A Long Night: An Animated Documentary as a Tool to Represent Difficult Knowledge in Public Spaces
Transforming Compassion into Action

Amina Jalabi

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

(Art Education) at Concordia University Montreal

Quebec, Canada

May 2020

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Amina Jalabi

Entitled: A Long Night: An Animated Documentary as a Tool to Represent Difficult Knowledge in Public Spaces Transforming Compassion into Action

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master's of Art Education-Thesis option

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair

Shira Avni Examiner

Lorrie Blair Examiner

Kathleen Vaughan Thesis Supervisor(s)

_____

Approved by Vivek Venkatesh
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Annie Gérin
Dean,

Date _____

Abstract

A Long Night: An Animated Documentary as a Tool to Represent Difficult Knowledge in Public Spaces: Transforming Compassion into Action

Amina Jalabi

A Long Night is a 12-minute animated documentary that draws on oral narrative and uses metaphor and symbolism to explore difficult stories of illness, hunger, and torture endured by three Syrian former political prisoners who survived captivity and are now residents of Montreal. For this work of research-creation, I recruited the three narrators through my connections in the Syrian Canadian community and conducted oral history interviews to collect testimonies in the context of the Syrian political history. While the content can be challenging, *A Long Night* emphasizes the courage of the speakers and the importance of taking action, where possible, against injustice.

Using the framework of difficult knowledge and Foucault's power and knowledge duality, the film references historical trauma and interprets difficult narrative while exploring its benefits in shaping a new historical consciousness that has been silenced for decades. The film *A Long Night* is a research-creation project that focuses on adopting strategies to guide its audience to transform their compassion into action while simultaneously being a cultural product that is easy to disseminate through social media and other accessible platforms.

Overall, feedback collected from the audience suggests that the medium of animated documentary is effective at communicating difficult narratives, such as systematic torture and mass violence. Furthermore, it can do so without alienating the audience, and may prompt positive action.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the courageous people who agreed to let me record their testimonies, the three survivors who endured imprisonment and torture in Assad`s prisons in Syria. Adnan, Hana, and Anonymous.

I wish to show my gratitude to my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Kathleen Vaughan. She guided and encouraged me to be professional and do the right thing even when the road got tough. Without her persistent help, this film and research would not have been realized. It is whole-heartedly appreciated that your great advice and direction for my research proved monumental towards the success of this thesis. I also would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Lorrie Blair who has been along with me on this journey form the first day. Last but not least, the completion of my film would have not been possible without the artistic support of brilliant film maker Shira Avni. I thank you both for your assistance and valuable feedback.

I would like to pay my special regards to Amina Khoulani, a Syrian survivor of Assad's prisons who gained exile in Manchester, UK, in 2014 and a founder of the women-led organization, Families for Freedom. Amina was also chosen as an International Woman of Courage in March 2020. I thank her for her guidance, input and allowing me to use their petition for this thesis purpose on channeling compassion into action.

I would also like to recognize the invaluable impact of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia at shaping my ethical practice as a researcher especially when working with vulnerable communities.

I wish to acknowledge the support and great love of my family, my husband and my soul mate, Bashar; my sisters, Afra, Mariam, Arwa and Buschra. They kept me going on and this work would not have been possible without their encouragement, emotional support and helping with babysitting.

I also would like to say a thank you to three friends who were always there for me when the going got tough and were always there to encourage me and make me believe in myself, Emma, Dania and Rania.

I had hoped a chance to interview Yahya Shurbaji, a close family friend who was a Syrian political activist known for his non-violence convictions and change through civic actions. It is reported that he was killed in Sednaya Prison in Syria under detention and torture. This work is a dedication to his memory.

Contents

List of Figures

A Long Night

Foreword: Overview of the film

Figure 1. Amina Jalabi. *Film poster*. 2019. Photoshop montage: Amina Jalabi

A project addressing the research question: **Can documentary animation represent difficult knowledge in public spaces and facilitate the transformation of our compassion into action?**

Working as an artist and an educator, I orient my work towards "difficult knowledge" as it is described by education theorists Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt (2003). Difficult knowledge expresses content that is challenging to address due to a taboo or a lack of vocabulary. The heart of my research-creation thesis is an animated documentary that uses metaphors to represent stories of torture, illness, and hunger endured in the Assad prisons in the last 30 years by three former Syrian political prisoners, now residents in Montreal who were recruited via my connections in the Syrian Canadian community. I use the shorthand “Assad regime” or “Assad prisons” to refer to the current authoritarian government ruled by the Assad

Family under the Baath socialist party. Bashar Al Assad, who is now in power, succeeded his father, Hafez Al Assad, upon his death in 2000 after he ruled the country with an iron fist since 1971 (Zisser, 2007).

My research-creation process consisted of three phases. The first phase was to locate relevant concepts in the literature and conduct oral history interviews with these three Syrian former prisoners of conscience.[1] Oral history interviews were crucial to my research because I was able to systematically collect testimonies from my participants in the context of the political history of the Syrian uprising and revolution. Oral history interviews are about locating a story within a larger event rather than just presenting findings out of context (Moyer, 2011). Given that the recordings would be used as the soundtrack of the film, participants had the choice to either keep their voice recognizable, have it digitally altered, or use someone else's voice. They could opt to keep their identity anonymous and use pseudonyms in the film credits and in this thesis. I also gave each participant the option to conduct the interview in Arabic, English, or French, depending on their preference. Arabic was the language I ended up using for all three interviews. I expected that most would favor their mother tongue. It was more comfortable for them to speak in Arabic while remembering a distressing experience. It is important to note here that during this phase of interviews, the participants and I held shared authority (Frisch, 1990) within the oral history method. However, in my second phase, the creative phase of animation, the authority was mine within a framework of "epistemological control," which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

[1] "Prisoner of conscience" is a term coined by Peter Benenson in 1961 in his article :The Forgotten Prisoners. The term describes anyone imprisoned on account of their political views, religion, race, or sexual orientation. It also refers to those who have been imprisoned and/or persecuted for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs or their identity (Wikipedia, 2020)

The second phase was creating my short (12-minute) two-dimensional animated documentary film, *A Long Night.* The artwork was digitally rendered using an application called "Procreate" on the iPad Pro and animated using Premier Pro. The animation moves in slow motion to allow the viewer time to process the difficult stories presented in the film, as well as to echo the totality of the prison experience in which time seemed to move more slowly. Animation has the capacity to bridge spaces between literal and figurative understandings of the world, and as such is an effective tool in describing and communicating difficult knowledge. In chapter 3, I will explain how the exclusion of my participants' physical bodies is a representational strategy when dealing with difficult knowledge.

The film's audio includes recorded segments from the Arabic-language interviews, as well as added special effects sounds that I purchased from the internet. As a final step, I included English-language subtitles to make the stories accessible for non-Arabic speakers, since it is very important to me to make these stories widely reachable to audiences outside of the Syrian plight.

The third phase occurred at the public screening of the film. A random selection of audience members was invited to complete a short survey. I asked for verbal consent to their participation and that I might use the answers for the thesis. The questions and responses are discussed below in my data analysis, in chapter 4.

The nature of this research-creation required that I engage in continual negotiation about how to present my final data, due to the complexity of artistic engagement with vulnerable communities and difficult knowledge. I had to exercise a certain degree of decision-making, yet I also had to allow a certain degree of openness and receptivity to my subconscious: I crafted my film artistically in this spirit. I designed the flow according to the emerging themes and their codes: themes being the general concepts and codes being the concrete examples of these

concepts. As an artist, I was constantly considering how to find meaning within a difficult narrative in the most coherent way possible. To have the final say on the parts of the interviews to include or exclude in my film proved to be extremely challenging. I explain in Chapter 4 how I navigated through this process of control (decision-making) and surrender (subconscious).

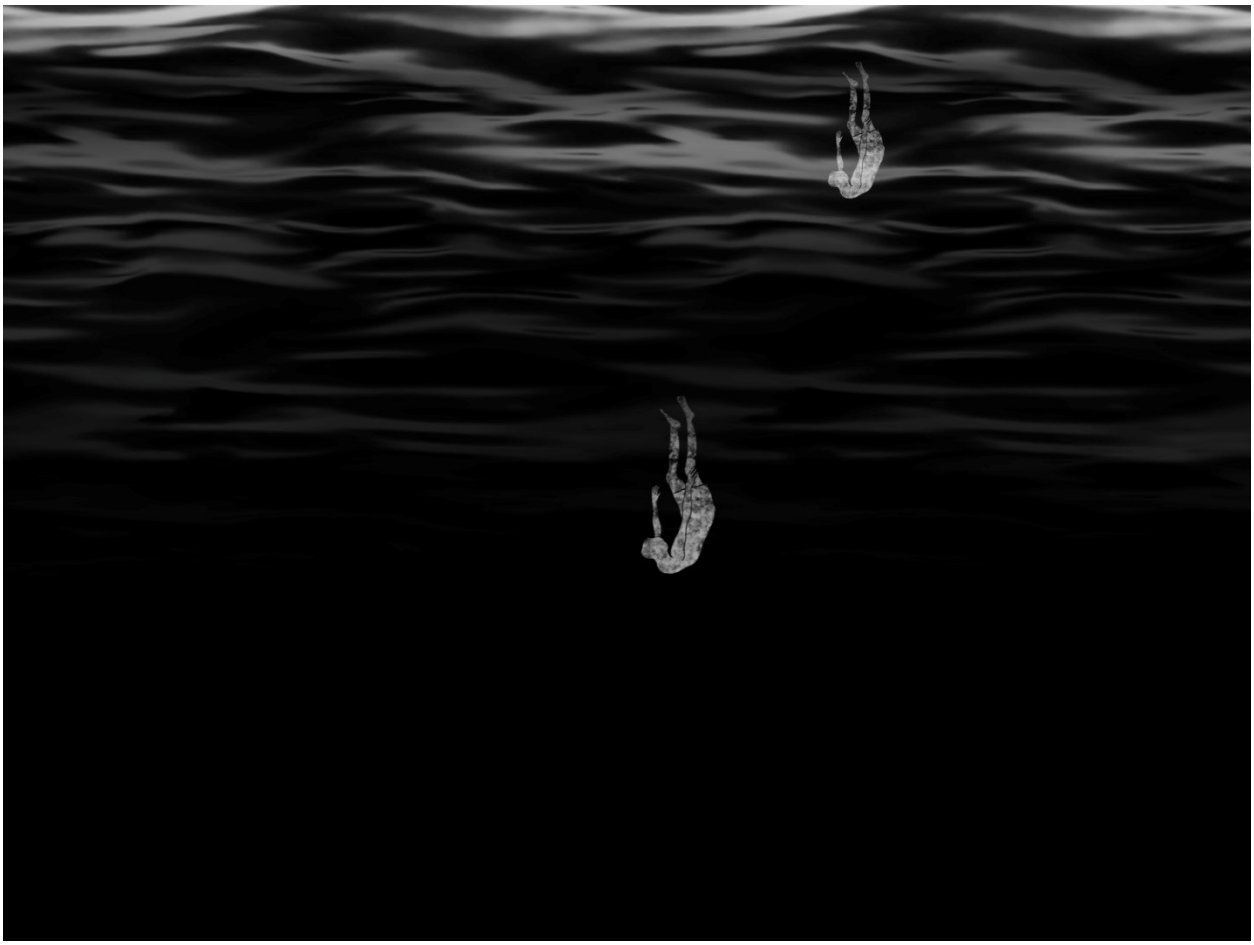

Figure 2. Amina Jalabi. *Theme of Disappearance and Death*. 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Figure 3. Amina Jalabi. *Theme of sickness*. 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

The participants and their relevant details

Hana: She was arrested in December 2014 and was released 14 months later. She was arrested on charges related to being a nurse in a makeshift hospital where she was treating the wounded and helping the sick in areas bombarded by the regime.

Adnan Al Mahamied: He was arrested in December 2012 and was released six months later. He had been arrested on charges related to his activism in civil society and organization of democratic civil councils.

Anonymous: He was imprisoned three times and tells the story of his second time in prison, in 1990. He was released six years later. In all three instances, his imprisonment was

related to charges of being sympathetic to Communism and in contact with members of the Syrian Communist Party.

I hosted a premiere screening of the full 12-minute film, *A Long Night,* at Concordia University on March 28, 2019 for members of the university community, my participants, and other contacts in the Syrian Canadian community. At the end of the film, I provided a link to an online active petition addressed to the United Nations' Security Council, which calls for the immediate release of all of Syria's detainees who are still alive (Families for Freedom, N.d[2].). Moreover, it demands the location of the burial sites of those who have been executed or tortured to death and hold the killers accountable (Families for Freedom, N.d.). The petition was designed as a strategy in creating "action" inspired by difficult knowledge. I felt it important in this research project not to leave the viewer abandoned with a sense of helpless empathy. Considering the context of the transmission of difficult knowledge, I also felt it important to give a sense of agency to the viewer to channel their shock and compassion into something productive. After the screening, as I mentioned earlier, I asked audience members to anonymously answer a written questionnaire of five questions (appendix B) asking how the film impacted their understanding and awareness of the gravity of the situation endured by Syrian prisoners of conscience, and whether they felt inclined to take action and engage in online or offline support of current prisoners to urge for their release. The questionnaires and responses are discussed at greater length in chapter 4. The answers from the audience contributed to my exploration of my research question: **Can documentary animation represent difficult knowledge in public spaces and facilitate the transformation of our compassion into action?**

[2] Families for Freedom. (N.d.) [Online Petition.] Retrieved from https://syrianfamilies.org/en/

Chapter 1

Situating Myself: Political Context and Family History

From 1964 to 2011, martial law permitted the Assad regime in Syria to arbitrarily arrest and detain political and civil society activists for unknown periods of time, holding them incommunicado (Zahler, 2010). Tens of thousands have been arrested, forcibly disappeared, tortured, and held in solitary confinement or otherwise inhumane conditions, frequently causing death (Amnesty International, 2019). In March 2011, Syrians took to the streets, initially in smaller numbers and flash demonstrations, and later as large organized demonstrations attended by tens of thousands of citizens in almost all cities of Syria. The uprising was part of the wave of protests known as the Arab Spring, which had just started sweeping the entire Middle Eastern region in the winter and spring of 2011. The response of the Syrian authorities to the uprising was brutal. The regime started to increase its crackdown on civilians, particularly targeting activists, citizen journalists, and medical and humanitarian workers. Civilians could be arrested simply for helping activists or treating wounded protesters. Although martial law was supposedly lifted after the Syrian uprising, it was reinstated in a harsher form under the disguise of anti-terrorism law (Amnesty International, 2019).

As a Syrian (now Syrian Canadian), I come from a family with a long history of political opposition to the Syrian Assad regime and so was aware of these political issues from a young age. Many members of my family, including my father and uncle, have been imprisoned for their activities—both intellectual and political. I grew up hearing their stories and those of many others, and so was aware from the earliest stages of my life of the fear and trauma that the Syrian people have endured over the last thirty years. I was exposed to stories of isolation, torture and disappearance. Sometimes, the stories were whispered with trepidation. Other times, they were

spoken loudly and comfortably, when shared among close family members and relatives. These are not old histories of an abstract past. They are still happening. Human rights violations still occur daily. The ones we hear about are only the "the tip of the iceberg" as described in a report by Anne Barnard published in the *New York Times* on May 15, 2019. Another report by the same journalist also for the *New York Times* was published on May 11, 2019, and featured survivors' accounts supported by photos and official Syrian documents smuggled out of Syria in January of 2014. An anonymous defector from the Syrian military police, known by the name Caesar, was able to smuggle out of the country 53,275 digital photographs that show at least 6,786 detainees who died in detention or after being transferred from detention to a military hospital (The Human Rights Watch, 2015). The photos were shown at the United Nations Council in April of 2014 in an effort to have the International Criminal Court in The Hague investigate the case as a crime against humanity. According to Samantha Power, the American ambassador to the United Nations under the Barack Obama administration, "The gruesome images of corpses bearing marks of starvation, strangulation and beatings indicate that the Assad regime has carried out a systematic, widespread and industrial killing" (BBC News, 2014, para 7). These stories are happening in the present, and they are always at the front of my consciousness.

Despite all this evidence, President Assad still denies the authenticity of these photographs and claims that these allegations are without any proof. In a 2015 interview with *Foreign Affairs* magazine, published as a transcript in March of 2015, Assad tells editor Jonathan Tepperman that the case was "funded by Qatar, and they say it's an anonymous source. So, nothing is clear or proven. The pictures are not clear which person they show. They're just pictures of a head, for example, with some skulls. Who said this is done by the government, not by the rebels? Who said this is a Syrian victim, not someone else?" (Assad,

2015, p. 63). As a result of this defense—and for many other reasons, including, significantly, a lack of international political will—this case was not prosecuted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Also, Syria is not a member of the International Criminal Court, and therefore prosecution would require a referral by the United Nations Security Council. A motion for such referral is exceedingly unlikely to pass given the double veto power of Russia and China, strong allies of the Assad regime in the Security Council (CBC news, 2015).

In February 2017, Amnesty International released a report titled, *Human Slaughterhouse*, documenting how the Syrian authorities have been silently and systematically killing thousands of detainees at the Sednaya military prison north of Damascus. The reports estimated that between 20 to 50 people were hanged on a weekly basis. The report also revealed that between 5,000 and 13,000 people had been executed since the uprising in 2011. According to Amnesty, the violations amount to crimes against humanity and it is critical to demand an independent and impartial investigation into crimes committed at Sednaya (Amnesty International, 2017). In May 2017, a report released by Reuters revealed that many of the dead bodies in Sednaya prison were disposed of in what is believed to be a crematorium, according to credible sources (Reuters, 2017).

Purpose of My Work

Memory is a site of conflict and struggle just as a body is a site of control and torture. In dictatorships, what is controlled is not just the bodies of those imprisoned, but also their memories. Destruction, detention and killing are tools to subjugate bodies, but erasing memory is an attempt to manage history. It is not just the forced disappearance of bodies, but also the forced disappearance of any remaining memories of them--of their ghosts. Therefore, the purpose of my work is to address the importance of cultural products that record and present not

only the survivors' stories but also the disappeared prisoners' stories or what museum theorists Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton call the "silenced history" (2011, p.2). However, I have a concern with how seeing or hearing accounts of systematic torture and mass violence might be profoundly alienating, and how a sense of confusion, uneasiness, and helplessness could result. Sociologist and criminologist Stanley Cohen, who had a lifelong concern about human rights violations, explains in his book *State of Denial* (2013) how humans turn a blind eye towards uncomfortable realities such as poverty, violence, and injustice. He concludes that denial and lack of empathy are the typical reactions to seeing such atrocities represented at a distance. He finds that, rather than an impulse to regard humanitarian atrocities with a critical eye, the human tendency is to behave with a lack of empathy. The American writer, filmmaker, and political activist Susan Sontag provides another explanation. Her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, suggests that lack of empathy is *not* a typical reaction, but the result of feeling helpless to stop suffering. She writes, "compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action or it withers" (2003, p.79). Therefore, the purpose of my work is also to focus on the importance of translating compassion into action, of having frank conversations about what we can do when we confront uncomfortable realities or "difficult knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, pp.755-776). In the following paragraph, I explore how cultural initiatives could facilitate the engagement with difficult knowledge. Later, in chapter 4, I will discuss the artistic strategies I employed to minimize alienation while visiting difficult stories of former prisoners of conscience, with the goal of encouraging agency and specific actions in response to my film.

Lehrer and Milton (2011) explain in their book, *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, that although the democratized technologies of the 21st century have had the effect of saturating the media that much of the world consumes with images of suffering, the capacity to commit

atrocities and human rights violations has not diminished. Nevertheless, they argue that it is possible to confront these atrocities by igniting social aspirations like empathy, identification, and cross-cultural dialogue, by recognizing multiple perspectives and catalyzing action (Lehrer & Milton, 2011). According to the authors, such aspirations can result from simple initiatives, such as the deployment of historical images that have been hidden from public circulation for decades to reshape public consciousness. They give the example of a public and historic initiative that took place in May 1990 in Prague. A line of kiosks displayed images from the 1952 Slánský show trial and the 1968 Prague Spring in the Wenceslas Square, one of the city's main and busiest city squares. The initiative occurred only five months after the nonviolent "Velvet Revolution" that brought down the country's authoritarian one-party government. The public installation was a historic moment where Praguers were invited to look at images that captured major and difficult moments of their country's history. The event encouraged visitors to "discuss their feelings and the implications of these new public revelations," and found that "a silenced history resurfaced." (Lehrer & Milton, 2011, p.2). In the terminology of trauma theorist Roger Simon, this is a phenomenon of reshaping "historical consciousness," where community members remember mass violence and trauma, and thus transform popular memory (Simon, 2000, p.2).

By exhibiting evidence of a forgotten past, the 1990 initiative in Prague acted as a call to remember. The act of remembering mass violence in public spaces is valuable beyond preventing or avoiding the mistakes of the past. Remembrance itself creates the context that helps us form and regulate meaning, feelings, perceptions and identification. It allows us to understand the human condition, its limitations as well as alternatives and new possibilities. As Simon and his collaborators assert, remembrance therefore becomes pedagogically important (Simon, 2000).

Given such pedagogical potential, the stories of my three participants who were prisoners of conscience offer an opportunity for critical learning, by which I mean the stories become tools for critical awakening and for emancipating oppression. Aside from important issues and concerns of reducing future atrocities, or whether current political prisoners will or will not be liberated, the pedagogical significance lies in the ways that memories, testimonies, and experiences are transmitted and shared so as to allow a perception and an exposure of the Syrian's regime human rights violations. The official discourse of the current Syrian regime denies the accounts of torture committed against political prisoners. The stories of former political prisoners therefore offer a form of resistance—in the sense of transmitting their knowledge and sharing their actual lived experiences with us. Their voices, so framed, become an alternative history to the unilateral narratives that emerge within dictatorships. Such an alternative history empowers those who have been silenced by authoritarian regimes. In his book, *History of Sexuality* (1978), French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault discusses how power and knowledge are closely related and are not independent entities. Foucault looks at human modes of knowing as being deeply connected with issues of power. Power is constructed through knowledge, and knowledge is reinforced and reproduced by power. He argues that the correlation of power and knowledge can constrain but can also liberate and have transformative effects on power structures if knowledge is used as a form of resistance. Seeing how power and domination structures are the result of historical genealogies empowers citizens to think of alternatives. When history is written by a single, unimpeachable authority, historical impasses seem inevitable, and hopefulness is futile in a system based in inevitability.

The Syrian regime created a totalizing discourse, and isolated Syrians in what became, as described by many Syrian civil activists, the "kingdom of silence," in which the regime ensured

that *Al Assad illa al-Abadd* or "Assad forever," was the main slogan, plastered on walls and constantly appearing on television and other screens everywhere. Syrians were denied any possibilities or alternatives, and even the movement of history was arrested. "Assad forever" implied that Syrians had no choice or voice or even the hope of different times. They were arrested in space and time.

By giving image and voice to narratives that could help us see through the walls of domination, animated documentary invites us to learn how to see through the regime's dominant discourse and to un-think its power structure. Documenting the stories of former political prisoners through a cultural product such as an animated film will give the Syrian community a way to remember, transmit and share difficult knowledge. The film gives form to the hushed stories we have always heard among our families and friends. The project aims to create public engagement or at least reshape the public consciousness by revealing hidden stories and giving voice to repressed pain. This engagement can give second-hand witnesses some agency, which is often very difficult (Sontag, 2003). As a result, viewers actively participate in the development of what Simon and his co-authors refer to as "historical consciousness," that is, the way members of communities revisit the past in order to understand it (Simon et al., 2000, p.2). This historical consciousness, in the Syrian context, is being deliberately and continuously erased by the hegemonic discourse of the Syrian regime, which monopolizes the Syrian narrative and denies the atrocities committed against prisoners. The stories of former political prisoners not only provide a window to the past, but also reflect what is currently happening with an alternate narrative.

Of the hundreds of thousands of victims of Hafez Al Assad's 1971-2000 dictatorship, only a very few of them have been able to communicate their story to the Syrian community.

Those few stories that are known are an invaluable resource that sheds light on the injustices that are being endured by tens of thousands of Syrians currently, under the reign on Bashar Al Assad, the son of Hafez Al Assad. According to Philip Luther, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Program, the forces of the Syrian regime have used torture to crush their opponents: “Today, [torture] is being carried out as part of a systematic and widespread attack directed against anyone suspected of opposing the government in the civilian population and this amounts to crimes against humanity" (Amnesty International, 2016). A February 2018 report from Amnesty International stated that:

> Security forces arrested and continued to detain tens of thousands of people, including peaceful activists, humanitarian workers, lawyers and journalists, subjecting many to enforced disappearance and torture or other ill-treatment, and causing deaths in detention. Government forces disclosed the fate of some of the disappeared but failed to provide the families with remains or information around the circumstances of the disappearances. (Amnesty International, 2018, para.1)

Syrian writers, journalists, and activists have used words to counter the current regime's unilateral discourse in small ways. Important works have influenced and inspired my thesis research. Mostafa Khalifa’s memoir, *The Shell* (2008), describes the horrors he witnessed during his 13-year imprisonment from 1982-1994. Khalifa, an award-winning novelist and political writer, recounts how he was arrested without any explanation of the charges and without any notice to his family of his whereabouts. He describes how many young men, including doctors, engineers, teachers, and writers, were tortured to death. If it had not been for the memoir, their stories would have been erased from our historical consciousness forever. While the author could not write until after his release, Khalifa exercised what he calls a “recording memory” (2008, p.

35). He memorized one page of what he would write, and he kept repeating it until it was settled in his memory. The work must be understood as a testimony, a memoir, rather than objective fact, taking into consideration the many factors that could have influenced his narratives such as being extremely sick, beaten, or hungry when he was in prison. Even this subjective memory of a past survivor has implications for the present. It raises awareness about current realities. Survivors' stories such as Khalifa's shed light on the injustices endured by the tens of thousands detained right now. These current realities cannot be separated from the past.

These stories from the past and current reports are difficult to address. An important angle in the pedagogical equation is the role of the discipline of art education in providing both learning and teaching opportunities about difficult knowledge. Art educators are increasingly engaged with students and artists who have lived the everyday oppression of the Syrian regime. Michaela Crimmin, an independent curator and writer; and a member of the academic staff of the Royal College of Art in London, notes in her essay, "Art and Conflict in the Context of Higher Education," that "many of today's staff and students have experienced conflict either directly or indirectly and are intent on exploring the theme more deeply" (2014, p.75). She argues that it is critical to encourage new teaching methods that engage with the culturally diverse character of an increasingly international student body who come from areas of conflict and who have escaped dictatorships and high-risk zones. Crimmin, who is also a co-founder of conflict + culture, a nonprofit organization, writes that "while academics in art departments are doing research and teaching courses that in part address conflict, there are few with a dedicated focus on conflict" (2014, p.75).

In the next chapter, I will locate and explore relevant literature that addresses animated documentary as an art medium that can be utilized in the context of social justice and political

conflict. I also locate important theory about the history of animated documentary, its legitimacy, and the tensions around it as a medium that claims to represent truth. I will argue that the art of film animation, in its own subjectivity, is best suited as an art medium to convey difficult personal accounts told from the point of view of victims of trauma and mass violence. Issues of reclaiming memory and history through art projects are also discussed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A Long Night is a short-animated documentary based on oral history interviews that uses metaphors and imagery to explore difficult stories of hunger, illness, and torture endured by three former political prisoners who survived captivity and are now residents in Montreal. Animated documentary is best defined by Annabelle Honess Roe, a lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Surrey, UK, in her book, *Animated Documentary*. She writes "animated documentaries are produced frame by frame; they are about *the* world rather than *a* world" (2013, p.27). While animated documentary is accepted by producers, critics and audiences, it is still facing obstacles to be accepted as "a viable visual representational strategy for documentary" (Honess Roe, 2013, p.27). Therefore, I will be locating relevant theory, history, and examples of practice to explore these obstacles and the tension around them.

History of Documentary Animation

Although documentary animation appeared as a mode of representation more than a century ago, there is a shortage of academic studies about the medium (Roe, 2009). In 1915, comic strip and animator Winsor McKay copyrighted the film *The Sinking of the Lusitania*. This film depicts the sinking of the ship after being struck by two torpedoes fired from a German U-boat. The film was one of many animated silent films created to stir anti-German sentiments during World War I. It is the film that gave birth to one of the oldest animation techniques, the rotoscoping technique: a process used by animators to trace over photographic motion picture footage, frame by frame, to create realistic movement for animated forms (Lukmanto, 2018) and is considered responsible for the look and development of many of today's animated documentaries (Kriger, 2012, p.2).

Not only is there a shortage of literature, but the discourse around the genre of documentary animation is divided and fragmented, as argued by scholar of animation, Jacqueline Ristola in her article, "Recreating Reality; *Waltz with Bashir*, *Persepolis* and the Documentary Genre" (2016). For example, when Iranian-born French graphic novelist and film director, Marjane Satrapi describes her film *Persepolis* (2007) – based on her graphic novel by the same title depicting her childhood in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution–she refuses to call it a documentary (Ristola, 2016). Satrapi's position seems to reflect a variety of artistic anxieties that arise from the impulse to delineate art forms from one another. To further understand the strictly demarcated boundaries between documentary and animation in *Persepolis*, one could look at the challenges faced by Ari Folman, the creator of *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). In contrast to Satrapi, Folman does not reject the idea of documentary animation. In an interview with *Cineaste*, Folman describes his struggle to get funding from various avenues in the Israeli film establishment. He was told by those who fund documentaries that his project did not qualify since it was an animation project. And when he approached the animation and fiction departments, they also rejected his project because they viewed it as a documentary (Esther, 2009).

Folman argues that animated documentaries walk the line between these genres and challenge the conception of the documentary genre in general (Ristola, 2016). Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre, a French-Canadian who has established her own independent film company, addresses these new boundaries in an interview with independent film maker and animator, Judith Kriger. Speaking about her first animated documentary, Saint-Pierre commented that, "The genres of film have become more stretched. The definition of what films are—you can really stretch the boundaries; in 2006, people said it can't be a documentary because it's animated." However, she

adds that “now people can recognize that documentary can be a mix of genres” (Quoted in Kriger, 2012, p.82).

Strengths in Documentary Animation: The Four Modes

The relationship between animation and documentary, as discussed above, is fraught with tension and unease. Paul Wells, the director and professor at the Animation Academy at Loughborough University in the UK writes that animated documentary can be controversial for “those who might hold a highly 'purist' notion of documentary insisting upon the use of 'as it happens' footage” (2016, p. 8). He divides the genre of animated documentary into four modes: imitative, subjective, fantastic and postmodern (Wells, 1997). For my purposes, I focus on the subjective and fantastic modes, given their relevance to the project.

In Wells’ classification, subjective animated documentary represents the subjective account of an individual. A soundtrack of the real person from the interview is often played alongside the artistic work of the animator (Khajavi, 2011), a method that I applied to my interviews. I used short segments from the audio-recorded interviews as a voiceover with English subtitles. Participants were asked to choose between either keeping their real voices, having their words narrated by others, or having their own voices digitally altered. They all chose to keep their real voices even the participant who asked to conceal their names.

The fantastic mode, according to Wells (1997), is based on the use of metaphors and symbolic images to represent reality. In the project I chose to combine the two modes to represent the difficult knowledge that I learned from my participants by using artistic metaphors rather than trying to accurately depict exact scenes or experiences. To bring the viewer into the world of the prisoner, I used symbolism to represent particularly challenging scenes and difficult memories and used specific visual and sound effects to convey their subjective experiences. For

instance, Anonymous tells the story of the old man who informed on him and was the reason for his capture. The old man who was in cell number four used to cry loudly at night because he felt deep guilt towards my interviewee who was in cell number one. I drew rain drops on a dark background to symbolize crying at night (see Figure 4).

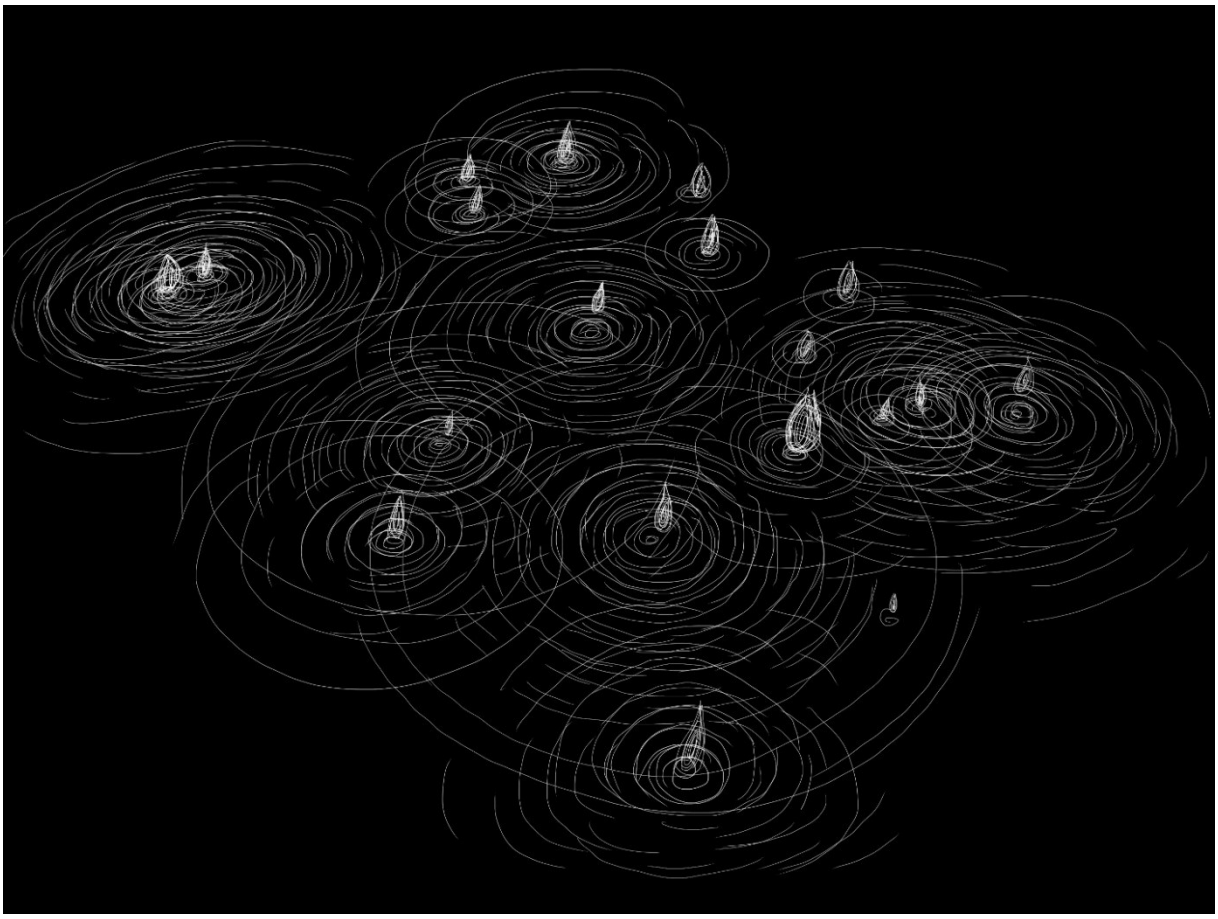

Figure 4. Amina Jalabi. *Rain.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Metaphor and symbolism are central in conveying difficult experiences during challenging historical periods, according to film historian William Moritz (1997). Moritz adds a crucial content analysis of four relevant animated films that were made during Russian domination in Eastern Europe. He chose these films specifically because they were all major award-winners and provided narratives that outwitted the totalitarian regime's censors, while being at the same time allegorical and satirical in their references to tyranny. According to

Moritz, the deliberately convoluted narrative structure helps the filmmakers speak out against dictatorship and present the viewer with a rich experience, or what the late Professor of Art and Education Elliot Eisner called "productive ambiguity" (Eisner, 1997, p.8). While I did not need to avoid censorship in my own project, I was concerned with conveying difficult knowledge in an approachable and productive way without alienating the viewers. In the following paragraphs, I go into depth about how symbolic representations can facilitate the reception of difficult knowledge.

The following literature addresses the question of how my film's symbolic structure and narrative representing the research data could spark the audience's compassion, add to their knowledge and deepen their understanding of others when hearing difficult stories. Wells wonders how illustrating individuals' subjective realities could awaken viewers to social criticism and move them beyond mere reception of an artistic expression. He writes, "Often, the startling irony of the subjective documentary is how it moves beyond its basis as the expression of an individual voice and finds correspondence in viewers to the extent that it articulates social criticism" (1997, p.43). A contemporary example is the film, *Broken: The Women's Prison at Honeneck* (2017), which uses symbolism in animation to reflect the magnitude of a difficult lived experience. Filmmakers Volker Schlecht and Alexander Lahl explain that they created this short conceptual animation to depict the sadness, pain, and excruciating details of the stories of two German women who were political prisoners in former East Germany. Their joint statement indicates how they were able to encapsulate rich and dense material by using symbolism: "We ended up with more than 100 pages of interviews, every syllable containing the story of a life. So rather than create a traditional story with a beginning, middle and end, we decided to make something more conceptual, a film that seemed more like a painting" (Lahl & Schlecht,

2017, para.7). Their film, *Broken*, combined the subjective and fantastic modes as outlined by Wells to convey difficult subjective experiences. It also illustrates the realities of the two participants through conceptual sketches, in line with the real soundtrack of the interviews, that sample fragments of their voices telling their prison stories. In this film there are two narratives: one narrative is built out of visual metaphors, and the other is built out of the voices of the interviewees. The filmmakers also visually illustrate these stories with symbolism to underscore and draw our attention to what is unfamiliar and unknown to us. For instance, one of the interviewees remembers how they had no privacy in the bathroom. She says: "You were observed: Does she brush her teeth in the morning or in the evenings? How does she wipe her behind? You had to wash yourself outwardly, so everyone could see that you cleaned everywhere" (Lahl & Schlecht, 2016). The creators of the film opted for an all-eyes illustration to depict the unfamiliar feeling of not having privacy in one's own bathroom (see Figure 5). The technique of combining symbolic visual content parallel to difficult vocal narratives creates a moving artistic mixture that aids in the transmission of difficult knowledge. It educates, it unsettles, and inspires action. I drew on this approach in my own animation (see Figure 4).

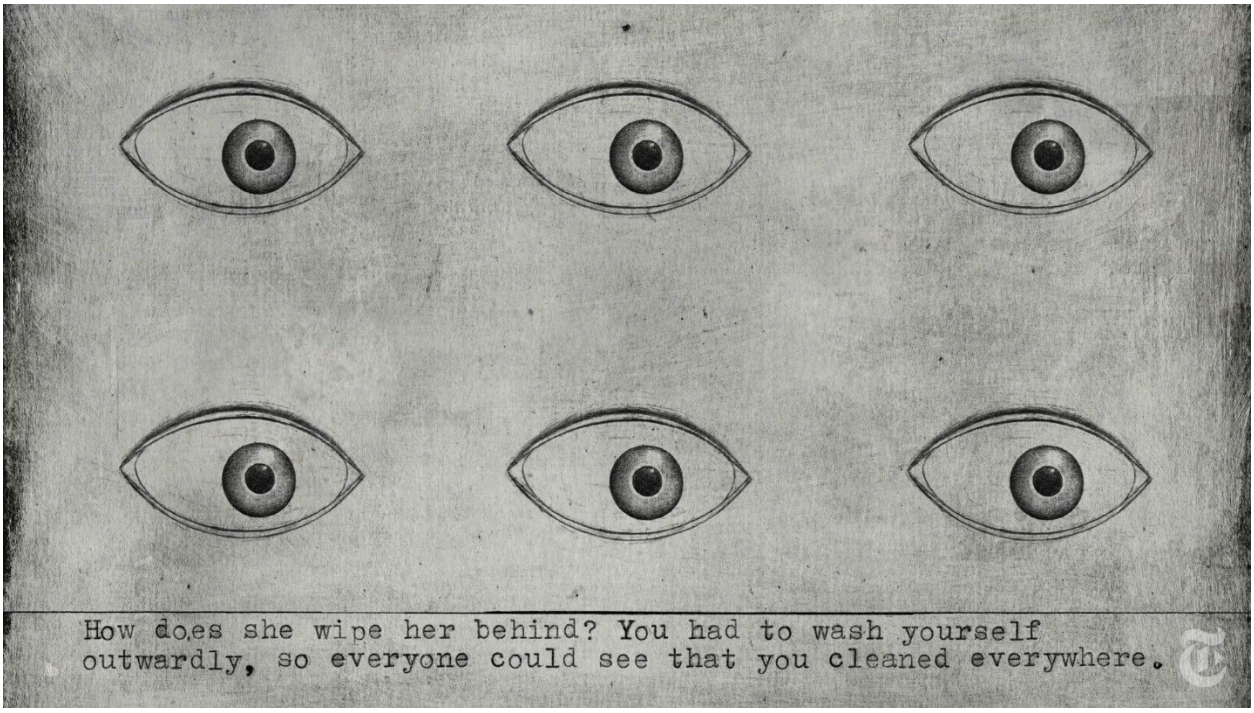

Figure 5. Broken: The Women's Prison at Hoheneck. 2016. Screen capture.

Documentary versus Animated Documentary

In the following literature review, I discuss relevant material considering indexicality in photography in order to draw a comparison with documentary, whether photographic or animated. The term "indexicality" in the context of photography and film refers to the bond between reality and its reflected copied image as a result of a chemical process (Gunning, 2004). In other words, photographs are not a *copy* of reality, but a *glimpse* of reality. Looking at the example of photographs taken by soldiers in the Allied forces following the liberation of World War II concentration camps, illustrates the issues that arise from such out-of-context images. Susan Sontag refers to an argument made by Hannah Arendt, a German-American philosopher and political theorist, which states that photographs and newsreels of the concentration camps are misleading when seen out of context, because photographs of starved-to-death corpses do not show a complete picture of concentration camp conditions, including a common practice of

extermination by gas and subsequent cremation. We do not see the killing and gassing; we do not see the whole reality. The photographs are only a glimpse of the aftermath (Sontag, 2003). Similarly, the smuggled Caesar photos, discussed earlier on page 9, do not show the events of torture and prison conditions in Syria but only the tortured dead corpses—torture reduced into a single image. These images are, of course, authentic, extreme, and shocking. However, just as with the images from Nazi concentration camps, as horrific as they are, these photos hide many elements and stories. What is concealed is much more than what is revealed because photographs freeze a moment in time, there is a necessary dismissal of the past, including the events that unfolded to create the instant that is captured in the image.

In the same vein, documentary films claim to capture reality, but this claim is also constantly challenged by scholars, who argue that exact representation is never possible to begin with. For instance, there is no way to fully document the realities of the Syrian regime prisons. A regular indexical (i.e. photographic) documentary that consists only of interviews will be, without a doubt, authentic and shocking, but it will lack an interpretive dimension of unseen realities. Moreover, animated documentaries declare their subjectivity from the outset, unlike regular indexical documentaries (Callus, 2010). Further, documentaries that claim to capture reality (i.e. to be indexical) are in fact works of film, regardless of the form they take, and are therefore constructs of reality. The realism of such documentaries, as Paula Callus argues, is always an "illusion of objectivity" (2010, p. 64). With all this in mind, I chose to echo that reality by making an animation instead of a documentary with interviews: I wanted to approach the truth of what has happened in Syria without recourse to Caesar's photographs, which only offer a glimpse of reality.

I contend that film animation, in its own subjectivity, is an art medium that is well-suited to convey difficult knowledge. Personal accounts and victim testimonies of trauma and mass violence can be recaptured through interpretations and sometimes juxtapositions within animation. The viewers are therefore compelled to interpret what they hear and experience in the interviews, as Annabelle Honess Roe, lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Surrey discusses in her book *Animated Documentary* (2013). She explains how the art of animation can re-create a unique embodiment of the experience of the subject, in what she calls, "vocalic bodies" (p.78). She explains that the creative work of the animator replaces the absent corporal human bodies that produced the original voices heard in the interviews. According to Roe, the removal of the indexical imagery (the human body that produced the original sound) can amplify the importance of the soundtrack in animated interview documentaries. Those vocalic bodies are used to convey experience and meaning while having the freedom to not exactly resemble what they represent. Roe invites us to think about the vocalic bodies (the representations of bodies created by the animator) as a tool that highlights the "autonomy of the voice as expressive and meaningful in its own right at the same time as adding a dimension of interpretation, and sometimes juxtapositions to what is heard" (2013, p.78).

In my animated film, *A Long Night*, the images I chose to illustrate the imprisonment experiences of the subjects are the vocalic bodies. Such images could facilitate the viewer's access into another dimension in which the soundtrack of my oral history interviews is amplified through the unique embodiment of the experience of unjustified imprisonment endured by my participants. For instance, Hana talks about how she could not sleep at night because there were too many cockroaches in her cell. The vocalic body is a woman sitting while cockroaches are symbolic representation.

Roe also addresses the importance of masking the real identity of the interviewees in order to protect them. Disclosing participants' identities in research about difficult knowledge can have implications for their family, friends, and for themselves. A participant in my film who elected to remain anonymous did not object to keeping his real voice in the film. That he was comfortable keeping his real voice is a testament to one of the strengths of animation: it has the power to convey truth while simultaneously creating a protected space for sharing difficult knowledge. I asked him more than once if he would not be more comfortable using someone else's voice, but he had already made up his mind. I did notice that at the moment I told him that the film would be in animated form, there was relief. Once he became aware that there would not be live video recording and a recognizable depiction of his appearance, he instantly wanted to give his real voice to the documentary. This is an illustration of how anonymity can be achieved to a powerful effect with animated documentary. Roe writes: "Animation is a more creative way of achieving such anonymity. Most often, this anonymity is necessitated when a film is on a sensitive subject of something that interviewees would not otherwise be willing to discuss on film" (p.79). Syrians under dictatorship, with memories of fear still deeply rooted in their subconscious, do not dare to speak out—at least not comfortably and freely. My choice is supported by art education scholar Lorrie Blair, who in her book, *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation,* raises the challenge of balancing between identity's confidentiality and the value of collected data (2016, p. 89). I believe that animation allows me to find that balance for *A Long Night.*

Figure 6. Amina Jalabi. *Insecte*. 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Reclaiming History and Memory

I used oral history methods to solicit testimonies as data for my thesis. These testimonies became an integral part of my research since they were presented in my film, *A Long Night*, to protest state violence, reclaim history and memory and expose injustices committed by the current Syrian regime. I interviewed three political prisoners and collaged their statements into a single audio track as the basis for my twelve-minute animation. In the following paragraphs, I locate literature review that discusses the benefits of testimony. Because oral history interviews are also a form of testimony, I believe it is important to look at them from an angle of healing and resistance--especially when it is combined with an artistic expression.

Social sciences theorist Inger Agger and Danish psychiatrist Soren Buus Jensen explore testimony as a tool for healing in their 1990 article, "Testimony as Ritual and Evidence in Psychotherapy for Political Refugees," published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. This study describes two case histories where two individuals were able to experience some positive change after thirteen sessions. During these sessions, they recounted their experiences as prisoners of conscience. The researchers argue that empowering former political prisoners to provide testimony and evidence regarding human rights violations helps them to transform their pain and suffering into spiritual and political dignity (Agger & Jensen, 1990).

While I did not frame my conversations as therapeutic encounters, I believe that through my film, A *Long Night*, based on these conversations, I was able to help memorialize the struggle against the current Syrian regime—adding a different kind of qualitative data that might never be known. Art Education scholar Kryssi Staikidis explains in her case study research (2013), "Advocating for Justice: A Maya Painter's Journey," that Guatemalan Maya painter Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay "used art as a tool to reveal—as well as to overcome—injustice." (pp. 3-4). Oppressive regimes will go to extraordinary lengths to obliterate any evidence of their human rights violations and maintain a discourse of denial. Therefore, the action of art making is itself a platform for exposing horror and for reclaiming memory and history (O'Loughlin, 2007).

Extreme measures by dictatorships are designed to conceal and silence as discussed by social sciences professor at Roskilde University, Sune Haugbolle. Haugbolle (2008) argues that the Syrian regime has succeeded in planting fear so deeply into people's consciousness that the tales of victims are doing work for the benefit of the punitive system by ensuring that an "abstract fear hangs over the heads of citizens like a Damocles sword" (p. 263). The author

argues that it is important to speak the truth and "turn the negative energy of victimization around and create a language of hope and freedom" (p.273). When one only hears stories of Syrian prisoners as rumors and whispers, language is poisoned with the state's discourse. But when these stories are told as testimonies and shared truths for the purpose of memory work, they are cleansed of the state's poison to the oppressed people's advantage. As a child, I always heard these stories privately, hushed and whispered with a tone of fear and sometimes even denial by family members. The denial manifests when testimonies are dismissed as rumor, which is a way the adults can protect the youth from repeating something in an unsafe place, potentially resulting in grave consequences for the family. Secret police (Mukhabrat) were and are still always present in all public spaces in Syria. Recently, however, a few stories are starting to emerge as testimonies in the hope that they may let the world know what is happening behind closed doors. The testimonial, by virtue of being spoken by a free agent, is a crucial countermeasure against the resignation and fear on which a fascist state relies.

The importance of remembrance, which is the act of remembering for posterity, is important as a tool for healing as well as a catalyst for social justice. Remembrance as a tool for social justice is discussed by researcher in migrant and refugee literature and film Rita Sakr, in her book, *Anticipating the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary Literatures and Political Geographies* (2013). While other articles discuss the healing effect and the importance of recording evidence against repression, Sakr sheds light on the importance of archiving the stories of prison since they fulfill a need for revenge without inciting violence. She explains that when Syrians start the process of reconciliation and state reconstruction gets underway, acknowledging and recognizing the prison experience will be a crucial part in rehabilitation on various sides of the political divide. Such discussions contribute to some of the debates in the area of transitional

justice in post-war areas. Testimonials are, therefore, an integral part in a society's process of transition out of a dictatorship, as they return agency to the people in a way that restores a sense of justice and dignity, even when actual legal procedures cannot always be applied.

However, testimonials have a multilayered impact. Given the challenging content in prison or war testimonies, public reactions to them vary. There is always an element of discomfort in dealing with difficult knowledge. This issue is raised by Roger Simon, who in his article, "A Shock to Thought" (2011), argues that when audiences are confronted with past events at an exhibition that offers different historical perspectives—as is the case in my film—the consequences, albeit varied, are always difficult. This proved true in the responses to *A Long Night*, as indicated by the post-viewing questionnaire I distributed to 15 filmgoers, seven of whom were Syrian, eight of whom were non-Syrian. I got back 10 responses from the mixed group.

Even non-Syrian viewers, who did not have pre-existing knowledge about the Syrian prisons, indicated that they experienced a difficult encounter when exposed to the challenging content of the film. From the post screening data I collected, it was obvious that of the 15 audience members polled most (10 out of 15) of the audience, especially the non-Syrians (all eight of those polled), felt a sense of confusion and apprehension that such levels of cruelty are still possible in today's world.

Important discussions took place following the screening of the film. There were varied reactions, from apprehension and shock from the non-Syrians to the emotional identification of some Syrians, who had been imprisoned or had relatives imprisoned, and even including some complaints by other Syrians of the limited scope of the documentary.

I believe that the variation in audience reaction will grow as the audience for the film grows. Since the film is not yet public on social media, the spectrum of the audience is still relatively limited. There could be even more tensions in the future. The intensity of individual responses may encourage awareness and action and help to expand the conversation around difficult knowledge in the Syrian context.

Therefore, the experience of representing difficult knowledge is itself difficult. Britzman (1998) refers to these moments when viewers are confused, disoriented, and, in the case of my film, unable to settle upon a meaning to the testimonies. This confusion, however, or what Simon describes as a "shock to thought" could lead to creating a "force that compels thoughts rather than a traumatic disruption that leads to the extended abandonment of thought" (Simon, 2011, p. 439). This informed the design of my project, as I wanted to give the viewers a chance to employ strategies to help them channel their responses after having been exposed to the large scale of the political oppression of Syrians, especially for the non-Syrian viewer. I will explain these strategies in more detail in the next chapter. My aim was to help them channel newly acquired difficult knowledge—their shock to thought and their unsettled present—into an action they could take. It was important in this research project not to leave the viewer abandoned with a sense of helpless empathy. In contexts of the transmission of difficult knowledge, it is important to invite the viewer to channel their shock and compassion since compassion is an unstable emotion and, as Sontag argues, withers if not directed (Sontag, 2003). It is crucial to provide strategies that guide compassionate emotions. This transfer of compassion could be expressed in various ways. It can, for example, shift a historical and political consciousness, or it can take informed actions to reduce the suffering and plight of others. The impact of difficult knowledge that many scholars such as Pitt, Britzman and Simon are exploring also informs my own central

question: **Can documentary animation represent difficult knowledge in public spaces and facilitate the transformation of our compassion into action?**

In the next chapter, I elaborate on the tools and practices I undertook to guide my viewer to transform their compassion into action. I discuss why and how I implemented a certain action-oriented strategy. I also discuss the benefits and limitations of a research-creation methodology. Finally, I address technical problems, possible ethical considerations, and my interview procedure.

Chapter 3

Compassion into Action

I had the chance to present my in-progress research-creation project to a workshop during the 2018 conference of the Oral History Association, hosted at Concordia University. In my presentation session, I showed a few scenes of my film to members of the conference. I had one particular item of feedback which seriously affected the execution of my project—especially in relation to the viewers' response to difficult knowledge. One audience member discussed the importance of finding "practical ways to engage the viewers and to help them transform their compassion into action." He suggested that providing some guidance on what they could do next could be a helpful and empowering way to channel the effects of the emotional impact. Likewise, providing them with material and links would enable them to pursue learning about the topic if they wished to. The feedback from this audience member inspired me to brainstorm ideas that could guide the viewers to transform their compassion into action. To make better-informed choices, I decided to consult with activists and families of political prisoners to suggest methods of applying this new difficult knowledge to practical end. With their advice, I found Families for Freedom, an important woman-led organization whose mandate is to globally campaign for the release of Syrian prisoners. This movement already has an active petition on the official website of the organization addressed to the UN Security. Their goal is to reach 10,000 signatures and they have 7,286 as of the time I am writing this thesis. A link to the petition (include the link here, so that the reader can access it to) was added at the end of the film to help viewers take action.

Based on the data I gathered from the audience screening of my finished film, including a link to the petition was an effective strategy. The comments and the answers to the questionnaire affirmed the need for vehicles for expressing and channeling the viewers' experience. One viewer wrote the following: “The link provided at the end made me think about taking action because it's an accessible and doable way to help. I didn’t realize it would be that easy to help.” This comment is a strong indication that the qualitative data presented in my film encouraged action-oriented empathy when combined with practical options, and that qualitative data is uniquely suited for generating action-oriented empathy. Unlike numbers, research-creation engages our senses and creates points of contact with our emotions. According to Eisner (1997), emotions make us understand the “other” better. He argues that forms of data representation outside of quantitative modes add to our knowledge and enlarge our understanding. He continues, an artistically crafted narrative has more power to evoke the reader’s strong emotions than facts described literally. Eisner does not elaborate on the significance of empathic participation in someone’s painful experience, but it is my belief, as a filmmaker and researcher, that research-creation that engages with difficult knowledge should be combined with strategic guidelines and effective practices for taking action. It is important to me to find ways to guide viewers to transform their emotions into action. In the next paragraph, I discuss research-creation as the best-suited methodology to address those concerns.

Research-Creation

As an artist and a researcher, it was essential for me to engage the senses as described by Eisner to develop an empathetic, as well as a practical, participation. It is important to note that Eisner's essays are about art-based research, which began in 1970s. He and other researchers believed that "art is not used to illustrate the findings, but rather to provide a greater meaning of the findings" (Blair, 2016, p. 68). Research-creation, on the other hand, is a new and emerging methodology. In research-creation, the work of art is an outcome that embodies and represents findings of the research. Research-creation is defined by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council as "[a]n approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms)" (SSHRC, 2020). The methodology of research-creation is gaining ground; however, it has not been entirely accepted by academics, nor artists. My film, *A Long Night* is a research-creation project, but it is also adaptable to Eisner's discussion because it simultaneously illustrates data and aspires to communicate greater meaning and compassion. Therefore, I am adapting some of Eisner's discussion on the strengths of art-based research and the limitations of research-creation. I will discuss those concerns in the next section. I will also discuss the debate around the tension between form and content and how it affected the way I made my film.

Limitations of Research-Creation Methodology

Research-creation and alternative forms of data representation have both advantages and disadvantages—what Eisner describes as "promises and perils" (1997, p.4). First, he argues that while arts-based research's productive ambiguity could serve as positive insight, it could also be a dangerous tool. Eisner explains that data that lacks precision can be used to impose ideologies and agendas on individual. He argues that arts-based research could be "a way of keeping the door open for fresh insights and multiple interpretations," but adds that "ambiguity is not without its perils. One confers his or her own idiosyncratic meaning to the data" (p. 9).

Secondly, Eisner raises the issue of how to ensure that artistic material (research-creation outcomes) reaches a target audience. For him, outside of official venues of presentation, such as print and visual media, methods of dissemination are quite constraining. It is crucial, however, to remember that he wrote this essay twenty-two years ago, before the explosion of the World Wide Web and social media. Fortunately, platforms for disseminating material have expanded. Films and documentaries can be widely circulated through various platforms such as Vimeo, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others.

Thirdly, he asks researchers to be their own harshest critics, and to remember not to compromise content, for the sake of novelty and cleverness of form (Eisner, 1997). This warning was a looming challenge for me as I worked on my film—how to be creative and original while staying faithful to the content. I was working with extremely difficult stories. Therefore, I wanted to make sure that my art would act as a vessel to communicate that knowledge to the viewer. It concerned me that the viewer would be solely interested in the film as an art project more than being drawn to the difficult stories! The aesthetic questions I asked of myself were challenging, but very important. I decided to follow specific rules of composition and framing

while also keeping the visual content to a minimum, and purposefully making the animation move in slow motion. I wanted to give the viewer the time and the space to focus and pay attention to the participants' voices, and in so doing, give them the space to process these difficult narratives. By avoiding making the visual too busy or too fast, I tried my best not to lure the viewer into an artistic bubble. Instead, I wanted the viewer to have access to the art as a support system or guide to help them navigate the difficult knowledge they encounter through the audio track.

There are different sides to the debate on the tension between content and form. Roe does not seem to share Eisner's concerns about the final form overshadowing the content. Roe discusses the question of aesthetics in her 2013 book on animated documentary. She argues that the more an art creation is well developed, original, creative, and aesthetically pleasing, the more it gives voice to its content. It must be taken into consideration that whereas Eisner is discussing research-creation in general, Roe is specifically addressing the art of animated documentary accompanied by the sound of original interviews. Roe has a different kind of concern. She is more concerned about the aspect of control and power dynamics that exist between the interviewer and interviewed. By doing interviews, the interviewer takes an "epistemological control of others," whether about past events or their current situations (p. 91). She argues that the structure of an articulated interview is based on an uneven balance of power and more so when processed later by the interviewer into a film where "subjects have little or no control in the process of production, distribution, and exhibition. Their visibility and voice are beholden to those who are in greater control of the media and have the ability, through considerably higher social status, to reveal their plight" (p. 92).

The oral history approach to interviews, however, offers a different approach to power. Such interviews provide contexts of shared authority (Frisch, 1990) where the interviewer does not hold an utterly dominant position precisely because these encounters are more about open dialogue than the command of the interviewer. In oral history interviews, the interviewer is also subject to the revelations of the interviewee, who chooses the storytelling path.

Making a film, however, means that there are still some issues of epistemological control. I do, therefore, acknowledge that by making a film based on these interviews, I held a somewhat dominant position by virtue of having the final choice of which segments to include or exclude in the film and their placement. I could choose how I wanted to represent them artistically through specific metaphors and images, a limitation that I need to acknowledge. Nevertheless, by invoking a political meaning, and space for reaction and interpretations, the film gives a voice back to the interviewees. It enables the participants to publicly share their difficult narratives even if they are shaped through a production process. It allows interviewees to share difficult knowledge that could otherwise remain absent and become a "silenced history," (Lehrer & Milton, 2011, p. 2) especially in the Syrian context. As discussed earlier, the Syrian regime goes to extreme measures to obliterate and deny those stories. I also explained earlier how fear is so deeply rooted in the Syrian conscious. Thus, Syrian historical consciousness is given a chance to be reshaped through an artistic expression like my film. I discuss in the next section how I conducted these interviews using the oral history method.

Oral History Method

In recruiting participants, I was seeking three participants of Syrian origin, now in Canada, who had experienced political imprisonment by the Assad regime. I chose this number because I wanted to do long interviews with deep listening. Ultimately, at the end, there was a

final selection of two men and one woman, all of whom I interviewed, and used their interviews for my film. The names of my participants and the circumstance of their imprisonment are introduced in the foreword section.

Considering the trigger issues, and the political divide in the Syrian community, making contact through informal means was crucial to provide frameworks of trust and dignity to the interviewees. I opted to find participants through less formal methods. I decided not to contact potential participants through organizations or groups that support and work with Syrian refugees. Instead, I approached them through mutual friends or acquaintances to create encounters of increased trust and transparency. I came to appreciate this decision after witnessing the results, when it became apparent that the participants were willing to open up since I introduced myself to them through someone they already knew and trusted. They were comfortable to speak openly and share some highly sensitive details and difficult narratives. They let a silenced history resurface.

In terms of the method itself, I conducted one-on-one interviews following the oral history model. Verbal questions consisted of, but were not limited to, the following topics: personal background; the situation that led to imprisonment; what they remembered most from that time; and what was the hardest thing about being imprisoned. I also asked how they were released. In addition, I asked about their current life in exile, the dreams and hopes they have for the future, and how these experiences have affected them. My strategy was to ask open-ended questions designed to increase the likelihood of long answers and the possibility of fruitful digressions. Towards the end, I asked if they wanted to add anything.

In the guide entitled *The Step by Step Guide to Oral History* (1993), historian and educator Judith Moyer advises beginning the interview with easy questions. In my case, this meant asking about their background and when they arrived in their host country. I initiated the interviews and conversations with light questions, as Moyer suggests. Moreover, I tried my best to be an active listener and pause only when necessary, to ask the participant to clarify a term or explain a statement that could be relevant to my research. For instance, I knew from previous conversations with former prisoners that there is a Syrian prison jargon, with certain expressions for particular torture methods. This prison jargon requires some translation, even within the Arabic language itself. For instance, the expression قعدة الدولاب "seat of the wheel" would come up often in conversations and is used to refer to a method of torture where the jailers insert the detainee's head, neck and legs into a car tire while being folded at the waist so that they were immobilized and could not protect themselves from beatings on the back, legs, and head by batons and whips. (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Also, the term حفلات استقبال "welcome parties" is used for the beating sessions that would start upon arrival in the detention center, taking place right after arrest and before any security check.

I phrased my questions as much as I could to encourage elaboration and explanation. I also would stop the discussion at some points and ask for clarification with language like, "I don't understand, could you show me or explain to me how this was done?" Or, "Could you elaborate more?"

I also needed to take into consideration that my interviewees might have experienced sexual violations as part of their torture and imprisonment and be sensitive about the potential impact on my participants of discussing these. Both women and men are sometimes subjected to sexual assault and rape by prison guards during these sessions (Amnesty International, 2016).

Depending upon the way the interview unfolded, I was always prepared to back off, skip a question, or sometimes push it down the list, if the participant was uncomfortable or uneasy in answering such questions.

For example, Hana, the woman I interviewed, refers in her interview to these sexual violations and the stigma surrounding her imprisonment. Hana's family fled the city of Aleppo because of aerial bombardment. She stayed behind to help as a nurse at a makeshift hospital where she treated victims of falling bombs. She said:

> You know how it is in a conservative society, especially in a city like Aleppo. It was a big deal that I didn't leave with my family when they decided to leave the city. It was a big deal that I slept alone in our house.
>
> What is more annoying is the way society wants to show compassion. They do it in a stupid way. As soon as I was released from prison, many young men came asking for my hand as if they were doing me a great favor because they are convinced, I might have been raped. For me, what they did was a bad thing. I would not be less of a human being, even if it had happened. I am not ashamed. It was my destiny to be detained, and I don't regret one thing I did, and it doesn't mean that you should pity me. (Hana, Personal communications, August 19th, 2018)

As an Arab woman, I understand the underlying and multilayered issues surrounding the imprisonment of women. Released women face stigma and rejection by family members and their community because of the possibility that they endured sexual violence. I did not ask her if she had been raped because she did not mention it when she was telling her prison account. At this point in the interview, we were already past the prison part and discussing the aftermath. I did not want to bring her back into the narrative, and I wanted to honor and respect her authority

of her narrative. I did not want to make assumptions or push beyond what she wanted to say by allowing a degree of epistemological control over the interview.

Hana did, however, mention witnessing the interrogation and rape of a male prisoner in front of her eyes. Watching or hearing other people being tortured was a common theme between the three prisoners. Adnan and Hana spoke of others being tortured more than they spoke of the torture they endured. Both Adnan and Hana, it should be noted, were imprisoned after the 2011 Syrian uprising when the regime started cracking down brutally on Syrians who were defying the dictatorship. In contrast, my last participant, who was detained in the 1990s, spoke more of his own suffering. Although this difference might be simply a matter of individual personalities, it might also relate to the amount of time that had lapsed since their releases. It might have been be less stressful for the first two to discuss their plight in prison through second-hard torture stories, since their experiences are still more recent. For the last participant, on the other hand, the elapsed time may have enabled him to articulate the depth of the impact that his experience had on him.

Ethical Considerations

The interviews were about sensitive and challenging lived experiences. Therefore, I had serious concerns regarding how well-equipped my participants were to handle and process the possible effects of recounting painful memories of circumstances they had endured. I am not a therapist, but I am aware that re-telling a story is related to re-living a memory, and that doing so may trigger post-traumatic symptoms. To mitigate this risk, I told the participants that they could withdraw entirely from the research at any moment before November 1, 2018, at which point the post-production process was to have begun. In fact, my work on the animated images took longer than expected, from October 2018 to January 2019. The participants were asked to give feedback

on the animated images in January upon the completion of the illustrations. Even though the consent form indicated a November 1 deadline, I extended the date until after January, because the work took me longer than I had initially planned. I did not want to move ahead without their consent. I should mention, here again, that to reduce any actual risk of reprisals for speaking out, participants had the choice of keeping their identities anonymous, either through digitally altering their voices or by using pseudonyms, as discussed earlier.

Another issue that I had to take into consideration was my close connection to the subject matter. Given my friendship with one of the interviewees, I made sure that there were no blurry lines between my role as a researcher and my role as a friend. I ensured my ethical conduct by making clear that my role was exclusively one of a researcher while I conducted the interviews. However, researchers are now developing the idea of "friendship as method," and seeing the benefits of a closer connection in facilitating social science research with familiarity, closeness, and friendship functioning as mechanisms to enhance the research and allow better access to data. According to Critical Media and Cultural Studies professor Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy, "the most important aspect of this methodology is that we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love" (Tillman-Healy, 2003, p. 735). Even those interviewees with whom I did not have a pre-existing friendship, this "ethic of friendship," I believe, was a boon to the research, providing richer interviews and a more sensitive artistic outcome.

As the researcher, I ensured that the participants and I agreed upon the research approach and procedures from the first time we met. Following the interview, I maintained contact with the participants, keeping them apprised of the creation process and requesting input so that the control that I could exert over their stories as the artist continued to be informed by their

individual preferences. I showed my work in progress to my participants before the premiere screening on two particular occasions. I gave them access to the first edit once I put all the visuals together and asked for their input. I asked them if they wanted me to add or take out any of the parts that represented their stories. After the second edit and adding all the sound effects, I gave them access to the film again I asked for their input and if they agreed with the approach I was using. My three participants said they had nothing to object to and didn't ask me to add different segments of the soundtrack. They expressed their approval and said that it was painful to watch. As I explained earlier in this chapter on page 38, I held the dominant position in the creative process which was the making of the film. It was what I agreed on with my participants from the beginning. As I said before, it was my decision to hold control of the production process especially because I possess the required knowledge and skills to make an animated documentary. Although I had control over the artistic process, the participants held veto power over the way that their stories and voices were used.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the process of the artistic construction of the film. Instead of completely deliberately controlling all content and the trajectory of the project, I wanted to be in an artistic space that allowed both wielding and yielding. Every artistic process has a tension between what to include and what to exclude. I will also discuss the themes and codes and how I relied on them to make my final aesthetic choices. Moreover, I will discuss feedback from the audience that took place after the premiere screening of *A Long Night.* Their responses helped me to understand how to answer my research question: **Can documentary animation represent difficult knowledge in public spaces and facilitate the transformation of our compassion into action?**

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss my findings. After explaining how I worked with my interviews to discover my themes, I will present the themes, and explain my artistic process and the reasons behind selecting specific codes to be metaphorically represented. Finally, I will discuss the feedback from the audience at the premier screening of *A Long Night* and how this session with the audience helped answering my research question.

The data of my research consisted of the findings from the recorded oral history interviews, as well as academic research surrounding human rights violations in Syria. In order to organize and determine my findings in the interviews, the data were coded while I re-listened to the recordings. Decontextualizing and decoding one interview at a time better enabled me to compare the material to my next interview, as recommended by Blair (2016). I used Saldana's guidebook, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2015), which offers twenty-four strategies for coding qualitative data. Saldana explains how data could be interpreted through recontextualization to help in the decoding process. Blair (2016) also specifies how Saldana draws the differences between codes and themes: themes are the ideas and concepts that emerge out of decoding; codes are specific details. For example, "solitary confinement" is a code, that is interpreted into "torture," which is the theme that I eventually worked on to represent in the final animated documentary. Given this method, several themes emerged and were carefully integrated into the final structure of the film. I thoroughly explain the process of my decision making in regard to what images and sounds to include or exclude in the following paragraphs.

There was a process of actively choosing audio segments (codes) and grouping them under similar accounts (common themes) to illustrate and structure my film. This process

unfolded through a dynamic tension. In a way, it took the shape of an artistic dialogue. I was actively shaping and being passively shaped. During the active mode, I designed the flow of the film according to the themes that I decoded from my interviews, and the artistic illustrations came from specific content of the audio material. During the passive mode, I permitted myself to be guided by my intuition and feelings. Eisner refers to this design stage as the space between control and surrender: "There is the process of being artistically engaged. I believe that this process rests upon the ability to negotiate the tension between control and surrender, between giving in to the insistent demands of the world and yielding to the chaos of the unconscious" (Eisner, 1995, p.5).

After the premier screening, a question about how I made these choices was addressed to me. I answered that the choices in the film were in large part based on the common themes that emerged from the interviews, and which Eisner refers to as the "insistent demands of the world" (Eisner, 1995, p.5). I added that I went with my gut feeling as well, which Eisner calls the "chaos of the unconscious" (p.5). This process of control and surrender reflects the mixture and movement of the "insistent demands" that emerged from the interviews and my own creative chaos. The space between control and surrender, Eisner argues, should be used as a productive space in which coherence has a chance to arise. For him, aesthetics, a structured story, and a cause, all blend together into a coherent whole. He writes, "Research with no coherent story, no vivid images, and no sense of the particular is unlikely to stick. Coherence, imagery, and particularity are the fruits of artistic thinking" (p. 5). The coherence that Eisner is discussing here is also referenced in Roe's work, as mentioned earlier in chapter 3 when I discussed the importance of the artistic form of the project and its power to strengthen content and communicate a cause.

Therefore, I chose to focus on the common themes which represented the "the insistent demands" of the spirit of the project. My three participants were imprisoned at different times in different locations, but they all told me similar accounts of their imprisonment experiences. Subsequently, I built the structure of my film around these common themes which highlight and reinforce the truth that civilians are unjustly imprisoned in Syria and are systematically tortured by the regime's apparatus. These stories are not the exceptions, but the norm. Each narrative represents a larger truth. A Syrian prison story is not a fluke story of one unfortunate person, but rather the repeat narrative of hundreds of thousands of Syrian prisoners. This is precisely what my film aims to do; to zoom into specific narratives to shed light on the larger hidden realities of Syrian prisoners through these personal accounts.

Equally important was building the structure of the film around the codes that emerged after I was exposed to the stories and their emotional content. In a way, I was also the audience to this telling of these stories, and they impacted me, evoking empathy and compassion. I wanted to channel this response to the "insistent demands of the world" artistically, and to translate my own visceral reactions into concrete illustrations. My aim was to invite the viewers into a created space that included the subjective experiences of the participants as well as my own artistic translation of what they endured. I made an active and conscious effort to represent the themes while allowing unconsciously specific codes more than others to direct my artistic choices.

Themes, codes, and artistic choices

The following is a list of the selected themes and their codes. These are: torture; psychological torture; resilience; sickness, disappearance and death; and unexpected end. Resilience is a common theme between the three participants but was coded differently. After

the list below, I discuss how I chose to represent them metaphorically. The reader will notice that I chose not to illustrate every code from a given theme. As an artist, I was engaged in an ongoing process of working out how to make meaning from difficult narratives in the most coherent way possible. It proved to be an extremely challenging task to have the final say on what parts of the interviews to include or exclude in my film as all the codes and stories told seemed crucial and relevant but I couldn't include all of them in the final artwork. To do so would have made the film too long in terms of time of production and also potentially overwhelming to the viewer.

Torture:
Code 1: Anal rape on male prisoners (excluded)
Code 2: Hanged by a rope from the ceiling while stripped naked (excluded)
Code 3: Being interrogated from midnight until dawn (included)
Code 4: Calling them names and insulting wife and mother of prisoners (excluded)
Code 5: Stripped naked (excluded)
Code 6: Solitary confinement (included)

TABLE 1

In the film, I chose to animate the particularly difficult theme of torture as abstractly as possible. Adnan and Hana spoke more of the torture they witnessed rather than the torture they endured. Their extreme discomfort in telling their stories revealed a certain degree of reluctance in sharing their suffering. As a result, I chose to comply to their own sensibility in representing what they went through, and consequently decided not to elaborate on their torture stories. I chose my illustrations to be as symbolic as possible to avoid any risk of voyeurism. However, during my artistic process, I started working on a scene that shows a specific method of torture

that involves hanging a prisoner from the ceiling. While working on it, I realized (or maybe I had a gut feeling) that it did not exactly fit my vision of the film, and so I removed that scene. After all, this research-creation project aims to symbolize suffering and torture and is not meant to be an indexical documentary. The film was designed to reflect the subjective account of each of my participants in the most humane and dignified possible way while also capturing the common elements of the prison experience of Syrians under the Assad regime. Therefore, I animated an extremely slow movement of dark clouds during nighttime to echo the totality of the interrogation experience where time seemed to move more slowly, and destiny seemed uncertain (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Amina Jalabi. *A long Night.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Psychological torture:
Code 1: The uncertainty of their fate (included)
Code 2: Hearing others being tortured (included)
Code 3: Hearing others dying (included)
Code 4: Seeing others dying (included)
Code 5: Making others confess under torture (included)
Code 6: Finding out someone has been sentenced to death (included)
Code 7: Male prisoners hearing a prison guard trying to rape a female prisoner (excluded)
Code 8: Going back and forth to court hearings without an end in sight (included)

TABLE 2

As I was re-listening to the interviews, I realized that that psychological torture is its own category and therefore should be its own emerging theme. The three participants experienced variations of psychological torture. As a result, I wanted to include this emerging theme and represent it artistically. Psychological torture figured predominantly in the conversations, even when discussing physical torture, because any experience of suffering, even when it is experienced as a physical pain, it is still deeply felt as an emotion. Therefore, psychological suffering is central because torture is not simply just a mechanical event with some specific painful details. It is rather a whole experience in which both the external physical torture and the internal subjective feelings mix and create the totality of personal incidences of suffering and as a result their personal narrative.

For example, Anonymous speaks of a horrific torture session he endured. He goes into great details to explain how prisoners end up uttering names and disclosing events under the pressure of torture, just to end the agony, even if those whose names they speak may not be

involved in any political activity. He then starts to reflect on the duration of his imprisonment, and how he ended up in such darkness. He had been arrested because another prisoner had informed on him. Therefore, any reflection on past events is not solely about the external factors, but rather it is about locating the feelings and emotions within that event.

I chose, therefore, to represent this theme (psychological torture) by using code number five (making others confess under torture). I drew a scene of an interrogation room where there is an empty chair and a pending light while blood is slowly accumulating in the background until the whole background becomes red (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Amina Jalabi. *Torture.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Hana speaks about hearing other male prisoners being tortured behind her cell door. Jailers do that on purpose to psychologically torture prisoners in their cells. She says that she could hear them dying and was so aware that she could not do anything for them. She relates the stories of other torture victims in connection to her feelings of helplessness. Here, again, we see how external factors relate in an emotional way when the internal subjective state is also shared. Hana had been imprisoned for being a nurse in a makeshift hospital to rescue victims of bombing. There she was: a nurse (external) who heard a man dying next to her cell (external) who was helpless to do anything for him (internal). I chose to animated black blood sweeping slowly under Hana's cell door. Again, the slow motion is to echo the difficult moments a person can live while hearing someone breathing their last breaths (see Figure 9)

Figure 9. Amina Jalabi. *Witnessing*. 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Resilience
By taking the following actions, the prisoners defied the prison authorities and got into trouble for doing so:
Code 1: Refusing to eat dirty food (included)
Code 2: Playing games (excluded)
Code 3: Daydreaming, and talking about their favorite food and how they would cook it (excluded)
Code 4: Having the courage to tell the judge that the court is illegitimate (included)
Code 5: Singing to a fellow prisoner at night to make him feel better (included)

TABLE 3

When I began my interviews, I was surprised to hear many stories of survival and resilience, as opposed to victimization and suffering. There were commonalities in the participants' accounts, especially regarding resilience. Adnan spoke about organizing imaginary culinary competitions and many would take part, and each person would talk about his favorite meal and tell the others how he would prepare it. On such occasions, the general mood of the prisoners would improve, and everyone would have a good time. This was upsetting to the jailers, and Adnan would be then called for interrogation and would be tortured for uplifting the spirits of his cellmates. Also, Anonymous tells the story of the old man who had uttered his name under torture, and who would cry at night out of guilt and shame. Anonymous explains how he would sing for him at night so that the old man's conscience could be comforted, and this also upset the jailers. I represented code Five from the resilience theme by drawing a boy who is running. I also subconsciously was drawn to the idea of illustrating something that

reflects the lyrics of the song. The song *Shadi* is one of Fairuz's songs (1970), one of the greatest Arab singers of modern times. The lyrics are [free translation]:

A long time ago…

When I was young…

There was a boy…

Who'd come from the meadows…

We played together…

His name was Shadi…

Shadi and I sang together…

Played on the meadows…

Ran together…

Young stories that went with the wind…

(see Figure10).

Figure 10. Amina Jalabi. *Shadi.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Hana described a similar account of resilience, but in a different way. The food in the women prison had hairs and nail clippings in it. She and her friends stopped eating and went on a hunger strike as an objection to the bad quality of the food**.** She got in trouble with the authorities of the prison for being the one who instigated the strike and who had encouraged the other women to follow her lead. It was obvious from the way she was telling the story that this was a moment of pride that Hana and her friends shared. Their hunger strike made them feel dignified and empowered. Resilience and pride elude indexical representation, but they do not

elude metaphor and symbolizing. According to Bill Nichols, an American film critic and theoretician in contemporary documentary film, a mind's state and/or motivation cannot be deduced from evidence that is visually indexical (Nichols, 1991). Therefore, a visual that is non-indexical is suited to represent the unrepresentable, and in this case, the state of empowerment experienced by Adnan, Hana and Anonymous--the state of mind that is resilient and defiant. I drew a girl with a plate in front of her while the background had big lines that moved in all direction to represent hair and nail clips (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Amina Jalabi. *Dirty Food.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Sickness
Code 1: Diarrhea (excluded)
Code 2: Being unconscious for three days (included)
Code 3: Not having menstrual period for 14 months (included)
Code 4: Bleeding heavily (included)

TABLE 4

My film uses animation to convey the theme of Sickness in a way that is more suitable and, in my opinion, more truthful. The theme of sickness where actual footage is lacking could be quite abstract to capture in an indexical documentary. In animated documentaries, health issues, sickness, and physical matters are possible to represent through metaphor and symbolism. For example, Hana spoke about the problems of her menstrual period that stopped for 14 months due to a substance that had been put in the water that affected the hormones of female prisoners. She mentions that other female prisoners either had stopped having their periods or had heavy periods due to this substance. Hana felt more at ease to speak about her feminine health issues and period in prison--a sensitive topic in Middle Eastern societies since it has to do with the female body. The anonymity afforded to her through the symbolism of animation empowered her to discuss women's health issues in prison in detail. Animation succeeded, in this instance, in representing a major health problem that afflict women in prison conditions (see Figure 3).

Disappearance and Death:
Code 1: Finding out that a prison mate has passed away (included)
Code 2: Finding out that a prison mate has been sentenced to death (included)
Code 3: Finding out that a prison mate has been sentenced to 18 years of imprisonment (included)

TABLE 5

Prisoners must deal with the news of death and long sentences daily. For example, Hana has vivid memories of a mother and a daughter who she encountered in prison. She recalls how Nazira was sentenced to death, and how Nazira's daughter Ghadir was sentenced to 18 years in prison. Hana always sounds emotional whenever she speaks of Nazira. I created the image of a crying woman with tears of blood streaming down on her face whose features start gradually disappearing to represent her unjust death (see Figure 12). She seems like a ghost. The disappearance of her facial features underscores the faceless and nameless victims listed in abstract numbers from reports of human rights violations. Nazira, for some fleeting moments, is no longer another number in the Assad prison system. We know her name and we know that she was a mother who was sentenced to death. She becomes a person, and not a mere number, even though we do not know who she was or how she looked. Through animation, Nazira comes back as a presence and her body is resurrected. As mentioned earlier, Roe discusses the importance of "vocalic bodies." The memories and bodies of people who will never be able to tell their stories survive through the voices in this mode of representation. Memorialization within a memoir comes into existence through the art of animated documentary. According to Foucault as discussed in chapter one, this is an example "knowledge and power". Knowledge, therefore, can become a tool of power, and a form of resistance (see pages 12). The example of

Khalifa's 2008 memoir, which I mentioned earlier, tells the stories of other people who had died, never having gotten out of prison, just like Nazira. Indexical representation of a memory within a memoir is impossible to capture except through metaphor and illustration. Animation, here, functions as an expression of Nazira's memory, a vocalization of her disappearance. Animated documentary "responds to the limitations of live action material" (Roe, 2013, p.26). The film, therefore, was able to explore the unknown and forgotten past and was able to transmit this difficult knowledge into our historical consciousness, for both me and for prospective/actual audience members.

Figure 12. Amina Jalabi. *Nazira.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

Adnan also recalls his brother's disappearance. The memory of Muhammad's disappearance is embodied through animation in the first scene of my film. I illustrated two small figures, Adnan and his brother, falling into enormous rising waves as if they were helplessly drowning into a deep ocean (see Figure 2). I used the images to symbolize the inability to take control of one's destiny and the feelings of being overwhelmed by immediate and grave circumstances.

Unexpected Ending:
Code 1: Being released on a bail (included)
Code 2: Judge recognizes prisoner from childhood (included)

TABLE 6

As my film drew nearer to being finished, I needed to choose an ending. However, my film did not follow a traditional story structure. Although it has a beginning and end, the segments in the middle do not follow a traditional storyline where there is anticipation and climax. In making the film *Broken,* which was discussed earlier*,* the filmmakers opted for a conceptual work that depicts sadness and pain. They wanted a film that looked and felt more like a painting (Lahl & Schlecht, 2017). Like them, I ordered the segments of my film like a painting to reflect the complexity of memory, pain, resilience, and so on. Although in my film I chose to focus on three survivors, the film was also intended to memorialize those whose memory was forcibly erased. I started with two men falling at the beginning of the film, and because I wanted to emphasize the presence of the absent ones, the ending presented itself--an instance of tension between control and surrender. Having started the film with the two men falling into the ocean,

at the end only one man was rising again, being pulled out by fate, and the scene of his rising followed by blurred red blotches to symbolize his accidental exit from hell, having left others behind (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Amina Jalabi. *Résurrection.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

It was interesting to read the responses from my viewers about the previously discussed scenes in my film. In the following section, I will discuss those comments. The questionnaire asked whether the film added to the viewer's understanding and awareness of the gravity of the situations endured by Syrian prisoners, and if so whether this understanding could be transferred into action. Further, the viewer was asked to indicate a specific scene in the film that

made a difference for them. It was interesting to read the responses from my viewers about the previous discussed scenes in my film. In the following section, I will discuss those comments.

Audience Feedback

In this section, I discuss the answers of 10 random members of the audience to my questionnaire.

Question 1: Did the film add to your understanding and awareness of the gravity of the situation endured by Syrian prisoners of Conscience? If so, please indicate one part of the film that made a difference to you in that way. Nine out of ten answered yes. All the answers that came, expect for one person, responded in the affirmative; that yes, the film had added to their understanding and raised their awareness.

The parts of the film that were indicated, in their responses, as making that difference in their understanding were the following:

scene	Number of Respondents
Investigator/monster (see Figure 14)	1
Two men falling (see Figure 2)	1
Woman confronting the judge (see Figure 12)	1
Sweeping blood under the door (see Figure 9)	1
Deep Stairs (see Figure 15)	1
Prisoner singing (see Figure 10)	1
Reporting on others (see Figure 8)	1

TABLE 7

The other 3 respondents didn't specify a specific scene. Two respondents indicated that the film in total made a difference through the images, the stories and the music. One respondent answered by "no".

Figure 14. Amina Jalabi. *Wolf Human.* 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

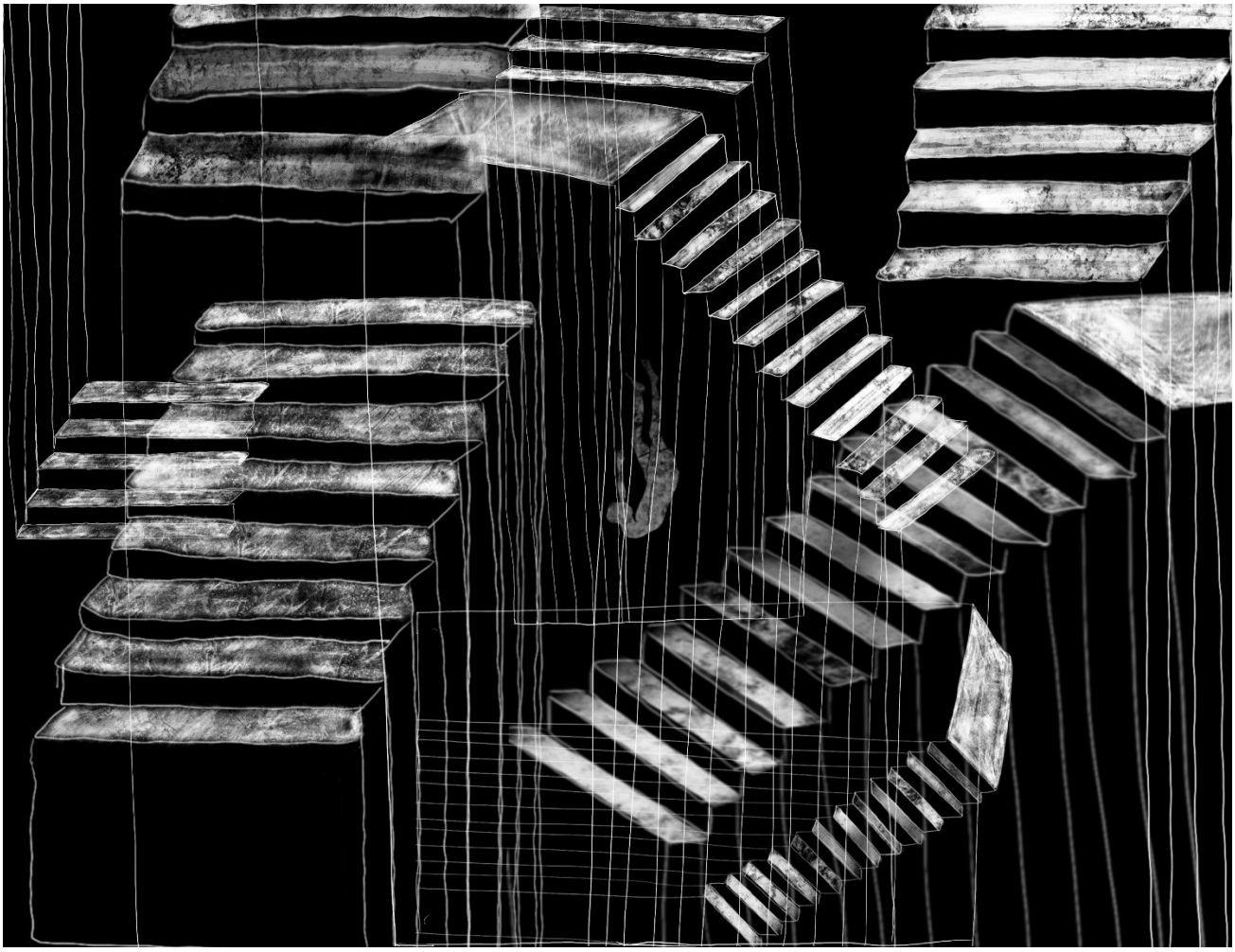

Figure 15. Amina Jalabi. *Stairs*. 2019. Procreate: Amina Jalabi

I found it quite interesting to observe the way different scenes impacted members of the audience in diverse ways. These diverse answers and different reactions testify to the ability of animated documentary to create a space for various layers of meaning while also adding to the viewer's knowledge. Animated documentary allows an interpretive space where specific difficult knowledge is shared, and yet making meaning and processing of the knowledge is within the subjectivity of the audience members and an individualized interactive process—a dialogical interplay between the animation and the viewer. Animated documentary is shown here to express difficult aspects of the human experience. "It is often the case that difficult concepts or unusual

codes of existence can *only* be expressed through the vocabulary available to the animator" (Wells, 1998, p.122). The fact that the multiplicity of representations and metaphors reached the audiences in different ways suggests that the metaphoric nature of animated illustrations widens the interpretive spectrum of possible meanings and subjective reactions.

Question 2: Do you feel empathy for the former prisoners? Can you describe that feeling in some way?

Ten out of ten answered Yes. Some members were apprehensive and had a certain degree of uneasiness in explaining their feelings. "Yes, of course, well, it is unexplainable, it can't be described with words" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). Such answers support Eisner's emphasis on the necessity of engaging the emotions in creating this kind of research, such as the medium of film or other artistic forms of data representation (Eisner,1996). As discussed earlier in chapter 3, on page 36, Eisner could not emphasize enough the significance of emotions in their capacity to help us better understand the "other" beyond written words and statistics. There is an important social psychology study cited by Patrick Power (2008), that confirms Eisner's views about emotionally responding to contexts that are not familiar to us using animation precisely. The study suggests that viewers respond in a more emotional way to nonrealistic images. Raymond A. Mar and C. Neil Macrae (2006) from the department of psychology, university of Toronto compared FMRI (Functional magnetic resonance imaging) scans between the brain activity of the viewers watching parts of a rotoscoped animation and its original footage. The scans showed revealing findings. Animated scenes trigger activity in the bilateral orbitofrontal cortex which process social emotions such as empathy, shame, compassion and guilt. On the other hand, original real footage of the same film caused a different kind of brain activity that is more associated with intent and agency. By representing the data in an

artistic form, the film acts as a mode of communication that may overcome semantics. As articulated in the above survey response, the audience is aware that they the film contains knowledge in the form of feeling, rather than words.

Another viewer expressed how visual and sound effects worked in a way that made the film more accessible to her and in turn helped her be more empathetic especially given that she does not speak Arabic. With this particular response I became aware of another strength of animated documentary that I had not initially considered: the power of animated documentary in crossing linguistic and cultural barriers. This gratifying response suggests that the animated documentary is particularly well-suited to causes that seek to reach wider communities than those affected. In the case of myself and these participants, who share in Montreal a city of residence in which Arabic is a minority language, it is especially poignant to consider that this work may be able to reach our neighbors.

As my literature review proposed, and these responses seem to confirm, documentary animation offers a medium in which these oral history interviews become even more accessible, through metaphor and representation and, as a result, difficult knowledge becomes more comprehensible. For example, another viewer singled out the sequence where we hear the prisoner singing to the old man in another cell but see the visuals of a little boy running over meadows. The viewer wrote: "The scene when the male ex-prisoner was singing, I felt deeply empathic how they were not able to run free like myself" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). Another viewer said to me, after the film, that this illustration of a little boy running while the men are in prison gave her the feeling that despite their physical constraints, these men found ways via their imaginations to reclaim their freedom, move in time and in this case go back to the innocence and freedom of childhood. She said that the difference and contrast between the

actual conditions of those in prison and the illustration of the little boy running in nature amplified and emphasized the surrealness and injustices of the world, and how dictatorship suddenly seemed so absurd.

Interestingly, another viewer chose the scene of rain drops to discuss what made her feel deep compassion and empathy. She was able to connect to the characters in a subjective manner. To the question whether she felt empathy, she said, "Oh gosh, yes, from the start, when one of the male voices talks about not blaming the man who informed on him, they keep their humanity" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019).

Two answers indicated the importance of seeing the larger context of the specific content of my film. One of the answers discussed how urgent it is to shed light on injustices committed globally. She writes: "I feel for so (too many) oppressed populations in this world. Your movie reactivates this general empathy, not only for Syrian people, but for all the oppressed people of the world" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). Such answers suggest that transferring difficult knowledge opens new possibilities of understanding, not just of suffering, but also of a larger spectrum of understanding of "other" and the world by deepening our understanding of humanity's suffering, and not only Syrian suffering. Generativity, according to Eisner, is when general awareness is generated from a particular awareness as a result of a specific case. "What artistically crafted work does is to create a paradox of revealing what is universal by examining what is particular. This is especially evident in literature and drama" (Eisner, 1995, p.3).

Question 3: Does that feeling make you inclined to take direct action of some kind to help people who are still political prisoners in Syria and urge for their release? Why or why not? All viewers answered this question in the affirmative. Moreover, ten out of ten were willing to take action and explained that they would do so because it is a human rights issue and that the

public needs to be more aware of such violations. Further, one viewer brought home the power of animated documentary in raising awareness and inspiring immediate action. He wrote: "sometimes, it seems like there are too many nightmares of humanity happening. It is impossible to choose. But this film made Syrian prisoners of opinion go to the top of the list" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019).

Question 4: If so, what kinds of things might you do? To this question, participants offered diverse feedback on ways of helping. I did provide a link at the end of the film to a website which has the Families For Freedom petition to be signed which is still active and addressed to the United Nations (add the link here). I still wanted to be receptive and open to other suggestions. Six out of ten wrote that they will sign the petition. However, three out of the six who would sign also suggested other ways as indicated in the table below. Another three respondents didn't indicate that they would sign but explained what they would do as indicated in the table below. One respondent suggested that they intended read more about the topic. Another respondent suggested fundraising. Another one suggested to organize demonstrations to demand the release of prisoners. Therefore, nine out of ten specified exactly how they would take action.

Respondents	Sign the petition	Other ways
1	Yes	Read more about it
2	Yes	Fundraising
3	Yes	Spread the story among Non-Syrians
4	Yes	N/A
5	Yes	N/A

6	Yes	N/A
7	N/A	N/A
8	N/A	Talking about it to people who are not aware of the situation
9	N/A	Demonstration to cancel the veto right at the UN
10		Tell people about it

TABLE 8

The suggestion that struck me the most came from four viewers and had to do with the dissemination of the film and raising awareness of the plight of Syrian prisoners. One viewer wrote: "I will for sure sign Syrian Families Org petition, but mostly I think I will try to spread the story among non-Syrians" Another wrote: "I will proudly share the story to raise more consciousness" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). One viewer did not specifically mention ways of spreading the knowledge but emphasized the need to discuss the plight of Syrian prisoners and how she will talk about them everywhere, "so that they will not be forgotten" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019).

The suggestions were proposed by viewers immediately following the film screening, which suggests that they are a response to the artistic treatment of my research. Via artistic means, the viewers were given access to enter the world of others and possibly to dwell in their place, even if for fleeting moments. Participants reported that the film touched them in ways that instigated their curiosity to know more about the Syrian context, to mobilize, and to fundraise as I saw in one of the responses to the film. The animated documentary resulted in awakening them

to the seriousness of the issue and created in them an "empathic understanding," a key criterion according to Eisner in his discussion about how artistic treatment of research in social and political sciences could inform us in special ways. For Eisner, "artistically crafted work also has the capacity to put us in the shoes of those we do not know and thus to foster empathic understanding" (1995, p.2).

Genuine concerns were raised by viewers in their answer sheets about the effectiveness and viability of signing petitions. One viewer wrote: "I will for sure sign the petition although, sometimes, I feel skeptical about the outcome of these petitions. They are essential, of course, we have to take action, I sign dozens of petitions each week, but I often wonder if they get heard in such horrible and dehumanized contexts" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). It is important to mention that the petition goal's is to reach 10,000 signatures. 6,912 had signed as of April 2019 when I started writing this thesis, the total as of June 28th, 2020 has reached 7,286 signatures.

Another viewer expressed her initial uncertainty on how to take action. She stated that it can be "nerve wracking to take action and step out of one's comfort zone, especially regarding something so sensitive" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019). The same viewer, however, expressed her willingness to sign the petition provided at the end of the film. She writes: "The link provided at the end made me think about taking action more because it's an accessible and doable way to help. I didn't realize it would be that easy to help" (Personal communications, March 28, 2019

Significance and Conclusion

A Long Night gave me the honor to amplify the cause of all those who are giving up so much to push the frontiers of human rights in Syria. My animated documentary delivered their stories through a medium that is subjective, evocative, and emotional (Roe, 2013). Animated documentary has the power to engage the senses and make the viewer more inclined to take action, which was evident in the overwhelmingly unanimous responses of the viewers of the first screening as discussed earlier.

Animated documentary can teach us about someone else's difficult experience by representing what is impossible to represent indexically. Educators and teachers stand to greatly benefit from new strategies that could be taught to students who wish to learn about others' suffering and pain through interdisciplinary methods. Moreover, the genre of animated documentary should take center stage in our curriculums and/or academic discourse, especially given the tensions around this genre. With the artist's hand interpreting every panel of the film, this genre can "rather than questioning the viability of knowledge, it offers an enhanced perspective on reality by presenting the world in a breadth and depth that live action alone cannot" (Roe, 2013, p.26).

To represent findings of a research that is based on difficult knowledge and in a way that might stay with the viewer is what Eisner refers to as "coherence," and what Roe refers to as "striking an emotional note" The control and power I had as an artist to represent my participants' stories metaphorically through animated documentary meant more visibility to them and a way for me to do something about a great calamity that these Syrian former prisoners underwent. Doing this project triggered many emotional and feelings. I had to honestly question the morality of fulfilling the requirements of my M.A. degree with creative

work that explored the great suffering of an oppressed people. I also initially felt somewhat apprehensive regarding the amount of suffering I would need to face, and which would naturally arise in the details that would be shared by my participants about their experiences of imprisonment. Weighing all these questions and concerns, I came to the conclusion that doing this research would not just be a journey of my personal education, but also an experiment in our ability to deal with and transfer difficult knowledge. The difficulties I would encounter would themselves become building blocks in the project. However, I also came to the conclusion that for future projects I might consider different approaches during the creative process, in which participants can share more control and power in deciding what kind of imagery to represent their stories. In other words, I might extend the shared authority of the interview stage to the creative stage of a project. Even so, I see that in this work – despite my trepidations, hesitation and retention of control over the creative process – the story of all those who have suffered and all those who have disappeared has in some way, even if limited, become a vocalized body through my film, *A Long Night*.

As an artist-researcher, I was able to offer a cultural product that challenges the official discourse of the oppressive regime of Syria. The project itself has become an opportunity to contribute in empowering and dignifying wounded community members. *A Long Night* can be considered a tool that may be used to raise awareness and inspire action. Animated documentary can help make meaning available to both sides; those whose stories are represented and those who enter the stories as witnesses. The participants see their history become surfaced and disseminated while the viewers have a chance to become agents of change.

I am ready to move forward and to invite more viewers to engage with *A Long Night.* I envision my film as a project that can be curated and displayed in public spaces. For example, as part of an exhibition of my work, I displayed printed stills from the film at the Centre Culturel George Vanier in Montreal on March 12, 2020. The images were accompanied by the audio from the recorded interviews and a script of the audio in Arabic, French and English (see Figure 16). The images were supposed to be displayed until April 2nd,2020. Also, the film was scheduled to be screened on the last day of the exhibition and the public was supposed to be invited to attend and discuss ideas on difficult knowledge, compassion and action. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was cancelled right after the opening night, but the cultural center is still interested in hosting the event sometime in the fall or winter depending on the developments of the COVID-19 situation.

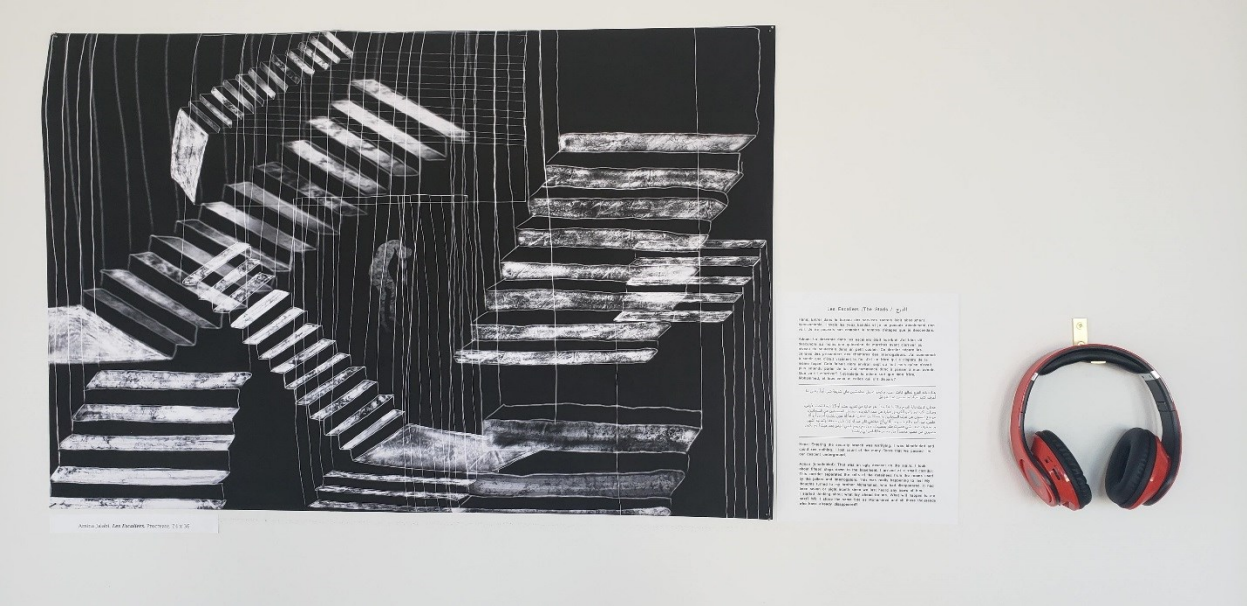

Figure 16. Amina Jalabi. *Still print, script and audio*. 2020. Photo: Amina Jalabi

Such public engagement can be simultaneously transformative and educational, as the theorists from my literature review (Lehrer & Milton, 2011) as well as the feedback from my survey respondents both suggest. While animation may seem like a daunting medium to bring

into an average classroom, easy-to-learn technology such as the free app, Stop Motion that can be installed on smart phones and tables can make it accessible to educators and learners, in both traditional educational settings and in public acts of assembly. For instance, *A Long Night* serves as an example of how animation is a uniquely suitable medium for communicating the nuances of history, especially those histories that run counter to dominant narratives, by relying on testimony and symbolism in equal measure. Animated documentary has special strengths as an element of strategies for transferring difficult knowledge. Therefore, I look forward to contributing more to the animated documentary genre as a metaphoric and powerful tool that represents reality in engaging and meaningful ways.

Figure 17. *Exhibition visitor listening to audio*. 2020. Photo: Lisa Paradis

References

Agger, I., & Jensen, S. B. (1990). Testimony as ritual and evidence in psychotherapy for political refugees. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 3(1),* 115-130. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00975139

Amnesty International. (2019). Syria [Data file] https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/report-syria/

Amnesty International. (2017). *Human slaughterhouse. Mass hangings and extermination at Saydnaya prison, Syria.* https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2454152017ENGLISH.PDF

Assad, B. (2015, March/April). Syria's president speaks: A conversation with Bashar al-Assad [Interview]. *Foreign Affairs* https://www.foreignaffairs.com/interviews/2015-01-25/syrias-president-speaks

BBC News. (2014, April 15). *Syria crisis: 'Torture' photos shown to UN Security Council.* http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27044203

Benenson, P. (1961, May 28). The forgotten prisoners. *The Observer.*

Bernard, A. (2019, May 11). Inside Syria's secret torture prisons: How Bashar al-Assad crushed Dissent. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/middleeast/syria-torture-prisons.html

Bernard, A. (2019, May 15). Why we spent 7 years documenting Syria's secret torture prisons. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/reader-center/insider-syria-prisons.html

Blair, L. (2016). *Writing a graduate thesis or dissertation*. Sense publishers.

Britzman, D. (1998). *Lost subjects, Contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning.* State University of New York.

Callus, P. (2010). Animation as sociopolitical commentary: an analysis of the animated films of Congolese director Jean Michel Kibushi. *Journal of African Media Studies 2 (1),* pp. 55–71. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.2.1.55/1.

CBC News. (2015, Mar 09). *Syria war crimes: Several countries sponsor graphic photo exhibit at UN* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27514256

Chapman, O., & Sawchuk, K. (2012). Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances". *Canadian Journal of Communication, 37(1),* 5.

Cohen, S. (2001). *States of denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Polity Press & Blackwell Publishers.

Crimmin, M. (2014). Art and conflict in the context of higher education. In C. M. Editor & S. E. Editor & O. S. Editor & W. C. Editor (Eds.), *Art and conflict* (pp.74-79). Royal college of Art

Eisner, E. W. (1995). What Artistically Crafted Research Can Help Us Understand About Schools. *Educational theory, 45(1),* 1-6.

Eisner, E. W. (1997). The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation. *Educational researcher, 26(6),* 4-10.

Esther J. (2009) "Waltz with Bashir: An interview with Ari Folman," *Cinéaste, 34(2),*67

Families for Freedom. (N.d.) [Online Petition.] Retrieved from https://syrianfamilies.org/en/

Folman, A. (Director). (2008). ואלס עם באשיר. [Waltz with Bashir] [Film]. Bridgit Folman Film Gang & Les Films d'Ici & Razor Film Produktion.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality*. (OKS Print.) Pantheon Books.

Fairuz. (1970). شادي [Shadi] [Song]. On يعيش يعيش [Ya'Eesh Ya'Eesh] [Album]. Parlophone & Voix De L'Orient.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. vintage

Books.

Frisch, M. (1990). A shared authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history State Univ of New York Pr.

Gunning, T. (2004). What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking photographs. *NORDICOM Review. 5 (1/2):* 39–49.

Amnesty International/ Hamdoun. M. (2016, August 18). Harrowing accounts of torture, inhuman conditions and mass deaths in Syria's prisons. Amnesty International Publication. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/harrowing-accounts-of-torture-inhuman-conditions-and-mass-deaths-in-syrias-prisons/

Haugbolle, S. (2008). Imprisonment, Truth Telling and Historical Memory in Syria. *Mediterranean Politics, 13(2),* 261-276.

Honess Roe, A. (2013). *Animated documentary*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Honess Roe, A (2009). Absence, excess and epistemological expansion: Towards a framework for the study of animated documentary. *Animation 6 (3),* 215-230

Human Rights Watch. (2015, December 16). *If the dead could speak: Mass deaths and torture in Syria's detention facilities.*https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities

Human Rights Watch. (2012, July 3). *Syria: Torture centers revealed: For 27 Detention Sites: Locations, Commanders' Names, Torture Methods.* https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/03/syria-torture-centers-revealed

Khajavi, J. (2011). Decoding the Real: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis of Reality in Animated Documentary. *Animation Studies Online Journal, 6.*

Khalīfa, M., & Starkey, P. (2017). *The shell: memoirs of a hidden observer.* Interlink Books, an imprint of Interlink Publishing Group, Inc.

Kriger, J. (2012). *Animated realism: a behind the scenes look at the animated documentary genre.* Focal Press.

Lahl, A., & Schlecht, V. (2017, Jan 27). Broken: The women's prison at Hoheneck. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000004882544/broken-the-womens-prison-at-hoheneck.html

Lahl, A., & Schlecht, V. (Directors). (2016). *Kaputt* [Broken] [Short Animation]. Die Kulturingenieure

Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice,* 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.

Lukmanto, Christine. (2018). Is Rotoscope True Animation? *ULTIMART Jurnal Komunikasi Visual. 10.* 12-18. 10.31937/ultimart.v10i1.758.

Mar, R.A. and Macrae, N.C. (2006) Triggering the Intentional Response. In G. B. Editor & J. G. Editor. (Eds) *Empathy and Fairness* (pp.110–19). Chichester: Wiley.

Milton, C., & Lehrer, E., & Patterson, M.E. (Eds). (2011). *Curating difficult knowledge: Violent pasts in public places*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Moritz, W. (1997). Narrative strategies for resistance and protest in Eastern European animation. In J. P. Editor (Ed.), *A reader in animation studies* (pp.38-47). John Libbey Publishing.

Moyer, J. (1993). Step-by-step guide to oral history. Retrieve from http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

Nichols, B. (1991) *Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary.* Indiana University Press.

O'Loughlin M. (2007). Bearing Witness to Troubled Memory. *Psychoanalytic review, 94(2),* 191–212. https://doi.org/10.1521/prev.2007.94.2.191

Power, P. (2008). Character Animation and the Embodied Mind-Brain. *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3 (1), pp. 25-48.

Prisoner of conscience. (2020, June 4). In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Prisoner_of_conscience&oldid=960641696

Pitt, A & Britzman, D. (2003). Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16 (6),* 755-776.

Reuters (2017, May 15). *U.S. says Syrians built crematorium at prison to dispose of bodies* https://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKCN18B20E-OCATP

Ristola, J. (2016). Recreating Reality: Waltz with Bashir, Persepolis, and the Documentary Genre. *Animation Studies, 11.* Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/30771757/Recreating_Reality_Waltz_With_Bashir_Persepolis_and_the_Documentary_Genre

Sakr, R. (2013). *Anticipating the 2011 Arab uprisings: Revolutionary literatures and political geographies.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Satrapi, M. & Paronnaud, V. (Directors). (2007). *Persepolis* [Film]. Celluloid Dreams & CNC & France 3 Cinéma & The Kennedy/Marshall Company & Région Ile-de-France

Social Science Humanities Research Council. (2020). http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22

Simon, R. I., Rosenberg, S., & Eppert, C. (2000). *Between hope and despair: pedagogy and the representation of historical trauma*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Simon, R. I. (2011). A Shock to Thought: Curatorial Judgment and the Public Exhibition of 'Difficult Knowledge'. *Memory Studies, 4(4),* 432-449. doi:10.1177/1750698011398170

Sontag, S. (2003). *Regarding the pain of others*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Staikidis, K. (2013). Advocating for justice: A Maya painter's journey. In T. K. Editor & M. B Editor (Eds.), *Stand(ing) up, for a change: Voices of arts educators* (pp. 3-15). National Art Education Association.

Tillmann-Healy, Lisa M. (2003). Friendship as Method. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9 (5),* 735. doi:10.1177/1077800403254894

The UN Refugee Agency. (2016). *Syria conflict 5 years biggest refugee displacement crisis time demands a huge surge in solidarity.* http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2016/3/56e6e3249/syria-conflict-5-years-biggest-refugee-displacement-crisis-time-demands.html

The UN Refugee Agency. (2018). *Syria Emergency*. http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html

Wells, P. (1997). The Beautiful Village and the True Village: A Consideration of Animation and the Documentary Aesthetic. *Art and Design, 12 (53),* 40-45

Well, P. (1998). *Understanding animation.* Routledge.

Wells, P. (2016). Writing Animated Documentary: A Theory of Practice. *International Journal of Film and Media Arts, 1(1)* 6-18

Zahler, K. (2010). *The Assads' Syria: dictatorships.* Lerner Publishing Group, Inc.

Zisser, E. (2007). *Commanding Syria: Bashar Al-Asad and the first years in power*. I.B. Taur

Appendix A: Recruitment script for participants (former Syrian political prisoners)

Email to send or points to discuss on the phone:

Hello,

This is Amina. As you may know, I am currently working on my MA thesis in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University. I am making a short-animated film based on the stories of former Syrian political prisoners now living in Canada. The film is scheduled to be screened at the Oral History Association (OHA) Annual Meeting in October 2018 and uploaded later on Vimeo.

I plan to examine how such a work of art will affect the Canadian audience members at the screening: does it trigger their empathy towards the injustices committed by the Syrian regime upon its political prisoners? If so, can we transform this empathy into action? As you are aware of, I have had family members and friends unjustly imprisoned in Syria. I emphatically believe in the importance of telling our many unknown stories as a counter-narrative to the regime's official discourse that denies the imprisonment, torture and forced disappearances of tens of thousands of innocent Syrians. Towards this end, I am reaching out to you as a potential participant in this project. I would like to know if you would be willing to share your story with me that I will then represent in my short-animated film.

My film will be an abstract animation that interprets the stories and reflections you will tell me about your imprisonment. Stories told by other former Syrian political prisoners now living in Canada will also be included in the final project. While certain phrases, images and metaphors may be used or may inspire my animated content, the interviews are essentially background information for my research. The film will be between 5 and 10 minutes long. You

will be invited to the screening at the OHA conference in October, but you can always watch it in the comfort of your home once it is uploaded on Vimeo.

Your participation entails agreeing to be audio-recorded in two interviews, with each lasting approximately one hour. You are free to take longer than an hour to tell your story or to tell it over the course of multiple meetings. The interviews will most probably take place in Arabic since it is our shared mother tongue. Short segments of the audio recordings from different participants will be used as a voiceover for the film. However, there are ways to maintain the anonymity of your voice: it can be either altered digitally in the post-production process or your words can be re-recorded by someone else. In either of these two scenarios, you have the option of using a pseudonym in the credits instead of your own name. You can also opt out at any time without any negative consequences, both during and after the interviews (before I start editing in August 2018.) As mentioned above, my animation is an abstract animation, which means no faces will be depicted in the film.

I will be sharing with you some final drawings to get your feedback on the content. I will do whatever it takes for you to feel that your story is represented to your satisfaction.

It is important to note that this experience might prove to be psychologically uncomfortable. I will provide you with a list of support services should you wish to access them for external assistance. I would like to highlight here that I am prepared to offer understanding and reassurance, especially since I can connect to your story on a personal level.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form that describes the project in more detail. This form also outlines the expected time commitment and your various options for confidentiality. It will be my pleasure to meet with you soon and answer any questions you may

have. You are welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Kathleen Vaughan, at kathleen.vaughan@concordia.ca or at 514.848.2424 ext:4677.

Regards, Amina

Appendix B: Information and Consent Form

For Former Syrian Political Prisoners

Study Title: Film Animation as a Tool to Represent Difficult Knowledge in Public Spaces: Transforming Compassion into Action

Researcher: Amina Jalabi

Researcher's Contact Information: amina.jalabi@gmail.com, 438.889.6345

Faculty Supervisor: Kathleen Vaughan

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: kathleen.vaughan@concordia.ca, 514.848.2424 ext:4677

A. Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is as follows: To raise awareness about the ongoing and unjust political imprisonment of average civilians in Syria by (1) collecting stories from released prisoners now living in Canada and (2) interpreting these stories into a short-animated film (5 to 10 minutes in length) for general audiences. I am aware that the filmmaker and researcher Amina Jalabi is interested in exploring the role that art can play in promoting social justice.

B. Procedures

I understand that I will be asked to participate in two interviews, each approximately an hour long, although I am free to take either longer than an hour or multiple meetings to tell my story if I wish to do so. In any case, I understand that each interview may require multiple sessions depending on my availability. I understand that my first interview will address my prison story and that my second interview will concern my reflections on this story. I understand that I will choose the location of the interview with the researcher. I understand that I will not be

paid for this interview and that I am free to not answer a question. I understand that the interview will be recorded with an audio recorder. The interview will be conducted in the language of my preference. I understand that, if I wish, the researcher will provide me with a copy of the full audio recording of my interview(s).

C. Risks and Benefits

I understand that the potential risk of participating in this research creation project is to experience psychological discomfort while remembering my experience in prison or to experience post-traumatic stress. Therefore, I understand that I am free not to answer any questions and may stop our interview session at any time, entirely without negative consequences. I am aware that I will have access to support services if I feel the need for them at any moment after the interview. I understand that **by disclosing my identity, I am aware of the implications for my family my friends.** I also understand that by telling my story and seeing it interpreted into an animated film, I may help raise awareness of the injustice experienced by both former and current Syrian political prisoners. I also understand that I may find seeing the animated version of my story to be an emotional experience.

D. Confidentially

I understand that the researcher intends to publish the findings of this research.

For film credit

I understand that I can use my real name or be identified by a pseudonym I have chosen. Please check one of the following two boxes: ☐ I wish to participate under my real name, which will be included in the film credits. OR ☐ I wish to participate under the following pseudonym, which will be included in the film credits.

For Audio use

I understand that parts of my audio-recorded interview(s) may be used in the short-animated film, which will be made public through screenings, presentations, Vimeo site, conferences, film festivals, art exhibitions, workshops, in articles, and in her master's thesis. Please check one of the following two boxes: ☐ I wish my voice to be used as is. OR ☐ I wish my voice to be altered digitally and made unrecognizable. OR ☐ I wish that my voice is replaced by someone else's voice

I understand that the researcher will destroy the interviews six months after she submits her MA thesis and that all original recording of my interviews will be destroyed at that time.

F. Conditions of Participation

I understand that it is purely my decision to participate in this research. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences before, during or after the interviews, and up until a conclusive collaborative decision has been made regarding the production of the film on August 1st, 2018.

I give my consent to AMINA JALABI to screen and publish the findings of this research, at screenings, presentations, Vimeo, conferences, film festivals, art exhibitions, workshops, in articles, and in her thesis.

G. Participant's Declaration

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and these questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is listed on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor by email at kathleen.vaughan@concordia.ca or by phone at 514-848-2424 ext.4677.

If you have concerns about ethical issues of this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514-848-2424 ext. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.

Appendix C: List of support services

Dial 8-1-1 to speak directly with a social worker, available 24/7.

Dial 514-935-1101 (tel-Aide): Confidential listening service for people in distress, available 24/7.

RIVO (Intervention Network for persons affected by organized violence) Therapeutic support services and rehabilitation of newcomers and any other person traumatized by organized violence, whether political, social, identarian or religious. (I contacted the center and was told that a file will be created for persons in need. Psychological services can be offered in Arabic) Phone: 514-282-0661 Address: 6865 Christophe-Colomb, Montreal, Quebec. www.rivo-resilience.org

Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture of Toronto (CCVT) This center, although located in Toronto, can be reached by phone. You will be immediately able to talk to a psychologist who speaks Arabic. I will provide you with a calling card to cover any expenses. Hours: Monday to Friday: 9am to 5pm

Saturday: 9am to 3pm

***I will mention to my participants that they can schedule their interviews around the hours of these services if they believe they will need it right after the interview.**

Appendix D: Sample Questionnaire for Former Political Prisonniers

First Interview

Identification

Which city or area are you from in Syria? What is your age? When did you leave Syria? Where did you live before coming to Canada? How long have you been living in Montreal?

Background questions

Did you come here as an immigrant or as a refugee? How were you able to arrive to Canada?

Why did you leave Syria?

Story of Prison

How were you arrested? When were you imprisoned? When were you released?

What would you like to tell me about your prison story?

What do you remember most from that time?

Did you have contact with other prisoners? With your family or friends from the outside world?

What were the guards like?

Did you observe any acts of resistance to the Syrian regime? If so, what?

What surprised you the most about your time in prison?

What was the hardest thing about being imprisoned?

Second Interview

The questions will be based on the themes and concepts that emerged from the first interview.

Questions to reflect on the story of prison*:*

How did your imprisonment affect your family?

How did your prison experience affect your other relationships? Friendships, for example?

How was your first day after you were released and what were your thoughts?

How often do you think about what happened to you and do you share it with others?

Do you tell people today that you were a political prisoner?

What would you most like people to know about your experience?

Appendix E: Oral consent script for random members from the audience

Hello everyone and thank you for your attendance today. I would like to ask you to take part in this anonymous questionnaire to examine viewers' reactions to such work. It should only take a couple of minutes to answer.

It is completely up to you if you would like to participate or not. But your feedback will help me in better examining the benefits of film animation as a tool to curate stories of former Syrian political prisoners in public spaces.

Once you submit your paper and leave the building, it will impossible to withdraw from your participation.

Appendix F: Questionnaire For audience

Title (5 to 10 minutes) is a short-animated film by Amina Jalabi which uses stories from former Syrian political prisoners to explore what it means to be a prisoner of conscience. This film was created as part of Amina's MA research. Your answers to these questions will help her understand the impact of her film and may be included in her MA thesis text.

1. Did the film add to your understanding and awareness of the gravity of the situations endured

by Syrian prisoners of conscience? If so, please indicate one part of the film that made a difference to you in that way.

2. Do you feel empathy for the former prisoners? Can you describe that feeling in some way?

1. Does that feeling make you inclined to take direct action of some kind to help people who are

still political prisoners in Syria and urge for their release? Why or why not?

If so, what kind of thing might you do?

Appendix G: Certificate of Ethical Compliance

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY

FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Amina Jalabi

Department: Faculty of Fine Arts\Art Education

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: Film Animation as a Tool to Represent Difficult Knowledge in Public Spaces: Transforming Compassion Into Action

Certification Number: 30009671

Valid From: July 26, 2018 To: July 25, 2019

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

_____

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee