

Life Narratives in a Selection of Contemporary Trauma Literature from Egypt

Sara Hegazi
(PhD Candidate, Alexandria University)

My doctoral research project titled “Life Narratives in a Selection of Contemporary Trauma Literature from Egypt” looks closely at the liberating power of life narratives as self-referential writing style gaining popularity in the contemporary Egyptian literary scene carving a space for under-represented and/or non-represented individual voices to inscribe their own personal stories. Life Narratives revolutionize the (auto)biographical literary writing tradition by introducing new concepts and practices of self-life-writing utilizing their narrative spaces as spaces of self-exploration, meditation and rewriting of the self. The three life-writers under study: Nadia Kamel, Lucette Lagnado and Sahar Hamouda, embark on very similar yet different (auto)biographical journeys, create and recreate in their respective texts their traumatic family narratives and eventually come to a better understanding of their own personal journeys with their lifelong painful and silenced chapters.

El Mawlouda by Kamel, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* by Lagnado and *Once Upon a Time in Jerusalem* by Hamouda, as (auto)biographical texts explore the tensions of life writing of trauma and challenge their authors to find creative literary and artistic outlets to put the actual writing of their lives into practice, by locating their narratives in larger socio-political and historical contexts that in many ways are the triggers behind their family traumas. The three personal narratives challenge the monopoly and the authority of institutional and colonial narratives and introduce new ways to read, write and question history. They also speak of entire communities, social and ethnic groups in different historical phases of twentieth century Egypt. The three life narratives of trauma are transgenerational and transnational social documents defying spatial and temporal limitations.

The three life-writers intentionally employ a narrative format to accommodate their personal narration of trauma. The family narratives are passed on to the three authors since their childhood as family fairy tale like stories. With the conscious use of fictional tools of narration on the lines of ‘Once a Time’, the focus of the story shifts from an obsession with truth to a willingness to hear a personal story and connect to another human being. Oral family history is channeled towards a literary expression, and life narration as a form of autobiographical writing is best appropriate for the creative narration of autobiographical nature. The dividing lines between fiction and nonfictional narration are intentionally blurred allowing the personal narratives to flow naturally and freely questioning generic assumptions and decentering the genre.

The three life narratives of trauma, exhibit moving definitions of (auto)biographical writing and look closely at innovate practices of self-life-writing. They also celebrate works of literature that might not be regarded as canonical or high brow literature. Life narratives as an innovative mode of self-life-writing proves that the field of (auto)biography is ever changing, ever moving and ever evolving.

Short Biography: Sara Hegazi is an assistant lecturer at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University. She has received her MA in Comparative Literature from Alexandria University in 2016 and is currently a PhD candidate at the same university. Her research interests include; Comparative Literature, Modern and Contemporary Arabic Literature, Performance Studies, Film and Literature Studies and Popular Culture.