses a qualitative research method, since this places the women's stories at the centre of the investigation within "their larger gendered social context" (Reinharz, 1992). In-depth, individual semi-structured interviews were selected as the means of data collection. The discursive format of the semi-structured interview allows the participant to express themselves freely without being restricted to a certain set of questions, while also permitting the researcher to probe the participants' experience in a story-like manner (Nay-Brock, 1984). Another important consideration that encouraged my use of one-on-one interviews is the ability to clarify my motives for, and association with, the project, as an Arab woman sharing with the participants the same ethnicity and experience of life under socio-political pressures. Thus, the participants may feel more at ease narrating their stories during the interview (Denzin, 1989).

The semi-structured interview compromised ten main questions relating to the development of trauma and the survivor's journey of recovery. Participants were asked to narrate their life story from their own perspective, and to "recite the history of events upon their understanding of trauma experiences and what these events had meant to them over time" (White, 2007). The questionnaire generally followed the theoretical model drawn by Tedeschi and Calhoun who define the process of post-traumatic growth as the ability to cognitively process traumatic experiences, resist old patterns and develop new schemas that "fortify the self beyond its pre-trauma baseline" (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p. 4). They also highlight the importance of self-disclosure and narrative development for survivors to fill the plot of their disrupted life and create a renewed version of them. The model begins with an understanding of the survivor before the trauma, then a narration of the main traumatic event, leading to the survivor's self-questions about her life and foundational beliefs. She then describes her emotional distress and closely explains her cognitive process beginning with automatic and intrusive thoughts, then moving to eventually share her acknowledgement of old thinking patterns and her efforts to rebuild a new schema in life with a more empowered self.

The ten interview questions were:

1. How did your story start?
2. How did you escape pain at your lowest point?
3. When was the turning point and how was this reached?
4. What changes did you make (internally or externally) to recover from your trauma?
5. How did you recover from your setbacks?
6. How do you cope with your daily routine today?
7. How do you stop the pain of your past from controlling your future?

8. What is your message to the world today?
9. In your opinion, how can we help Arab women to rise above their past traumas and socio-political pressures?
10. How do you view your painful experience today in your life? What is your personal resolution?

2. Participant sampling

As noted above, I narrowed my focus group to women from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, as I am more attuned to their cultural traumas (being half Egyptian and half Jordanian).

Drawing on Austin's claim that "traumatic events are never fully assimilated in present but take time to manifest themselves, by often migrating to a different place and a later time to make their impact felt" (Austin, 2009, p. 19), I decided to broaden my scope of data collection and conduct more interviews outside the MENA region to achieve a broader reach for a better resolved trauma experience. Five out of ten interviews were conducted with participants who have resided somewhere other than their home country since their traumatic experiences.

It is significant to highlight the main types of trauma classified by the development-based traumatology framework (DBTF), which identifies three types of traumas:

1. Type I acute trauma, which results from a single incident (such as the loss of a loved one in an accident);
2. Type II complex trauma, which refers to the exposure to *cumulative* traumatic events that are often developmental and interpersonally generated (for example, abandonment by a caregiver);
3. Type III chronic trauma, which results from the repeated and prolonged experience of

interpersonal trauma such as domestic violence or sexual abuse (Kira, 2001, 2010; Kira *et al.*, 2008).

Although I initially contacted specific local NGOs in Cairo to conduct my interviews (UN Women Egypt, Her story, the Syrian Association, the Zaytouna assembly and the Pearl program), our meetings did not occur owing to the Covid-19 outbreak. I relied instead on the purposive sampling method for reaching my sample group from within my extended social circle, since this allows the selection of specific participants for an in-depth case study (research-methodology.net). The participant sample group consisted of ten females whom I previously knew, or of whose struggles and healing journeys from past traumas I had heard about. The sample group consisted of four Egyptian, two Lebanese, two Syrian and two Jordanian women aged 25 to 65 years. Four women's cases involved complex trauma, four involved chronic trauma, two women's cases involved acute trauma following the loss of a principal male figure in their lives.

In parallel, I conducted three sessions with an Egyptian female therapist to hear her comments on the common cognitive blocks encountered by trauma survivors in their healing journey. A fourth session will be conducted to revise the film's script and to ensure that each character is accurately dramatised within her trauma type.

3. Conducting the interviews

Although PTSD is considered a sensitive topic for research (Taylor *et al.*, 2011), I encountered an initial enthusiasm and agreement from all the participants, many of whom said that sharing their testimony formed part of their healing; indeed, two participants had already shared their healing testimony in public: Miss Suliman (an Egyptian art teacher) gave a Ted-Ex youth talk

in Egypt titled “The art of moving on”, and a Jordanian participant wrote a book on her recovery from emotional disappointments through spirituality.

All interviews were conducted individually at a time and place specified by the participants (Doody and Noonan, 2013). The prior rapport with most of the participants had a positive impact on the interviews’ essence, as it “facilitated the access to the participants’ narratives” (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) and comforted them while sharing sensitive details from their stories (Liamputtong, 2007). Moreover, I was not just listening to my participants but would occasionally share my self-reflection on their narratives or acknowledge the emotional progress I have witnessed in their healing journey. Hence, the whole nature of the interviews became “a non-hierarchical reciprocal sharing” of personal stories, which increased “the validation and respect for participants and relieve participants’ fear of judgment and stigma” (Pranee Liamputtong, 2007). Etherington emphasises that the researcher must “self-reflect or self-critique” while conducting sensitive interviews (2004, p. 20), while Birch and Millar (2000) assert that the self-reflective interview can also perform a therapeutic function in its reframing of negative experiences and drawing conclusions. This feature was prominent in one of my earliest interviews, which lasted for five hours in the participant’s art studio. Although agreeing on an organised interview schedule is generally advised (Doody and Noonan, 2013), I instantly sensed that having a predetermined schedule of questions would make the participant less inclined to speak openly. So I allowed her to narrate her story at her own pace using visual details, then I recapped her answers on each questionnaire item at the end of the interview. The other interviews lasted for about an hour, and most of them had a constructive impact on both me and the interviewee.

4. Method of transcription: Integrating Field Notes during my interviews:

Most qualitative research techniques require field notes to be collected in order to provide a rich context for data analysis later on (Harris, Beckman, Reed, Cook, O'Brien, 2014; Tong). My method of field notes collection was through writing "keyword-based notes" or "sketch notes" during my interviews (Rohde, 2012). Due to the long extensive "fluid nature" of my interviewee's sharing their testimony and narrative, these keywords serve as a coded personal memo for their research answers (Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). The method of taking notes during the interview using keywords is also primarily consistent with my research topic and Dori Laub's second level of witnessing, which is witnessing other testimonies while acting as a "bystander, an active listener, and a psychoanalyst," suggested in his article "An event without witness" (2003). For Laub 'it is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing' (Laub, 2003). Thus, the use of field notes allowed me to 'maintain eye contact with participants' without "interrupting the flow of the moment or distracting them," they also provided assurance that the "participants are protected" because the notes are de-identified for the purposes of the study as specified in the consent form (Tsai et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers are also encouraged to use an "add back" verbal content or commentary from the interviewees into the interview transcript (Sandelowski, 1994). I also found it helpful to incorporate crucial statements and essential vocal content on the process of my thematic analysis (Sandelowski, 1994). Last but not least, critical self-reflection after each interview allows me to evaluate my "performance, biases, and feelings" (Hinds et al., 199) and aids in producing "a complete analysis and reflection following the interview" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Watt, 2007).

5. Ethical considerations

A participant information statement and voluntary consent form were secured before the interview to ensure the participant's anonymity and safety. In an effort to preserve my participants' identity and comfort, participants names are replaced and concealed from the research committee. Assigning pseudonyms is the most popular method of anonymity that has been studied in the qualitative interviews with sensitive topics (Clark, 2006: 5). Though, some research participants gave their consent for me to use their names in the research setting because they feel their stories are finally being heard in justice. Others undoubtedly worried that their family and the public would recognize them, when exposing their names or a detailed account of their history. So, I reluctantly decided to refrain from naming interviewees, but I used pseudonyms for the main participants whose tales were incorporated into the film script in my analysis, to ease out the analysis and the discourse of their content (Grinyer, 2002: 3), While maintaining the anonymity of the other participants. I also assured my participants that the film's story would be constructed from fragments of their shared narratives, and that only my supervisors and reviewers would have access to their full narratives, thereby concealing their stories and identities from their families and friends.

6. Limitations and secondary resources

As explained earlier, the triangulation of data sources was used to obtain a richer study on Arab female traumas and their interdependent socio-political realities, as well as to ensure a broader perspective on Arab women from beyond my social circle and daily life.



For secondary data collection, I relied on shared testimonies on UN platforms and UNHCR Egypt websites, and published stories on open-source media outlets such as DW Documentary, *The Guardian*, UNCEF, Moral courage, BBC Three, CNN and Sat7. I also attended the MedFest film conference in August 2019 and curated the panel's questions with its founder Mina Reda El-Nagger. The conference included a three-day screening of nine short films on Arab female trauma, followed by a panel discussion involving psychiatrists, filmmakers and public audiences. I have also attended an online course on trauma recovery on the UDEMY website and have read *Healing the Soul of a Woman* by chronic trauma survivor Joyce Meyer (2018).

I deliberately searched for inspiring trauma survival stories and biographies of Syrian women published online or in the traditional manner. The most prominent biography I encountered was a book by Melissa Fleming (the UNHCR chief spokesperson) called *A Hope More Powerful than the Sea* (2017) in which she recounts the story of Doaa El Zamel, a

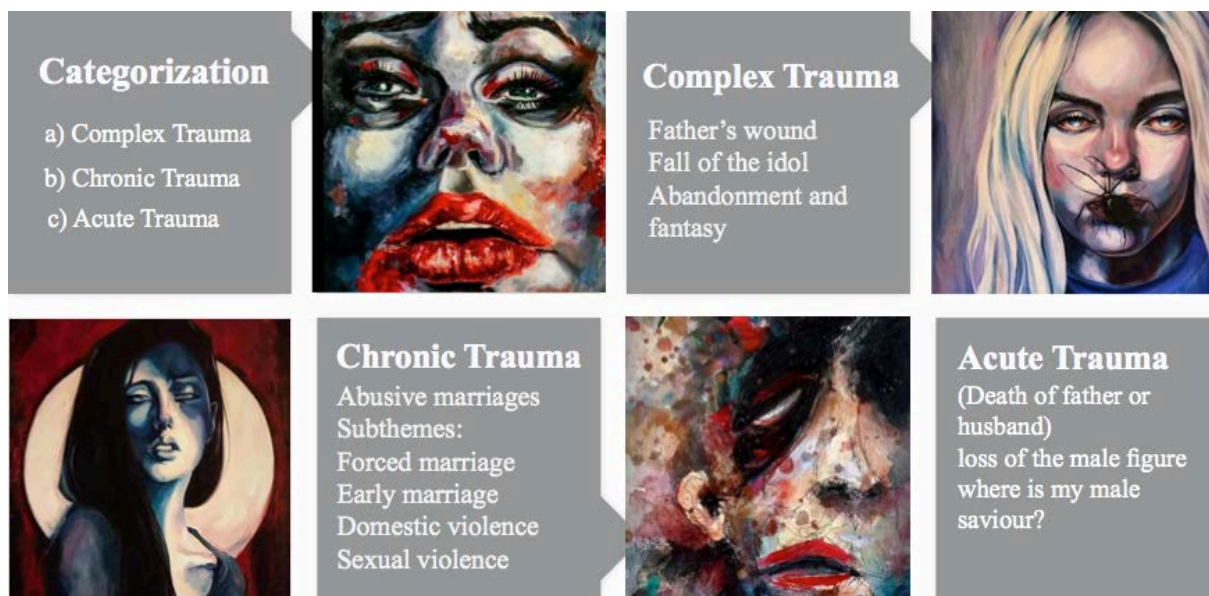
survivor of a mass shipwreck incident in September 2014. Doaa was one of ten survivors out of 500 passengers on board. Unable to swim, she was saved by her fiancé Bassem who placed her on a child's inflatable life ring. Bassem drowned after the pair floated helplessly at sea for two days, but Doaa took responsibility for the lives of two infants after a grandfather and a mother asked her to save them. Bearing the responsibility for these two young lives helped Doaa to survive her ordeal. She was credited for her bravery by the Greek embassy and now resides in Norway with her family. I have used Doaa's story as a baseline for the acute trauma portrait in my film project, but as my focus is on the aftermath phase of the traumatic event, I cemented the character along with the many other accounts I have examined from the secondary data research.

7. Auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography is one of the methods in qualitative research that integrates the researcher's personal experience (auto) into his process of understanding cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004). It uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to reach auto-ethnography findings and outcomes and can be used with varying approaches. An interpretive approach observes and analyses the "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 2003, p. 67), while a second is the empathetic approach which "enters into the mind and personage of the author, seeking to see things from the author's perspective" (2003, p. 109). The roots of the film are found in the recurring socio-political pressures in the Arab world, coupled with my personal encounters since the Egyptian revolution and the experience of suddenly living in exile in my own country after the departure of family and friends. The dispersal of my family seven years ago can be viewed as the triggering event for the film, but it also precipitated a series of many other adverse events that exposed more deeply rooted

implicit remnants from interpersonal encounters that I witnessed in my childhood and adolescent life. The accumulation of these encounters, my deadlocks, short triumphs, relapses and the constant process of regaining balance and re-empowering my psyche – have acquainted me with the topic of trauma. Although I may not be able to directly share my narrative in the project, I am inducing my experiences within the recounted narratives through my visual voice and memoir. Thus, it can be said that the researcher, the researched, the dominant and the subordinate, personal experiences, and socio-cultural structures are all examined and combined in this project. In addition, auto-ethnography is fundamentally integrated within the main concepts governing the project's development and literature review (such as Kaplan's concept of witnessing and Sontag's notion of regarding the pain of others), and it is therefore both a process within, and a product of, this project (Ellis, Adams Bocher p. 273).

8. Data analysis: Setting the themes



Thematic analysis was useful for analysing the collected material of this project because it provides a means for interpreting data and detecting the recurring themes that are “important to social reality” (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p. 5). Narratives were categorised by trauma type

(complex, chronic and acute) and, after re-reading and closely examining the interviews' transcripts, ten initial universal themes were identified. These were then divided into three main themes that each comprise sub-themes. (The paintings in the above figure belong to Miss Suleiman, who has launched her art therapy studio after her divorce).

My identification of themes and patterns in this chapter was also validated by trauma theory. Each trauma type has been studied and outlined from its root cause, through its manifestation and on to its healing journey. While the three main themes describe the cause of the trauma type, seven cognitive and behavioural patterns of all types were identified and described in the trauma-healing journey.

Examining the traumatic experiences in the ten narratives has revealed that the main theme of complex trauma is the father's wound, which itself comprises four sub-themes (the abusive alcoholic father, the absent father, the passive oppressive father, and the father's infidelity). The main theme of chronic trauma was abusive marriage, which breaks down into sub-themes of early marriage, forced marriage and infidelity. Lastly, the theme of acute trauma is the sudden loss of a male figure, whether a husband or a father.

Although all participants have shared the common traumatic reactions of haunting memories and anxiety, it was found that different types of traumas produce different responses. Moreover, participants from the same trauma type had different dissociation symptoms, adaptation strategies and recovery behaviours from each other.

Many cross-cultural trauma studies also explain that the manifestation of distress varies according to cultural differences, personal background, and personal history and resilience, and can therefore be both unique according to the survivor's culture and shared with

aspects of the experiences of others around the world (Kirmayer, 2014). As such, I shall be analysing the most universal similarities found in each trauma type, as well as the common cognitive patterns and behaviours that are collectively encountered in any trauma recovery journey.

a) Complex trauma: The father's wound

Complex trauma refers to prolonged exposure and adaptation to adverse events within the developmentally sensitive years (Courtois and Ford, 2009). These exposures often occur within the child's caregiving system and may include physical or emotional abuse and neglect. As explained in the previous section, the project focuses on the father's wound as the theme of complex trauma. Herman set out how the father's abuse and neglect leaves the survivor "with a fragmented sense of self and a contorted personality" (Herman, 1992, p. 133). Blaustein and Kinniburgh (2010) explain that complex trauma usually appears in "core developmental deficits" of four competency categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, self-regulatory and neurocognitive. Similarly, four participants displayed various post-traumatic behaviours such as dissociation through binge watching, social isolation, constriction and self-protection in relationships, extreme emotions in relationships, mood fluctuations and the re-enactment of abusive relational patterns. It is clear from the narratives and theory that complex trauma survivors often struggle to "form healthy and secure attachments" (Courtois and Ford, 2009). Six of the ten participants had already made the connection between the behaviour of their fathers' and the repetitive failures in their relational patterns, and two participants explained that they are subconsciously drawn to males who resemble their fathers physically and behaviourally. One participant shared that from the day she discovered her father's infidelity, she repeatedly became attracted to men who resembled her father. At first, she found this

therapeutic but as soon as they did something she did not like, she would view them through the lens of her father's abuse. Freud identified the concept of "substitution and transference" of trauma, originally terming them "despicable energies". He explained that trauma survivors' neuroses mean that they cannot differentiate between their past and present, so they often project and transmit their unresolved conflicts, dependencies and fears onto the substituting figure (Freud, 1963, p. 107). Caruth reiterates this concept by saying that "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (Caruth, 1995, p. 2). Levine supports this re-enactment behaviour, explaining that traumatic memories are "primarily organised around emotions and procedures" that the body performs automatically and subconsciously (Levine, 2015, p. 21). Herman likens the experience of complex trauma to "losing oneself" because it causes a deep loss in the survivor's agency and identity, unlike acute trauma, which manifests as losing one's mind (Herman, 1992, p. 141). One participant explained that the result of her father's abandonment was self-abandonment: the sense of rootlessness and feeling astray in the world. Physiotherapist Jeremy Macallister (2016) explains that complex trauma survivors often "recreate their caregivers internally" – if their caregivers abused them, they tolerate abusive relations; if they were belittled or rejected by the caregiver, they would feel the same towards themselves. Yet survivors often fail to articulate these internal ties and the way they affect their realities (Macallister, 2016). From the narratives shared and from Herman's studies, it was also found that complex trauma survivors often dissociate through fantasising about different realities; these may be fantasies of revenge or compensation, daydreaming, or merely binge watching for days and weeks. Herman explains that these fantasies "perform as a mirror image of their traumatic memory", functioning as the survivor's defence system to self-empower and "bypass

their outrage” at abandonment or abuse (Herman, 1995, p.135). Herman adds that survivors of complex trauma often develop a psychological barrier to self-disclosure and sometimes feel regret after narrating their stories. As a result, the four participants were assured that their narratives would not be shared with any researchers they did not already know. Herman clarifies that this resistance to sharing or exhibiting feelings is the stagnation point of the complex trauma recovery, which causes the traumatised to remain in their “fantasy of a magical resolution whether through compensation, revenge, or forgiveness” (Herman, 1992, p. 138).

La Capra contends that it is the working-through strategy that gradually empowers the survivor “to gain critical distance from their trauma, and start discerning between the past, present and future” (La Capra, 1995, p. 8). One participant shared that she realised she is not obliged to suffer all her life, and she offered the following empowering quote: “the past is in my head, but the future is in my hands”. She said that she deliberately refuses to live a second-degree life because of her painful past; but to obtain a different future, one has to repair oneself from the past.

b) Chronic trauma: Sexually abusive marriages

The data analysis indicated that women who have been raised in abusive households tend to be drawn into other cycles of abuse, whether through abusive marriages or casual relations. The sampled participants have also acknowledged being mentally abused and emotionally manipulated, either by being belittling or by being disconnected from their families and friends. Herman added that these schemes “were designed to induce fear and helplessness” in an attempt to destroy the victim’s agency and sense of autonomy and allow the perpetrators to continue their control and abuse (Herman, 1992, p. 39).

Most participants would not share their experiences of being captive within their families and, even after their liberation, they hesitate to reveal their pains because they often fear being blamed, misunderstood, or dominated or harmed by their families' reactions. Most explained that they were not given the necessary care by their families and, as Herman states, most families "may show little tolerance for the survivor outrage or may swallow up her anger in their own quest for revenge" (Herman, 1992, p. 48). My participants also indicated that their families were the reason they had to leave their homes and countries. Herman further explains that chronic trauma survivors often take years to recover because their societies do not allow them to mourn, ask for justice, or externalise their feelings (1992, p. 35). Accordingly, the length of the healing journey for my participants varied from 6 to 15 years after their traumatic events, and some said that they still experience remnants of their PTSD symptoms when stressed. Herman adds that chronically traumatised people are constantly alert and hyper-vigilant and cannot easily dissociate, and they are therefore more prone to developing harmful numbing effects through substance abuse. All participants shared their struggle with self-regulation; some became addicted to alcohol, emotional eating, or irregular emotional or sexual relations. The survivors' substance abuse often hinders them from developing new social interactions and "their lives get reduced to the goal of survival" in which they get used to "constriction as a form of adaptation" (1992, p. 63). Externalising the traumatic experience is a necessity for chronic trauma recovery because it helps survivors to regain their sense of redress, order and justice, while the community's response has a powerful role in drawing the resolution of chronic trauma, either by recognition or restitution (1992, p. 32). One participant shared that she gets deeply soothed every time she receives a comforting response to her story. In addition, Herman emphasises that the restoration of autonomy and self-actualisation are principal needs

for chronic trauma recovery. Two participants explained that they found a form of healing through their new occupations. One of them is Miss Suliman, who has been told by her ex-husband that she has no talent. He used to tear her paintings apart during their fights but after her divorce she opened her own art studio, held very successful art exhibitions for herself and her students, and a few years later she also remarried.

c) Acute trauma: Loss of a loved one in an accident

Acute trauma is generated by a single non-recurring incident. Theory and shared narratives reveal that unspeakability is the most common response. Laub (1995) writes that memories of acute trauma lack verbal narrative and context and are often translated in the survivor's brain as vivid sensations and images that are re-enacted in a heightened reality in the survivor's mind.

Miss Abdelwareth (a participant who lost her father in 2019), explained that their attachment to silence equates to their attachment to their lost person to the extent that they tend to enjoy guarding their melancholia and sometimes feel guilty when they let it go.

Correspondingly, Herman explains that the survivor's obsessive re-enactment of the trauma prevents their recovery and mental processing. Lifton (1984) coined the term "psychic numbing" to describe a mental "turning off" that is universal among "survivors of disaster, war, or loss of a beloved one in accidents" and that results in what he calls a "paralysis of the mind".

Shapiro explains that most acute trauma survivors may find their emotional healing when engaged in social services (Shapiro, 2010, p. 11), and the participants shared that their engagement in charity work with underprivileged children has helped them to process and externalise their pains. One participant told of how witnessing and working with orphan children during a trip to Ghana has helped her to self-reflect, be less self-centred and more

grateful for all she has in life. Herman defines this healing approach as the “survivor mission”, because the survivors “feel recognised, loved, and cared for themselves while taking care of others” (Herman, 1992, p. 150).

9. Universal cognitive patterns and coping strategies in the healing journey

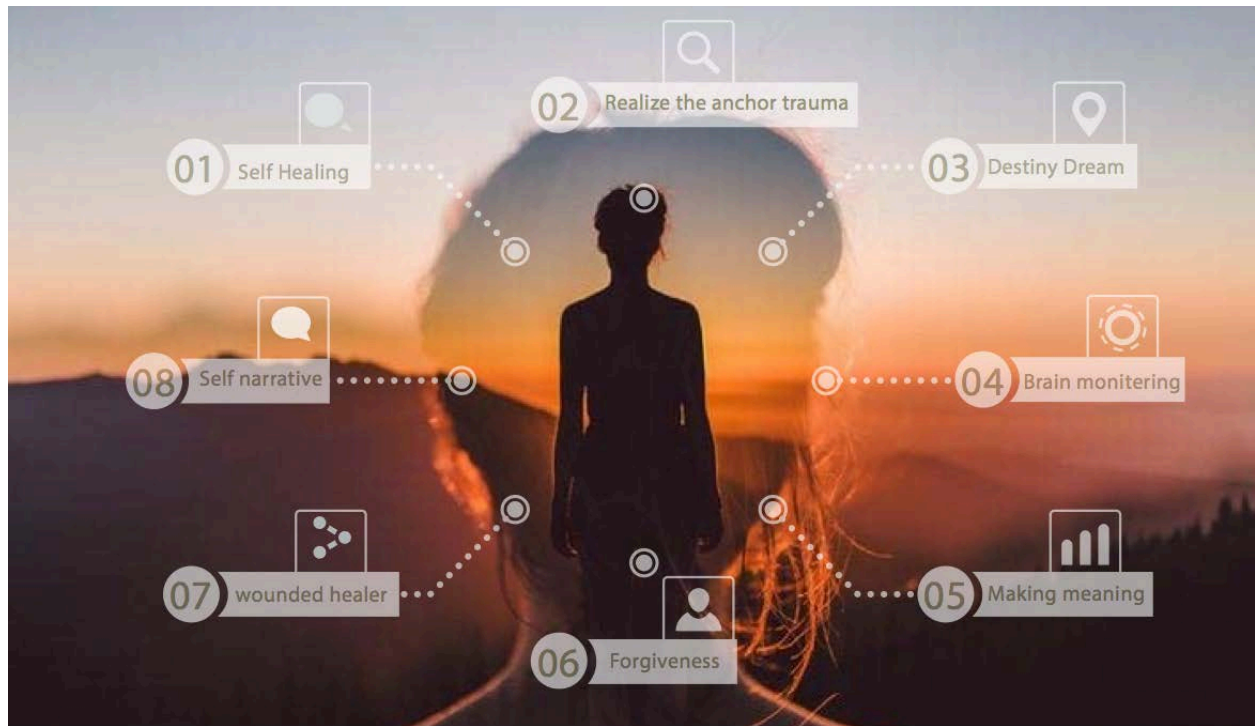


a) Naming the problem

Herman explains that the diagnosis of complex and chronic trauma can be hard to discern because survivors usually have disguised presentations of PTSD symptoms without a direct or clear reason tied to them. However, reliving a trauma may “offer an opportunity for mastery and healing” because when survivors begin to realise the patterns in their lives, they begin to cognitively process their anchor trauma and the source of their fears. By “learning the true name of her condition” and understanding her diagnosis, the survivor can begin to master her trauma and resist being imprisoned in its cycles (Herman, 1992, p. 111). One participant shared

that she discovered that her somatisation with insomnia, chest and back pain was diagnosed for her feelings of rejection and the patterns she lived in her emotional relationships, which were still closely tied to her father's wound, so by her realisation of this emotional pattern, she started to work on her self-worth and deliberately avoid bargaining and destructive relations. Another participant shared that a tormenting fear was the dominant factor in her life decisions and relations. She realised that her fears were a creative but negative force in her life, often becoming her reality, and even leading her to anticipate future disappointments and act upon them, or to sabotage things whenever they were going well. However, when her therapist pointed out that she lived a life driven by fear, she began to consciously avoid fear-driven decisions, gained control over impulsive behaviours and became more discerning in her thinking patterns.

b) Self-healing *versus* dependency



Psychologist Arielle Schwartz explains that traumatic events are usually accompanied by attachment trauma in which the survivor will either “withdraw from relations to avoid further rejection” or be overly dependent on others (Schwartz, 2007). As explained earlier, trauma survivors often become involved in dysfunctional relations despite expecting a different outcome each time. However, all participants came to the realisation that emotional healing is not only intentional but also self-reliant in its process and goals, and all acknowledged the importance of self-reconciliation before rushing into new phases. “It is all about self- healing”, said one participant, adding that “one must become the narrator and dictator of building [one’s] own future; waiting for a rescuer will never change today’s reality”. Herman describes self-healing as “the survivor’s inner knowing of their own trauma”, learning to self-regulate, and building a new system of self-beliefs, ego strength and adaptive coping strategies (Herman, 1992, p. 147). One participant described how she discovered a new realm within herself and

hidden talents when she took a year off to re-evaluate her unhealthy decisions and to become acquainted with all the missing parts of herself.

c) Making meaning

Herman states that trauma survivors often struggle with the question of why they had to pass through such suffering (Herman, 1992, p. 127). Van der Kolk (2002) has called this problematic mental phase “stuck points”. All participants admitted that they struggled with stuck points of bereavement and rationalising their experience to reach closure. Herman (1992) explains that reaching a convincing resolution help survivors to neutralise the hijacking effect of traumatic memories on their psyche. Most participants explained that their traumatic event marked a rupture in their lives, not just in the context of the event but also in terms of their sense of self, physique, spirit and soul. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) define five principal psychological areas in which survivors can make meaning of their traumas and outgrow their pain: they can cultivate a “larger appreciation for life” with reformed priorities, develop a healthier view of relationships, grow in personal strength, and discover new life tracks and spiritual domains. (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p. 6). Similarly, the participants shared different resolutions for their traumas, and most have developed a stronger spiritual life since their traumatic events. One participant described how her oppressive marriage was the cocoon that enabled her metamorphosis and her reformed character. She now perceives her trauma as the back door to a more mature self and a blissful life. Some shared that they still miss who they were before being broken and abused; and that while they could not yet fathom the reason behind their suffering, they realised that their suffering has made them more empathetic towards others and empowered them in their professions. Miss Suliman also raised the concept of living as a “wounded healer”, which she uses in her art therapy sessions. A

wounded healer is a notion introduced by Jung, similar to the “survivor mission” introduced by Herman. Jung referred to it as “the ability and the desire bridge the worlds of affliction and healing” to other inflicted selves. For wounded healers, the process of helping others often strengthens their ability to surpass their own wounding (Newcomb *et al.*, 2015).

d) Dissociation *versus* self-authorship

Herman (1992) explains that healing a trauma brings together all parts of one’s self at deeper levels of inner knowing to develop a greater sense of self-authorship. Magolda (2007) denotes self-authorship to be the shift in self-perception “from an externally defined sense of self to a more internally defined sense of self”, so that the survivor understands her personal vulnerability and how to address it through self-monitoring. Modern psychiatrists such as Mathew Tull define self-monitoring as the means to master past trauma and PTSD by bringing awareness to one’s thoughts and feelings, and then to separate this experience into thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. Tull added that there are various means for consciousness raising and boosting self-knowledge, such as keeping a daily dairy of intrusive symptoms, journaling, meditation, mindful breathing, or any form of spiritual activity (Tull and Aldao, 2015). One participant shared that she used to give herself daily practical exercises to conquer her fears; another said that she learnt to practice positive visualisation to fight her negative thoughts and painful flashbacks.

e) Black hole *versus* active imagination

Van der Kolk (2002) describes the implicit state of mind of the traumatised brain as “black holes” that shift the survivor’s biological, social and psychological equilibriums around their traumatic events and imprison them in their past. Herman discusses how trauma survivors often

have a foreshortened sense of the future with constrictive symptoms that affect their life planning and future expectations. One participant explained that painful images from her past were constantly looping through her mind like a bad movie. It was not just that she was forced to watch continually, but that she could not imagine anything else playing instead. Another participant explained that she struggled to foresee a healthy emotional relationship for herself because her anticipation was that abuse, manipulation and infidelity precluded her from being in any relationship, as well prevented her from ever feeling sufficiently safe to confess or exhibit her feelings. Traumatic flashbacks are full of fleeting images and percussive sounds; they disrupt the mind–body distinction and freeze the survivor’s will as if they are in a nightmare, thereby destroying the survivor’s sense of self and future (Culbertson, 1995). Herman affirms that the dialectic nature of traumatic memories can be self-perpetuating if they are not identified and resisted. She says that the “re-making of an ideal self needs a lot of courage from the survivor to actively exercise her positive imagination especially after it has been loaded by fantasies and traumatic memories” and that just as the survivor must dare to defy her fears, she must also dare to define her future goals and wishes (Herman, 1992, p. 145). Miss Suliman also shared that she began working on vision boards to help create a mental image of her future and that she uses them as anchor images to return to whenever she feels lost and overwhelmed by her past.

The use of mental imagery is one of the central therapeutic strategies in trauma recovery, helping to “replace the victimisation imagery with a self-nurturing imagery” (Weiss, 2003, p. 381). The process of guided imagery is closely related to cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which promotes the idea that the “individual’s view of self and the world are central to the determination of thoughts emotions and behaviours, and thus by changing one’s thoughts,

emotions and behaviours can be changed” (Clevenger, 2014).

f) Victim mentality *versus* self-narrative

Interpersonal trauma often disrupts one’s story and disconnects self-dialogue, leading to the “human self- defence system becom[ing] overwhelmed and disorganised” (Herman, 1992, p. 53). For Brison, trauma memory is “speech acts of memory”, suggesting that the process of “undoing and remaking of self” involves “the shift from being the object of the perpetrator’s speech into being the subject of one’s own” (Brison, 1999, p. 39). Many studies support the view that because a dysfunctional self-perception or a victimised self-image will often lead to further abuse and disruptions, the survivor needs to develop a healthier self-concept through positive self-talk (Corey, 2012). Self-talk, or self-guided dialogue, one of the main coping strategies proposed by CBT, is a “private cognitive procedure” performed to mediate a behavioural change and regain control over one’s life narrative (Corey, 2012, p. 20). Ricoeur also fosters the concept of a “self narrative” or “narrative identity that retrieves the self through narrating one’s life events in the form of a story to help positive anticipation, stressing that our internal dialogue often directs and dictates our realities and future (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 132). The author Joyce Meyer (a survivor of her father’s incest) tells of a moment when, while crying and praying, she heard the words “You can be pitiful or powerful but you cannot be both”, which became the turning point for her to abandon her victimised self and begin developing a healthier self-image through spirituality and self-talk (Meyer, 2018, p. 149).

g) Blaming *versus* forgiveness

The fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) indicates that the “persistent blame of self or others about the cause or consequences of traumatic events” is one of the highest levels of PTSD (Cox, Resnick and Kilpatrick, 2014). Many health studies suggest that unforgiveness, blaming, bitterness and emotional anger may not just exacerbate trauma, but may also cause physical diseases and immunity loss (Harris and Thorsten, 2005). Other studies encourage trauma survivors to make peace with their past and their perpetrators to ensure a healthy life (Cohen, Gottlieb and Underwood, 2002).

Many of the participants acknowledged that for years they have struggled with bitterness and blame. One explained that she blamed her mother for marrying her alcoholic father, another blamed her father for her forced marriage, and most of them had at some point blamed God for allowing them to be harmed and abused. However, once they progressed in their emotional healing, they began to view their perpetrators as the real victims, gradually freed themselves from apportioning blame, and regained control over their lives. Schiraldi (2009) instructs the trauma survivor to choose to forgive their perpetrators, not because they deserve it or because they have asked for it, but because it will liberate them from living a life tied to their trauma. Forgiveness, he adds, has been mistakenly viewed as weakness; however, it is the offended person’s inner strength that is at issue, rather than the offender’s. Relinquishing the need for blame and reparation is the way to a better future. One participant explained that forgiveness was a decision not a feeling, saying that she had waited years for an apology so that she could forgive, but when it never happened, she said that she had to pluck out the arrows herself, or else they would have oxidised her forever. I will discuss in chapter 4, how these trauma and healing themes were embedded in the film’s narrative.

Chapter 3: Translating narratives, creating characters

The idea of bearing emerges prominently in the writing of the psychoanalyst Dori Laub who says:

Trauma is an event without a witness, and to witness is to tell, and to tell is to witness. It is the encounter between the survivor and the listener, that makes a repossession of the act of witnessing.. this joint responsibility is the source of the re-emerging truth (Laub, 1992, p. 80).

Reflecting on his experience as a child survivor of the Holocaust, Laub identifies three interdependent levels of witnessing. First, being a witness to oneself during the experience; an “inner witness” or one’s own consciousness with whom an inner dialogue takes place, and without which self-reconstruction cannot occur. Second, being a witness to others’ testimonies and self-reflecting on shared testimonies. Third, being a witness to the process of witnessing itself, in which the narrator and the listener work together to reach an elusive truth or resolution (Laub, 1992, p. 184).

In line with Laub, I shall reflect on my process of witnessing and translating the shared narratives into film characters. I shall demonstrate my experience as a witness to oneself, to the shared testimonies, and to the overall process of witnessing. I shall illustrate each character’s origins and development through the use of Eder’s model of the “clock of character”, which will help me to comprehensively analyse each character, elaborating the characters’ structures, features and their entanglements with culture and society.

1. Methods for fictionalising the shared narratives

a) Meta-narrative

Having established that traumatic experiences and shared testimonies have long been “submerged” and have become distorted in their submersion, Laub and Felman demand “a contextualisation of the text by the historical, autobiographical, political, and intellectual aspects of its production in a dialectics with the witnessing reader’s continual re-evaluation of her/his own pre-existing ‘conceptual prisms’” (Laub, 1992, p. 82). Hoffman (1978) also defends this interconnected concept, arguing that “To a large extent, we’re the keepers of each other’s stories, and the shape of these stories has unfolded in part from our interwoven accounts, trauma however unravels whatever meaning we have found and wove ourselves into” (Kundera, 1987, p.10).

Marguerite Duras also advocated for and employed these multi-perspective and meta-narrative modes while writing her trauma fiction films; she explains that the exact force and characteristics of the survivor traumatic experience will never be retained on the screen, as “the experience is transmitted across positions: from victim to eyewitness to spectator” (Duras, 1991). Hence, she combined multiple testimonial voices and discourses, all of which attempt to depict the co-presence of the extremes of war and the everyday life of Holocaust survivors from various perspectives. This meta-narrative strategy also coincides with Caruth’s contention that “trauma narrative should preserve both the unaccountability and referentiality of historical trauma” (Caruth, 1996, p. 29).

Furthermore, Kaplan maintains that

To write about or to film traumatic circumstances requires that one approach the core of the event and try to relate it to other significant events that may be able to withstand its power. The effort to tell the story of the event bears witness to the desire to re-establish a significant world. The task of imagining the events and giving them significant form belongs to the artist. The artist is the prophet of forms. And when forms are in radical disarray, the artist suggests patterns of reordering, even if, in the process, seeming to contribute to their further disarray.

(Kaplan, 2004, p. 174)

In consequence, the film characters were formed by intersecting narratives, either from the shared individual interviews or the secondary data of my research on the realities of these trauma survivors. I then applied this research to the character's fictional worlds to support revealing them as products of social praxis.

b) Semi-fictionalised ethnography and domestic auto-ethnography

As explained earlier, auto-ethnography is integrated into the qualitative research of this film project. Anthropologist Reed-Danahay defines auto-ethnography as a genre of autobiography, because it is a “form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). Autobiography in film emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as filmmaking was radically changing in response to social changes brought about by the civil rights, anti-war, student and feminist movements. Michael Renov describes this autobiographical mediation of cultural and historical in his book *The Subject Of Documentary* as being “suffused with the performance of subjectivities” (Renov, 2004, p. 177). Catherine Russell (1999) notes that

autobiography “becomes an auto-ethnography where the filmmaker understands his/her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes”. Auto-ethnography, therefore, is not only a form in which the filmmaker is technically involved but also an “art of memory” and mediation of socio-political events (1999, p. 276). Humphreys and Watson coined the term *semi-fictionalised ethnography*, which “restructures events occurring within one or more observations into a single narrative using devices drawn from fictional writing” (Humphreys and Watson, 2009, p. 50).

The second method I have used is Michael Renov’s concept of domestic ethnography, which he describes as a kind of autobiographical practice that interrogates the self and documents the lives of close others (1994, p. 216). Likewise, Mariam’s narrative is a semi-autobiography of reconstructed events juxtaposed with other two shared narratives, which are in fact from two of my closest friends over the past twenty years. In many ways we have been co-witnesses of each other’s lives, setbacks and healing. Thus, the three accounts were integrated into building the narrative and the character of Mariam.

There were several reasons for the decision to interweave other narratives with my auto-biography. The first was to avoid any vicarious traumatising to either of the two participants, which may have resulted from a single narrative being fully presented on screen. As Kaplan asserts, “testimony is the symptom of trauma; it is where and how the force of trauma is felt. Therefore, trauma narratives should also be presented by their fictional avatars” (Kaplan, 2006). The second reason was that neither my autobiography nor the other two narratives were sufficiently coherent to be fully narrated and filmed. Felman points out that a testimony does not offer an all-encompassing recounting of the traumatic event, as the event itself is inaccessible, and the survivor can only ever give a glimpse into the memories of an

overwhelming event. Many scholars accepted the impossibility of full representation of a testimony. For Felman, testimony is a “discursive practice, as opposed to a pure theory” (Felman, 1995, p. 13).

Marguerite Duras (1991) also explains that the meta-narrative mode of writing trauma fiction has solved the problem of symbolising trauma by using multiple testimonial voices and discourses, all of which attempt to reach the reality and everyday life of the trauma survivor from various perspectives. Duras applies her auto-biographical experience of witnessing the Holocaust and its impact on her husband to her film writings, naming this process a “personal realism”, which helped mediate the voids between the shared narratives and the film characters. Freud termed this concept “screen memory” to denote any memory which functions to hide any past unconscious mental content (Freud, 1901).

Last but not least, integrating the shared accounts into my autobiography coincides with Kaplan’s concept of witnessing, which “takes the Other’s subjectivity as a starting point, not as something to be ignored or denied” (Kaplan, 2004). It also concurs with Laub’s concept of “inner witness” in which in one’s relations to others is mirrored in oneself. Laub explains that “through the other I witness myself, and through me the other is attested”. He added that the “conscience mirrors the self-representation in its communication with others, and the witness within oneself cannot be sustained without an external witness” (Laub, 1995). Likewise, in many ways, I realised that my self-representation and narrative was co-dependent on the knowledge of the other two accounts narrated and presented in this chapter.

c) The borrowing approach

Gardner turned a story into a film plot “by borrowing some traditional plot or an action from real life ... by working his way back from the story’s climax; or by groping his way forward from an initial situation’ (1991, p. 72). For Gardner, borrowing also means limiting choices to the most dramatic events or the repetitive events found between narratives, and that even when borrowing a real story, the author still needs the continuum of imagination and observation so that he can imagine himself into the characters’ minds and make the narrative come alive. He explains that “the roots of any character lie in your observations of yourself and of other people, those observations are refracted through your imagination” (p. 75).

2. Eder’s tool for analysing characters

Jens Eder’s heuristic model, the ‘clock of character”, was borrowed to analyse the process of translating the shared narratives into the film characters. The model helps to analyse the film characters as “identifiable fictional beings with an inner life that exist as communicatively constructed artifacts” (Edser, 2010, p. 10). The model distinguishes four aspects of the characters: as artifact, fictional being, symbol and symptom. A character’s artifact is the audio-visual information and shared accounts that helped to shape them. Fictional being is the act of illustrating characters in the film’s world, describing their behaviour and their mental and social worlds. The symbol demonstrates the representative nature of each character – who the character stands for in the external world. Symptoms explain the effects of trauma on behaviour and how these traumas are produced by the characters’ socio-cultural circumstances.

Creating Mariam

Artifact

Mariam's portrait is formed and affected by the socio-political unrest that occurred after the Egyptian revolution. UNHCR archives show that thousands of Egyptian families and young couples emigrated during or after the Egyptian revolution (UNHCR.com). The first two years after the Egyptian revolution bore witness to many economic and political fluctuations, including the shift from the Mubarak regime, changes to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, and the election of an Islamist President (Carnegieendowment.org). As a result, a division between the political Islamic parties, the liberal parties and other social forces has emerged to threaten peace. Sectarian tensions, together with the deterioration of safety and economic conditions, have led to a wave of emigration by Egyptians of both religions. Statistics from the American Embassy show that an average of 350,000 families voluntarily left Egypt the year after the revolution (Zohry, 2013).

Amid the Arab Spring chaos, two members of my family (my mother and my sister) were granted an immigrant visa by the American Embassy in 2013 and began their move to the USA, along with my father too. However, I could not join them as I have exceeded the permitted age so I had to remain in Egypt. During the past eight years, I have encountered many situations in which I felt that the only way to see my family was to attempt to claim political asylum in the USA. But I repeatedly battled and rejected this route, and faced the consequences of living alone in fear in a turbulent city with the social stigma faced by a single woman living in Egypt separated from her family.

Mariam is inspired by my personal setback of suddenly living in exile in my own country after the departure of family and friends. Mariam's character was also influenced by

the end of my six-month stay in the USA, after which I was legally obliged to leave, even though I was still scared to return to Egypt alone. Similarly, Mariam is a single Egyptian woman who lives alone in Egypt during the phase of upheaval immediately after the revolution, battling with her day-to-day life in a patriarchal society. Although Mariam's familial condition in the film is different from mine, I have incorporated my memories of living alone in Egypt as a single woman without a male guardian into building Mariam's psyche, pressures and setbacks.

The other two participants who shaped the character of Mariam also had different familial conditions but they were forced to leave Egypt and file for asylum under similar socio-political pressures after the Arab Spring.

The second narrative account: Miss Nagy

The second narrative account that shaped the character of Mariam is 34-year-old Miss Nagy whose parents separated when she was 16 because of her father's alcoholism. In 2012, at the age of 24, she emigrated alone to the USA and filed for asylum. She stayed at the home of her father's sister for few years until she settled on her own. Miss Nagy explained that the reunion with her aunt had subconsciously forced her to confront her father's wound, which I have interpreted as her "second event" that re-enacts the original trauma of her father's abandonment, as denoted by Freud.

Before traveling to the USA, Miss Nagy went to visit her father in her childhood apartment. She never saw him again and six years later, her father died in this same apartment.

Before Miss Nagy's recovery, she explained that she was full of rage at her father's failure and her mother's passiveness. After she had had several emotional attachments to toxic

partners, she realised that she had internalised her father's absence as rejection, which made her bond with men whose behaviour and habits resembled her father's. These partners would temporarily play the alternative father in her life then leave when she tried to fix them. After seven failed relationships, she began to realise the patterns in her emotional relations and started to work through the trauma of her abandonment and father wound.

It is important to highlight Freud's concept of "substitution and transference" of trauma, which he called "despicable energies". In this process, survivors of complex trauma transfer their wounds from caregivers onto their partners and seek compensation from them (Freud, 1923). Freud interpreted this vicious pattern of re-enactments of abusive relations as a compulsion repetition that causes the experience of a trauma to continue to repeat itself "exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (Caruth, 1995, p. 2).

Therefore, I have adapted the compulsion repetition of toxic relationships and their reflection of the father absence in Mariam's narrative.

The film narrative also shows that Mariam's parents are separated, and that her relationship with her mother is charged and complicated. I have also adapted Miss Nagy's meeting with her aunt to Mariam's meeting with her uncle in Alexandria. The film narrative portrays the last meeting with the father as an act of forgiveness and confrontation with the past and childhood wounds.

Third narrative account: Miss Shaker

The third account is that of 41-year-old Miss Shaker who lived in Egypt with her mother after her father's death. According to her account, the sudden absence of the male figure in her life

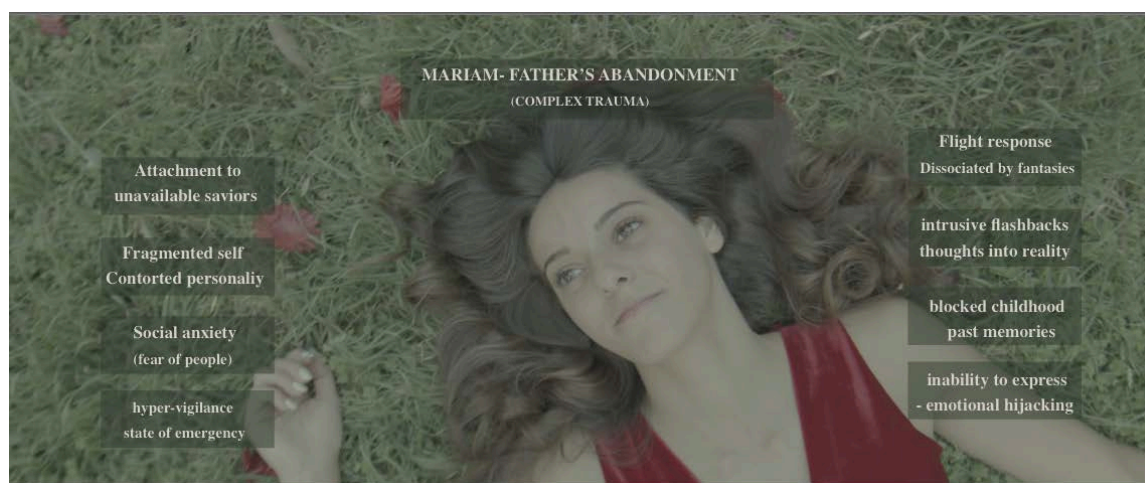
opened the door for toxic partners to become the dominant male figure in her daily life. Even though none of these men was socially or financially compatible, she still found it hard to reject them. Herman says that “in the aftermath of a death event, the survivor needs a symbolic world to be refashioned” and the drive to restore order pushes the survivor to seek an instant compensation (Herman, 1992, p. 30). However, after several failed relationships, Miss Shaker travelled with her mother to join her sister and extended family in the USA. At the age of 36 she filed for asylum and began her life anew. She explained that at the beginning of her stay in the USA, she was bitter and resentful of how her life had turned out and of the years lost with the wrong men, but then she met Jamal (the second character in the film) who listened to her story and witnessed her pain and healing testimony. After Jamal sees her have having a panic attack while driving at night drive, Miss Shaker urges Jamal to accompany her at night to help combat her fears. Her renewed circle has helped her to revisit her victimised self and empower her autonomy. Both Miss Shaker and Jamal currently work in a hospital emergency room and live independent lives.

Correspondingly, I have adapted the meeting of Miss Shaker and Jamal to Mariam and Jean’s meeting and have incorporated the process of “double telling” into the film to show the healing that this new connection has brought.

In conclusion, Mariam’s character represents Arab women who are living without a male guardian in their paternalistic societies. Normally, much social pressure is placed on Arab women who live without a male guardian (whether a father or a husband), and in many respects they are forced to live a second-class life. Mariam’s complex trauma is shaped by the tension caused by the absence of, and her attachment to, a male figure (her father) and the wound of his abandonment. Herman states that complex trauma survivors “recreate their caregivers

internally” to the extent that even if their caregivers abuse them, they tolerate these abusive relations; if they were belittled or rejected by the caregiver, they would feel the same towards themselves. Yet survivors often fail to articulate these internal ties and the way they impact their realities (Herman, 1992).

Fictional being



Mariam is a single Egyptian playwright who lives alone in Egypt after her mother’s emigration and her father’s abandonment fifteen years previously. She depicts the complex (developmental) trauma resulting from her father’s abandonment of her and grew up lacking a male figure in her patriarchal society. The absence of her father has ushered in a series of predicaments that she has had to face on her own, including social hostility, gender discrimination and unfair dismissal at work, rejection by her lover’s family, as well as augmented fears and social anxieties. Mariam tends to combat her bitter reality through writing, fantasies and binge watching.

Mariam’s flight response to her trauma often leads her to dissociate from her reality by daydreaming of an alternative reality (Herman, 1992, p. 32). Her sense of abandonment causes

her to be constantly in a hyper-vigilant state, always expecting loss or harm.

Through her writing, Mariam attempts to self-heal and to find meaning in the unjust situations of her story. However, she never realises how her present is affected continually by the childhood wounds to her psyche.

Symbols

Mariam is a universal portrait of daughters without fathers who grow up with a father wound. Her sequence in the film reveals the psychological effects of these invisible wounds on the survivor's soul, their self-image and their quality of life. Mariam's sequence also represents the initial state of acting out of trauma, the black hole of isolation, self-depreciation, emotional hijacking, intrusive re-enactments of painful situations and augmented fears that tend to interfere with her present and dictate her future. Moreover, as a playwright, Mariam represents the significance of the narrative trauma therapy developed by White and Epston in 1989. Narrative therapy encourages trauma survivors to write their story in the voice of another character. In this way, survivors start externalising previously internalised issues and begin to realise the difference between their past, present and future selves (About Narrative Therapy, n.d.org). Characters attempting to situate their interpersonal trauma through testimonial writing in film include Stingo in *Sophie's Choice* (1982), Jo in *Little Women* (1994), and Marguerite in *The Memoir of War* (2017), which is based on the life of the author Marguerite Duras.

Symptoms

a) Mariam's flashbacks

Mariam's maladaptive coping mechanism caused her to react to her trauma with the flight response, leading her to dissociate from reality as a method of "bypassing the outrage" of her

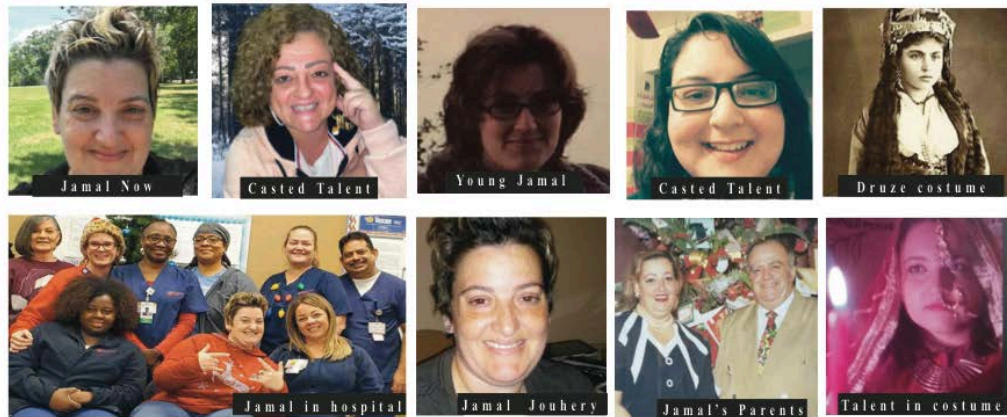
wounds, past abandonments and disappointments (Herman, 1995, p. 135). Herman states that these fantasies “perform as a mirror image of her traumatic memory” and Mariam often suffers episodes of emotional hijacking and intrusive flashbacks from her past. Herman interprets such flashbacks as prolonged regressions into the intense states aroused by childhood neglect, including fear, alienation, or grief that could not yet be processed (Herman, 1992. p. 22).

The experience of complex trauma manifests as “losing oneself” (Herman, 1992, p. 15) and in Mariam’s case the successive abandonments and rejections by parents, employers and ex-lovers have caused a deep sense of loss in her agency and purpose in life. She feels a sense of rootlessness in the world, moving from place to place with a wandering spirit and an orphaned psyche. Herman writes that complex trauma survivors also develop a psychological barrier to self-disclosure and sometimes regret narrating their stories (1992, p. 28). Nevertheless, “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (p. 19). Although complex trauma survivors cannot acknowledge or name their problem, they may “experience intense emotion without associating them with a certain memory or an event” (p. 25).

Similarly, Mariam’s invisible trauma “floats free of a specific event” (p. 25). Because she does not know how to articulate her story or recognise her anchor trauma, Mariam needs to meet the other two characters of the film to witness and to be able to reflect on her life story and to process her trauma within a safe environment. As indicated by Laub, “it is only in the process of bearing witness or narration that the story of the trauma comes into being” (Laub, 1995). Herman stresses that no one can face trauma alone, asserting that trauma needs an “addressable other” who can “mirror or testify to the unknown and unintegrated aspects of the traumatic experience” (Herman, 1992).

Creating Jean

Real characters and their actors



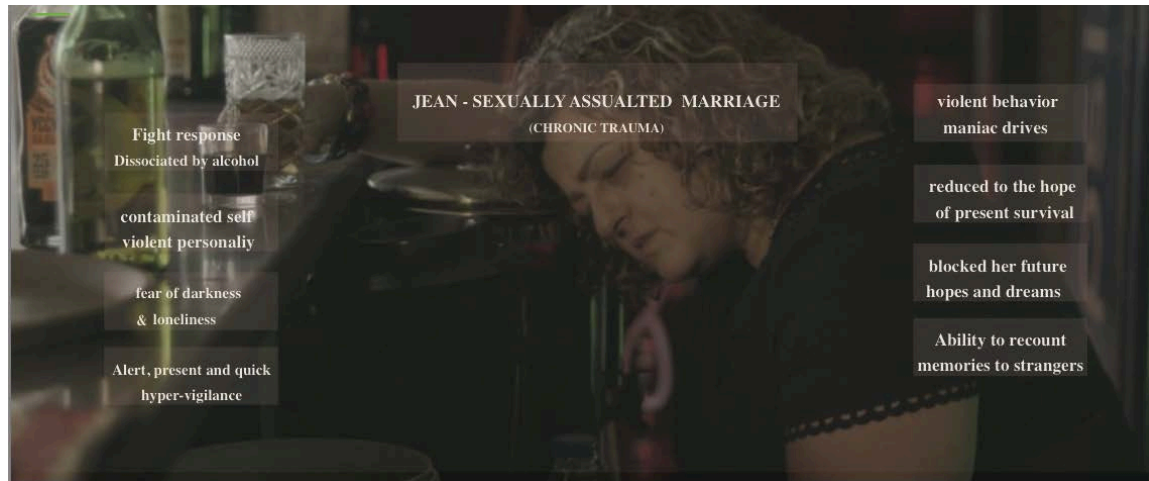
The character's artifacts

Jean's character is inspired by the real story of interviewee Miss Eljouhery, who is a 46-year-old Lebanese woman, a former chef and restaurant owner who currently lives and works in Texas as a hospital emergency room registrar.

Miss Eljouhery comes from a Druze family whose beliefs incorporate elements of Ismailism, Gnosticism and other philosophies. The Druze are a secretive community so they are not allowed to disclose their views or the consequences of their family traditions to strangers. Marriage is used as a method to maintain traditions and religious beliefs from one generation to the next (Rohland, 2008) and so at the age of 17. She was forced by her father into marrying a rich Druze man who was known to be a restaurant owner in Italy. She could not object to her father's wishes. After the wedding, she travelled with her husband to Italy only to discover that he was a fraud who worked in prostitution and who married her to steal her father's gold and wealth. To this end, her husband used sexual violence against her, coming one night with two other men to gang rape her. Thinking her dead, he left alone in the house, but

she managed to escape. With nowhere else to go, she returned, eventually staying at her neighbour's home where she earned money for a ticket to Lebanon by painting her house. When she reached Lebanon, she could not tell her family of her marital experience for fear that her brothers would assault her. Repressing anger and in need of love and care, she began to dress and talk like a man. The need for love and empathy drove her into sexual relations with her female friends. When her parents found out, they sent her away from Lebanon to prevent her bringing more shame upon their family. So she travelled alone to the USA and filed for asylum. After a while, all of her family escaped the civil wars of Lebanon and travelled to Liberia where her father opened a restaurant. He called Miss Jouhery to help him run the restaurant, so she dropped her asylum application and joined him in Liberia. There she worked for many years as the restaurant's chef and used alcohol to cope with her pains and the demands of work. When war broke out in Liberia, the restaurant was burnt down and the family escaped into a life of roaming from place to place. Miss Jouhery travelled back to the USA and currently lives there with her two siblings. She has also changed her career and she now works as a registrar in a hospital emergency room.

Fictional being



Jean, a 46-year-old Lebanese chef working in Mariam's uncle's restaurant portrays chronic trauma survivor brought on by sexual incest. Jean's father forced her into an early and abusive marriage when she was 17 years old, and when she finally escaped it, her family forced her into exile in Egypt because of her violent outbursts and anger issues. Unlike Mariam, who is fixated on fantasies, Jean lives in the present moment, "her life is reduced to the goal of survival, with a foreshortened sense of future" (Herman, 1992, p. 63). Although she has managed to forgive her perpetrators, she is still living in the shadow of her past. Jean finds comfort only by enslaving herself in the kitchen and consuming an excessive alcohol intake.

Jean finds gradual freedom from her chronic fears after narrating her story to Mariam and meeting Dima and Massa, who are characters more vulnerable and in need than she. Mariam also would benefit from listening to Jean's story, as it would revise her victimised self and provide her with the motives to forgive her father. As noted by Laub, "consciousness or the inner witness mirrors the self in its communication with others" and "[w]itnessing can be conceptualised as the companionship of an 'inner' and an 'outer' witness," the 'inner witness' is self-reflecting on the narrator's story while the 'outer witness is establishing a co-presence

with the narrator's trauma and validating their pains" (Laub, 1995).

Symbol

Jean represents sexually assaulted victims and survivors of domestic violence. While gender-based violence is a universal problem, the situation is particularly dismal in the Arab region because of the deeply rooted traditional patriarchal culture (Bouhila, 2018).

Domestic violence became a public concern in the MENA region even before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to an Arab Barometer survey conducted in 2018–2019, 15% of households across the MENA region report cases of domestic violence, while others stay silent to protect the family. Researcher Donia Bouhila along with the Arab Barometer institute record that the rate of domestic violence is 82% in Lebanon, 72% in Egypt, 71% in Morocco, and 66% in Algeria (Bouhila, 2018).

Bouhila also demonstrated in her research 'Sexual Harassment and Domestic Violence in the Middle East and North Africa' that family shaming and victim blaming are also very common phenomena within Arab societies, where blame is often placed on victims of sexual assault (Bouhila, 2018). Herman states that most families "may show little tolerance for the survivor's outrage or may swallow up her anger in their own quest for revenge" (1992, p. 34). What is more, these societies do not allow victims to mourn, ask for justice, or even externalise their feelings, so chronic trauma survivors often take many years to recover from this "double traumatisation" first by their perpetrators, and then by their families and social circle (1992, p. 35).

Herman's work further reveals that chronic trauma survivors do not share their experiences with their families even after their liberation, although they may talk to strangers who offer empathy without questioning their story, thus emphasising the importance of empathetic listening to the victim's recovery (1992, p. 32). Jean's conversation with Mariam illustrates the double telling stage identified by Caruth (1995, p. 7), that is, how the process of active listening exposes the cycle of abuse, and how victims become mentally controlled and emotionally manipulated.

Symptoms

Herman explains that chronically traumatised survivors are continually in a hyper-vigilant and agitated state, and tend to live with a psychological constriction that applies to all aspects of life from relationships to thoughts, memories and emotions (1992, p. 63). Correspondingly, Jean's trauma is seen in her fight response, which manifests itself in her tendency to remain busy and avoid intimacy with others. In so doing, she has enclosed her life in the restaurant to avoid interacting with the external world. Jean also subconsciously intimidates others to avoid triggering any interaction or emotional attachments.

Herman adds that because chronic survivors cannot easily dissociate, they tend to struggle with addiction and self-regulation issues and become prone to developing harmful "numbing effects" through substance abuse (1992, pp. 32, 62). As in the real-life story of Jamal Eljouhery, Jean is addicted to alcohol, although she never gets drunk, thus preserving her hyper-alert mind.

Herman also indicates that chronic survivors may complain of somatic symptoms when triggered, as "they no longer recognise the connection between their bodily distress symptoms

and the climate of terror in which these symptoms were formed” (1992, p. 29). In the film, Jean has a chronic phobia of the darkness and night drives, which cause panic attacks and many of the symptoms listed by Herman, such as breathing difficulty, choking sensations and a rapid heartbeat (p. 30). Illustrating how years of captivity come to dominate a survivor’s internal world years after liberation, Herman points out that “the victim may continue to fear her former abductor”, that she may live with the sense that her “perpetrator is still present, even after liberation”, and has the expectation that he will eventually hunt her down (p. 66).

Unlike Mariam and Dima who were reluctant to share their stories, Jean can recount her story to Mariam. This process of externalising the traumatic memory into a trauma narrative will, as Harman asserts, greatly help in improving her PTSD symptoms and regaining her sense of recompense and social justice (p. 32).

Herman also discusses the significance of occupational therapy in the recovery of trauma survivors (p. 32). Jamal recounted how she found healing through her new occupation and how her work as a registrar in the emergency room enabled her to benefit from helping others. Herman argues that a survivor’s self-recovery is boosted when occupational therapy generates a renewed faith in her personal strength and self-actualisation (p. 40).

Creating Dima

Doaa el zamel and Massa, Raghad's story - creating Dima



Artifact

Dima (which means warrior) represents the story of a Syrian refugee. Her narrative is inspired by the real story of Doaa Elzamel, one of the few survivors of the shipwreck incident of September 2014. Melissa Fleming, the UNHCR chief spokesperson, recounts Doaa's story in her 2017 book *A Hope More Powerful than the Sea*. Fleming tells how Doaa and her family escaped the civil wars of Syria and travelled to Egypt where Doaa met her fiancé Bassem. At Bassem's urging, they were smuggled out of Alexandria to Italy. During their voyage, the smugglers forced the passengers to change boats, and the boat Doaa and Bassem were on sank. Doaa could not swim, so Bassem found a child's inflatable life ring that she could climb into. On the second day after the wreck, a man begged Doaa to hold his granddaughter Malek before he drowned. Floating aimlessly with Bassem with the bodies of the dead bumping around them, Doaa held Malak with one hand and Bassem in the other, but after a while Bassem slipped under the water in front of her eyes. After Bassem's death, a woman swam to Doaa and entrusted her with her two-year-old daughter Massa. Doaa spent four days in the sea, holding the two infants who were nearing death. Eventually, a merchant ship rescued her and the ten

remaining survivors out of the original 500 passengers. Sadly, Malak died a few hours after her rescue, but Massa survived. Doaa reached Greece and was credited by the Greek embassy for her bravery in saving the young infants.

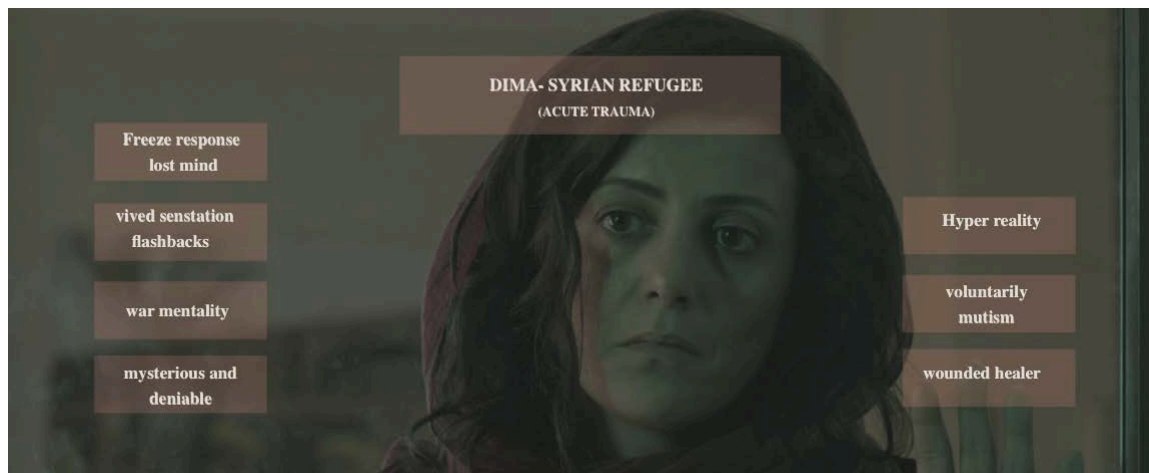
The UNCHR arranged for Doaa and her family to reside in Sweden where she still lives and studies. Massa was also reunited with her uncle who lives in Sweden too. A film by Steven Spielberg telling the story of her journey from Syria to Egypt and Sweden is currently in development.

Dima's story adds the threads to the layer of collective and acute trauma into the film. She reflects the current refugee crisis and the growing diaspora of families in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. UNHCR reports show that Syrians constitute the largest displacement of refugees in the world. Their registers show that there are around 6.5 million Syrian refugees around the world, 12 million of whom are internally displaced, and 3.6 million of whom are in Egypt (Unrefugees.org).

However, as I focus in this film on the aftermath phase of the traumatic event, I have cemented Dima's story by integrating other similar accounts of people who have lost loved ones at sea but found a means to heal and survive. One such story that inspired Dima's character is that of Raghad, who was interviewed by UNHCR Egypt with her family (*Refugees voices from Egypt: Raghad's Dream*, 2017). Raghad is a young Syrian refugee who currently lives in Cairo with her family. She recounts in her interview that she was only married for 40 days before her husband was killed in strikes on Damascus. After his death, Raghad's family sought refuge in Egypt. However, her father decided to smuggle the family out of Alexandria when he found he could not make a living to support them. However, the family were caught

and arrested by the Egyptian Coast Guard, and remained in Egypt. Raghad explained that she uses art and painting as a form of therapy to regain her hope for the future, saying “I draw things I miss, things I’ve lost, and things I need” (*Refugees voices from Egypt: Raghad’s Dream*, 2017).

Fictional being



Dima is a silent and mysterious character who represents voluntarily muteness, “psychic numbing” and the freeze response to trauma described by Laub (1995). Laub explains that the loss of language and disconnection from others is a notable symptom of war survivors because traumatic memories of acute trauma often lack verbal narrative and context.

Since Dima’s memory is in a phase of temporary amnesia after the accident, she gradually remembers flashes and moments of her accident only in scattered “vivid sensations and images” that re-enact “a heightened reality’ in her mind, as described by Laub. The spectator thus pieces together Dima’s backstory and narrative through these intrusive fleeting flashbacks, hyper-arousals and haunting images.

Dima's flashbacks reveal that she followed her fiancé's plan to smuggle themselves out of Egypt to Italy, despite her fears of the sea and her inability to swim. The ship eventually capsizes and she loses her fiancé after he saves her life. Dima is saved only by the presence of Massa (who appears in the film narrative as her sister). However, the final scene of the film will reveal that Massa is not Dima's biological sister but an unaccompanied child whom Dima has saved during the shipwreck.

Symbol

Dima symbolises the Syrian female refugee who recently lost her male guardian amid the chaos of war. She is a survivor of acute trauma triggered by the loss of a loved one in an accident, as per Herman (1992). She portrays the trauma of survival through silence and isolation, which extends to the freeze response and dissociation from her present reality and place (Herman, 1992, p. 134; Laub, 1991, p. 64).

Studies and reports by UNHCR have revealed that silence is a collective symptom among Syrian refugees (UNHCR.org). Laura Silvia Battaglia, an index editor in Italy who reports refugee narratives, indicates that self-censorship by asylum seekers often starts with the psychological shock of their past realities and arises from the expectancy of safety from their host communities. Some remain silent to avoid the shame of recounting the unspeakable, others are afraid to be judged and misunderstood, while some others think it is enough for them to feel alive again and that they don't want to rock the boat again (Battaglia, 2018).

The aesthetics of silence in conjunction with anti-narrative strategies was a pervasive theme in the post-Second World War cinema. Films such as *Persona* by Ingmar Bergman (1966) and *Aventura* by Antonioni (1960) utilise silence to represent the effect of trauma or to

set a distant tone to their film's characters and environments. Some Arab films have also used the anti-narrative strategy to develop plot, such as *Incendies* by Denis Villeneuve (2010), and as a representation of trauma, such as *Obscure* by Soudade Kadadin (2017). Sontag (2017) affirms that "images will invite the spectator to identify with what is seen, while the presence of words makes the spectator into a critic" regardless of whether silence is a result of political oppression or familial pressure, and advocates the representation of unfathomed war trauma through image, sound, editing and lighting rather than dialogue (Sontag, 2003).

According to Kaplan's ethics of witnessing, Dima's inability to narrate her trauma invites the spectator to function as a witness and to engage the audience in a process of empathetic witnessing beyond her political position and narrative (Kaplan, 2005, p. 19).

Dima's portrait is also as a reflection of Mariam and Jean's restless psyche and wandering spirit. Even though they are not legally classed as refugees, their familial conditions have imbued them with a sense of having been orphaned and of refugee alienation within their communities. Dima's portrait also asserts that collective trauma is inseparable from interpersonal trauma, and that it is the collapse of family ties that shapes and enroots personal trauma and the war wound. As Laub (1995) notes, "one perceives, thinks, feels, and does in relation to others".

Dima's survival method is to function as the wounded healer (Jung, 1961; Herman, 1992) to Massa. Herman defines this healing approach as the "survivor mission" where the survivor can only "feel alive and cared for themselves while taking care of others" (1992, p. 150). Dima's portrait also accords with the concepts of witnessing by Kaplan (2004) and "regarding the pain of others" by Sontag (2004), which are crucial for self-healing, revisiting

the victimised self and self-regeneration.

Symptoms

As illustrated, Dima's trauma manifests itself in the freeze response where survivors aim to evade a potential danger or wish for it to pass as quickly as possible (Herman 1992, p. 15). As demonstrated by Lifton (1984), this "psychic numbing" or "turning off" is universal among "survivors of disaster, war, or loss of a beloved one in accidents: and represents a "paralysis of the mind". Consequently, the "disremembering" that characterises Dima's traumatic memory is displayed on screen as the regaining of a lost memory, explained by Caruth (1995) as "the revisiting of the lingering unprocessed memories through scattered and quick flashes of the traumatic incidents".

Melancholia and the obsessive re-enactment of trauma prevent recovery and mental processing until the survivor decides to deliberately work through of trauma instead of trying to escape from it (Herman, 1992, p. 130), hence Dima's reluctance to reveal her story. Instead, her narrative is traced through her disassociation and memory fragmentation. Herman's studies and the shared accounts reveal that a person's attachment to silence equates to their attachment to a lost person. They prefer to retain their melancholia and memories and may guilty if they let it go (p. 36).

Creating Massa

Artifact

Massa's character is a portrait of the unaccompanied "lost child" amid the chaos of the Arab Spring. UNHCR records show that 40% of the world's displaced population are children.

Documents from Refworld.org show that in 2013 there were 2,440 unaccompanied or separated

children in Lebanon and 1,320 in Jordan. Recent UNHCR records show that there are over 3,700 Syrian children in Jordan and Lebanon living without one or both parents, and with no adult caregivers at all. In some cases, the parents have died, been arrested or have sent their children into exile alone out of fear for their safety (unhcr.org). Furthermore, Eurostat's 2019 report states that 19,835 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the 28 countries of the European Union during 2018 (amnesty.org).

Legal authorities do not always succeed in placing unaccompanied children with a long-term loving family. The refugee council reports that many governments' policies also prevent the reunification of refugee children with their families. Consequently, there are numerous relief groups and host communities that initiate assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. These NGOs help asylum seekers with their legal stay and housing situation and aid them in rebuilding their lives through mental health and occupational support (Amnestyinternational.org).

Massa and Dima represent this initial limbo state of refugees who are trying to cope with their new land, reality and occupational world. Massa's character is mainly cemented by the real character of Massa, one of the two infants saved by Doaa Elzamel from the shipwreck of 2014. Fleming (2017) tells how Doaa would massage the fists of the infants and sing for them to keep them warm and awake. Doaa felt such a strong bond with the infants that she began to think of herself as their mother and their survival became more significant to her than her own. She said in an interview with the *Daily Mail* that "It was the sense of responsibility towards saving these two infants that helped me survive and resist death till the end" (dailymail.uk).

It is important to highlight that the UNHCR reports that two children drown every day trying to cross the eastern Mediterranean to find safety with their families in Europe (UNHCR, 2017). Recent tests by UNHCR revealed that war zone and displacement were the factors most strongly associated with PTSD symptoms among Syrian children. Many Syrian children have witnessed death first hand and suffered abandonment, neglect and abuse in Syria or later in the refugee camps (Procaccini, 2016). In the light of this knowledge, the characters and the relationship between Massa and Dima developed from the issue of whether Massa had any living relatives. I thought that Massa would have resumed her life as Dima's sister and lived as one of her family members.

Fictional being



Six-year-old Massa is a Syrian refugee who plays the sister of Dima in the film. She represents cumulative trauma – the experience of multiple types of traumas in one's lifetime (Samuels-Dennis *et al.*, 2010). Massa has lost her family during the shipwreck and remains an attentive silent witness, not yet fully aware of her family's death. Freud asserts that traumatic symptoms

are not merely “the forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the person gets away “apparently unharmed’ (Caruth 1991, p. 17). Hence, Massa is experiencing temporary amnesia or delayed stress syndrome, the latency period as denoted by Caruth.

Although Massa has stored many horrific images of death from the shipwreck incident, she gradually begins to comprehend and process her family’s loss through her drawings and by sending letter boats to her family. As identified by Freud and noted by Caruth, Massa has stored the experience of the accident as “an inherent latency within the experience itself in which the experience will be revisited and repeated after its forgetting” (Caruth, 1991, p. 11).

Massa’s character mainly represents a transitional figure who bridges the characters’ damaged past and the rebuilding of their future. Thereby, she is central to their self-reconstruction, bereavement and healing. Massa also depicts the wounded inner child of the characters who all suffer the family wound and social alienation. She also depicts their first state of unconsciousness (inherited latency/temporary amnesia) in which they are not yet aware of their losses or of the trauma inflicted on their psyches (Caruth, 1991, p. 17). Nevertheless, Massa’s presence helps each character reconnect with their wounded inner child. She refreshes Mariam’s longing for her father by reminding her of her childhood, she reminds Jean of her dreams of having a family and forces her to drive at night. But most importantly, Massa helps Dima to hold on to life rather than drowning in her own grief. Massa, in her final scene, is also the personification of intergenerational trauma and the legacy of a trauma that has yet to be acknowledged and confronted. Retrieving an absent or belated memory shows how historical or generational trauma is in some sense presupposed in the theory of individual trauma (p. 136).

Symbol

Many international films in trauma cinema have adopted the figure of the innocent war child in their trauma narratives. Lury (2010) states that the figure of the “lost child” has held a key position in post-war discourse since the wars of 1945.

Italian Neorealist and Holocaust films such as *Pasia* (1946) by Roberto Rossellini and *Schindler’s List* (1994) by Steven Spielberg, respectively, as well as many other films, utilise the figure of the lost child to portray the impact of war, persecution and loss on the lives of children and the nation (Lury, 2010, p. 5).

Recently, a few Arab films have also featured the figure of lost child, such as *Capernaum* (2018) by Nadine Labaki and the documentary *For Sama* by Waad ElKaateeb (2019). Both films rely on the lost child or war child figure to broach the impact of the destruction of war on their realities and psyche. The encoding of lost war child traumatised into film invites the audience into a “powerfully affective interweaving of history, memory and witness; instead of just offering facts of war, the point of view of the child raises the question of the future identity of nations and individuals, and highlights the temporal gap between the future, the past and the present that is left by war and persecution (Lury, 2010, p. 7).

Massa’s figure in the film narrative depicts trauma in its belated response and accentuates the notion that childhood is a phase of witnessing in which children store memories that will later affect their futures and shape their psyches (Herman, 1992, p. 7). Thus, the character of Massa seamlessly invites the characters and the audience “to a process of traumatic remembering, which is essential for the identity reconstruction” while affirming that “an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history” (p. 2). It can

therefore be said that Massa's presence in the film highlights the link between the process of remembering and the re-founding of identity (Lury, 2010, p. 7).

Symptoms

Massa is a witness to war and murder. Despite the high levels of potential psychopathology recorded in Syrian children, only 32.1% of Syrian children are able to narrate or report their negative experience (UNHCR.org). Massa, like many of these Syrian children, is traumatised into silence, stuck in a freeze response that leaves her rarely able to speak or react, while also suffering from breathing difficulties brought about by near-drowning experience (Fleming, 2017, p. 250).

Children's silence is attributable to the frequency of negative experiences they have witnessed as part of their daily lives. Because they cannot differentiate a negative experience from a normal event, they often have difficulty articulating and comprehending these events. Their large number of non-responses may also indicate that they find it uncomfortable to disclose their experiences for personal and/or social reasons (Perkins *et al.*, 2018).

Art therapy has been highly effective in treating the cumulative trauma of traumatised children and Syrian refugees (Lyshak-Stelzer *et al.*, 2007). Art therapy also helps therapists to determine children's trauma-related symptomology and access their emotions (Talwar, 2007) and non-verbal memories (Johnson, 1987). Art therapy has also helped in the reconstruction of the trauma experience and in moving beyond the traumatic incident (Gantt and Tinnin, 2007). For this reason, I have used drawing as the initial therapeutic tool for Massa's trauma processing. When we hear Massa's voice for the first time, she is dictating to Dima a letter for her parents.

3. Reflecting on the shared narratives and finding the film's theme



From the thematic analysis of the shared narratives and the literature review, it was found that patriarchy, displacement, social alienation and family wounds are the common themes of Arab female trauma (Hassounnah and Kulwicki, 2007). It also became apparent that there is a direct relation between wars violence and domestic violence, and between political unrest and family separation and displacement to the diaspora. During political unrest, Arab women submit to their male guardian's decisions and accede to the demands of their male relatives, thereafter viewing themselves through the stereotypical lens of oppression and social constraint (Mojahed and Alaidarous, 2020).

Hassounnah and Kulwicki argue in their article 'The practice of Honor Crimes: A Glimpse of Domestic Violence In The Arab World' (2002) that there is an insidious desire for male validation that grows in the subconscious of any Arab girl. This self-questioning creates a growing systematic trauma that most Arab women are not aware of (Hassounnah and Kulwicki, 2007). Freud defined this autocratic inner voice as the superego. He explained in his theory of personality that the psyche is structured into the id, the ego and the superego, and that these three parts work together to create human behaviour. While the id and the ego are one's

preconscious and conscious self, the superego functions at the subconscious level to represent internalised ideals acquired from the father (as the cultural carrier) and other societal influences. It is the foundation through which voices of authority acquire their power; whether parental, educational or political. These voices of authority shape and affect the otherness of self, because they are fiercely imperative and suppress the urges of the id and the ego. Hence, the superego represses the drives of trauma and triggers anxiety and psychic unrest. Freud clarifies that supportive parents may help to form a supportive superego, while a harsh superego is more likely to be formed by emotionally or physically absent or abusive parents (Freud, 1923, vol. 19, p. 257). In this regard, it can be said that the shared antagonist of the film's characters is their superego whose voice, whether societal or parental, creates the fear that has long worked to drive or paralyse their lives. As such, the film aims to bring these voices of fear into consciousness, work through them, process them, and live beyond them.

Chapter 4: Translating examined theories into the film's script

Due to the incomprehensibility nature of trauma and its defying presence, there are several discourses on the possibility of narrating and representing trauma in literature and film studies. As examined earlier, the film borrows the genre of 'trauma fiction', as defined by Anne Whitehead in her book *Trauma Fiction*, Whitehead explains trauma fiction to be 'able to represent what 'cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives', as it can mimic 'its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, are characterized by repetition and indirection' (Whitehead, 2004 p.3 & 83) (2004, p.3 & 83). Furthermore, trauma fiction allows spectators to witness the characters' trauma through their fictional avatars, hence a safe 'cognitive distance' is established between the traumatized subject (the film character and the spectator). According to Kaplan 'ethics of witnessing, this 'deliberate distancing from the trauma subject' facilitate the self-reflexivity process for the viewer and promote a process of self-healing (Kaplan, 2005, p.5). For Joan Copjec, cinema in the self- reflexivity mode operates as a metaphor for self-awareness (Copjec 1988: 242). In the light of this knowledge, this chapter aims to analyze the narrative techniques and approaches researched and examined throughout the process of writing the film script. It is also significant to highlight the difference between the film's narrative structure which is established from the theoretical framework provided in chapter one and reexamined here in this chapter, and the narrative approach which have influenced my screenwriting research and the narrative techniques which are common film tools and methods such as various forms of flashback etc.

Three narrative structures are discussed and applied in the film's skeletal, the first is the theoretical framework drawn from Caruth's model of trauma (2004) and Herman stages of recovery (1992). The second is Kaplan's ethics of witnessing and the backstory wound plot (2005). These two narrative structures were clearly examined in chapter one. The third is the Hero's journey model by Joseph Campbell (1990) which also facilitate guiding the film's plot point. There are also four narrative approaches that guided the film's script, the first is the thematic approach for the acting out phase of trauma in Mariam's sequence. The second is the use of fragmentation for representing Mariam's narrative, the characterization method for representing Jean's narrative and the broken narrative for representing Dima's narrative. Then I will discuss various narrative techniques and methods I researched and applied on the film's scenes.

Patrick O'Neill defines narrative techniques in his book *Fictions of discourse: Reading Narrative theory*, as 'the devices of storytelling. He specifies that most approaches to narrative are divided 'between a *what* and a *how*' the *what* includes states, setting, characters, and events, while the *how* is the technique in which the *what* is presented' (Neil, 1996, p, 22). In the same vein the narrative techniques will be discussed by, clarifying what is aimed to be presented and how it is presented.

1) Narrative structures applied in the film's narrative

1.1 Re-examining the film's theoretical structure: the acting out and working through:

The film's narrative structure is divided into main two narrative threads; the first thread is the trauma narrative, featured in Mariam's sequence. It applies the experiential model of trauma laid by Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed experience* (1996). By which the characters initially engage in 'acting out' of their trauma, since their traumas aren't yet consciously recognized. The acting out phase is primarily performed in Mariam's sequence; it entails her isolation, dissociations and living in 'compulsion repetition' of her trauma. Yet, Mariam will encounter a deferred event of her anchor trauma known as the second event (Caruth, 1996, p.2). Important to highlight, the two others character will also initially exhibit traces of their repressed trauma till they are encountered with their second event (Caruth, 1995, p.4). Once the anchor trauma is exposed and acknowledged by the character, she is ready to initiate the process of working through her trauma. The second thread of the film, is the healing narrative which begins in act two, when Mariam meets Jean at the restaurant and they start the working through process of their traumas. The healing narrative applies Herman's Tri-phasic model of trauma recovery in her feminist text *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). According to Herman's recovered theories, the first stage is the social reconnection where the three characters meet in the restaurant and 'a complex mirroring process' occur (Herman, 1992 p. 94). The second stage is the recounting of past traumatic experiences, where Jean narrates her testimony and backstory to Mariam and they try to conclude a resolution for the past traumatic events. The third phase of trauma recovery is the self-

reconstruction, where each character is allowed to mourn and reconcile with her past, confront her fears and start rebuilding her identity beyond her past traumas.

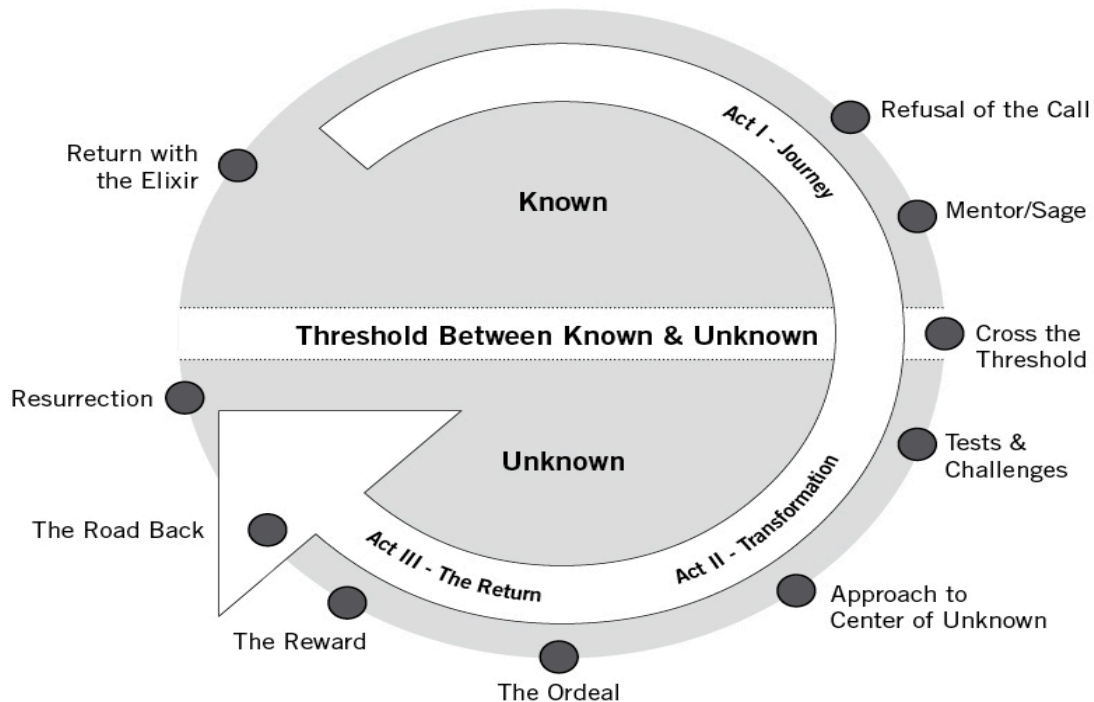
1.2 The Ethic of witnessing and the backstory wound

According to the ethics of witnessing by Kaplan in her book *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005), witnessing a trauma narrative is the ‘unusual anti-narrative process of the narration’, which maintains a cognitive distance for the spectator to engage in the working through process of the character (Kaplan, 2004 p. 9-10). Hence, the representation of the characters’ trauma will be presented in a reversed process termed as the ‘Backstory wound’ by Michaela Krützen (2004), which is an intra-personal process into the character’s traumatic memory, where the film confronts the viewer with fragments of the character’s past into his present in the form of flashbacks, hallucination or dreams, and reveal the anchor trauma and main traumatic event at the end of the narrative.

1.3 Defining the plot structure: The Hero journey plot points by Joseph Campbell:

I also borrowed the plot points of ‘the Hero’s Journey’ or the Monomyth’ as designated by Joseph Campbell (1972, 2004). The hero journey is a universal narrative structure that is known to invite the protagonists and audiences alike into individuation and self-healing (Campbell, 2004, p. 202). During the Hero’s Journey, the character is called to leave his ordinary world and ventures into a new special world to retrieve something they need. This special world introduces the character to his inner flaws and put them into several tests that reshape and develop their character. Their renewed self allows them to reach their goal and return back to transform their ordinary worlds.

The Hero's Journey



The hero journey consists of 12 stages, which act as a narrative guide point. These plot points are: 1) the ordinary world. 2) Call to adventure, 3) Refusal of the call, 4) Meeting the mentor 5) Crossing the threshold, 6) Tests and allies, 7) Approaching the innermost cave, 8) Bypassing the ordeal. 9) Seizing the reward. 10) the road back. 11) Resurrection. 12) The return with the Elixir.

The hero starts in his 'Ordinary World', where the hero's flaws, conflicts and environment are introduced. The hero in this film narrative is Mariam, and the ordinary world is her isolation in her apartment, where she exhibits various PTSD symptoms. The 'Call to Adventure' in this film is the mother's calls for Mariam to leave the apartment and travel to Alexandria (her new world). Mariam's meeting with Jean performs as the stage of 'meeting the mentor' who trains her on the new adventure.

‘Crossing the threshold of the special world, is the stage when ‘the hero adventures out into darkness; and is put in danger; his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone’ (Campbell 2004, p.201). This is the stage where Jean encounters her panic attack during their night drive. The ‘tests, allies, and enemies’ stage signifies their wasted shopping, the arrival of Dima, the fainting of Massa. Approaching the innermost Cave (scene of dread) is when Jean had to drive at night to save Massa and deliver her to the nearest hospital.

Bypassing the Ordeal, is when the hero experiences difficult hurdles and obstacles that may lead to a life crisis. This is the stage where they eventually lose the restaurant at the film’s climax. After surviving The Ordeal, the hero seizes the sword, which is a reward that they’ve earned, and allow them to finally take on their biggest conflict (their ordinary world). According to Campbell, the reward may be a physical item, an insight or wisdom that will help the character win the battles of their ordinary world. The reward in this film narrative is the Dima’s ability to mourn, her parents arrival. Mariam’s reward is her ability to reconcile with her past and renounce her life decisions. The Road Back is where the hero takes the ‘The Road Back- out of the special world ‘into the ordinary world. This is the stage where Mariam returns to her childhood home and confront her past wounds. The Resurrection phase is when the hero uses everything; they have learned to win over their life’s conflict once and for all. This is the stage when Mariam starts writing her new novel and calls it ‘Metanoia’ (beyond fear). Hence, Mariam decides to rewrite her trauma story, she bikes through the city without fear, and revisits her father. The Return with the Elixir is when the hero brings their knowledge or the “elixir” back to the ordinary world. The elixir in this film narrative would be

Mariam's experience of 'Metanoia', which is the inner transformation that occurred in the characters' hearts and minds (Campbell, 2004).

2.1 Thematic approach in building the scenes of Mariam's sequence:

Joshua Hirsch stresses that 'post-traumatic cinema' should not only represent traumatic historical events but also attempt to 'embody and reproduce the trauma for the spectator' (2003: p. 2) The literature scholar Laurie Vickroy assures in her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Vickroy, 2002) that trauma narratives (fictions, memoirs, etc.) should facilitate access to the traumatic experience, it should 'internalize its rhythms, processes and uncertainties'. It should also encourage an interactive spectatorship for the trauma experience, she says:

This requires an engagement on the part of the audience with "personalized, experientially oriented means of narration" that expand their range of awareness of catastrophic events and their individual and collective implications vis-à-vis each other by luring them into "uncomfortable and alien material, sharing victims' pain, shifting between what can and cannot be revealed (Vickroy, 2002 p.3).

Hence, the first act in the film's narrative, which features Mariam sequence focuses mainly on exhibiting the post-traumatic subjectivity, the experience of acting out of trauma with all its uncertainties and maladaptive coping mechanism. Therefore, the task of writing Mariam's sequence was mainly focused on Mariam's traumatized subjectivity and her PTSD symptoms, on which I relied on the thematic analysis encoded and described in chapter 2.

Consequently, I borrowed the thematic approach laid by Eric's William in his book '*Screen Adaptation: Beyond the Basics*', in which he suggests building scenes upon certain themes and objectives (Williams, 2017, p. 78). Therefore, I have worked on visually translating the encoded themes into scenes, in a way that would also advance the film's plot and portrait Mariam's psyche in a cause and effect sequence. For example, the compulsion repetition is visually translated into the amusement park scene, the blame game is translated into the mother's dialogue. This approach will be extensively clarified later in this chapter while discussing the scenes' narrative methods.

2.2: Fragmentation narrative approach for complex trauma: Mariam's trauma

Ann whitehead explains in her book *Trauma Fiction* that trauma narrative resists the linear narrative structures and temporalities" (Whitehead, 2011p.5). For Whitehead, trauma experience is not fully experienced by the character, hence, it cannot be fully revealed at any time in the narrative; it should rather haunts the character as a repeated lurking memory, experienced later at the deferred event form the main traumatic event (Whitehead 2011, 5). Caruth coincides with whitehead by saying that "[t]he traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they themselves become the symptoms of the history that they cannot entirely possess' (Caruth 1995, 5). Alternatively, Whitehouse suggests that this history crisis is reflected via 'the broken narratives and disruptive lives, which have emerged out of the debris of recent traumatic events' (Whitehead 2011, 5). As in the real world, traumatic stories in fiction should become fragmented, so the screenwriter conveys traumatic experience in a realistic way.

Goldsmith and Satterlee suggest fragmentation as a narrative strategy to be employed in trauma

fiction, as it “conveys the fracturing of time, self and reality that ... accompanies traumatic episodes or recall’ Goldsmith explains that fragmentation in narrative is achieved through the use of flashbacks, non-linear narrative, delayed narrative or textual gaps (*Representation of Trauma* 45). Hence, the fragmented narration in Mariam’s sequence lies between memory traces and fragmented flashbacks, which reveal some raw traumatic truths about her past anchor trauma. Mureen Turim explains in her book *flashbacks in film*, that the fragmented flashback functions ‘to represent the mental processes to show the memory flashes and brief disjointed or distorted images which come to a character’s mind’ (Turim, 1989: p.190). Turim also writes that: ‘Floating temporalities do not maintain the points of reference necessary to the flashback as a device’ (Turim 1989: 246). Hence, the fragmented narration creates a collaborative spectatorship on the behalf of the viewer, to fathom Mariam’s backstory wound, (the father’s abandonment. Since Mariam’s flashbacks never reveal the full event but only fragmented truths and fleeing images of her anchor trauma.

2.3 The second approach: screen memory and auto-fiction:

Furthermore, Laurie Vickroy stresses on ‘a personalized narration’ in the trauma narrative she explains in her book *Trauma and survival in contemporary fiction* :

personalized narration of trauma integrates non-linear and fragmentary features of testimonies on the stylistic level, bearing witness to the past through individual viewpoints that ultimately results in a collective witnessing as spectators are engaged empathically (Vickroy, 2002 p.4).

Hence, the second approach in narrating Mariam’s sequence was the integration of personal memories, fragmented features of my testimony and individual viewpoint. As I examined in the

last chapter, Humphreys and Watson defines this narrative approach as semi-fictionalized ethnography, which restructures events occurring within one or more observations into a single narrative using devices drawn from fictional writing.

Susan Kerrigan asserts in her book *Screen production*, that in order for ‘filmmaking as research’ to be truly successful, researchers need to address their research topic from the ontology, epistemology perspective, she asserts the necessity for the researcher to ‘delve into the self to discover and articulate why they have chosen a particular question which will then lead to their decisions on methodology and methods’ (Kerrigan, 2015).

Accordingly, I have integrated two personal dreams in Mariam’s narrative, one of which was the dream that triggered my decision to embark this research journey of creating a healing narrative for the traumatized female subjectivity. According to Freud’s definitions in his article ‘screen memories’, these scenes are regarded as "screen memory" which functions to express hidden unconscious, mental content (Freud, 1899). Cristina Demaria and Macdonald Daly address in their book *The genres of the post conflict testimonies* that “new textual forms and textual genres [...] are emerging” to represent traumatic experiences (Demaria and Daly 2009, p.11). In addition to “novels, autobiographies, pseudo-autobiographies, collections of testimonies and life stories, historical essays in fictional format, fiction in historical format, and their different mixing and intertwining,’ a new hybrid form is introduced known as ‘autofiction, autography, confession or remembrance’ (Demaria and Daly 2009, 16). Hence, integrating personal fragmented features of my testimony, biographical dream and memoir into a fiction film defines this film narrative as an auto-fiction narrative.

3.1 Characterization: narrative approach for chronic trauma: jean's trauma:

As examined in the previous chapter, Jean's narrative is adapted from the real story of Miss Johery, so the plot of this narrative revolves around Jean's chronic trauma and unveiling the layers of her stigmatized self and past. Geoffrey Hartman addresses in his article 'representing trauma' the use of characterization as a narrative approach for transcribing testimonies of Holocaust stories, Vietnam and incest (Hartman 1991). He describes this method as 'characterizing dispossessed individuals and examining their internalization of their personal and collective histories, hence 'reveal the effects of living under Subjugation' (Hartman 1991p.4) Hartman illustrates that through the characterization approach we move the focus of the plot from the events to the characterization. For Hartman, trauma narratives should 'reflect awareness to the effects of catastrophe within engaging the spectator in the multi contextual social issues'. Hence, Jean's sequence aims to portray the collective psychological state of sexually abused survivors, reveal her symptomized subjectivity, her 'contextual social issues' and root causes. Hartman suggests three main characteristics of the trauma narratives that addressed writing the scenes of Jean's sequence, he explains that trauma narrative should firstly 'raise question on subjectivity and defining loss in our lives; secondly, 'the dilemmas of these character should confront us with our own fears, and provide space with which to consider these fears'. Thirdly, trauma writers should reveal 'the dilemma of the public's relationship to the traumatized made problematic by painful experience and psychic defenses that can alienate others by public resistance' (Hartman,1991).

Hence, Jean's sequence entails three main sequences, the first scene exhibits Jean's daily routine, and 'raise question on subjectivity', through witnessing her sleep overs at the restaurant and addictive state. The second scene is witnessing Jean's panic attack, which opens

a space to question individual fears as suggested by Hartman. The third scene reveals her backstory, her 'psychic defenses' by staying at the restaurant and narrates her parents and public reaction to her dilemma. In this scene, the subject matter of chronic trauma and the public resistance is also addressed, the characters' conclusive dialogue extends into multi-dimensional emotional effects of the complex trauma and seeking resolution.

4.1 Broken narrative: Narrative approach for acute trauma: Dima's narrative:

Following Whitehead's definitions of trauma fiction, which advocates the use of broken narrative and fragmentation to mimic the trauma experience in reality (Whitehead 2011, p.5). Dima's backstory will be revealed through the broken narrative strategy. However, it is important to distinguish here between Mariam's fragmented flashbacks and Dima's broken narrative. Mariam's fragmented flashback manifest in fleeting images and memory traces of her past events; however, piecing these flashbacks together don't form a narrative or backstory. While Dima's narrative will be revealed through scattered flashbacks throughout her sequence, and through piecing them together a Dima's backstory is formed. Dima's flashbacks perform her disremembering process of past incidents (Caruth, 2004). Drawing on Hartman, who also stresses that trauma narrative should engage the spectator with 'the character's attempt to remember', he explains that character's memory should be 'explored through affective and unconscious associations rather than conscious memories and structured plots' (Hartman, 1991). Therefore, the temporal ordering of Dima's flashbacks and mental images will 'reenact, the past traumatizing situations', through which the viewer will gradually comprehend the characters past traumatic events (Elm, Kabalek and Kohne, 2014 p. 5), accompany the character's working through of trauma and structuralize her backstory.

5.1 Narrative strategies and methods to witnessing trauma

1- Opening scene: The personal is political:



‘The personal is political’ is a slogan coined by Carol Hanisch (1971) that became synonymous with the second wave of feminism. The political slogan argues that the personal experience of women is rooted in their political situation and gender inequality (Carolhanich.org). Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allue in their article ‘Splintered glass: the facets of trauma in the post colony and beyond’ explain the direct link between individual and cultural trauma, they say:

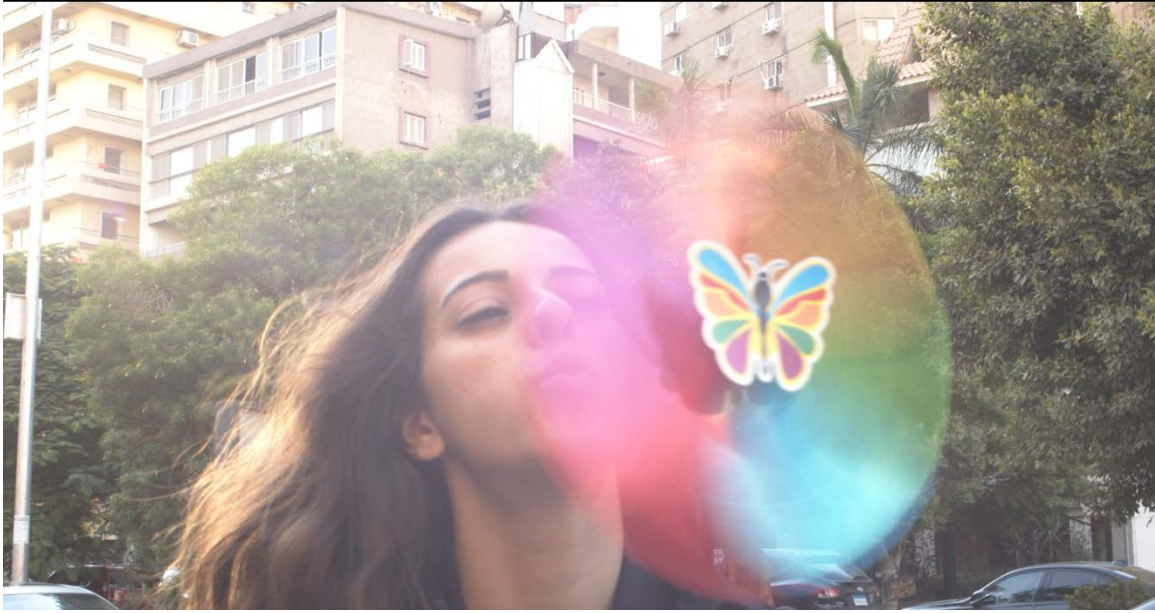
‘Since the effect of trauma depends on the socio-cultural context of the society affected, for an event or situation to acquire the dimension of trauma, it must have destabilized the structures of meaning of a collectivity’ (Herrero and Baelo-Allue, 2011).

Similarly, on writing the film’s opening scene, my goal is to present an individual struggle within the ‘socio-cultural context’ of society, hence frames the protagonist (Mariam) as a

cultural figure of personal and collective dimensions of Arab women traumas, their daily plights and patriarchal and hostile environments. Hence, the scene performs in a panoramic portrayal for the city landscape through Mariam's pedaling; through which, the spectator is posited in a witnessing mode for the protagonist's environment, male gaze and streets chaos.

Important to highlight that female biking is still considered as a risky act in Arab societies, most of which regard it as a social taboo that provokes the males' gazes and harassments. However, one of the most prominent social movements that appeared after the Egyptian revolution, was the organized biking parade that encouraged female biking within a large safe group and planned routes. Despite their continued attempts, female biking is still a hazardous activity for Arab female to bike on their own (Atlanticcouncil.org). However, I argue that the image of a female biking alone in Cairo streets will trigger associative memories with the Egyptian revolution of 2013, its street dynamic and social movements. Steff carps describes this approach as the prosthetic memory which is "a culturally-transmitted marker of communal history and experience" (Johnson 2004, p.2) in the same vein, it can be said that the opening scene performs as an apparatus for understanding 'the real world' and an 'access to history' (Craps 2010, 52).

Hartman also suggests 'the individual as representative of a social class or group, while Survivor memoirs and autobiographies are also encouraged to be examined and included. (Vickroy 2002, p.5, 172) Likewise, the scene has an autobiographic reflectance, as it embeds my attempts and failures to learn biking and my dreams to bike one day without fearing the harassments. Mariam's her bold strolling past the car lines implies that this is a story of survival and crossing over the socio-cultural stigmas and myths.



The film title appears after the opening scene, ‘Meta-noia’ is a Greek scientific term means beyond fear, it is constructed of two words, ‘Meta’ which is beyond in Greek language and ‘noia’ which is derived from the term paranoia. Today the term Metanoia is commonly understood as a heart conversion, a fundamental change of mind that causes a reformation in lifestyle. Petruska Clarkson defines Metanoia in his article ‘Metanoia: A Process of Transformation’ as ‘the psychotic breakdown and the subsequent psychological re-building or healing’ (Clarkson, 2017 p. 224). This theme of change is visually emphasized through the repetitions of circulating figures, such as the paper windmill, the printing machine, the bike wheel, these recurring visuals aim to infer the coming fluctuations and changes in the character’s life.

2- The mundanely catastrophic: Mariam's dismissal:



The scene's reference and background:

The office scene presents Mariam's dismissal as she learns that another male colleague has been credited for her novel. Mariam who tries to defend her work finds herself jolted in her apartment's bathroom and dismissed from work. The scene's narrative is delivered through the use of domestic ethnography, which encourages the filmmaker to embed real stories and experiences from his/her close circle (family members and close friends). likewise, the scene is inspired by my sister's personal experience, (whose name is also Mariam, meaning bitter), My sister as well had one of her advertising designs stolen by a colleague in her advertising agency, and when she raised her objection, she got dismissed later from her job. On the narrative perspective, the scene has three main functions, firstly, it acts as the inciting action which abruptly the character's world. Secondly, it triggers Mariam's traumatic neurosis as suggested by Caruth's model of trauma experience (Caruth, 2005), and thirdly, it informs the audience

about the mundane reality of patriarchy and gender inequality Arab women encounter in their labor world. According to Hartman, trauma narrative should move beyond the subject matter and present traumatic situations of ‘depersonalized and institutionalized historiographies’ with an ‘implicit critics of how social political structures create and perpetuate trauma’ (Hartman, 1991 p.4) Stef Carps explains in his article ‘*words of grief: traumatic memory and literally witnessing in cross cultural experience*’ that ‘current trauma discourse has difficulty recognizing that it is not just singular and extraordinary events but also ‘normal’, everyday humiliations and abuses that can act as traumatic stressors’ (Craps 2010, p.18). Scholar Greg Forter describes these daily traumatic situations as the ‘mundanely catastrophic’, in his article ‘Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the politics of literary form’ he writes:

I am speaking here of the trauma induced by patriarchal identity formation rather, say, than the trauma of rape, the violence not of lynching but of everyday racism. These phenomena are indeed traumas in the sense of having decisive and deforming effects on the psyche that give rise to compulsively repeat and highly rigidified social relations. But such traumas are also chronic and cumulative, so woven into the fabric of our societies (Forter, 2007, p.5).

Hence, the scene aims to invite the viewer to witness a ‘mundanely catastrophic’ situation, an event with an induced patriarchy, gendered discrimination and injustice that is often blinded by the public discourse and the trauma discourse and practice. Lastly, the scene also embeds Kaplan’s ethic of witnessing. For Kaplan, witnessing also means enticing the spectator with ‘the rage of the injustice and discriminations’, intensifying the spectator’s desire to help, which ultimately leads to an ‘empathy- based pro-social moral encounter’, between the character and spectator (Kaplan, 2004, p.102).

3- The prompt and the act of memory:



Through examining and applying Freud's model of traumatic neurosis, he explains that 'a single fragment of the past can evoke a more substantial experience' (Freud, 1919, p. 210). Psychologist Daniel Goleman defines this state as 'emotional hijacking', in which the brain takes over with an attack of past moments leaving the victim feeling helpless over their own present for a period of time (Goleman 1995, p. 34). Freud asserts that this gradual succession of flashbacks often develops into spatial dissociation (Freud, 1927). By applying Freud's trauma model on the scene, Mariam walks towards her kitchen in a stray mind, she then starts experiencing a flow of flashbacks that transports the viewer into different moments and locations from her past. My aim in this scene is to explore the narrative approaches to represent the emotional hijacking and posit the spectator as a witness to Mariam's split mind.

a. The act of memory versus narrative flashback:

On examining the taxonomy of flashbacks, it is useful to distinguish between two forms of flashback signified by David Bordwell in his book *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985). Bordwell uses the term flashback for narrative or the *recount* to refer to the verbal descriptions of past events narrated to a character or to the spectator (Bordwell, 1985, p. 77). The second term is the recollection or the act of memory, which is a memory album, an audiovisual rendering of mental images, a depiction of the experience of memory in time. Hence this scene will be performed in the form of an act of memory or a recollection of mental images as signified by Bordwell.

b. The prompt

Bergson and Proust also shed light in their book *Memory and understanding* on the act of prompt, which triggers and stresses out the memory. They explain that memory may dwell in material objects persons, events or visual resemblance. Philosophers like John Frow and Aristotle assured the use of objects as spatial metaphors, in which experiences are retained and memories are triggered and revived (Bergson and Proust, 2018 p.83). Likewise, the habitual act of preparing coffee prompts Mariam's memory of her break up meeting with her partner. The shift between a present perception and a memory image is presented through a close on Mariam's cup. The coffee stir acts as a visual metaphor for Mariam's emotional stir.

4- The stream of consciousness:



a) Stream of consciousness:

On determining the narrative approach for the couple flashback, two approaches influenced my writing process. The first approach is Maya Deren's film, *Meshes of the afternoon* (1949), Kaplan regarded this film to place the viewer as a "witnesses to the heroine's subjectivity and stream of consciousness with suggestions that a violent patriarchal order is responsible' (Kaplan 2004, p.122). Kaplan also highlights Deren's use of stream of consciousness and defines it as as 'the enclosure within the self', which 'expresses or relays the experience of trauma', while denying the full identification with the heroine. (Kalan, 2004 p.124). Daniel Oliver (1840) describes 'stream of consciousness', as narrative mode that attempts to depict the multitudes thoughts and feelings, which pass through the mind of the protagonist (Danieloliver.org). Mureeen Turim also explains that the 'stream of consciousness' functions 'to represent the mental processes to show the memory flashes and brief disjointed or distorted

images which come to a character's mind' as a form of Floating temporalities that 'do not maintain the points of reference necessary to the flashback as a device' (Turim 1989: p. 246). Therefore, I borrowed Deren's use of the 'stream of consciousness on this flashback scene to present Mariam's mental process, her disjointed flow of thoughts emotional flashbacks. Thus, the couple flashback perform in a recollection of floating temporalities, merging 'brief disjointed' moments from the couple's past relation, their separation dialogue, and their random encounters after separation.

b) Chasing the hooded figure and the uncanny:



Mariam's chase for her partner after his abandonment is also inspired by Deren's chase for the hooded male figure with a mirror face, She explains, 'While the man who enters the house at first seems mild and kindly, he turns cold and is associated with the terrifying nun phantom' (Kaplan, 2004 p.125). Kaplan relates these chasing shots with Freud 's theory of the 'uncanny',

where the familiar interpersonal relations may suddenly turn into abusive ones, while not being able to fathom the relation's uncanny nature, the individual's psyche may still be tied and bonded to this relation and its abuse (Kaplan, 2004 p.124). Moreover, Mariam's chase for her ex-partner has also another psychological justification and metaphor, according to Goleman theories in his book *Emotional intelligence*, the sensation of ending a relationship frequently triggers early reminiscences of parent's abandonment. This pain leads the survivor (Mariam) to return and chase the leaving partner to cure the panic of her father's desertion and request from the partner to alleviate and compensate their earlier sense of abandonment (Goleman 1995, p. 40).

c) The Mirroring face and the superego voices:

For Kaplan, the hunting shots in the city streets also suggest that the world of the film represents the larger public space she describes it as the 'legacies of unconscious cultural violence, symbolized by the violence within the domestic space' (Kaplan, 2004 p.125). She explains that the male mirroring face is only 'reflecting its surroundings' and 'producing its own ideas'. I relate this state with Freud term of the super ego voices which assaults the ego with its intro-projection. Oliver explains the impact of the trauma's role on the survivor's ego and agency he explains: 'We internalize our relationships with others, which empowers us with a sense of our own agency but can also leave us with a sense of the limitations of our own agency if we are in marginal or oppressed social positions or power relations. (Oliver 1991, p. 84). In parallel, the couple dialogue reveals that Mariam's partner decides to leave her for her familial situation, which he regards as unsuitable according to the known societal terms and habits. Hence, the scene also exhibits Mariam's ex-partner as the hood figure with a mirroring face that interjects the view of others into her being and self-image, the scene also renders the

superego voice and social taboos as the main antagonist of Mariam's agency and narrative, as it stands against the union of this couple. Hence, this sudden abandonment assaults Mariam's ego and leaves her in a state of emotional bargain, asking for social acceptance and validation.

d) Objects as visual co-narratives:

Lastly, in this scene I also borrowed Deren's use of 'objects as visual co-narrative', where she uses repetitive image of the key, the knife and the flower. Likewise, in this scene, Mariam's return back to her present reality in the kitchen at a culmination point of the couple's dialogue. The match cut between the flashback and the present was through an audio overlapping sound of the boiling milk spilling over the stove. After a small sip from this milk, Mariam realizes it is an outdated milk and starts experiencing somatic pains and dizziness. The expired milk in this scene is a visual metaphor for dwelling on the past and emotionally feeding on toxic relationships. Mariam then starts to circle in a vortex of emotional and mental pain till we see her jolted in the amusement park in another psychic space and time.

5- The multiplication of self – inner witness:



The recollection as backward-turning' memory:

In this scene, Mariam's memory performs in a poetic form of recollection as she recalls her emotional history of her past toxic relations and successive abandonments she lived. Important to highlight, Bergson & Proust also distinguish between two forms of recollection: the involuntary memory known as the 'backward-turning' memory, and the voluntary memory, which is tied to the demands of the narrative situation. They explain that involuntary memory 'disengages the spectator from the exigencies of the present, inserting us in the past, hence the overwhelming quality of the experience, and the richness and vivacity of the sensations it revives'(Bergson and Proust,2018,p. 126). Drawing on Bergson theories, Mariam's involuntary memory in this scene perform in the 'backward-turning' memory, which reveals that her mind is at the service of her emotions overtaking the flashback's imagery and space.

The recollection and the repetition compulsion:

This scene aims to perform the phase of ‘repetition compulsion’ as explained by Dominik la Capra, in which the trauma is unwillingly repeated on ‘behavioral, emotional, physiologic, and neuroendocrinology levels’ (Kaplan, 2004 p.19). The scene also presents Freud’s concept of ‘substitution and transference’ of trauma, in which the complex trauma survivors can’t differentiate between their past and present. Hence, they project and transmit their unresolved conflicts, needs, dependencies onto the substituting figure (Freud, 1963; p. 107). Moreover, Susan Anderson explains in her book *The journey from Abandonment to healing* that earlier separation traumas cause the adult emotional life to be disrupted, where the earlier separation renounces as self-sabotage in primary relationships and tendency to compulsively repeat the abandonment circumstances in repetitive patterns (Anderson, 2000 & 2014 p. 29).

Mariam’s recall of these emotional relations performs in her seat in a rotating cup in the amusement park, as we see Mariam’s alternating between several relationships, at various stage of her life, till she appears as her younger self seated with her father in the same rotating cup. Hence, the scene visually implies Mariam’s substitution of her father’s absence by theses successive partners. The abandonment of her father was also signified through his flashing figure throughout the cup’s rotations, till he finally disappears, leaving her rotating alone in the revolving cup.

The use of multiple selves:



On designing the narrative approach of this scene, I also borrowed Deren's use of the multiple selves employed in her film *Meshes of the afternoon* (1949). Kaplan explain this device, as an "affect aesthetic" of trauma, she says:

Traumatized beyond belief, the heroine splits into three subjectivities, three different identities, a mild white woman, a woman in blackface, and a murderous white woman. The Woman's unconscious desire for revenge against male dominance is indicated (Kaplan, 2004 p.125).

Likewise, the scene embodies Deren's use of the multiplication of self, by presenting three different selves of Mariam at different ages and emotional relations. With every toss of the rotating cup, Mariam is witnessed with a different man.



The self-witnessing – realizing the pattern:

The scene also aims to perform what Herman's defines as 'the realization of old patterns and past mistakes'; she explains that this insight would finally allow the survivor to break free from the cycle of compulsory repetition and help initiating the process of working through of trauma (Herman 1992, p.110). Herman emphasized that reliving a trauma may eventually 'offer an opportunity for self-realization, mastery and healing; as survivors begin to realize the patterns in their lives, they start to cognitively process their anchor trauma and the root cause of their fears. Herman's theories coincide with Dori Laub examined concept of self-witnessing or inner witnessing in which the self is being monitored (Laub,2013). Hence through the visualizing the term 'self-witnessing', Mariam is seen from an objective camera witnessing her successive emotional failures which are ensued by her father's abandonment.

6- Crises in witnessing, resistance to disclosure:



This mother daughter dialogue has multiple purposes and narrative implications, the first is exposing Mariam's narrative resistance to share her setbacks. Geoffery Hartman explains in his article *Representing trauma*, that trauma narrative should 'reveal the many obstacles to communicating, silence, simultaneous knowledge denial, dissociation resistance repression among other (Hartman, 1991 p.4). Trauma scholar Lopez Sanchez describes this narrative resistance in these words: 'representation and narrative are linked to what is said and what is not said; in other words, what is repressed' (Sanchez,2010, p. 46). Likewise, During the Skype call, Mariam tries to hide her dismissal news from her mother to avoid her anger and bombarding questions. Susan Anderson also explains that one of the major symptoms of abandonment trauma is the anxiety with authority figures and the fear response to their anger (Anderson, 2000).

a) Mother- daughter conflict and blame game:

Hartman also heightens the conflict of mother and daughters' relations in trauma narratives, he explains that 'daughters feel a conflicted protective fearfulness towards their mothers and a dread of living their traumas' (Hartman, 1991 p.5). Herman also highlights that when one parent is absent, the child grows to displace all their rage and blame onto the non-offending existent parent (Herman 1992 p. 78). In parallel, the mother- daughter dialogue in this scene reveals Mariam's perception of her parents (autocratic figures) as the main perpetrators in her life. Mariam blames her mother on their absence, arguing that single women are easy preys in their societies; and the manager was able to steal her work because he knows she has no one to back her up. Hence, in this scene I aimed to highlight the theme of blaming the perpetrator through their dialogue. According to Herman, the survivor's inclination towards blaming the perpetrator and victimizing oneself, tends to be one of the major stumbling blocks to break through the trauma, Since the survivor is emotionally settled in his victimized self (Herman 1992, P.89).

b) Crises of witnessing and the absence of a listener:

The heated dialogue of the mother and daughter starts to lag and cut out till the Skype call is cut off. The cut out conversation implies what Dori Laub defines as 'a crises in witnessing in his book *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, which occurs because of the absence of an empathetic listener, for whom the survivor can externalize their traumatic events and share their story (Laub, 2013 p.10). Hence, Mariam's inability to verbalizing her setback events and her mother's inability to listen can be regarded as a form of failed witnessing or a crises in witnessing. As a result,

Mariam's verbal failure develops into further dissociation and the loss of contact with her reality, space, and time.

7- Symbols and coded imagery in dreams: Mariam's Forest Dream:



a) Screen memories and biographical dreams:

To start with, this dream sequence is inspired by a personal dream I encountered, developed into a screen material, I employed several narrative tools to reconstruct and develop it through allegories, psychological coded imagery and visual metaphors. Hence, my aim in this scene was to explore the narrative devices for transcribing biographical dream into screen memories. My dream entails lying down tied on ground, then some sharp objects start to be hurled against me. Being tied to ground, I was defenseless and I couldn't know who are the perpetrator attacking me. When I finally managed to pull myself out and stand up, I recognized that my perpetrators were two individuals, one of

them is in my close interpersonal circle and the second is emotionally involved to this person. Being filled with rage and avenge, I started to chase them and verbally denouncing them out loud.

b) Analyzing the coded themes and emotional energy in my personal dream:

On analyzing the coded themes in my personal dream, I applied Charlotte Delbo concept on embedded memories, Delbo designates the term the "skin of memory" which encapsulates the emotional energies encountered in dreams, 'and through which they occasionally and unexpectedly burst into the present, full and real, as if played again' he explains, the dream imagery 'should be presented as felt, reenacted rather than seen' (Delbo, 1990, P1,2,3). Hence, on analyzing the emotional energies and coded themes in my dream narrative, three themes are interpreted, the first is the attack on self and agency. The second is Freud's concept of the uncanny (1919) where the homely and the familiar turns to be alarming and frightening, the third is the trauma bonding and the search for avenge from the perpetrator.

c) Methodology of developing the narrative of the personal dream into screen memories:

On developing and constructing the dream's narrative, three foundations Vertices were suggested by the research Carlos Figueiredo, Inês Coimbra in their article '*Dream and reality in the film storytelling and their boundaries: viewer inner self-centered and ergonomic consciousness*' (2017). The first approach is emphasizing the dreamer's self, and the organizational unit of his consciousness, hence clarifying to the viewer the 'I' who dreams', (Hobson, 2003, 142). In parallel, the orientation to the dreamer's subject is clarified in Mariam's scene, when she lies down on bed and falls asleep while watching the

meditational video. The second approach is the boundary place or the transition between the waking state and the dream state, whether it is blurred or overlapped, representing these boundaries between reality and dream. Hence, the transition from the reality of Mariam's room into the dream's world was emphasized through the match cut between the forest scene projected on Mariam's room and the forest landscape where she starts moving in this projected landscape. The third approach emphasizes the dreamer's Consciousness and the dreamer's alertness to the environment, their bodies, and their emotions, likewise, Mariam exhibit responses towards what she experiences in the dream's narrative ex: rage, seeking revenge and facing a decision at the end of the dream.

d) The use of surrealism and coded imagery:

On designing the narrative approach of this dream scene I followed Surrealists concept, which attempts to depict dream material through symbols and codes. Robert J. Lifton also assured in his chapter 'Adult trauma in wars and disasters' that the symbolization of dreams can bring ingenuity to the spectator's life directions more than the waking thoughts (Lifton, 1995 p128). Thomas Elessastror also suggests the 'mind game' concept, in trauma films, he explains that trauma films should be coded and untied like a mind puzzle (Elessastror, 2001). For Elessastror, coding trauma films (dream scene) with metaphors and allegories invites a Collaborative spectatorship. Thus, a witnessing process can also take place (Elessastror, 2001).

e) The dream's coded imagery

On this section I will uncover and describe my interpretation for coding the dream's imagery in symbols and metaphors. The scene starts with Mariam wandering joyfully around the bushes in a red dress. Mariam's restful walk represents her psyche pre-trauma before the attack on her agency. As explained by Susan Borrison in her article 'undoing the self' trauma disrupts the one's narrative into before and after the traumatic events (Borrison, 1991). The forest as the mise en scene of this dream aims to imply the process of self-seeking, soulful exploration and a spiritual journey, as defined by J.C. Cooper in his book *An Illustrated Encyclopedia Of Traditional Symbols* is 'a symbolic threshold for the unconsciousness of the psyche' (Cooper, 1987 p.72). Thus, Mariam escapes her reality into the forest in search for her agency. Mariam's red dress signifies her search for love and attention. Mariam's short rest was soon interrupted by a flow of stones being thrown towards her. The stones resemble the several abuses she encountered from her patriarchal society and community, she anxiously gets up and holds onto one of these stones which was tied to a red rope, Mariam then follows the red rope in search for avenge from her perpetrators. The stone tied with a red rope is a metaphor for the trauma bonding and attachment towards the abuse, the unjust events and her perpetrators. Black hands start to appear which point her towards several directions. Following the black hands led her into several encounters; each encounter has a hidden male figure holding a mirror. However, all mirrors fails to reflect her image, one mirror would be rusted, the other would be broken and the third would be hazy and blurry. The black hands are a mythical archetype for the intervention of fate and destiny (Cooper, 1978 p 111.), it is mainly used here as visual metaphor for the dictation of trauma upon Mariam's destiny, as it aims to imply the

compulsion repetition of trauma, which forces her into a patterns of self-destruction through toxic emotional relationships. As conveyed by Caruth ‘the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will’ (Caruth, 1995 p.2).



These broken mirrors signify the intro-projection of the male figures upon her psyche and self-image. Mariam then bows under each mirror and grab a bunch of faint lilies, which signifies Mariam’s bargain for love, and validation through the male figures in her life. However, one of the main recovery themes of the film is the self-authorship, which is the shift of self-perception ‘from an externally defined sense of self to a more internally defined sense of self’ (Magdola, 2007).



Therefore, among the bushes one mirror appears that reflected Mariam' portrait, the reflective figure comes out of the mirror and offers Mariam a red lotus flower. The lotus flower has mythological significance in many eastern cultures, to represent self-healing, rebirth, and spiritual enlightenment (Binghamton.edu). The use of a double mirror is also a metaphor for an encounter with selfhood and self-authority in the understanding of trauma as used by Maya Deren in her film *Meshes of the Afternoon* who also used the double mirror and multiples selves to represent her female authorship (1943).



On Mariam's walk she encounters a door with a hanging key on a tree branch and a male jacket hanging on a tree branch on the opposite side. Mariam has to choose between the two directions. Once, Mariam walked towards the male jacket, the black hands reappear and gather around her threateningly till she fell and wakes up. The choice in front of Mariam signifies her decision in the aftermath of trauma, between her Id ego and super ego, whether she would choose the door and the key into inner liberation and self-authorship (her Id- ego), or she would continue seeking herself through the presence and validation of the male figures in her life (super-ego).

8- Narrative therapy - fictional dissociation - Writing block:



According to Herman's theories, the main goal in trauma recovery for the protagonist is to reconstruct their narrative and put words into their trauma story. However, one of the main effects of trauma is the disruption of one's story and the disconnection of inner-dialogue (Herman, 1992 p. 53).

a) Narrative Exposure therapy:

Therefore, in this scene, Mariam wakes up from the dream very inspired to write; however, she struggles within her attempts to make meaning of her story. Mariam's explorative journey in writing exhibits one of the main healing themes in the film's narrative, which is the "Narrative Exposure Therapy" (NET), as coined by Maggie Schauer, Thomas Elbert, and Frank Neuner. The NET is a treatment approach which aims to open pathways to 'emotions, cognitions, physiology, behavioral and sensory elements, and meaning content'

associated with traumatic events, in concurrence with a recall of life experiences (Narrative Schauer & Elbert, 2011). Herman describes it to ‘bring together the puzzles and parts of one-self at deeper levels of inner knowing’, so the sense of self -authorship could be developed (Herman, 1992 p.22).

b) Black hole of trauma and fictional dissociation:



However, Herman also asserts that the survivor initial attempts to build a narrative will be partially dissociated, as they face the problems of “coherence, control and integration” (Schauer et al., 2011, p. 34). Likewise, the scene performs in a montage of jump cuts, where Mariam strives to achieve a coherent story, as she also relives numerous psychosocial manifestations of her traumatic condition. Mariam’s writing block implies her inability to fathom her trauma. Van der Kolk describes this implicit mental state of the traumatized brain as ‘black holes or ‘Stuck points’’, where the survivor’s biological, social and psychological equilibriums are fixated around their traumatic events, and block their

childhood memories from their site of conscious. (Der Kolk, 2002). Hence, the theme of the black hole seems to overtake the scene's narrative and surpass the initial therapeutic task. Thus, Mariam's failed attempts to form a narrative, start to transform into a way of escaping reality through fiction, where she disconnects from the outer world. Kaplan defines this mental state of psychic numbing as 'fictional dissociation' (Kaplan, 2004, p.283). Herman, also stresses that complex trauma survivors often dissociate through fantasizing different realities, whether revenge or compensation fantasy, daydreaming, or merely binge watching for days (Herman 1992, p.135). Hence, Mariam starts dissociating through dwelling onto alternative realities, which according to Herman seems to 'perform as a mirror image of her traumatic memory', they also function as the survivor's defense system to self-empower and 'bypass their outrage' from abandonment (Herman, 1995 p.135). Accordingly, to represent Mariam's state of fictional dissociation, I continued with the use of the projector, to execute the visual effect of an immersive media in Mariam's room, which can also symbolizes her self-absorption and trauma captivity.

9- Biographical Dreams and screen memories:



Background context: The dream scene in the bus is also copied from a personal dream I have encountered on my last days of my legal stay in the states in 2018. At that stage, I was afraid to travel back to Egypt, and also afraid to file for asylum to join my family. I was living in Miami with my family, but I was invited by my friend (Miss Nagui) to move to California, to navigate options of staying in states without filing for asylum. Important to highlight, that this dream was the turning point that impacted my decision into choosing and exploring this research topic for my doctoral research; (female trauma and subjectivity), as I thought that I only experienced fractions of the real fears, any refugee normally encounter, while moving into a new city, an unknown future, with nowhere to stay in, and nowhere to return to, many of them would also have encountered the death of their loved ones and the loss of their homes in the war chaos. Hence, this dream inspired me to use my trivial tribulation to transpose and express the other major conflicts

collectively experienced by Arab females in their family diaspora and war chaos. Accordingly, my aim in this scene to explore narrative devices that can visually translate my anxiety dream into a screen memory.

a) Freud's screen memory and anxiety dream:



The scene starts by applying the epistolic narrative technique, in which the character transcribes their emotions through a series of journal entries in a diary format. This epistolic scene is accompanied by Mariam's monologue, where she declares her inability to close the metanarrative gaps in her life narrative. Through this monologue, the audience is given access to Mariam's mind and subjective view. The monologue seamlessly shifts into Mariam expressing her anxiety towards moving into the new city and the intimidating faces she is encountering. Mariam then expresses her vigilance towards the successive stressful events like: her uncharged mobile, inability to reach her uncle, losing her baggage, getting lost in the city, getting catcalled and harassed whenever she seeks help. At the climax of this hysterical chase, more bizarre images are witnessed, till Mariam wakes up to find herself seated in the bus.

Translating theories and themes into the dream's material

Reading through Freud's screen memories, dream themes and interpretation. This dream is defined by Freud as an anxiety dream, Freud explains that anxiety dreams and dream distortion reveal 'conflicting aims, repression, and disguised fulfillment of wishes'. (Freud 1900, 1916–1917). He describes 'anxiety dream as products of conflict: 'Something that is a satisfaction for the unconscious, may for that very reason be a cause of anxiety for the ego' (Freud 1940, p.70–1). In attempt to analyze and uncover the dream's themes, Freud also calls for seeking the inner motives and the external environmental factors that stimulates these anxiety dreams. According to Freud, these conflicting aims and issues of panic are rooted in a repressed childhood experience, which got stored as traces form the experience of a body in trauma, the experience of being was then overloaded and disassociated. Freud notions also coincides with Susan Anderson's theories on abandonment, she explains that a common PTSD of abandonment is that the amygdala is on 'high alert, ready for a crisis, and eventually leads to a prolonged hyper vigilance' (Anderson, 2000 p. 27). The idea of living in a state of emergency, also manufactured by the politics of fear, of negotiating the everyday in a state of heightened awareness seems to suggest the dreamer's fear of their outer world. Thus, it can be said that Mariam's anxiety dream has been tempered out of her childhood abandonment, and her trauma has developed into what Herman calls as a 'crisis of faith' between the traumatized subject and their society (Herman, 1992 p.55). In conjunction to the above theories, I also re-applied Delbo's concept of the 'skin of memory', which suggests interpreting the dream by the emotions surrounding the event. As a result, three main themes can be interpreted into the screen memory, the first is Mariam's sense of abandonment, the second is her vigilance and augmented fears and the last is her distortion view of her environment, which I personally

regarded as a form of augmented reality or hyper reality. In the next chapter I will examine the visual methods I used to represent this dream through the hyper-reality techniques.

10 - Retrogressive screen memories: Mariam meets the uncle: second event:



In this scene, Mariam visits her uncle in his restaurant and their encounter has suddenly reenacts the stage of her parents' separation when she had to stay at her uncle's place till the divorce is settled. However, Mariam recalls that her stay wasn't welcomed by her uncle's wife. The scene mainly performs Freudian concept of 'second event', which recreates or abreact the original traumatic event through a narrative recall. Herman stresses that traumatic experience at the childhood stage produces a 'temporal gap' and a form of dissolution of self. Accordingly, the diagnosis of a complex trauma is complicated, as the survivor may not have the complete recall of her traumatic history and she may initially deny such history. Consequently, the survivor fails to draw the link between the neglect occurred in her past and the current

psychological difficulties of her present (Herman, 1992 p. 111). Likewise, this recollection flashback has revived Mariam's anchor trauma which she has long blocked from her psyche. According to the Freudian notions in his article 'screen memory, this form of flashback is known as Retrogressive screen memory he says:

Trauma does not simply originate from outside the psyche but is instead structurally internalized and subsequently awakened by potent reminders It is the retroactive act of recall that thrusts a moment from the past into the present, thereby exceeding the conventional logic of time as a series of succeeding 'now' moments. (Freud, 1957, p.197).

The scene ends when Mariam puts down her uncle's invitation to stay at their place, and flee out of the restaurant, leaving her luggage behind. Mariam's imperative leave reveals her avoidance to her trauma's stressor; Mariam's involuntarily desire to escape also exhibits the individual's subjective reaction to the past traumatic event (intense fear, helplessness, or escapism). Yet, Mariam's forgetting her luggage at the restaurant displays the prevail of her induced fears manifested earlier in her anxiety dream, which eventually dictate her reality.

1. Retrogressive memories - recollection of images:



Following Herman's theories that 'traumatic events are not assimilated in its time of occurring, yet they manifest later in the consciousness in the form of flashbacks in the waking states' (Herman 1992 p.24). Likewise, Mariam spent the night engulfed with flashbacks from her childhood with her father, her parents' separation, and her father's leave for them twelve years ago. These flashbacks revive Mariam's anchor trauma (the father's abandonment) and childhood memories that she has long blocked from her present. According to Deleuze this form of flashback is known as 'recollection image' (Marks, 2002 p. 253); Laura U. Marks cites Deleuze notion in her article 'A Deleuzian Politics of Hybrid Cinema' as

A recollection image is like a fossil in that it embodies the traces of events whose representation has been buried. When recollection images cannot be connected to a present situation, they become 'strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous (Marks, 2002, p. 253).

Hence, Mariam's flashbacks manifest as recollection images and traces of past events, these micro shots of her childhood hijacked Mariam's present time that she stayed awake till the morning.



When the morning hits, she walked into the bathroom and decided to cut off her split ends. Though I wrote this scene in an intuitive way, I later examined the meaning of this emotional act, according to Psychologists John Markowitz in his article 'More on hair cutting and phycosis' that hair cut is 'a cathartic effort to regain control and power over one's life and agency; it is a painless way to cope with the heartbreak and trauma of a breakup' (Markowitz, 1988). Similarly, Mariam's urge to cut her split ends signifies her longing to liberate from the emotional bond she has with her father and the legacy of pain caused by this abandonment.

Act2: Working Through Trauma: Herman's recovery model

1- Social Reconnection and undoing the self



a) Social reconnection and the encounter of Mariam and Jean:

Mariam finally moves out of her immersed isolation and walks into her 'new special world' at the restaurant, where she meets Jean. The encounter of Mariam and Jean applies the first stage of Herman recovery theories of working through the traumas; according to Herman this stage entails 'building a renewed social connection' and a relatively safe environment (Herman, p.133). I was also inspired by Susan Brison concept of 'undoing the self' as explained in her article 'Trauma narrative and remaking the self', she explains that 'bearing witnessing to trauma often entails 'reintegrating the survivor into a renewed community' where a process of undoing and remaking of self can occur. She also assures that Marx, Freud and other feminist theories share the same of philosophy, that:

The self as fundamentality relational; formed in relations to others and sustained by social context, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence yet resilient enough to be reconnected by the help of others (Brison 1991, p.41).

Hence, through applying Brison and Herman's concept into the scene, Mariam and Jean's sense of self and subjectivity will be reconstructed through this renewed connection and witnessing.

b) Witnessing and regarding the pain of others:

On their first encounter, Mariam finds Jean (the chef) knocked out of her alcohol intake at one of the restaurant couches. After a short dialogue, a montage of cuts exhibits their sequence of days, Jean's culinary training for Mariam and Mariam's disorientation and resistance to be in the present and learn. Hence, a process of 'double witnessing process' occurs between the characters, through which Mariam witnesses Jean's daily hangover and stayover at the restaurant, while Jean witnesses Mariam's dissociation and stray mind during the culinary learning. Mariam's witnessing of Jean's daily knock out invites the viewer to witness the physical experience of living with trauma.

Moreover, Mariam's repetitive witnessing for Jean's suffering aims to apply Susan Sontag's concept of 'regarding the pain of others'. According to Sontag, 'observing the suffering of others creates 'a therapeutic transference' between trauma survivors and evoke a sense of empathy and interconnectedness (Sontag, 2003 p.67). Hence, it can be said that the scene applies Kaplan's ethic of witnessing, where a process of double witnessing occurs for both the spectator and character. On my filmic research, I recognized that the encounter of two characters, who are survivors of analogue or diverse trauma was a fundamental narrative

are in films dealing with a recovered subjectivity, examples of these films is the encounter of Lui and Elle in *Hiroshima mon amour* (1969), and the encounter of the three neighbors in *Sophie's choice* (1982). According to Marguerite Duras, the writer of *Hiroshima mon amour*, the effect of the encounter of two analogues trauma forms a therapeutic connection between the film's characters and the spectator. As they transvers into new world outside their traumatized reality and enters the world of another traumatized subject. Irvin Yalom describes this empowering process as the 'adaptive spiral' through 'universality', as it dissolves feelings of isolation, shame, and stigma through the connection with diverse others (Herman, 1992 p. 154).

c) Mirroring mechanism:



According to Herman, the encounter between the characters brings forth another therapeutic affect known as the 'mirroring mechanism' (Herman, 1992, p.154), she explains that between the characters' diversity and their friction, their traumatized

subjectivity will be exposed, their maladaptive coping mechanism will also be surfaced, this will ultimately facilitate access to their repressed histories and past. Furthermore, according to the hero journey plot points, Mariam's meeting with Jean acts as the hero's meeting with mentor. In this stage, the mentor trains or lends the hero a needed insight to confront flaws, initial fears and face the threshold of their adventure (Campbell 2004, p.12). Likewise, Jean's culinary training and Mariam's failed attempts is an allegorical representation for the process of undoing and remaking the self as denoted by Susan Borish. Likewise, Mariam's tendencies to dissociate from reality and Jean's persistence to teach her, equips her to be more grounded in her present reality. Lastly, the restaurant as a setting aims to imply an elusive process of working on self and working through the trauma.

2. Narrative device: The ghost of the past - the panic attack scene



This panic attack scene is derived from the real account of the shared participant Miss Johery. Jean's panic attack scene during her night drive is a manifestation of her PTSD, according to Freudian trauma theories, Jean's panic attack is the second event, which retroactively re-awakes the repressed and initial terror of her past sexual abuse from her husband. As examined by Herman, chronic trauma survivors who bypassed episodes of rape and violence may continue to live in the fear of someone's violence and experience disguised presentations of PTSD (Herman, 1992 p. 22). The fear from an absent subject is a common motif in trauma fiction known as the ghost of the past (Nordini, 2016).

3. Second stage of working through trauma. Jean's recounting of memories:

In this scene, Mariam starts questioning Jean about the reasons behind her terror, Jean starts by giving short answers till she gradually unfolds her backstory to Mariam. Jean and Mariam dialogue scene emulates Herman's second stage in the process of trauma recovery, which entails the deliberate recounting of past traumatic events (Herman, 1991, p. 21). Susan Brison defines this stage in her article 'trauma narrative and the remaking of self' as the 'remaking of self', where the survivor utters 'speech acts of memory', which is the verbal account of the traumatic event, hence transforming their traumatic memory into a narrative memory (Brison,1990). Kaplan and Dori Laub also assert that witnessing is a dialogic procedure, which entails the presence of an empathic listener to whom the testimonial narrative can be delivered. (Kaplan 2004, p. 32). Laub explained in his article *Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening* that the listener (the witness) should be a bystander, 'who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed' (Laub, 1992 p. 81). Laub also explains that witnessing is 'externalizing the event to the listener, who on his behalf serves as the "psychoanalyst" that reconstructs the meaning of this traumatic event (Laub 1992, p.12). Josef Breur and Freud define this process as "the talking cure" as it relieves the survivor from his captivity and PTSD symptoms (Breur and Freud,1985 p.30). Hence, my aim for this testimonial encounter is to explore the narrative framework of Jean's backstory, which will posit both Mariam and the spectator on the witnessing and self-reflection mode (Herman 1992 p.131). Since, the overall impact of this scene is to forge a therapeutic encounter between both the characters and the spectator.

a) Narrative device for Jean's testimony: Flashback-with-narrative

I started my research by examining Mureen Turim discussion on narrative and testimonial flashbacks in her book *'flashbacks in film'*, where Turim's designates this form of flashback, as *'flashback-for- narrative (to listening subject)'*, she explains that 'this flashback may provide a realization of the recounted scenes, to accompany the verbal narration of the past event to the listening subject (a character within the diegesis)'. She adds: 'The life of this flashback lies in the voice/image relationship in this mixture of confession, inner thought, and symbolically loaded mise-en-scene, story as a voice- over flashback confession' (Turim, p.178).

2. Revising the testimony scenes in post trauma cinema: fragmented dialogue.

In parallel, I have examined the narrative style employed in the testimony scenes in the post-traumatic cinema. Examples of these films were the fragmented conversation between Lui (the Japanese man) and Elle (the French woman) in *Hiroshima mon amour (1969)*, where Lui continued to draw the story out of Elle, and eventually helped her engage back with her past. For Duras, this cut out dialogue has transitioned their temporary love affair into a therapeutic interaction. Another example, is Sophie's unveiling her truth to Stingo in *Sophie's choice* film (1982) although she is romantically involved with Nathan, Stingo was her empathetic listener and witness. However, I realized that the narrative flashback in both films, was fragmented and dispersed across the film's length. The fragmentation in the flashback's narrative aims to perform the narrative resistance of the characters' traumatic memory, as well as emphasize the listener's role in intervening and facilitating the recounting of trauma by triggering questions (Herman, 1992. P125).

c) Reconstructing the testimony scene and the narrative Flashback

However, Luckhurst re-examine this narrative disclosure and suggest that ‘a reconstruction of the trauma requires a full immersion in a past experience of frozen time’; he also suggests to depart from the traumatized sensitivity through disruptive modes of narrative framing. Hence, the idea of dispersing Jean’s backstory throughout a fragmented dialogue was dismissed. Instead, I borrowed Geoffery Hartman’s theories in his book *in the aftermath of the holocaust* (1997), who proposes a more linear narrative of the past akin to the real archive footage of Holocaust testimonies. He explains: ‘the chronological temporality of linear narratives allows the survivor to create a sense of past, present and future’. Kaplan also stresses that ‘equally important about trauma is one’s specific positioning vis-à-vis an event’ (Kaplan, 2004 p.12). Herman highlights that ‘ordering one’s life retrospectively brings some mastery over their lives and relief to the unmastered portion’ (Hartman,1997, p. 325). Accordingly, Jean’s backstory is narrated chronologically in a linear form, without cutting back and forth to the present. The narrative flashback performs as a scene within a scene. Jean shares her story without the interference of Mariam, so that the spectator will have a full immersion in her story.

d) Constructing the structure of Jean's narrative (her backstory):



On transcribing Jean's story into a narrative monologue, I borrowed Herman's model for 'reconstructing the trauma story', she says: 'reconstructing the trauma story begins with a review of the survivor earlier life before the trauma and the circumstances that led up to trauma.' (Herman, 1992 p.126). Therefore, Jean's backstory starts by her adolescence years in Lebanon, when her father took her out of school and forced her into an early and abusive marriage. Herman suggest that the 'The next step is to reconstruct the traumatic event as a recitation of fact', where 'a detailed narrative account of the event with a description of traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is verbalized'. she also adds that 'survivor must describe her feelings, and her response to it and the responses of the important people in her life' (Jean's family) (Herman, 1992 p. 54).

Thus, Jean's describes in her monologue her fears towards her marriage and her inability to object her father, then she describes intensively her marital abuse experience and her traumatic

shock when she learnt about her husband's identity, and how she withholds her story in silence even after liberation and she also narrates her family's response towards her traumatized reverberation and anguish behaviors after divorce.

e) Reconstructing the dialogue towards a resolution - Mariam's role:



As examined by Herman, Trauma survivors would often struggle to answer the question of ‘Why, why did this happen to me?’ for Herman, ‘the struggle for meanings is the struggle to exist’ (Herman, 1992; p.127). Therefore, the therapeutic conversation should entail reaching a reconstructed resolution for the past setbacks. Herman explains that the listener should pursue the survivor to provide answers for their trauma story, much in a way a psychoanalyst would questions a patient in a therapy session (Herman, 1992; p.127). Therefore, Mariam starts triggering answers from Jean that help her navigate her feelings towards her family and her standpoint towards her perpetrators. The listener (Mariam) and the survivor (Jean) should reach an explanatory narrative of what happened and why it happened.

Hence, they try exploring the unconscious processes that influenced her past decisions, old behavior, and help the survivor fill out the plot' of their own story. Herman also adds that the narrative should include the survivor's response towards the responses of the people involved in these events. If a harming person caused their traumas, from their families, their community or nation, then they should conclude different forms of justice and consider forgiving their perpetrators so they can transcend the harmful impact over their present life. (Herman 1992, p. 126). Similarly, in this dialogue scene Mariam helps Jean piece together an ordered verbal resolution from her story. Jean expresses that she forgave her family members, as she needed to cut off the trauma ties with her past and live beyond their harm. She also concluded that it was her fault that she didn't defend her life choices and allowed others to dictate her life. Herman also explains the coming together between the survivor and the listener, is 'a repossession of the act of witnessing'. In the talking cure between Mariam and Jean they would share a 'joint responsibility to provide an emerging truth' about their past trauma and seek its resolution (Herman 1992 p. 14, 127).

Dori Laub calls this reflective process as 'the double telling' (Laub, 2003), since Mariam also benefited from listening to Jean's story as it helped her revisit and reflect on her own trauma. In other words, Jean's story and resolution was the missing cue to assimilate Mariam's past trauma. Mariam's listening to Jean's story and her ability to forgive her perpetrators has transcended Mariam's position from the victim into the position of the witness. Consequently, this act of witnessing has revisited and reshaped Mariam's self-victimization and her view of her father as the perpetrator.

4- Dima's hypo-arousal: Dima's arrival with Massa



While Dima is working silently on a stray mind, she suddenly got dizzy and dropped a jar off the shelf, as she reenacted the shakiness of the ship's kitchen during its drowning and relived the moment somatically. This scene applies Walker's concept of 'disremembering' which is a 'frame of a non-realist disturbance and fragmentation' that disrupts the scene's diegesis (Walker, 2005:19). According to Caruth, acute trauma survivor often suffer from a temporary amnesia due to a 'constriction of the field of consciousness' which kept painful memories split off from ordinary awareness (Caruth,1991, p.33). Hence, Dima's memories perform in fragmented quick fleeing images as literal as they were diffused with fantasies of her hopes. These fleeing images from the traumatic memory disrupt her perception of time, as if her past becomes fully present.

Van der Hart also explain in his article ‘Structural dissociation theory’ (O. Van der Hart, 2006) that post-war victims find it difficult to integrate into their ongoing lives, and construct a normal post-war existence. This often leads them to split off their painful memories instead of confronting them. Consequently, the traumatic memories remain suspended and start hunting them in an intrusive and heightened reality (Van der Hert, 2006).

a) Failed witnessing:

Jean scorns Dima for her inattention and telling her that she will disregard her irresponsible behavior for the sake of her sister Massa. Jean who is always hyper alert, noticed that Massa was almost fainting. So, they rushed into the car to reach the nearest hospital while Dima remained frozen in place and slowly followed them later.

b) Hypo arousal and freeze response:

In this scene Dima’s trauma is exhibited in her freeze response, as explained by Herman, acute trauma survivors who bypassed a ‘Single-incident’ trauma will normally experience hypo- arousal, avoidance, numbing, and intrusive thoughts on daily basis. (Herman 1992, p.63). She laid the difference between the hyper-arousal and hypo-arousal; whereas the hyper arousal occurs when someone is agitated exhibiting tremors, sweating, anger bursts or dilated pupils. Whereas, the hypo-arousal is a less visible trauma-related response, it manifests as ‘shutting down’, ‘zoning out’ or being ‘on autopilot’. Hypo-arousal, in contrast to hyper-arousal, is characteristic of the survival response of ‘freeze’ (Herman, 1992, p.14 & 31). Hence, in this scene Dima has responded in a hypo-arousal response while Jean reacted in a hyper-arousal response.

5- Dima's disremembering and associated memories:



As they arrive in the hospital, Dima stands outside the emergency room frozen in place witnessing Massa off the glass window. In this scene we see that Dima is still in ‘a hypnotic trance state’ post the shipwreck incident. Applying Lifton theories on the psychic numbing, he explains: that the subjective shutting off human psyche acts as an adaptive response to the terror of the moment and annihilation, as it gives the survivor the awareness that something is happening, but with a sense of unreality or disbelief (Herman 1992p.170).

a) Disremembering, Triggers and Associative memories:

Thema Bryant-Davis explains in his book *Surviving sexual violence* ‘that traumatic memories can be recalled by specific cues that may be associated with a physical space, ‘Similar locations, similar smells, similar looks or lighting,’ can all resemble aspects of a space where a trauma occurred (Davis, 2011 p.202). Similarly, Dima’s witnessing for Massa being aided by the nurse triggers flashbacks of their first emergency intervention after the shipwreck incident, she associates incidents happening at the hospital with moments and deaths she witnessed in her past after the shipwreck. This act of witnessing and reenactment

functions as the second event for Dima, as it awakes her from her hypnotic state post the shipwreck.

b) Double witnessing:



This scene also employs the process of ‘double witnessing’ as examined by Dana Amir in her book *‘Bearing witnessing to the witness*, in which the spectator witnesses Dima's recall of their rescue moments and Massa’s strife to be rescued, Mariam and Jean are also witnessing Massa's strife with her breathing. According to Dana Amir, the double witnessing of trauma between the spectator and the characters will transfer both the spectator and the character from the position of the victim into the position of the witness, which will revisit the sense of victimization (Amir, 2018 p. 20).

c) The use of performativity in flashbacks:



Caruth explained the essence of this flashback ‘a history that literally has no place, not in the past, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood’ (Caruth 1991 p.153). Likewise, the sight of the boats and the couples walking at the beach reenacts a flashback of Dima’s meeting with her fiancé Bassem and their plans to travel to Italy through the sea to get married abroad and have a better future. We hear the couple’s non diegetic dialogue over a recollection of images. However, Caruth’s theory of belatedness indicates that not all aspects of a traumatic situation are available for recall. Janet Walker explains that the disremembering narrative after recall ‘is a mixture of truth and fantasy or metaphor’ (walker, 2005). Elsaesser notes that as a result of the displaced recall, ‘trauma also suspends the categories of true or false, being in some sense performative’ (Elsaesser, 2001: 199). Roy Brand also advocates the performative form of flashback, he explains in his article *Witnessing on film*, ‘Witnessing is the attempt to make the experience communicable, that is to bring it back to life by reconnecting it to a whole person or a community, It stands in the position of loss and testifies it’ (Brand, 2009). Accordingly, Dima’s flashback of the couple is a recollection of images that aims to communicate Dima’s ‘experienced of loss, or as missing in some way’, the flashback is more performativity than factual, portraying the essence of the

couple's relationship, their longing to unite, and fantasies to get marrieds, along with an implicit sense of loss. Thus, flashback imagery doesn't just encompass actual past event and but also Dima's feelings towards these lived events, hence her recall is a mixture of truth and fantasy as suggested by Walker. The flashback ends with Dima's swirling her white wedding dress and matches back with her laying down a white tablecloth on one of the restaurant tables.

5- Freeze moment of Massa: stopping time:



a) Everyday weariness of the present:

In this scene, we see a wide angle with a time lapse of the three working ladies as the day passes versus the fixed frame of Massa seated on her chair all day, where she seems frozen in time and space. According to Dirk de De Bruyne 'the juxtaposition of motion and stillness, sound and silence, 'evoke moments of rupture' and 'indicate shock moments for both the main character and the viewer (Hodgin &Thakkar,2017, p.21). Hence, the scene invites the viewer to have a pause moment to meditate and think through the scene's events.

This time lapse aims to portray what Anne Cvetkovich refers to as the ‘everyday weariness’ of the present’ (Cvetkovich, 2009), the mundane strife in the post-traumatic lives of these marginalized women. The scene also implies a subliminal link between the three characters and Massa. The dichotomy between Massa’s immobility and the moving characters is a visual metaphor for their fixation of trauma, despite their advance in their mundane tasks, their anchor trauma is still unprocessed. Hence, Massa’s immobility is a metaphor for their buried inner child, their blocked memories and denied trauma so they can cope with the hardcore reality of their lives. In their commitment to maintaining a seemingly normal lifestyle, they suppress their painful memories and traumas instead of confronting them.



b) Trauma representation through a silent witness

Massa's immobile witnessing as the day passes also denotes her state of shock, disorientation, and anxieties in the aftermath life of a war child. Throughout the film, Massa appears as a silent witness and an unemotional observer. While her feelings and thoughts are largely impenetrable to the spectator. However, the film makes it explicit that it was the trauma of losing her family in the shipwreck that made her stop speaking. Massa's muteness is akin to Kerim's deafness and muteness in *The Perfect Circle* film by Ademir Kenovic (1997), and to Ivan's stuttering in *Ivan's childhood* (1962) by Andrei Tarkovsky. These films render war trauma metaphorically and literally as unspeakable for the war child.

6- Setting as a metaphor relational home:



This scene is also inspired by the period of time in 2018, when I was obliged to file for asylum. As my mother fully resided in the States, and my father's work was not stable in Egypt. To add on, further family issues suddenly aroused and my parents wanted to separate, so I was staying with my two close friends (Miss Nagy and Miss Shaker) in their rented apartment in California. At that stage we were three Arab ladies in a foreign country, with unknown future, and perplexing family situations since they were disconnected from their families as well. Hence, this scene is inspired by this phase as I aim to explore and examine the dynamics between inner self and the space. My research led me to find the term 'relational home' which is coined by Robert Stolorow in his book *Trauma and human existence* (2007), he says: the recovery from trauma takes place within a relational home, in the 'inter-subjective context' in which 'emotional pain and existential vulnerability will be experienced, traumatized states will be revealed, 'they can become less overwhelming and more bearable, and this makes

various defense mechanisms, such as dissociation or avoidance of contact, less necessary (Stolorow, 2007 p.10). In parallel, Jean's home performs as the 'relational home', a proxy for the characters' personal homes, where they were primarily inflicted and traumatized. Since, the characters' homes were their original site of trauma. The characters' stay at Jean's home and 'the dynamics of their togetherness' exposes their private struggles and hidden traumas. Film scholar Buber describes this process as 'the inter-human which opens out what otherwise remains unopened' (Buber, 1951, p. 86).

In this scene we see, Jean who always sleeps at the restaurant, finally returns home. And we see that Jean's home is packed with antiques from her family, inferring her attachment to the past, and indirect way to her legacy of trauma. This melancholic state of 'fixating on trauma' is described by Kaplan as the 'quiet traumas' of families, where there were culturally sanctioned forms of violence and abuse, that were privately ritualized and normalized, while publicly denied and dismissed' (Kaplan, 2004, p.87). Thus, the scene also implies the characters' 'quite trauma' and their collective suffering of family wounds, social alienation and sense of homelessness.



For, Mariam, Jean's home become what Philosopher Gaston Bachelard regards in his book *The Poetics of space* as the 'unconscious is housed', in which the space 'evokes the original maternal womb and one's first childhood house'; For Bachelard, 'Home (actual or imagined) brings our longings, and memories into focus, where an inner landscape is reinhabited and a new world can be built' (Bachelard, 2017 p2.). Likewise, the sight of Dima undressing Massa's socks reenacts Mariam's flashback of her father, when he used to perform a puppet show and triggers her longing for him.



For Dima, Jean's home becomes her place of 'dwelling', 'a recollection, and a coming to oneself', as described by Emanuel Levinas in his article *The Dwelling* (1991 p.156). Since, Dima's finally remembers her traumatic incident and reenacts her drowning moments, the death of her fiancé after the shipwreck. It also reveals that Dima is a homeless wonderer, having all her clothes in her baggage. Hence, Jean's home as a setting is an essential narrative agent in the film plot and a therapeutic catalyst in the character's working through of trauma; as it performs as a transformative space that both revisits and exposes the mysteries of the characters' trauma.

7- The use of surrealism in Traumatic imagery:



In this scene we see Dima is hesitant to get into the shower, she carefully places her legs into the shower basin, where a close up reveals that shower basin is filled with fish. This image is inspired by Robert Jay Lifton's description of the traumatic memory and the "ultimate horror" experienced by survivors of war trauma and extreme event (Lifton, 1997). Lifton explains in his article *the 'survivor's witness'* (1997), that traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images, with 'a heightened reality'; he adds this ultimate terror causes a 'fragmented sensation; forming an 'image without context'. (Kaplan 2004, P.27) and leaves the survivor of death encounter with an "indelible image" or "death imprint." Drawing on Lifton's description of traumatic memory by use of the term 'heightened reality', it led me to explore the surrealism techniques in the medium of cinema. Pierre Reverdy describes the Surrealist imaginary by this quote:

The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from

a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality (Reverdy, 1918).

Being a student of Marcel Duchamp's concept of re-contextualization' (1917), has also affirmed my narrative choice, Duchamp's suggest that the re-contextualization of an object (swimming fish) into a new medium, leads to a 'creation of a conflict with the existing conventions of the narrative representation' (Williams, 1990 p.5). Hence, a heightened reality can be visually experienced by the juxtaposition of two different realities, heightening the role of fantasy of the traumatic memory (Freud, 1923, p. 24). Hence, the swimming fish being extracted from its original context and re-contextualized in the shower basin manifests Dima's 'fragmented sensation' post her drowning experience in the shipwreck. This near death encounter left an indelible death imprint that confuses her mind between reality and traumatic imagery. Lastly, Herman extends further to explain that 'traumatic memories, in their predominance of imagery and bodily sensation, and in their absence of verbal narrative, resemble the memories of young children' (p. 27) In fact, the swimming fish in the shower basin also crystallize my own fears of the sea and its creatures; as I experienced many jellyfish stings as a child, which made me have a certain fright from swimming in the sea.

Act3: The resolutions and wrap- up: relapse and reconstruction.

8 - The use of temporal hybridity: climax scene:



This scene presents the climax of the film narrative performed in a montage of successive shots in the kitchen. The scene aims to emulate what Herman defines as ‘traumatic relapses and failures’. The scene montage accelerates in rhythm and intensity showing moments of characters’ failure to quench their traumatic relapses and the demands of their labor world, till they finally lose the restaurant. Herman explains that trauma recovery is never complete, new conflicts and frequent occasions would arise ‘with a resurgence of traumatic memories’ and traumatic relapses’ causing the survivor to think that they hit back to the bottom point again, and that their trauma has proved to be ‘incurable’ (Herman 1992, p. 152). This distortion and disordering of time steered me to examine the temporality of trauma in trauma cinema, which led me to the term ‘temporal hybridity’. Temporal hybridity as described by many trauma scholars, it is ‘a dialectic of various temporalities’, it is a common feature in post colonialism, or postmodernism discourse, that are all associated with various forms of time play. Scholar Elizabeth Outka defines it in her article *Trauma and Temporal hybridity in Arundhati Roy’s*:

the God of small things (2011), as ‘a bewildering mix of different times: images, and sensations, that may serve the ‘depiction of collective trauma’ or ‘providing a vivid map of trauma’s lingering damage’. It may also be seen as a sign of oppression, when one culture forces another to assimilate (Outka, 2011 p.21,53). Hence, to emulate the character’s traumatic relapses and their failure to pace up with their present reality, the sequence performs in a temporal hybridity, a bewildering mix of multiple moments and time knots of the characters’ private struggles and the response of their external environment to their failures, when they involuntarily exhibit their symptomatic gestures. Thus, the sequence accelerates in rhythm and intensity, presenting shots of Dima’s dizziness, Mariam’s disorientation, Jean’s drinking, Massa silent drawing, the restaurant owner shouting, and the complaining of the restaurant clients. The scene finally ends where the characters eventually collapse and they lose the restaurant.

Drawing on La Capra’s theories, the characters’ loss of emotional control in their labor environment reveals that their traumatic dissociation is both an affect and a representation of a silenced past, La Capra explained it as ‘a moment when one dissociatively feels what one cannot express, and disorientedly represents what one cannot feel at the same time’ (La Capra, 1995 p. 42). Thus, the characters’ trauma and symptomized subjectivity has been both expressed and blocked in this scene.



Important to signal, the characters' the loss of restaurant narratively coincide with the 'All is lost' moment in the hero's journey's plot structure. According to Campbell, every story should have an 'all is lost' moment that forces the hero to undergo a true change and reconstruction. It is when the character lose their boat so they learn to swim and face their inner threats and flaws (Campbell 2004, p. 130). Similarly, the restaurant was the characters' temporary shelter, a training phase where the characters encounter and mirror each other. However, drawing on La Capra theories of 'spatial analysis', their stay in the restaurant's routine could have locked them 'stuck' in their traumatic patterns and old 'emotional infrastructure', and their traumas could risk developing into an 'arrested process' in their lives (La Capra 1995 p. 173). Therefore, the characters had to lose this restaurant (sheltering place) to move into a new confrontational phase and shift their pursuit from working their obligations into navigating new psychic spaces within themselves.

9- Mourning traumatic losses:



Narrative device: mourning and grief rituals in ‘the memory place’

According to Herman, mourning traumatic losses is an essential stage in the working through of trauma, and the resistance of mourning may risk the tyranny of the character’s past (Herman,1992 p. 188). Likewise, after the loss of the restaurant, each characters seem to go back to their hideous corners and exhibit the bottom pit of their emotional arcs. Drawing on Geoffrey Hartman’s theories in his article ‘Representing trauma, issues, contexts and narrative tools, the mourning phase may be triggered by revisiting the site of trauma, he defines this site as a ‘memory place’ (Hartman,1991), where the memories of feelings from the past can be located and contemplated in the present. Psychologist Bryant-Davis suggest that revisiting the accident/death site after trauma can reduce posttraumatic stress symptoms (Heir & Weisæth, 2006), they also encourage processing the grief rituals to reconcile with the facts and the reality of death. Hence, for the mourning phase of Dima and Massa, we see that they have returned back to their ‘memory place’, the seashore, where Dima can finally mourn and contemplate the loss of her

fiancé during the shipwreck incident. As a form of grief ritual, Dima and Massa sail away Massa's letter boat into the sea, which is an allegory for placing flowers on the tombs of their loved ones. This scene also embeds Caruth concept of departure and return as explained in *Unclaimed Experience*, (1997), Caruth illustrates how someone who has been experienced an accident and "gets away, apparently unharmed" (Caruth, 1997,p. 84), would finally return to the traumatic experience with a departure from its site, meaning that this return is an attempt of mastery and a mental release form the traumatic experience. Hence, Dima and Massa return to the site of trauma (the shipwreck accident) is an attempt to experience mastery through leaving the site's death and grief inherited in the traumatic space and moment.

10. The use of art therapy as a self-expression and grief:



On this scene, Massa interrupts Dima's story by showing her drawing of a flipped boat floating dead passengers on the red sea. Massa's drawing triggers Dima's flashback of the shipwreck. Then, Dima helps Massa write a letter for their family and fold it into a letter boat to sail it away to their family. In this scene, I borrowed the technique of art therapy to perform as a narrative trajectory of Massa's silence and repressed memories. Drawing on Herman's theories who that survivors might turn to nonverbal communication methods such as drawing or painting to help processing their non-verbal memories. Given the "iconic" visual nature of traumatic memories, drawing pictures could be the most effective initial step in dealing with these 'indelible images' (Herman 1992, p.177). La Capra also explains that these indelible images as the phase of 'fixation on trauma' of war survivors, he defines as an "idée fixe", a death imprint (Kaplan 2004, p.32). Hence, Massa's drawing helps her accessing her lurking traumatic images, and move beyond 'this death imprint' to start working through of trauma (Herman 1992, p.27). As a result, Massa utters her voice for the first time in the film for

dictating Dima her letter for her parents, which also infers her progress in her trauma processing.

11. The sublime of death and life



The spectator then follows Dima's entry into Jean's home and witnesses the relapses of the characters. Jean who has never had a life outside her restaurant shows symptoms of 'regression', which is a defense mechanism to escape the threats of her new life and financial threats (Myrick & Brand, 2006). Whereas Mariam has already packed her bags and ready to surrender to her mother's new life plans. Mariam is once again falling into the trap of fulfilling her mother's desires (autocratic figure) who is the symbol of the superego's voice in her life. Following the theories of Psychologist Anderson, an abandoned child will always grow to exhibit traces of codependency and self-abandonment towards their life decision and routes as an adult (Anderson, 2000 p.22). Nevertheless, Kaplan explained that 'from the ruins, something new will be born and the task is to learn to think the significance of survival among the ruins' (Kaplan 2004 p. 167). Similarly, this would be the phase where the characters are obliged to rebuild their lives and psyches out of the ruins and losses of their pasts.

12. The use of Deus ex-machina: the arrival of Dima's family:



In this scene, Jean's outrage has been cut out by the arrival of Dima's family. This scene is inspired by the real story of Doaa el Zamel as narrated in Fleming's book, Doaa describes her re-encounter with her family in Sweden as a second chance to live (Fleming,2017). Hence, on this scene I reflect on Dima's relief by the arrival of her family, as well as my personal relief, when my parents suddenly give up the divorce idea and decided to reconcile. Accordingly, on this scene I employed the Deus ex machine narrative device, Vasily Shevtsov defines it in his book *Deux machina as a method of constructing a happy end in Art film* which as a plot device that uses a sudden, unearned resolution to resolve dense dramatic conflicts that may otherwise seem hopeless (Shevtsov ,2015 p.12). The family arrival and the sudden relief it causes, implies the power of family and the importance of interpersonal relations and in the 'remaking of self' as suggested by (Herman 1992, p.59).

Dima's family as the 'Foreign bodies'

Moreover, on researching innovative methods for narrating and representing repressed memory, I came across the concept of '*Foreign Bodies*' as defined by scholar Laura Di Prete

In her article "Foreign Bodies": Trauma, Corporeality, and Textuality in Contemporary American culture (Laura di prete, 2016). Di peter argues that the centrality of a body figure can perform as a medium for remembering or releasing trauma, she says: 'foreign body' whether literal or metaphorical would help articulate the psychic trauma, facilitate the mourning process as well as the process of working through. Hence, in this scene the arrival of Dima's family can be regarded as 'the foreign body' which helps the characters articulates their traumatic pasts. Since, Mariam's witnessing the warm greeting between Dima and her father, aroused her desire to revisit her father and reconcile with her roots. This also coincides with Freud theories, which implies that the 'very insignificant incidents may trigger repressed feelings and hysterical symptoms from childhood, since the major childhood traumatic episodes are hidden behind the more recent events' (Freud 1927, p8.).

13. Reconciliation with the past - the use of elusive figure:



According to Dominick La Capra's theories, we must engage in the events of the past as part of working through the effects of those same events (La Capra 1995 p. 33). Herman also demonstrated that the reconstruction of the trauma requires the 'immersion in the experience of its frozen time' (Herman 1992 p.132). Applying these theories along with Caruth's theory on the return to the trauma site, Mariam decides to return back to her family's apartment, and revisits her childhood memories. This also coincides with my personal decision to return to Egypt and confront past hanging issues that emotionally disturbs my present. Many studies also signified the importance of the Inner Child Work for recovering a child abuse or an emotional neglect. Scholars explain that inner child work, help brings back into conscious a broader understanding of family ties, and restore incidents and moments in the implicit memory. Consequently, it aids in raising awareness of the-emotional triggers with all its embedded shame and re-traumatization, it also helps establishing a sense of safety in the body and

neurological system and the implicit memory (Psycheandsomatherapy.com).



Accordingly, I applied this therapeutic approach into this scene as describes by Herman she says: ‘method of exploring the past will be by viewing photographs, constructing a family tree, or visiting the site of childhood experiences. Post-traumatic symptoms such as flashbacks or nightmares are also valuable access routes to memory’ (Herman,1992, p.37). Hence, Mariam started exploring the past by gazing at the corners of her old home, she recalled her parent’s fights along with a child lullaby. These non-diegetic sounds of her repressed memory remind viewers of the implicit nature of childhood-stored memories. Michel Chion defines *these* subjective-internal sounds in his book *Audio-Vision* as “mental voices” (Chion, p.76). in the scene I also used the elusive figure of the inner child, who way hiding under bedsheets and shutting her ears, from her parents’ quarreling sounds. Important to the use of the elusive figure of a child is common motif in trauma films. Serge Leclair argues that:

[f]or each of us, the wonderful child is the unconscious, primordial repre- sentation in which, more densely than anywhere else, our wishes, nostalgia, and hopes come together. In the transparent reality of the child, the Real of all our desires can be seen,

almost without a veil. We are fascinated and can neither look away nor grasp it
(Leclaire 1998, p. 3).

Mariam then started to view some memorial items she crafted with her father and reviewed the journals she wrote as a child expressing her rage towards his abandonment. After scrolling through the journal pages, she wrote, ‘today I choose to forgive him’. This exploration on her past provides a context within which the associated feelings and burdens of the abandonment trauma can finally come to light and be externalized and understood.

14. The use of internal monologue for self- rebuilding:



According to Herman, reconstructing the trauma story is an essential step for the survivor’s trauma recovery. Paul Ricoeur also fostered the concept of ‘self-narrative’ or the ‘narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1986), which is the retrieval of self through narrating one’s life events in a form of a fiction story to help positive anticipation, he stressed on the fact that our internal

dialogue often direct and dictate our realities and future (Ricoeur 1986 p. 132). Likewise, after Mariam's confrontation with her childhood wounds, she starts writing a new narrative, her writing is accompanied by her non-diegetic monologue; where she says: 'Today I will start writing a new novel called 'Meta-noia': life beyond fear.

Mariam's redemptive monologue:

Herman's trauma theories also emphasized that trauma rips one's voice and disrupts the self-dialogue (Herman 1992, p.8). Pierre Janet in his book *Psychological Healing* has stressed on the linguistic operation during the memory processing, he emphasized that normal memory is 'the action of telling a story', in which one will not be able to process any situation, until an inward resolution and a verbal recital of events is addressed to oneself and others. Likewise, the traumatic memory is reconstructed by placing 'this recital in its place as one of the chapters in the survivor's personal history' (Walker, 2005, 661). Consequently, the survivor develops an objective metafiction approach towards their traumatic events and starts developing a healthier self-concept, self-authority and a positive inner dialogue (Corey, 2012). Therefore, Mariam's monologue performs as a reconstructed speech of memory, a guided self-dialogue (Corey, 2012), her narration is more like an exercise for positive self-dialogue (Corey, 2012). As examined earlier, positive self-talk is considered one of the main effective coping strategies proposed by Cognitive behavior therapy. Corey explained that a positive self-dialogue performs as a 'private cognitive procedure' that help mediate a behavioral change and regain control over one's life narrative (Corey, 2012 p. 20). Hence, Mariam's regain of her voice and verbalizing her inner vows to conquer fear is a declaration of victory over her past inherited fears, and her past surrender to the voices of the super ego and society. Hence, Mariam's monologue performs as a

reclaim of self- authorship over her life, she is now holding back the pen of her life and ready to re-write a different story for her life beyond the shadows of her past and her mother's plans. When the "action of telling a story" has come to its conclusion, the traumatic experience truly belongs to the past. At this point, the survivor faces the tasks of rebuilding her life and self- construction in the present (Herman 1992.p140).

15. Healing themes for self- reconstruction:



Herman explains that after the 'action of telling a story' has come to its conclusion, it is time for the survivor to reclaim their life narrative and start rebuilding their life in the present as they seek a renewed future (Herman 1992 p.140). On designing and narrating the self-reconstruction phase of Jean, healing approaches are borrowed from Herman's theories and examined in the coming section. Drawing on Herman's theories, the survivor must challenge herself to 'defy her old fears, she also must dare to define her future goals and activate her positive imagination' (Herman, 1992, p.145). Hence, cross cutting Mariam's monologue, we see

Mariam's cycling her bike down the neighborhood without fear. Dima as well defies her fears of the sea and took few steps into the water and Jean stepped out of her isolation of restaurants' kitchens.

a) The Act of forgiveness - Confronting the father:



Drawing on Herman's theories, moving towards a different future entails forgiving or confronting the person that caused the trauma without fearing the consequences. Through which the survivor learns another forms of justice to address what happened (Herman 1992 p. 130) Hence, Mariam's arrival at her father's house and placing her old journals is an act of forgiveness and confrontation with her past. She finally found courage to express her feelings towards her father and move beyond his abandonment. Mariam witnessing her father afar also collides with Herman's theories, that forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean regaining the relation. Yet, the trauma recovery necessitates reconciling with the past and unbinding the perpetrator from their authority over the survivor's life and happiness.



b) Occupational therapy:

Herman emphasized that self- actualization and restoration of autonomy are principal needs for the recovery of abused and chronic trauma survivors (Herman 1992 p.149). Which she suggests the occupational therapy as a method of regaining agency and ‘repairing their shattered self-esteem’ (Herman 1992, p. 149). Herman’s theories are intact with the real story of my participant Jamel el Jouhery, who also shifted her career from being a chef to being a registrar in the emergency room in a hospital, this career shift lends her a renewed subjectivity and route in life, not just by ‘reconnecting with the outer world’ again but also by witnessing herself beneficial to others and able to soothe their pains. Likewise, the scene starts by a shot of Jean opening the first aid cabinet in the hospital; the image is accompanied by Mariam’s words declaring she will not be afraid of opening new doors in her life, and moving beyond the shadow of her hunting past.

c) Survivor mission, finding values in past pains:

The second healing approach embedded is ‘The Survivor Mission’ by Herman, in which the survivor finds healing by saving and helping others (Herman 1992, p.141). Herman explains that ‘helping others in need will speed up the reconstruction of traumas for the victims of abuse’, the healing approach in the self-narrative is ‘finding value in the past pain’, powering hence, Jean’s occupation at the hospital helps her find value and meaning for her past pains and traumas, as she uses them to help others. (Herman 1992, p.141), hence, Jean can now theorize her traumatic past as a crossroad in her life narrative, a back door that introduced her into her new self.

d) Authority over traumatic memories – Dima confronts her fears:



The scene of Dima and her family at the beach draws a family portrait and retouches the family theme in the film. It is mainly derived from the real story of Doaa elzamel who was united by her family in Sweden. The family portrait also accentuates the impact of the pathological

relations and family ties in shaping and demolishing of self, traumas, and memories. Herman also explained that ‘restoring the vital relationships’ of the survivor is one of the main signs of self-reconstruction and trauma recovery (Herman 1992, p.153). So, the spectator can expect an improvement on Dima’s psyche by the return of her parents.



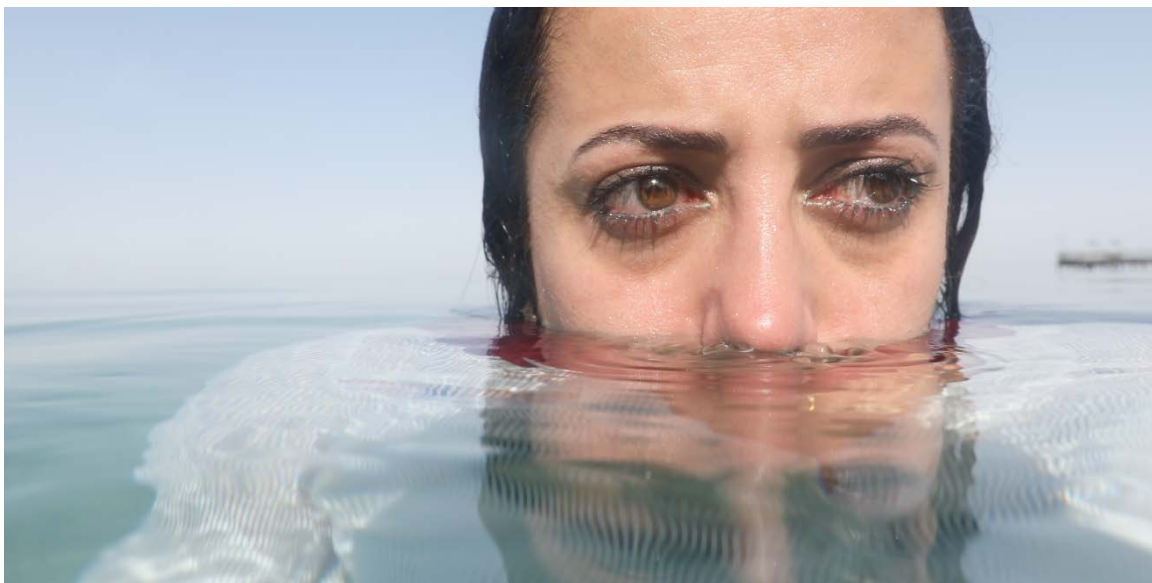
e) Memorizing the traumatic event with its associated feelings and fears:

For, Herman trauma recovery includes memorizing the traumatic event with its associated feelings and fears (Herman 1992, p. 153). Thus, we see a shot where Dima decides to walk into the sea water and has a confrontational leap with her childhood fears, the drowning of her fiancé. This scene is also derived from the book ‘hope beyond the sea’ (2017). Dima’s dive into the sea water infers that she has initiated working through her traumatic memory, bypass her frozen response and she is now able to bear the feelings associated with her traumatic incident.

f) Retrieving from the belated amnesia and regaining the authority over memory:

Furthermore, Dima's recall of Massa's mother shows that she started to 'have authority over her memories, (Herman 1992, p. 152) and she is gradually retrieving from her belated amnesia and freeze response.

g) Wounded healer, witnessing and regarding the pain of others:



The shot where Dima looks back at the horizon to witness Massa sailing her letter boats aims to emulate Kaplan's concept of witnessing and regarding the pain of others which underscore the film's approach, when the camera alternates in close up between Dima and Massa, it invites the spectators to place themselves in Dima's place both as the survivor (subject of testimony) and as a witness of Massa's trauma, hence it places the spectators in a process of a double witnessing, for both Dima (the witness) and Massa (the victim).



However, drawing on La Capra's theories in his book "Writing history writing trauma" that trauma narratives which never promise the 'phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity and definitive closure' as they may risk perpetuating the trauma in spectators or readers (La Capra, 1995 p. 71) Likewise, while the other character were able to step forwards towards their healing, Massa is still in her unfathomable phase. As we see Massa sailing her letter boats to her family, and gazing sadly to the sea horizon with a longing face to her family. Hence, the scene emphasizes that 'trauma will never be fully resolved, or acknowledged in its time and place and recovery will never be complete' (Herman 1992, p.152).



Massa's frozen portrait dominating the screen, invites the spectator to be the witness for her traumas as well as requests the acknowledgement of her traumatization. Herman explained that although war news intervenes public awareness, it is still rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation still operate on a social as well as an individual level (Herman, 1992 p.80) Therefore, Massa's portrait aims to put a face to the many hidden and marginalized narratives that aim to be witnessed or acknowledged.

Chapter 5: Cinematography concepts and production techniques:

Joshua Hirsh emphasized in his book *Afterimage, Film Trauma and Holocaust* (2003), that Trauma in the contemporary media culture faces a 'crises in representation' (Hirsch, 2003). Other scholars have focused their studies on how can film represent an experience that is not fully assimilated or acknowledged by the human mind (Caruth, 1995, p.4), others laid their studies on how can film revisit the subject of pain without re-traumatizing the spectator, and how can film perform in the witnessing modalities which promises a process of self-reflection as signified by Kaplan (Kaplan, 2005 p.39). These inquiries have also overarched my research approach for the film's cinematography and examining the filmic strategies for the trauma representation of the characters. According to Janet Walker, trauma films should show draw on a range of innovative strategies' for trauma representation', she says:

Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over verbal narrative and context, these films are characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles. And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashback (Walker, 2005: 19)

This chapter describes the context through which I define my approach to cinematographic practice-as-research and researching cinematographic practices; within presenting brief examples of the cinematic tools I have articulated and experimented in the film scenes. These visual tools were derived from the studied theoretical scholarship, analyzing film contents and case studies I have undertaken.

1. Montage tools and motifs: the use of match cuts - Sutured discourse

The overall editing of the film follows the Einstein and soviet montage school of editing, which is known for stitching shots to deliver meanings, hence, the use of the match cut is a visual motif in the cinematography and montage of this film. The match cut was by various methods, one of which was by as focusing on one elements of one scene for the transition to the next scene. Mureen Turim explains the function of these visual matching in her book *Abstraction in avant garde films* (1985) she says

they are small-scale articulations between sound and image, which are woven together with the spatial, temporal and narrative codes to place the viewer of the film in what has been called a sutured discourse. This initially means that the camera angles and their variation from shot to shot are selected so as to provide an imaginary entrance for the viewer to a scene (Turim, 1985 p. 171).

Match cuts are widely used in thriller and psychological films, but I was mainly inspired by the match cuts in *Slumdog millionaire* (2008) by Danny Boyle, and *Eternal Sunshine of Spotless mind* (2004) by Michael Gondry, as they used the match cuts as a transitional motif for the characters' s flashbacks and act of memory throughout the film narrative. In the same vein, I have planned several match cuts throughout the film to link between the film scenes and emphasize the characters' spatial dissociation and mental activity. For example: Mariam's close up in the manager scene was used to match cut to her close up in the mirror of the bathroom, the sound of the toilette flush was also overlapping between the scenes. The camera rotating 360 degrees in the kitchen scene was used to seamlessly dissolve into the rotting cup in the amusement park. Mariam's dizzy gesture was matched with her vomiting gesture in the bathroom. The camera zooming into the forest scene at the projector was seamlessly dissolved

into the actual forest landscape in her dream scene. lastly Mariam's sketches flying off the balcony visually matched the view of birds flying to imply the character's lost dreams.

2 - Camera techniques in Mariam sequence:

1. The Intercultural cinema and the melodic counterpoint:

The cinematographic thinking:

This scene is influenced by the 'intercultural cinema as signified by Laura Marks, in her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (1999), Marks explains 'that intercultural cinema evokes memories of culture and place, through an appeal to non-representative knowledge' (Marks, 1999 p.7). Another element that influenced my cinematographic thinking, is the opening scene of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1969) which entails long visual tracks of the city landscapes of Hiroshima before and after the bombing. Michelle Royer analyzed Margaret Duras's use of tracking shots in her films in his book *The cinema of Margaurite Duras* (2019), he describes these tacking shots to 'give the impression that the camera scrutinizes the space as if to try to unearth past sensory artifacts from what is gazed at' (Royer, 2019). In the same vein, my aim in this scene is to invite the spectator to witness the film's setting and introduce the city's landscape before and after the revolution, as I aimed to film the political street graffiti during the revolution to 'evokes memories of culture and place', and introduce the protagonist as a culture figure who is directly influenced by the story setting. (unfortunately most of the graffiti was demolished and the film shows only one remaining in Tahrir square, so I added the political report on the Egyptian revolution before the opening the scene to context the film's period and events).

The cinematographic process:



On the cinematography of this the scene, I have used the fly on wall camera technique. (which I often use in my social documentaries). The long visual tracks along with the fly on wall camera of the cityscape, invites the audience to witness the sociocultural paradoxes of the Egyptian streets as well as the portraits of Cairo’s inhabitants. The fly on wall camera also lends the scene with a sense of truth and a “socially validated reality; which according to Herman, ‘crucial for any trauma’s discourse and representation’ (Herman 1992, p.8). The scene also follows Kaplan’s concept that ‘Trauma on film is as much about individuals as it is about collectives, and the interaction between them needs always to be acknowledged’ (Kaplan 2004 p 11). Hence, the scene embeds three different framings and camera set ups to exhibit the street interaction between the character (individual) and her environment (collectives). The first shoot is dedicated to capturing the main actress biking while I follow her with my camera. This shoot aimed to capture the live responses, the street reactions and male gazes towards the protagonist while biking. The second shoot, we had a professional biker as a stunt and two different camera frames were recorded, one shoot was through a go pro camera attached to the stunt’s bike as she bikes boldly among the street crowds, and the second is the aerial shots recorded by drone. The interplay between these three framings may present the character from an ontological frame and her interaction within sociocultural environment.

The scene's music choice and affect:

The music of this scene started as a diegetic music that comes from the ear pods of Mariam but ends out as an extra-diegetic melody, when she took off the ear pods and the music continued. The music piece used in this scene, is the Bach Concerto No.1 in A minor. The approach of using classic music to present the protagonist's inner mental state was used in many trauma films, I was mainly influenced by Polanski 's film 'The Pianist (Roman Polanski, 2002). Polanski used Chopin's music 'as a symbolic, extra- narrative language in the film's storytelling to represent the character's interpolation of his traumatic experience. I chose this organized orchestral piece to play as a melodic counterpoint to the city's chaos, drawing on Freud's theories that the dichotomy between sound and image 'reveals repressed violence to be the basis of both individual and group identity' (Freud, 1929 p.20). Hence, the orchestral piece in this scene reveals Mariam's anxiety of the repressed violence in the city, it also performs as a musical hallucinatory coping mechanism, revealing her desire to split off from her real world and ease out her anxiety. Hence the orchestral music helps her remain poised during her moments of duress while biking.

2. The extreme close up and the invisible witness



In the office scene, my aim was to activate the ‘empathetic witnessing’ mode for the spectator as they witness the gender discrimination and injustice occurring for the protagonist. Kaplan defines empathetic identification as:

an identification which allows the spectator to enter into the victim’s experience ... inviting the viewer to at once *be there emotionally* (and often powerfully moved), but also to keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to the victim by the traumatic process. The victim in the narration bears witness to the catastrophe, but the viewer becomes the point of communication (Kaplan 2004 p. 124).

Hence, my cinematographic inquiry led me to research on the emotional affect theory in film and the relational viewing with the spectator. In which I discovered the Edsh Tan’s concept of the ‘invisible witness’ (1994). Tan explains in his essay ‘Film-Induced Affect as a Witness Emotion’ (1994) that ‘limiting what the viewers can see in the fictional world would enhances the diegetic effect of the scene’, hence, it places them as invisible witnesses who ‘are unable to act’ nor help the character (Tan, 1994). So, I initially placed the camera to be fixated on Mariam’s close up the entire scene, while we can only listen to the manager’s off screen voice, so the spectator would be limited to the diegesis of the scene’s world as suggested by Tan. This technique may also oblige the spectator to witness Mariam’s tight situation and uncomfortably listen to her manager’s replies. However, after experimentation, I found the set up negatively

affecting the actress's performance. So, I re-filmed the scene with the two characters on set. Alternatively, I have used the close up frames to capture Mariam's response and distress. The close up also applies Tan's concept of the invisible witness, as he explains 'both invisibility and the lack of control over the character's gaze preclude the spectator's empathy and cause for action' (Tan, 1994 p. 27). Drawing on Plantinga's theories in his book *Passionate viewers, Film, Cognition and Emotion* (Plantinga, 1999) 'The close-up shots of faces that last longer than necessary can become "scenes of empathy," as it allows viewers time to experience emotional contagion or affective congruence with the character on screen' (Plantinga, 1999, p.239). Steven Katz also explains in his book *Directing shot by shot* that 'the closer the line of sight is to the character, the greater the identification with the character, hence the spectator would feel the weight of the characters' personality' (Katz 1991, p.269). Dirk De Bruyn also asserts that a character 'looking directly at the viewer' enlists 'the viewer as confidant and psychoanalyst' (De Bruyn, 2014: p.13). Important to highlight that the use, of close up as an empathy frames is a visual motif in the film, as I used it repetitively with the other film characters.

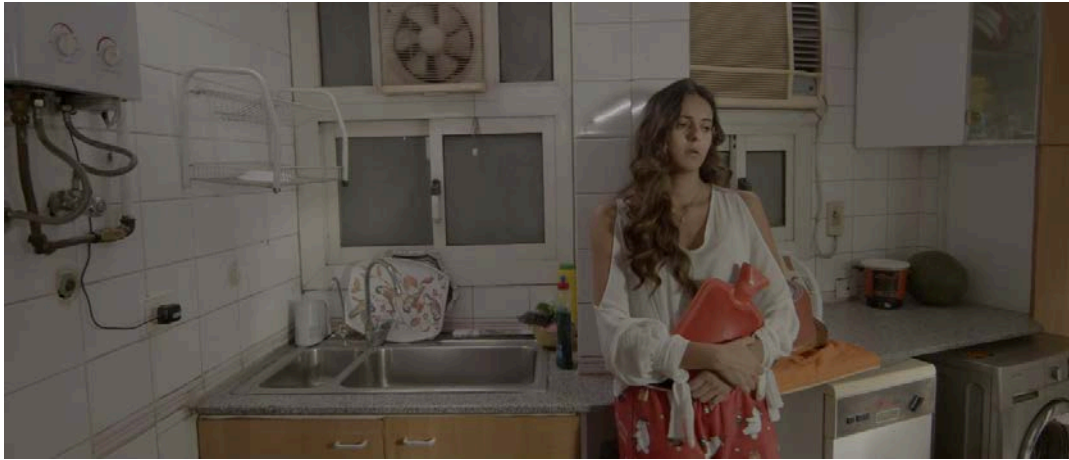
3. The use of the following shots and the subjective camera:



Scholar Roy brand explained in his article ‘Witnessing Trauma on Film’ that ‘Witnessing also means following the unfolding of the event’, he says: ‘Engaging in the passage of time is a paradigmatic characteristic of the witness, this engagement means being there at the time and the place of the event in its unfolding in time’ (Brand, 2003P.209). Brand’s description of witnessing can be visually performed through the use of the following shots, Suszan Hayward defines following shots in her book *cinema studies* that it ‘establishes the audience alignment with ‘the unfolding event’ (Hayward, 2002 p. 12). The following shot also helps the viewer to identify with the character’s point of view as the protagonist is constantly being pursued, this fulfills the engagement of the passage of time as suggested by Brand. Accordingly, the following shots were also a visual motif on the film’s narrative, it was significantly used in Mariam’s sequence to establish the witnessing mode for the spectator from the first act. Brand explains that ‘witnessing means being present’ not just ‘ontologically (as *being* there) but ethically – as being responsible or at least responsive to the event’. Brand parallels being

present in the event with the elusive process of memory working, He says: 'witnessing traditionally conceived carries an ontological baggage.. we cannot change the past or determine the future but we can see ourselves implicated in some important ways' (Brand, 2009). In the same vein, the following shots were extensively used as a transitional shot in the mental process of Mariam, as it transposes both the spectator and character from one psychic space into another. For example, the following shot of Mariam's entry to the kitchen implies her initiation of traumatic neurosis. The following shots in the hotel's dark corridor implies stepping into her new unknown world. The following shot of Mariam's entry into the forest emphasizes her dwelling into the fantasy world of her dream. The following shot of Mariam's entry into the restaurant implies initiating a new phase in her life; lastly, the following shots of her walk into her old apartment emphasizes her access into a new psychic space within herself, which is her reconciliation with her roots and past.

4. The alternation between objective and subjective camera:



This scene aims to posit the spectator as an empathetic witness for Mariam's emotional hijacking and dissociation. On this scene, I also borrowed Maya Deren's camera techniques in her film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943), Kaplan highlights Deren's alternation between the subjective and objective camera to convey the character's subconscious and subjective reality (Kaplan, 2005 p.128). Similarly, the scene also embeds this device, where the subjective camera allows sympathizing with character, and 'engages the spectator with the character's interior life and view of the world' (revolving walls of the kitchen), Then denying this subjectivity, the camera repositions itself to an objective camera and performs as an observer to witness the character's strife remotely. For Deren, this interplay between subjective and objective camera angles 'inspires a sense of impotence on our part' as the spectator (Kaplan, 2005 p.128). We are unable to help her yet we can only witness her strife distantly and listen to her labored breathing. Mariam's labored breathing was deliberately prominent in the scene's sound scape to heighten the empathetic witnessing. Drawing on the seminal work of Michel Chion in his book *Audio-Vision* (1994) 'breathing noises in a film can directly affect our own respiration' as can the suspension of breath or its rarefaction' (Chion, 1994:p. 34).

5. The use of projector as symbol for the Super Ego



Roy Brand explains in his article ‘Witnessing Trauma on Film (2009), that ‘trauma requires a different form of exposition, it cannot simply be expressed or represented due to the fact that there is nothing there to be expressed or represented’ (Brand, 2009). Similarly, this scene aims to present Mariam’s complex relation with her mother (authority figure – super ego), and the loss of communication between them with ‘a different form of exposition’ as suggested by Brand. So I used the skype call and projector to portray mother daughter relation. The projected image of the mother behind Mariam’s wall was inspired by the prologue of the film *Persona* by Ingmar Bergman’s film (1966). *Persona* prologue opens in a projected sequence that ends with one of the protagonist’ child gazing at his mother’s image. Many scholars like Frank Gado regards the films as a self-reflexive approach on Bergman’s relation with his mother (Gado 1986: p. 322), Gado also highlights the term *Persona*, literally means “person” and a ‘role’ (Barr 1987: 130), so he regards the film as Bergman’s interrogation about the role of his mother in his life. In his words the film communicates ‘the childhood memory of maternal rejection” into “the reality of man’s abandonment” (Gado 1986: p.344). In the same vein, I used the projector in this scene as an aesthetic device to symbolize the mother figure as the voice of authority and the super ego’s voice in the character’s mind, and psyche. Moreover, the mother’s image in the background appears visually detached from the daughter in color, tone and saturation. This visual dichotomy also aims to mimic their distant and broken

communication (Brand, 2009).

6. The use of speed ramping, freeze frames and hyper reality.



Robert Desnos designates in his article dreams and cinema ‘that artists should take their dreams and nightmares as inspirations to produce their artworks and attempt to reproduce what they have seen during their nocturnal fantasies’ (Desnos, 1991 p.91). Similarly, this dream sequence is inspired from a personal dream I encountered and developed it to reproduce the dream’s ‘nocturnal fantasies’ into a screen material. As noted in the last chapter, Herman explains that complex trauma survivors have a crises in faith when it comes to the outer world, this is because they have lost their sense of safety and trust in their primary years, so this experience of lack in trust would continue throughout their lifecycle (Herman 1992, p.37), they become ‘incubated in terror’ and augmented fears which are not factual (Caruth, 2015, p.33). Thus, Herman’s use of the term of ‘augmented fears’ inspired me to examine the visual techniques of the augmented and hyper-reality to deliver Mariam’s subjective view of the outer world. Hyperreality is a postmodern semiotic concept coined by French sociologist Francois Baudrillard. Baudrillard described "Hyperreality" in his article ‘Simulacra and Simulation’ as the blending of reality and fiction together, that there is no ‘clear distinction between where one

ends and the other begins'. Baudrillard also describes the visuals of hyper real to be an 'implosion of the medium itself in the real'. So the term 'implosion of the medium' led me to experiment with the landscape and space distortion through camera movement and speed ramping. Speed ramping is an editing technique where individual shots 'transition between slow motion to fast motion to normal speed of 24 seconds', achieving a fluid relation between space and time. Christopher Nolan has also used this method and manipulated 'the temporal status of the images 'through this device in his films inception (2010) and interstellar (2016). Aserinsky and Kleitman model of dreams also coincide with landscape distortion in dream imagery, as they draw the relation between the REM (rapid eye movement) and the mental imagery of dream, they concluded that the REM sleep was identified as the phase where the sensory experience was prominent and marked by visual bizarre imagery. These bizarre elements are connected to the 'perception of space and time: spatial-temporal distortion, discontinuity, and acceleration's' (Aserinsky and Kleitman, 1953, p.273-274). They also explained that the REM phase eye movement to be faster than in the dream state, and these movements are unpredictable, they explain:

The eyes during dream show unusual changes in directions: many oblique and contorted movements that are never been experienced during the awake phase are visible in dreams'. Hence, my aim was to simulate the bizarre eye movement through the various styles of camera movement and montage (Aserinsky and Kleitman, 1953, p. 274).

Moreover, Raymond Bellour in his book *To The Freeze Frames And Beyond* (1987), also asserts the use of slow motion and freeze frames to reproduce our unconscious structure images in dream state (Bellour, 1987). For Bellour, the Freeze frame is one of the techniques that 'allow filmmakers to convey the stillness and the timeless dimension of the dream' (Bellour,

1987). Accordingly, the scene's imagery switches between three types of camera movements and freeze frames, the first is the subjective handheld shots following Mariam's escape from her harasser, the handheld shot is known to be used for 'the malfunctioning state of mind' (Hobson, 1991, p. 9). The second shot is the Mariam's fast panoramic view of the city's landscape from the bus window, and the third is the traveling shots of walking onto the crowded Egyptian bazar, in which the gazes of crossing pedestrians will be posed as the freeze frames in the dream's imagery. On filming these traveling shots in the crowded bazar, I used the go pro camera, to facilitate filming closely and catch street portraits. The speed of these traveling shots was then manipulated in the montage to switch between (slow, fast motion, freeze frames and speed ramping). Consequently, the character is seen as a product of a vast distorted hyperreal landscape. Furthermore, the scene ends with what Herman defines as a 'terrifying immediacy, as if the threat is happening in the present', Herman explains that this symptom is common in traumatic dreams. According to Herman's theories, the imposition of the dreamer's (Mariam) environment leads to an 'altered neurophysiological organization' which made her suddenly wakes up, to find herself still in the bus. A match cut frame is also used to connect Mariam's dreaming and awakening state and facilitate the shift between these two physic spaces with an illusionistic dimension (Herman, 1992 p. 60).

7. Witnessing the passage of time, traveling shot, empty shots:



In this scene the camera uses the traveling shot to follow Mariam's movement from the restaurant to the taxi ride to the hotel, then taking up the elevator and walking down a dark corridor to her room. The sequence lasts around 2 minutes on screen, which can be regarded as precursors of 'slow cinema'. According to Mathew Flangen's essay 'Aesthetic of Slow on Contemporary Films' (2008), Slow cinema is known for the 'the employment of (often extremely) long takes, or filming mundane quietude and the everyday' life (Flanagan, 2008). This scene is also inspired by Margaret Duras use of 'contemplative' empty shots in her film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1969), when we witness Elle leaving her work and reaching her hotel in a long following shot. One can argue that these traveling shots don't add to the film's narrative, However, Roy Brand's stresses on the 'necessity of engaging the audience in the passage of time'. He explains in his article 'Witnessing Trauma on Film' (Brand, 2009) that these events where 'nothing happens' are crucial to posit the spectator in the witnessing position; He adds that those scenes which appear to 'be evacuated or disembodied' as if nothing is occurring, are actually opening up a space for the spectator to think and reflect back on what he has witnessed earlier in the film narrative and start experiencing the story from another personal perspective

(Brand, 2009). He says: ‘by shifting the sense of time from the narrative problem, the spectator is able to build a moment of connection, self-realization and identification with the character’s experience’ (Brand, 2009). Filmmaker Justin Remes also argues that at the heart of static films is an "awareness of time", the long durations offer the viewer "space for meditation, immersion in the image [and] sober reflections on the nature of movement and stillness", time and space, cinema and art" (Remes, 2015, p.13, 22). In the same vein, these two minutes of traveling shots aim to provide a meditative space for the spectator to think through and reflect on the past scenes.

8. Production techniques in Jean’s narrative: Jean’s panic attack:



Cinematographic thinking:

a) The shallow focus and the bokeh:

On designing the cinematography scheme of Jean’s panic attack, I decided to add the shallow focus and bokeh effect to the visual scheme of the scene. The shallow focus is known to focus on the protagonist in foreground and blurring out the background. This selective focus technique can instantly attain the bokeh effect when filming outdoor at night.

Director Steve McQueen also used the shallow focus in his film *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013) to draw the spectator's attention into the character's traumatic experience and bring the spectator closer to the character's inner world. The Scholar Brain Brown also explains in his book *cinematography theory and practice* (2016) that 'Selective focus and out-of-focus can also be highly subjective visual metaphors for the influence of drugs and madness, as well' (Brown, 2016 P.6). Hence, the shallow focus in this scene was mostly effective in performing the character's panic attack, her blurred vision and dizziness. By racking the focus, the car lights come would out of view, then slowly coming back into focus mimicking her subjective reality.

b) The scene's montage:

My first target while editing the panic attack scene was to convey the character's terror without triggering the spectator's anxiety or fears. My research inquiry led me to experiment with the scene's audiovisual elements and its associated emotions and affect. My second aim was preserving the scene's mystery, the 'unpredictable knowledge' as suggested by Caruth, that 'the trauma reenactment should convey 'Both the truth of an absent event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility' (Caruth 1995, p.153). Hence, the incomprehensibility of the scene would provoke the viewer to question the causes of Jean's terror. According to Kaplan's ethics of witnessing this unfathomed form of trauma representation, would place the spectator in a witnessing mode, as it delivers an experience of a collaborative spectatorship in making meaning of the scene (Kaplan 2004, p. 201).

Brewin also indicated in his article 'Intrusive Images in Psychological Disorders':

that Flashbacks are usually triggered by a number of internal and/or external

situational cues. When these cues trigger, the survivor return to the original traumatic situation like a time travel and re-experience the fear of the traumatic event without much information of its time and background (Brewin, 2010 p. 117).

Similarly, I was not satisfied with the first cut of the panic attack scene so I started to add audiovisual cues of jean's past sexual abuse during the panic attack scene, ex: flashes of a lamp switching off, the sound of whipping and a micro shot of undressing a male belt., These ambiguous images and non-diegetic sounds aim to add emotional cues to jean's panic attack experience and intensify the 'incomprehensibility' of the flashback.

c) The scene's sound – the sound events:

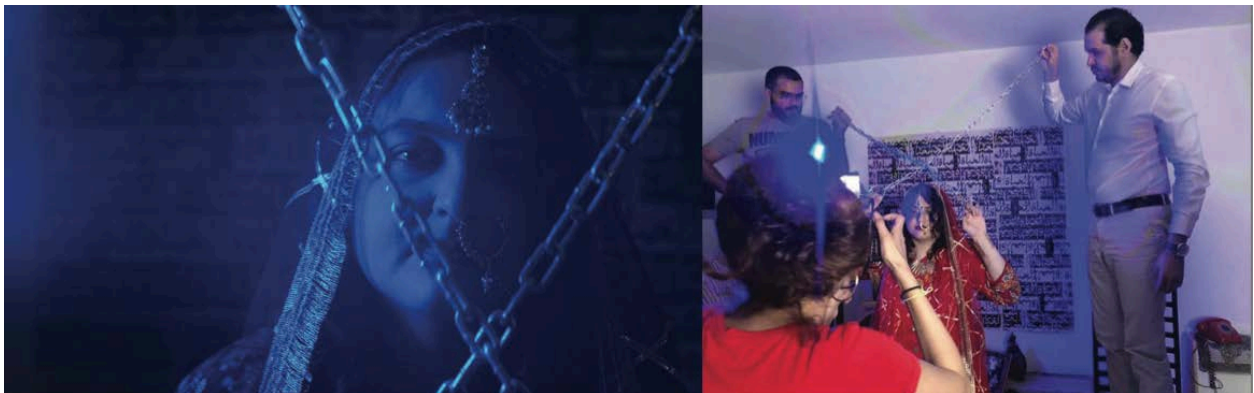
On scoring this scene, I was mainly keen that the music would be a representation of fear and not the experience of it, so the spectator would witness a frightened protagonist without being frightened himself. So, after some experimentation during the montage process, I have reached a conclusion in the soundscape of this scene, which is to rely on sounds textures rather than a melody. Mureen Turim also advocates this scoring approach in her book *Abstraction in Avant Garde films*, she explains that avant-garde film movement relies on the use of "sound events" rather than melodic sounds, to 'potentially form a sound composition' (Turim, 1985 p.110). According to Jacob smith 'this informal structure not just unfolds successively in time, like a narrative, this is achieved by always retaining the feeling that they are performing more than representation' (thecine-files.org). Similarly, I found myself mixing the music tracks composed by the music composer; adding female vocals and sound textures to reach a more complex and a multi-layered soundtrack that has no definite melody, so as to imitate the character's absurd mental Action.

9. The Narrative flashback of Jean: the use of dichromatic images

The Cinematographic thinking:

This narrative flashback focuses on the process of bearing witnessing to Jean's testimony. Hence, the scene aims to invite both Mariam (the listener) and the spectator to witness Jean's backstory as a psychoanalyst and bystander, through which a self-reflexive process can occur (Kaplan 2005 p. 31). On this scene, I had two research questions, the first is to decide on the overall film look of the narrative flashback and the second is the representation form of the sexual violence scenes, since my aim was to elude the spectator's re-traumatization and avoid any form of vicarious traumatization occurring to the spectator.

a) The use of di-chromatic images for the traumatic memory



On designing the spectacle look of the flashback, I have adopted Dirk De Bruyn's techniques explained in his book *The Performance of Trauma in Moving Image Art* (2014). De Bruyn's concluded that 'the flashback symptoms are analogous to the features of the collage and materialist films in their successive images, mono and dichromatic images, rapid editing and juxtaposition of sound and image'. Hence, to achieve a similar effect of the monochromatic and flickering image of the materialist images, I have used various Nano light tubes with flickering hues, so the lights would rapidly flicker in color achieving the

frame-to-frame colorful shifts in the materialist films. However, filming the whole backstory in the monochromatic would also lose many narrative details, and De Bruyn's approach doesn't propose a form on how the traumatic memory can be filmed for therapeutic narration. Accordingly, I have followed the advice of the creative arts therapist Shaun McNiff, in his book *'art therapy and digital technology'*, McNiff suggest using 'simple and direct language and methods, as well as terse and economical descriptions'. He explains:

The therapeutic power of any form of video therapy derives from its ability to form a bridge between past and present and facilitate a reliving of life experiences in a manner similar to shamanic enactment, with the screening of the work revealing insights and bringing past experiences alive for audiences.

(McNiff, 2018, pp. 32-34).

Hence, I have incorporated McNiff's advice in using 'simple and direct' visual style for the rest of Jean's backstory and using monochromatic image for the emotional moments.



b) The use of double projection:



For the second inquiry, regarding the representation of sexual violence, I have followed Roy Brand's concepts in his article 'Witnessing Trauma On Film (2009), Brand asserts that 'projecting the surrogate of the event rather than the full dramatization of the traumatic event is at the core of witnessing ethics (Brand, 2009). Hence, I borrowed the techniques of Malcolm Le Grice and his use of multiple projections to represent the 'surrogate 'of the extreme events of sexual violence narrated by the character. De Bruyn explains in his book *The Performance of Trauma* (De Bruyn, 2004) that these projections can create an illusion of motion from the superimposed sweeping gestures, as they direct the 'spectator to the mnemonic value of the traumatic incident and its intensity, with remaining off-screen' (De Bruyn, 2004 p. 23). Drawing on Black (2002) and Chouliariki (2006) in her book *The Spectatorship of suffering*, "distancing spectators from violent acts and catastrophic events ... [gives] audiences the degree of detachment necessary for imaginative engagement" (Black, 2002: 27). Hence, the use of projection and distancing the viewer from the screened events will remind the spectator that this a reconstructed spectacle of a past event not a present reality, hence elude the spectator's vicarious trauma.



On choosing the projected imagery, I have used ‘conventionalist images’ and selective poetic media for the projected material, images that convey the essence of a violent event to the spectator, ex: slow motion versus quick flashes, a glass shattering, lamp flickering etc. Gilles Deleuze defines this approach as ‘the image and its vibrations’, in which the content and form are combined together to create an experience of trauma that would more likely initiate a process of reflection for the viewer, a ‘birth of thought’ (Kaplan 1994, p. 164). Since Deleuze criticizes the approach of representing trauma with suffering in terms of both the original traumatizing event (torture, war, rape, abuse) and its aftermath (the legacy). He argues that when the audience are increasingly subjected to images of extreme violence, ‘the price of such exposure may be an emotional and intellectual disengagement with the event and the wider world and even inherit a “psychic numbing” (Kaplan 2010, p. 5), which for Deleuze it is the contrasting effect of the ‘birth of thought’ (Kaplan 1994, p. 164).

10. The now moments and shift between realities in flashbacks:



As explained earlier, Mariam's intrusive flashback interrupt the narrative's present and transpose the viewer into an earlier time without a prominent transition. Yet, this scene introduces another form of flashback, which is the temporal shift between two period of times, the present and the past. This flashback is relatively longer than the memories traces and fleeing images presented in her sequence. Since, this flashback scene performs as a scene within a scene, to accentuate the mirroring mechanism occurring between Massa's present and Mariam's childhood. The scene is also influenced by Freud's concept of retrogressive memories, he says:

Tauma does not simply originate from outside the psyche but is instead structurally internalized and subsequently awakened by potent reminders It is the retroactive act of recall that thrusts a moment from the past into the present, thereby exceeding the conventional logic of time as a series of succeeding 'now' moments.

(Freud, 1957: p.197).

Hence, the sight of Dima undressing Massa's socks reenacts Mariam's flashback of her father performing a puppet show for her behind the sofa. The seamless transition between the present and flashback aims to perform the now moment as suggested by Freud.

a) The montage of the now moment flashback:



For the visual form and montage of this ‘now moment’ flashback, I followed the editing style of flashbacks of *Hiroshima mon Amour* (1969). Mainly, the flashback of Elle meeting her dead German lover was my study case for this flashback. In this scene, we see Elle’s smiling gaze at Lui’s hand, which instantly shifts to the hand of her German dead lover, then we see Elle’s reaction shot and the camera returns to back to the Japanese lover again. Alian Resnais also used present-time diegetic noise like a train’s whistle to link between the two realities. Similarly, Mariam’s gaze cues the audience a subtle access to her memory. The flashback is introduced by the sound of her father singing a lullaby while the camera is still on Dima and Massa, Hence, the father’s lullaby becomes an asynchronous sound for the viewer till we shift to deigesis of the flashback with the sound overlaps. Mariam’s close of up was the transitional shot between the two realities.

1. Disremembering: the absence of the main event:



According to Roy Brand's theories, 'Witnessing doesn't mean having an immediate and fully present experience of the event but rather it stands for the impossibility to represent or understand this event' (Brand, 2009). For Brand, witnessing trauma on film is when the viewer attempts to comprehend the backstory and the unfathomed trauma with the character. Hence, the spectator asserts a mental effort to bridge the gap between the event and its representation (Brand, 2009). Documentary filmmaker Alain Resnais Jones, the director of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1969) asserted that 'if you tried to somehow show something very real on screen, the horror disappeared' (Jones, 2003). Resnais also concluded that documentary footage was not an appropriate means of portraying the magnitude of human suffering and trauma. Accordingly, I borrowed Resnais's approach and Brand's theory of witnessing in the absence of the main traumatic event, which is the shipwreck. According to Kaplan's ethics of witnessing, the absence of this event (shipwreck incident) emphasizes the un-representable nature of the crisis, which may 'provoke a denial of representation and hence make it unapproachable' (Kaplan and Wang, 2008), and accentuates its horrific effect without vicariously traumatizing the spectator.

2. The performance of loss and the experience of numbness:



The scene's mood and articulation: the emotional effect of the color blue.

This scene presents the ‘working through’ process through mourning as designated by Herman. Herman explained that ‘only through mourning, the survivor can discover their indestructible inner life and get over their traumatic losses’ (Herman, 1992p 125). Roy Brand suggests in his article ‘Witnessing Trauma on Film’ that the ‘performance of loss and trauma should entail ‘the midway between a mood and its articulation, a loss and its narration’. It should also ‘deliver the awareness of our numbness as we witness our loss’ (Brand, 2009). Hence, my aim in this scene is to create ‘the midway between a mood and the articulation’ the of loss and mourning for the characters. My intuitive approach to articulate the mood of mourning in this scene imagery was through manipulating the scenes’s hues and tones of the image. The Scholar Anne Cousseau also highlighted Duras’s use of the color blue to capture a sensorial experience, she explains in her book, *Mettre en scene*, that ‘Colour is the means by which one can reach pure affect and by which the immediate encounter with the physical world takes place’ (Cousseau 2002: 39). Hence, I emphasized the bluish tones of the scene imagery, to match in with the gleaming sea. I achieved this misty look by filming after sunset, and lowering down the contrast and the sharpness of the camera lens and leaving it close to its raw colors in the post-production.

Emotional numbness and restaging real events:



This mourning scene also entails Dima's flashback of the shipwreck after seeing Massa's drawing. The flashback is a recollection of images of the passengers' strife during the shipwreck. In the montage of the flashback, I also included real footage from TV news of shouting passengers, babies crying, and other passengers throwing themselves into the sea to avoid the coastal security. Hence the scene has both my cinematic recreations of the passengers struggling on the shipwreck and archive real footage of refugees on smuggling boats. This filmic approach was inspired by Joshua Hirsch definitions of a 'post-traumatic cinema', he explains that post-traumatic cinema 'doesn't only represent traumatic historical events but attempts to 'embody and reproduce the trauma for the spectator' (Hirsch, 2003: 4). Hirsch also stresses that exposing the spectator to a filmed representation of the physical reality of a traumatic event, would position them as a secondary witness to these traumatic events (Hirsch, 2003: 4). On the other hand, Roy brand advocates integrating the feeling of numbness within witnessing loss and mourning, he says:

we as audience should question our numbness as we witness the performance of trauma on film, he added that 'We are made to view this numbness of loss on the screen at the same time we experience it within ourselves, we are like the participants of the film in a state of experiential limbo or a living dead (Brand,

2009).

Kaplan also addressed that the public audience has already turned numb to news footage, she defines this type of trauma representation to be voyeuristic and ‘empty empathy’ (Kaplan, 2004 p.10). Hence, the blending both archive footage with recreated representation of refugees on shipwreck aims to achieve this emotional numbness suggested by Roy Brand’s, and render the scene’s mood to be ‘empty from an affective or hysterical response’, commonly used in mainstream trauma cinema (Brand, 2009).

14. Trauma trails and intergenerational trauma:



Towards the closing of the scene, we see a match cut between Massa's paper boats and the ariel shots of the boats at the sea shore. This match cut aims to lift the narrative off the interpersonal trauma to the collective war trauma, and the ongoing displacement and family diaspora. Hence the scene invites the spectator to witness the film narrative beyond its story diegesis, and implies the idea of inter-generational trauma and the insistent repetitions of traumas and diaspora. Scholar Judy Atkinson defines this state as the 'trauma trails' in her book *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines: The Trans generational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia*, 'she says: 'those tracks which 'run across country and generations from original locations of trauma as people moved away from the place of pain. These trauma trails carried fragmented, fractured people and families'. Trauma travels with human subjects, across time and space' (Atkinson 2002, p. 88). Accordingly, the scene reassures the theme of the urgency of witnessing to these marginalized and discrete stories.,

Chapter 6: Self Reflections and Conclusions

According to Dori Laub theories in his article 'Event Without Witness; 'traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its submersion', which renders trauma experiences as incomprehensible to us, he also stresses on the process of reaching an elusive truth within the process of witnessing. For Laub, being witness to the witnessing process itself and understanding the elusiveness of the event, includes understanding the distortions of personal traumatic memory and the haunting by an event'. Abraham and Torok also address this elusive truth as a phantomatic return of what subjects consider shameful and secret events (Laub, 2003 P. 124). Drawing on Laub's three levels of witnessing, the self-witnessing, witnessing others, and witnessing the process itself, I will discuss the element of elusive truth in terms of self-knowledge for the level of self-witnessing, and witnessing the process of filmmaking itself. My reflexive approach of self-witnessing will be analyzed through the Cathleen Countree's concept of the 'Auteur Directors as the Shamans' and wounded healers (2015). While my reflexive approach for witnessing the filmmaking process will be analyzed through the model of Donald Schön (1983) the reflective Practitioner as described in his book *The Reflective Practitioner*. Schön suggests three stages of reflection, the first is the knowing in action, where I reflect on my role as an author and auto-ethnographer filmmaker and establish the concept of wounded healer, the second is the Reflection in action where I address the memory revision encountered on the film's editing process, the third is the Reflection-on-action: where I address personal insights from the film project as a research outcome. My self-reflexive method relies on the use of screen memory, psychoanalytic studies and empathetic merging with characters.

Self Witnessing and Witnessing The Process Itself:

Auto-biography – the auteur as the wounded healer

The Reflective Practitioner - Knowing in action:

Drawing on Schön's model *The Reflective Practitioner*, (1983) I reflect on the first process the Knowing-in-action within my role as an auto- ethnographer and autobiographer, in the process of writing the script and the reflective dissertation. I approached my an auto-ethnographic role by reflecting on episodes of my recent lived experience, and family diaspora. Norman Denzin (2008) calls this inquiry method 'interpretive biographical research'. By recalling past events in a deliberate and ruminative way.

To start with, I began this research project in 2019, after returning from the United States to live in Egypt on my own. My US tourist visa had also expired at this point, and many lawyers advised that the chances of renewing it were slim. Because the embassy consultee would question my immigrant intent, having all of my family members as American residents, and not having proof of strong ties to my home country. While my father can still travel between Egypt and the United States, my mother was forced to stay in the United States to fulfill her made legal period of residency. The same case was with my two close friends, who applied for asylum and were unable to return to their home country. So meeting them again necessitates a change in bureaucracy laws. Furthermore, returning to Egypt to begin my Doctoral research was not convincing to my parents or any of my close friends, since Egypt's Ministry of Education does not credit online programmes. So it became clear to me at that point that this research film practice is my survivor mission and a tool of expression, where I can use my minor adversity to explore others' survival stories and healing testimonies, and create a healing narrative out of my limbo state. Countree defines this creative approach in her article 'Auteur Director as The

Shaman’, where she addresses that the process of filmmaking can be therapeutic for both the filmmaker and the spectator and the auteur performs as wounded healer she says:

creating their films allows them to repossess their “lost” souls, just as they assist us , the spectators, in reclaiming our own through a formed and shared imaginal experience’.

Filmmaking (and viewing) can, therefore, be a method of reintegrating fragmented elements in the mind-body-spirit complex, Similarly, through their filmmaking All have undergone some manner of psychic and/ or bodily “dismemberment” and in shamanic terms have become “wounded healers (Countree, 2019).

In the same vision, I started this research project with a great passion to navigate and research on healing testimonies, stories of survival, believing that my story is not that important nor inspiring to tell, but at a later stage, I noticed that my self-alienation attitude was because of the ‘fragmented elements in the mind-body-spirit complex’ and dismemberment (Countree 2019). since my story was in a stuck point, it can be said that I was operating from the black hole of trauma, lacking a solution for my present familial situation nor a vision for my future. Countree also addresses most modern auteur filmmakers, like shamans, are engaged in their work because of the redemptive power of imagination itself. As Oliver Stone suggests: The act of imagination, the act of seeing beyond yourself, stepping outside your ordinary, small, mundane life, living a larger life through [movies]—that can only help you in your everyday life (Breskin 1992, 22). Oliver Stone comments on this creative state he says,’ we shift from unknowing to understanding, from disconnection to compassion, this is an alchemical process that is utilized by directors, psychologists, and shamans as, each in their own way, can either renew, reform, and restore souls, or, conversely, distort, disease, and disrupt them’ (Oliver, 1996 p.45). I also noticed my strong narrative resistance towards

sharing my personal story for the academic discourse or public exploration, I found it difficult to reveal or link the private material of my film script for the analysis of the writing dissertation. One possible reason for my narrative resistance approach, would be that I (filmmaker/ practitioner) was still in the midst of processing, I was still working towards reaching an ‘elusive truth’ and or ‘making meaning’ out of my recent influctations. Another possible reason I recognized, is the stigma involved in discussing research topic of the indirect quite trauma as defined Kaplan, this stagnation was also signposted by scholars like Julia Straub and Aija Sakova’s in their essay; the Stigma of the Autobiographical’, as they highlight the ‘painfulness inherent in the processes of remembering on the act of writing’ they write:’

Using the medium of film it illustrates the internal psychological survival mechanism of compartmentalisation. If It is about history and family, it is about secrecy, abandonment and pain. It doesn't have a happy ending. There is no resolution and no redemption (Straub, Sakova, 2009).

Hence, telling stories, through fictional avatars and imaginal space can provide the filmmaker with what Rita Charon Rita Charon (2006), defines as as “narrative medicine,” in her book *Narrative Medicine honoring the stories of illness* as she ‘sees stories of one’s life as deep, nourishing bonds that hold us together’, and gives "the opportunity for filmmakers to make positive contributions to society, which may also eliminate their own feelings of alienation and exclusion, she says:

In some sense we are all storytellers repeatedly shaping and reshaping our identities through our tales, helping each other by virtue of talk and revealing our desires and anxieties through the power of words (Charon. 2006 p.34).

Hence, I realized that integrating an autobiographical present (of family trauma) for an academically oriented perspective, and engaging it in theoretical and critical writing may be found primarily a re-traumatizing or stagnating mode of work. However, these exact challenges will later prove to be rich resources for self-witnessing and self-explorations towards the end of the research project

The Editing process and the memory texts

The Reflective Practitioner - Reflection in action:

Working as the auteur cinematographer and executing the filming process myself left no room for misunderstandings and delegations and allowed the creative authorship, freedom for experimentation and self-expression. But it was mainly the editing stage that initiated a self reflective process and allowed me to revisit the film's narrative and re-interpret my memory texts and images, through which I discovered personal insights on my role as a writer/ director visualizing materials I have written. Annette Kuhn describes this process as the 'memory texts' which is the re-enactments, the re-staging and re-working of memory through visual media, she defines it as the memory revision, she adds that 'memory changes through performances of visual media looks at how these may embody, express, work through, and even unpick, interconnections between the private, the public and the personal' (Kuhn ,2002 p. 34). Wolfgang Giegerich's comments on this creative state, he says, "Image is thought represented in form", he also added that the shaman's vision is primarily an "inner" one and her or his "seeing/healing" cures both internal and external injuries (psychological and physical). By analogy, the alchemical filmmaker heals wounds of the mind, heart, soul, *and* body'

(Giegerich's 1998, p.114).

Hence, In the process of Memory Revision Through writing and editing, I was able to re-engage with my past and create ways of delivering these memory texts into screen memories. I also interrogated the relationship between my history and my autobiographical present. Drawing on Anne Whitehead, "in the face of mounting amnesia, there is an urgent need to consciously establish meaningful connections with the past" (Whitehead, 2004:) Hence, the self-reflection and self-witnessing process will be examined through the lens of memory test, screen memories and character identification. (I will reflect on these personal insight in the next section).

The Reflection-on-action:

On this stage, I will reflect on the film as a research outcome after it is completed to In attempt to discover how 'knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön, 2016, p.26). Hence, after stepping away from the 'finished' film for a period of time, and revisiting it from a renewed perspective for the thesis writing and reflective analysis. These personal insights are what Kaplan and Deleuze calls us 'the birth of thought' or the 'cerebral stimulation' which initiates the process of self-healing (Kaplan, 2004 p. 5), which is one of main sought after goals in this research project. (I will reflect more on these insights on the self-witnessing section), Jacques Maritain describes this process in his book *creative intuition in art and poetry* (1953) as an "Illuminating Intellect, as it begins with an individual 'through a process of initiation, transformation, and enlightenment of self then it is shared and takes place communally' (Maritain, 1953 p. 32).

Self -reflection through Screen memory and psychoanalytic theories:

Through my work on *Screen Memories* in this dissertation I demonstrated Freud's concepts that 'formative experiences shape the way a person thinks and imagines; and they become part of one's psychic DNA' (Freud, 1919). Hence, childhood issues, and past memories should be both embedded in the auto-ethnographic filmmaking and individual's processing of trauma, to resolve stuck points and black holes of trauma. Hence, when the times comes to analyze my own film work through these psychoanalytic concepts, I noticed that my research work started in 2019, the first year of experiencing the family diaspora, my parents' separation and feeling exiled in my own country was a second deferred event to a previous traumatic event that occurred in my childhood, I was then able to access to this repressed phase and navigate its associated memories. On that earlier phase, I was around eight years when my parents separated for the first time, my mother had to travel in Jordan, and me and my sister stayed at our uncle's house, for some unfathomed reason, we had no contact with both parents this whole period, we were never able to phone call my mother neither see my father. They suddenly both disappeared. I also recalled that we used to work at my father's clothing store, which is still far away from his main office. So working on this fashion store at a young age allowed me to witness diversified figures and facets of the society, this overwhelming experience made me in many levels a silent witness, observing and storing images and memories just like Massa in her restaurant experience in the time lapse scene. I also realized that me and my sister at that phase were very emotionally similar to Dima and Massa limbo's state, though both parents are alive, they are still not present and our future was still being rewritten. Many other personal insights, birth of thoughts and memory texts have been revisited through this reflective practice and film work, such as my narrative resistance and inability to communicate my setbacks like Mariam.

Identification and merging with the characters:

Oatley (1999), defined in his article ‘Empathy and Merging’ a process of identification with characters as known as the empathetic merging in which “ in which we do not merely sympathize with a person, we become that person” (p. 446). My initial insight of identifying with Mariam has led me to examine the identification and empathetic merging between me as the author and the other characters. Herman also advocated this self-reflective approach, she explains that, When people cannot fulfill their life motives , they become passionate storyteller, with an emotional outcome that affects their lives. Hence, they narrate their stories with blended facts and fiction, this happens in the context of imagined or real dialogues, which enables various positions to interact and produce meaning for the inclusive interaction of “author and hero/heroine” (Herman, 1992).

Eliade also defines this self-reflective approach as “the cinema of redemption”, he defines it as films that speak to the issues of initiation, transition, and transformation—to shamanism when he suggests ‘discoveries and contacts must be extended through dialogues with others. But to be genuine and fruitful, a dialogue cannot be limited to empirical and utilitarian language’ For Eliade, “A true dialogue must deal with the central values in the cultures of the participants” (1974, 96). Hence, I worked through the self- reflection process within the dialogue and the empathetic merging with the characters and the shared narratives.

Self-reflection through the empathetic merging with characters

Jean: the sadistic choice and sense of ownership

My empathetic merging with Jean's narrative was through revising the Sadistic choices she encountered by her autocratic figures. Merging with Jean reveals to me the conflict I had with my father as I was constantly opposing and objecting to the asylum decision, which raised the awareness of regaining agency after trauma. Oliver Stone defines subjectivity as the individual's ownership and responsibility for his own life choices (Stone, 2011).

Dima: the melancholy, the mourning film

My empathetic merging with Dima, occurred while editing her silent cry scene. As it revealed to me that I had experienced several successive emotional separations without mourning their absence. As a practical person, I quietly repressed my grief by working on this doctoral dissertation or academic lecturing. I was never allowed to grieve or confront the sudden absence of the important figures in my life.. According to Michel Foucault in his treatise *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 2001: 119), this refusal to mourning develops into a repressed melancholic state, and an attachment to the experience of loss, which may eventually lead to a degree of obsession in the mind of the melancholic subject. This denial and "fixation on a single object" is reminiscent of post-trauma behaviour, in which victims exhibit a clear obsession with the "absent" and the "perceived" (Foucault, 2001: p.119). Drawing on Richard Armstrong, this film project can be regarded as mourning film, Armstrong defines a mourning film as one that "negotiates the emotional consequences of loss as it reverberates through the bereaved" (Armstrong, 2012: 12). Andrea Sabbadini takes it a step further, claiming that "all films represent some sort of loss and, indeed, are themselves (among many other things, of course) forms of mourning and of recovering lost objects." (2007: 4)

Massa and the non-people, the absent Family

My empathetic merging with Massa occurred while editing her freeze scene in the restaurant kitchen, as I aimed to imply a subliminal link between her frozen state and the characters' inner child. Then I noticed that her frozen state was her coping mechanism for dealing with the absence of her mother and family. Karen Randell and Sean Redmond (2012) use the term 'nonpeople' to describe disappeared people, they write: 'The absented bodies are abducted, kidnapped, ushered away in the middle of the night; they are placed in limbo," they write (Randell and Redmond, 2012: 8). As a result, I became aware of my affinity with my absence of my family as well, and that I was working in a creative intermediate space, known as "transitional" or "potential" space, Donald Winnicott describes in his article 'Playing and reality' that 'The transitional space is the overlapping space originally between the mother and the child, and between the familiar and the unfamiliar' (Rose, 1978) but has also a space between two forms of existence, between inner and outer space, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between psychic and material world (Winnicott 1971, p. 1). Though, I regard this film to highlight the tension between the absence and presence of the male figure and its impact on the female subjectivity and agency, Winnicott's theory reveals to that the film was also affected by premature maternal loss and isolation during early childhood and its repercussion on the present reality.

Conclusion:

The research project begins by addressing representation crises in contemporary cinema and trauma narratives. In the first chapter, I addressed gaps in trauma scholarship and feminist filmmaking in Arab cinema, and I provided a theoretical framework for the film's skeletal structure based on Caruth and Freud's trauma model. Production and narrative tools from Dirk De Bruyn's cinema performance were also examined. The second chapter describes the film project's methodology, including my use of a qualitative method for gathering healing narratives through individual interviews and secondary data, as well as auto-ethography. The narratives were then analyzed and decoded using thematic analyses, and three types of traumas and characters were created. The chapter also decoded various healing and recovery methods. Trauma themes were woven throughout the plot of the film. The third chapter is a more descriptive extension of the methodology in which I transcribe the shared testimonies and discuss the process of translating the shared narratives into film characters. The fourth chapter investigates and collects multimodal narrative techniques that shaped the film script; a tailored framework was created for representing each trauma type based on its traumatised subjectivity and symptoms; fragmentation for complex trauma, characterization for chronic trauma, and the broken narrative for acute trauma. The chapter also investigates the various transnarrative and flashback functions used to represent trauma from the witnessing mode, the act of memory, the stream of consciousness, the now moment, performative flashback, and the testimonial narrative. As well as testimonial narrative flashbacks in which an act of witnessing occurs in the film scenes. The chapter also looks at how I translate biographical dreams into screen memories. The fifth chapter examines my cinematographic research practice and montage techniques to film and represent the characters' trauma within the witnessing modalities, thus I

discuss several filmic techniques I experimented with and employed to establish performative witnessing spectatorship for the viewer and avoid any factors of vicarious traumatization. The final chapter offers a self-reflective analysis within Dori Laub's concept of self-witnessing and witnessing the overall filmmaking process. My method of self-reflexivity stems from the application of psychoanalytic theories and the autobiographical nature of my film; through the lens of auteur director as the wounded healer, screen memory, and character identification, thus the shared key insights (see Ellis 2004, Adams, and Bochner 2011).

My original contribution to film studies encompasses both the theoretical and practical research fields. From the theoretical perspective, the research study responds to the issues Kaplan addressed in the trauma cinema in her book *Trauma and Cinema , Cross Cultural Explorations*, Kaplan addressed ‘the fixation of trauma as the ultimate limit of representation, in trauma narratives, she also addressed that scholars don’t think about the film impact on the viewer, (Kaplan, 2004 p. 15) hence she suggested the mode of witnessing to be the most redemptive mode of viewing trauma narratives. Thus, my research study provides a theoretical framework for a healing film narrative that transcends the issue of ‘fixation of trauma’, the theoretical framework embeds Kaplan’s ethics of witnessing along with exploring and experimenting other visual narrative techniques that facilitates establishing the witnessing mode for spectator. This theoretical framework can be used and developed further as blueprint by other filmmakers for other focus groups and studies exploring the witnessing modality of trauma viewership, directors can now adapt these techniques and resemble the visual language in their film research practices. Moreover, According to Kaplan, the witnessing mode opens a new psychic space for self-reflection and self-healing (Kaplan, 2004 p.16), so the film project can be subjected to further experimentation and testing of its therapeutic purposes and

capacities within, or clinical practice, cinema therapy sessions, focus group screenings and discussion panel with inflicted females and trauma survivors.

Filmography:

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- Eternal Sunshine of Spotless mind*. 2004.[film] Directed by Michel Gondry.Available at Netflix.
- Fatmagul'un sucu ne*. 2010. [TV series] Kanal D. available on 16th September, 2010.
- For Sama*. 2019.[film] Directed by Waad Elkhateeb. Available at: Netflix
- Hiroshima Mon Amour*. 1959. [film] Directed by Alain Resnais. France-japan: Pathe films.
- Inbetween*. 2016. [film] Directed by Maysaloun Hamoud. Israel-France: DBG Films.
- In Country*. 1989. [film] Directed by Norman Jewison. United states :Warnor Bros.
- Ivan's childhood*.1962 [film] Directed by Andrei Tarkovski. Soviet Union: Mosfilm.
- Marnie*. 1964. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. United states: Gepffrey Stanely Productions.
- Meshes of the Afternoon*. 1943. [film] Directed by Maya Deren. United states: Maya Deren.
- My Favorite Fabric*. 2018. [film] Directed by Gaya Jiji. France-Germany-Turkey :Gloria Films.
- Outer Space*.1999. [film] Directed by Peter Tscherkassky.Austria: Peter Tscherkassky
- Pasia*. 1946. [film] Directed by Roberto Rossellini
- Refugees voices from Egypt – Raghad's Dream.UNHCR Egypt (2017).
- Segn El Nisaa*,2014. [TV series] ElQaherawelnas. 28th june,2004.
- Sen anlat karadeniz*, 2018. [TV series] ATV. 24th januray 2018.
- Seqout Horr*, 2016. [TV series] CBC. 6th june2016
- Shaherzad's Diary*. 2013. [film] Directed by Zeina Daccache. Lebanon.
- The Day I lost My Shadow*. 2018. [film] Directed by Soudade Kadadin. Syria:KAF Production.
- Shindler's list* (1994) Directed by Steven Spielberg Available at. Netflix

Sila, 2006. [TV series] ATV.15th September 2006.

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Slumdog millionaire. 2008 [film] Directed by D. Boyle. Available at Netflix

Taht El Saytara, 2015. [TV series] Elnahar. 18th june2015

The Entity.1981. [film] Directed by Sidney J. Furie. United states:

The Fly. 1986. [film] Directed by David Cronenberg. United states: Brooksfilm.

The Perfect Circle. 1997. [film]. Directed by by Ademir Kenovic .Bosnia and Herzegovina:
Ademir Kenovic.

Wadjda. 2012. [film] Directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour. Saudi Arabia: Razor Film Produktion.

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Appendix

Production design images and behind the scenes

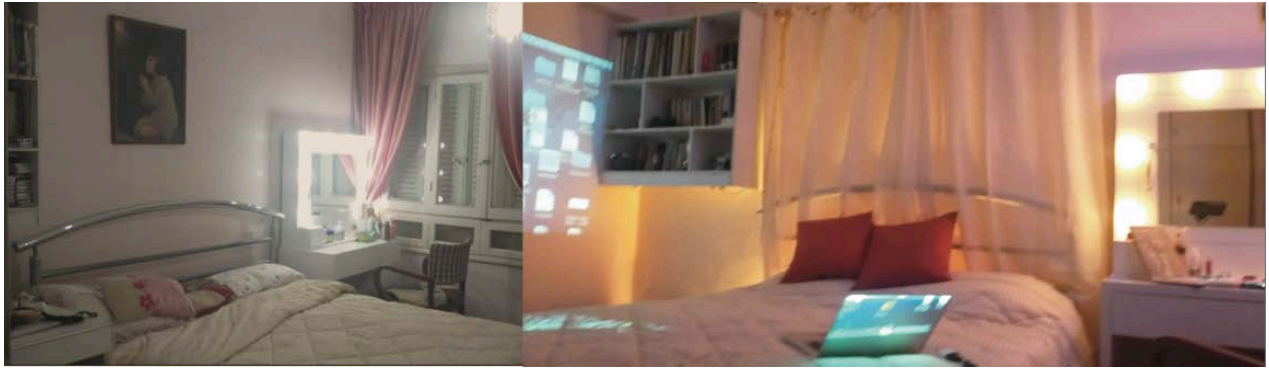


Figure 1



Mariam's Bathroom

Figure 2



Mariam's Kitchen

Figure 3 Mariam's kitchen



Figure 4



Figure 5 restaging a hospital room



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

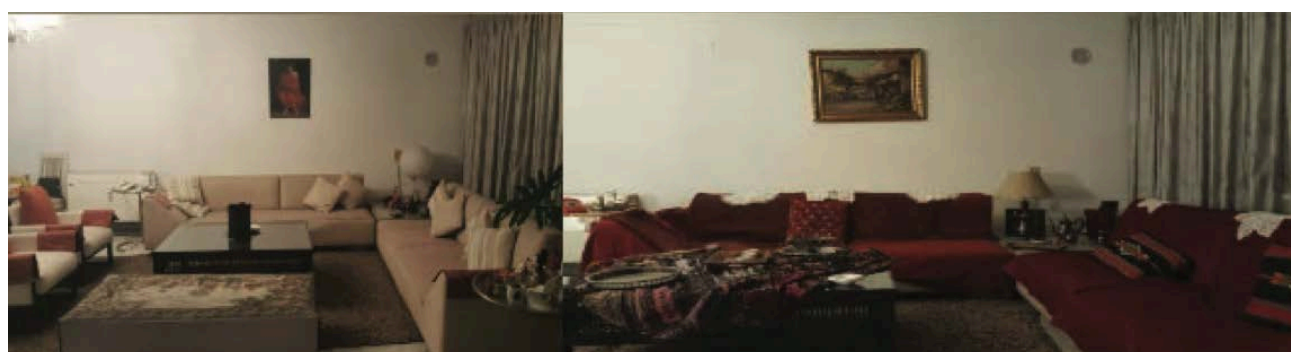


Figure 9

